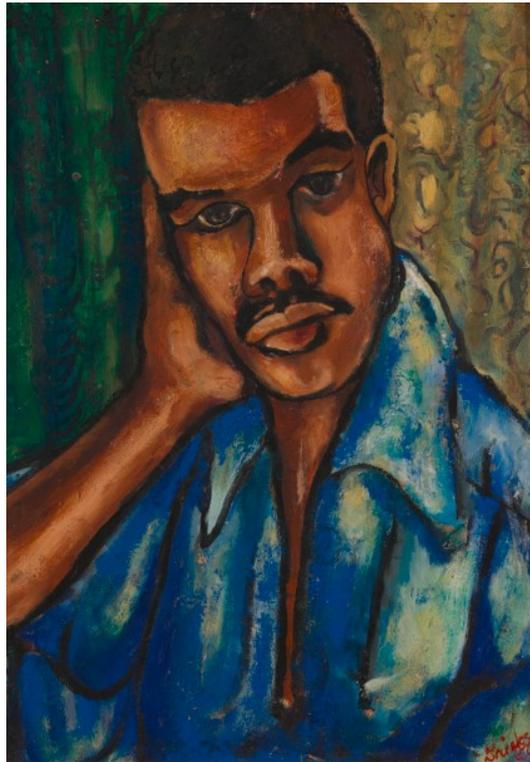


Coming Soon: ‘Icons of Nature and History,’ a Major Survey of David Driskell Opens at High Museum in Atlanta in February 2021

by [VICTORIA L. VALENTINE](#) on Dec 29, 2020 • 11:58 pm

A MAJOR TRAVELING SURVEY of **David Driskell** (1931-2020) opens at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta in February 2021. “[David Driskell: Icons of Nature and History](#)” will present an overview of Driskell’s illustrious career and celebrate highlights of his oeuvre, across painting, printmaking and collage.

About 60 paintings and works on paper will be on view, dating from 1953 to 2011. The works are informed by abstraction and figuration; reflect the African American experience; express his keen observations of the American landscape; and draw on spiritual symbolism and African aesthetics.



DAVID DRISKELL (American, 1931–2020), “Self-Portrait,” 1953 (oil on board). | Collection of the Estate of David C. Driskell, Maryland. © Estate of David C. Driskell. Courtesy DC Moore Gallery, New York. Photo by Luc Demers

Years in the making, the exhibition is the first survey of Driskell’s practice since his death less than a year ago, from COVID-19 (April 1, 2020). He was 88.

Julie McGee guest curated the exhibition. The author of [“David C. Driskell: Artist and Scholar”](#) (2006), she is an associate professor of Africana studies and art history at the University of Delaware. McGee paid tribute to Driskell in September during the [John Wilmerding Symposium on American Art 2020: A Tribute to David C. Driskell](#), hosted online by the National Gallery of Art in partnership with the David C. Driskell Center for the Study of the Visual Arts and Culture of African Americans and the African Diaspora at the University of Maryland, College Park, and the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. She gave the keynote address, speaking at length about Driskell’s life and artistic practice.

“David was the best storyteller. He was the best chronicler of his own life. Those who had the opportunity to listen to him and be around him know this. He would say that the importance of storytelling is very much rooted to the South. And he would then also point to Bearden, Romare Bearden, who was a colleague, a mentor of sorts, a friend, and Bearden’s own interest in storytelling, Southern folklore, creating images that spoke to a narrative of Southern traditions,” McGee said.

“What I find really compelling, however, is Driskell’s own artwork, individual works of art, they are not particularly narrative. In fact, they are iconic. They’re symbolic representations that give us remembrances of things that he held dear.”

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“ICONS OF NATURE AND HISTORY” is co-organized with the Portland Museum of Art in Maine, where the exhibition will be presented in June 2021, and then will travel to a third and final venue next fall, The Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C.

“David Driskell: Icons of Nature and History” touring schedule:

- **High Museum of Art**, Atlanta | Feb. 6-May 9, 2021
- **Portland Museum of Art** | Portland, Maine | June 19-Sept. 12, 2021
- **The Phillips Collection**, Washington, D.C. | Oct. 6, 2021-Jan. 9, 2022

The choice of venues reflects Driskell’s biography. The exhibition will be on view in cities and at institutions with close connections to Driskell, who was born in Georgia, lived part-time in Maine, and first visited The Phillips Collection as an undergraduate at Howard University.

