

## Just One Piece of Art, But Many Surrounding Issues, at 'Black Light'



Gathering of Black Women Artists for Black Lives Matter at New Museum in New York, 2016.  
(Courtesy Black Women Artists for Black Lives Matter)

By **Sarah Hotchkiss**

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Every year, the graduating curatorial practice students at California College of the Arts organize a culminating thesis exhibition of their own choosing. Often, the group looks back, using the Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts as a space in which to recontextualize a moment in history through the lens of their particular curatorial conceit.

With *Void California: 1975-1989*, the class of 2016 turned their focus to “punk-inflected media” responses to the neoconservatism of the Reagan era, presciently prepping us for artmaking in our current political climate.

The class of 2017 similarly looks both backwards and forwards with *Black Light*, opening March 16, an exhibition of just one object, but a full program of artist talks and panel discussions all variously addressing the relationship (or lack thereof) between cultural institutions and black artists.



Underground Museum cofounder Karon Davis greets the audience at 'Holding Court: Black Lives Matter,' 2016. Courtesy of The Underground Museum. (Photo by Christel Robleto)

These events, all free and open to the public, bring up questions of agency, historical models and the means by which communities can make themselves visible. In other words, *Black Light* is an exhibition that cuts out the middleman, creating a space in which audiences can encounter the issues facing black artists and the perspectives of black artists face-to-face, without the artwork as intermediary.

Highlights include a March 30 conversation between Dale Brockman Davis (co-founder of [Brockman Gallery](#) in Los Angeles) and [Duane Deterville](#) (CCA professor and art historian) on the overlapping histories of black artist-run spaces in Los Angeles and Oakland.

And on May 6, [Rasheedah Phillips](#) delivers a performative lecture on Afrofuturism and time travel via memory, imagination or crystals.



Rodney McMillian, 'red dust between,' 2017. Courtesy the artist and Maccarone, New York/Los Angeles. (Photo by Josh White)

Other contributors to *Black Light*'s programming and the forthcoming exhibition catalog include Karon Davis (co-founder of [The Underground Museum](#) in Los Angeles), [Jacqueline Francis](#) (CCA professor and art historian), Robyn Hillman-Harrigan (of [Black Women Artists for Black Lives Matter](#)), and Marc Bamuthi Joseph ([YBCA](#)'s chief of program and pedagogy).

*Black Light* takes its name from a series of portraits and text-based paintings made by artist [Faith Ringgold](#) during the 1960s civil rights movement. And yet the one artwork included in *Black Light* comes not from Ringgold, but from Los Angeles-based artist Rodney McMillian, aiding the exhibition's bookending of past and present. McMillian's brand new painting *red dust between* -- a blue bed sheet layered thick with an abstract landscape of paint -- serves as a fitting backdrop for the difficult and necessary conversations *Black Light* aims to foster.



***Black Light*** is on view at CCA's Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts in San Francisco March 16-May 14, 2017. For more information [\*click here\*](#).