An artist and scholar, Driskell was a highly regarded authority on African American art. He helped build the field; served as a nexus for three generations of artists, curators, and art historians; and taught and mentored untold numbers.



DAVID DRISKELL, "Homage to Romare," 1975 (Collage and gouache on Masonite). | © Estate of David C. Driskell. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment

Driskell led the art departments at Howard University (two stints as acting chair), Fisk University, and the University of Maryland, College Park. After 21 years as a professor of art, he retired from UMD in 1998 as a Distinguished University Professor Emeritus of Art. He split his time between Hyattsville, Md., and Falmouth, Maine.

His ties to the High Museum were established more than four decades ago. In 1976, Driskell organized "Two Centuries of Black American Art" at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). An expansive presentation showcasing works produced between 1750 and 1950, the landmark exhibition was the first historically comprehensive survey of African American art. The show traveled to three additional institutions, including the High Museum (Jan. 8–Feb. 20, 1977).

Driskell was a friend of the High Museum and established an important collaboration with the institution in 2005. Administered by the Atlanta museum, the annual David C. Driskell Prize, recognizes the contributions of artists and curators to the field of African American art. Funds raised through the Driskell Prize dinner support acquisitions by African American artists. Since its inception, 48 works have been added to the High's collection.

Maine served as a retreat, a haven of creativity where he built his first official studio. Prior to earning his BFA from Howard (1955), Driskell spent the summer after his junior year at Skowhegan in rural Maine (1953). The experience was transformative, altering the lens through which he viewed nature and seeding a desire to return. In 1961, Driskell purchased a home in Falmouth, Maine, and it became his summer home. He added a studio and maintained expansive gardens on the property, which is about 15 minutes from Portland.

Over the decades Driskell was active in the area, serving on the boards at Skowhegan, Maine College of Art, and the Colby College Museum of Art. He also taught at Bowdoin and Bates colleges. A few years ago, the Center for Maine

Contemporary Art in Rockland presented "Renewal and Form." a solo show featuring Driskell's woodcuts, serigraphs, linocuts, and monoprints.

A fully illustrated exhibition catalog accompanies "Icons of Nature and History." The forthcoming volume includes a lead essay by McGee and contributions from Renée Maurer, Sarah Workneh and Katie Sonnenborn, Shaun Leonardo, Keith Morrison, Jessica May, Thelma Golden, Lowery Stokes Sims, Richard Powell, Michael Rooks, and Monet Timmons. The catalog also features a selection of Driskell's writings, chosen by Powell.



DAVID DRISKELL (American, 1931–2020), "Young Pines Growing," 1959 (oil on canvas). I Clark Atlanta University Art Museum, John Hope Franklin Purchase Award. © Estate of David C. Driskell

Maurer, an associate curator at The Phillips Collection, wrote about Driskell's connections to the museum, which span about 70 years, beginning with his tenure as a Howard student. He enrolled at the HBCU in 1950. Washington was segregated, but similar to museums on the National Mall, the Phillips was open to all races.

Driskell first visited the museum with his instructors. Maurer cited an oral history interview with Driskell from the Phillips Collection Archives (conducted Dec. 23, 2008, by Donita M. Moorhus at Driskell's home in Hyattsville, Md.). Maurer said the artist felt at ease in the galleries, marveled at seeing his professor James Lesesne Wells's work on display, and even courted Thelma Deloatch, his future wife, at the museum. (They married in 1952.)

“I was obviously very race conscious, having been brought up in the South and coming here and experiencing the extension of the Southern way of life. I still felt accepted at the Phillips,” Driskell said. He added: “I couldn’t go to any other gallery in Washington, any other place, to see my teacher’s work, and I think some of it was race consciousness, but for the most part, it was pride that I knew this person, and his work is in the Phillips. It extended that welcome to me.”

Decades later, the Phillips acquired its first work by Driskell in 2009, and he served on the museum’s board of trustees from 2016-19.

At the conclusion of her keynote address, McGee shared a few words about “Icons of Nature and History.”

“This exhibition, which includes about 60 objects with a focus on his practice as a painter, an artist who trained in conventional practices that were Eurocentric, who understood American painting, who was tremendously moved by African art and the ancestral impulse that he saw in African art, and then an artist tied to Southern roots,” she said.

“Exhibitions, including this one, are one of the markers of a lifetime of joy and beauty. The way that he understood the significance of the creative practice was very much connected to the sense of the divine, that the creative act is a connection to a divine. Nature, too, was connected to the divine, because nature brought us nourishment and joy and beauty.”

McGee continued: “There was a saying that he would use from an Old Testament psalm written by King David, right? So we can laugh and think about David as King David. He was certainly a king for us in many ways. And the line that he would quote is ‘Joy cometh in the morning,’ and he referred to that in many ways, that the studio practice, that sacred space, brought joy, but it came out of the turmoil of finding the right form.” **CT**

“David Driskell: Icons of Nature and History” is forthcoming at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, Feb. 6–May 9, 2021

FIND MORE about [The David C. Driskell Center](#) for the Study of the Visual Arts and Culture of African Americans and the African Diaspora at the University of Maryland, College Park, on the institution’s website



DAVID DRISKELL (American, 1931–2020), "Still Life with Sunset," 1966 (oil on canvas). | Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C., Collection of Joseph and Lynne Horning. © Estate of David C. Driskell, Courtesy of DC Moore Gallery, New York



DAVID DRISKELL (American, 1931–2020), "Yaddo Circle," 1980 (egg tempera and gouache on handmade paper). I Collection of the Estate of David C. Driskell, Maryland. © Estate of David C. Driskell, Courtesy of DC Moore Gallery, New York. Photo by Stephen Bates



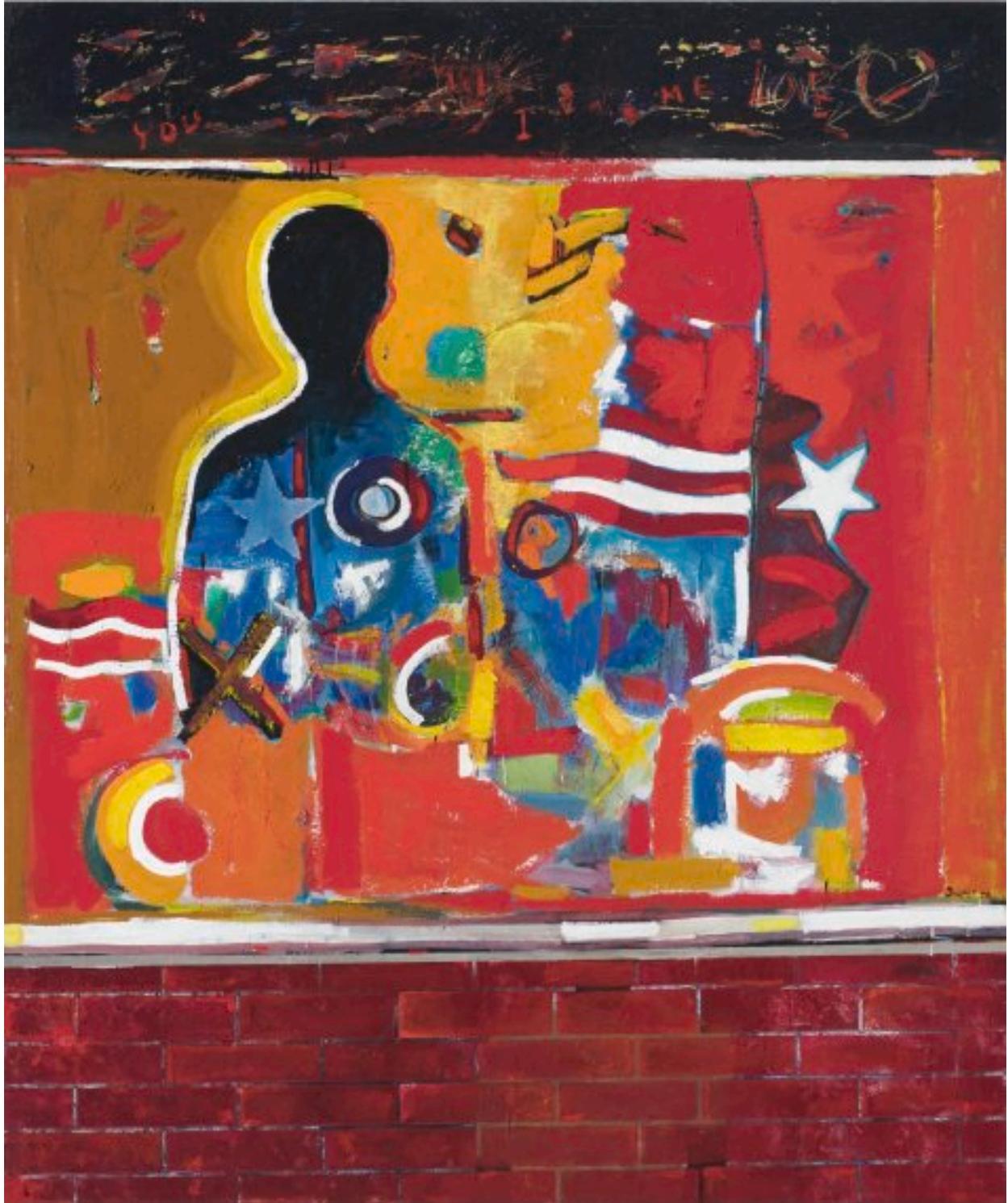
DAVID DRISKELL (American, 1931–2020), "City Quartet," 1953 (oil on canvas). | University of Maryland. © The Estate of David C. Driskell



DAVID DRISKELL (American, 1931–2020), "Memories of a Distant Past," 1975 (egg tempera, gouache, and collage on paper). | Collection of Joseph and Lynne Horning, Washington, D.C. © Estate of David C. Driskell, Courtesy of DC Moore Gallery, New York



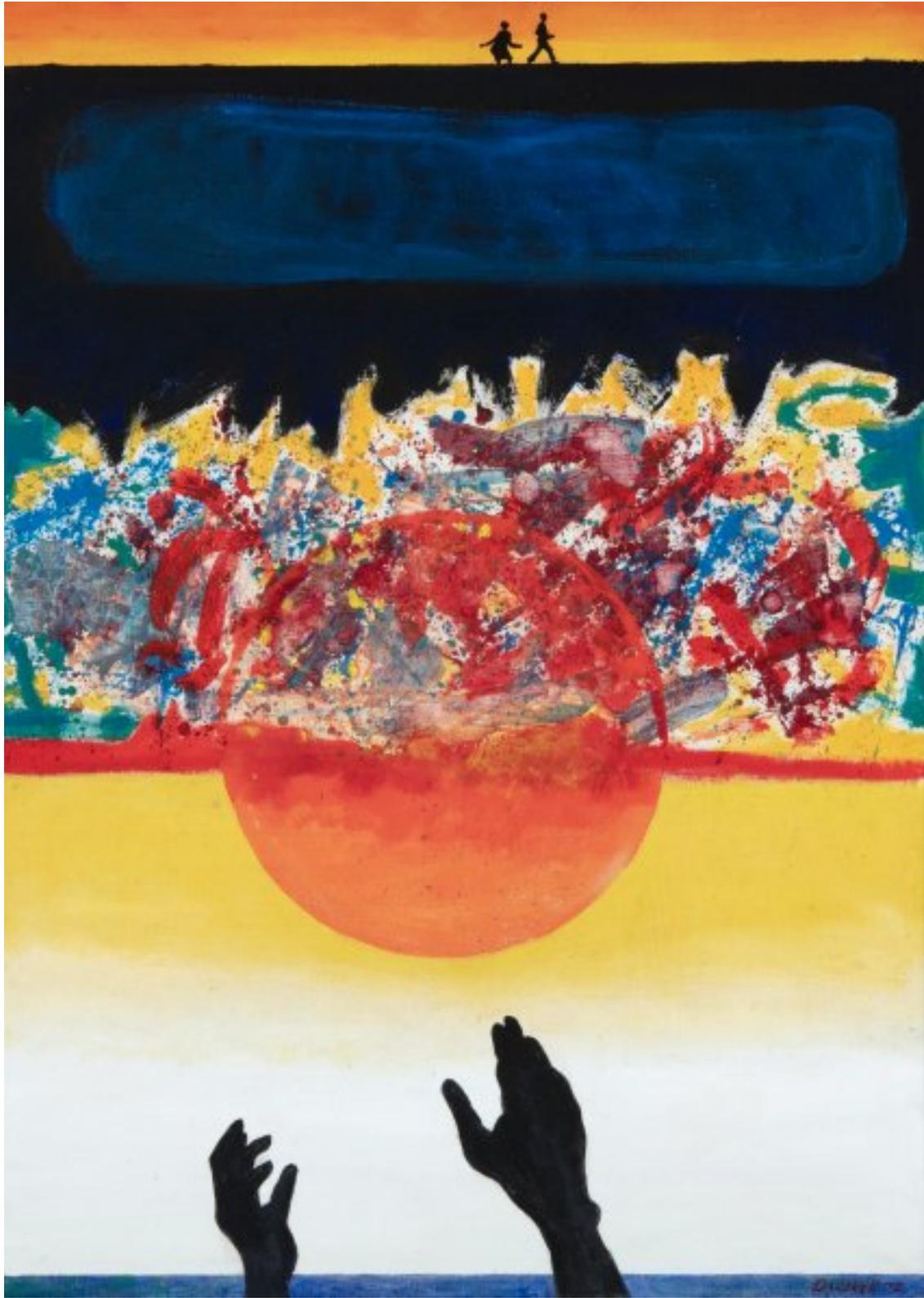
DAVID DRISKELL (American, 1931–2020), "Untitled," 1958 (ink and charcoal on paper). I Purchased by the David C. Driskell Center at the University of Maryland, College Park, from the David C. Driskell Collection, 2009.18.042. Image courtesy of the David C. Driskell Center at the University of Maryland, College Park. Photography by Gregory R. Staley. Photo © David C. Driskell Center, 2017. © Estate of David C. Driskell, Courtesy of DC Moore Gallery, New York



DAVID DRISKELL (American, 1931–2020), "Ghetto Wall #2," 1970 (oil, acrylic, and collage on linen, 60 × 50 inches).
Portland Museum of Art, Portland, Maine, Museum purchase with support from the Friends of the Collection and with support of the Freddie and Regina Homburger Endowment for Acquisitions, and the Emily Eaton Moore and Family Fund for the Collection, 2019.16. © Estate of David C. Driskell, Courtesy of DC Moore Gallery, New York



DAVID DRISKELL (American, 1931–2020), "Flowing Like a River," 1996–97 (collage and gouache on paper). | Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia. Caroline Thomas Fund and Harold A. and Ann R. Sorgenti Fund for African-American Art, 2005.20. © Estate of David C. Driskell, courtesy of DC Moore Gallery, New York



DAVID DRISKELL (American, 1931–2020), "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," 1972 (acrylic on canvas). | Tougaloo College Art Collections, Tougaloo, Mississippi. Purchased by Tougaloo College with support from the National Endowment for the Arts, 1973.084. © Estate of David C. Driskell, Courtesy of DC Moore Gallery, New York



DAVID DRISKELL (American, 1931–2020), "Fisherman's Pride," 1956 (oil on canvas). | Collection of the Estate of David C. Driskell, Maryland. © Estate of David C. Driskell. Courtesy DC Moore Gallery, New York. Photo by Luc Demers



DAVID DRISKELL (American, 1931–2020), "Self-Portrait as Nkisi Nkondi Figure," 2010 (graphite, charcoal and mixed media). | Collection of the artist. © Estate of David C. Driskell



DAVID DRISKELL (American, 1931–2020), "Two Pines #2," 1964 (oil on canvas). I High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Gift of David C. and Thelma G. Driskell, 2000.203. © Estate of David C. Driskell, Courtesy of DC Moore Gallery, New York



DAVID DRISKELL (American, 1931–2020), “Woman with Flowers,” 1972 (oil and collage on canvas). } Art Bridges, Bentonville, Ark., AB.2018.3. © Estate of David C. Driskell. Courtesy DC Moore Gallery, New York

BOOKSHELF

The forthcoming volume [“David Driskell: Icons of Nature and History”](#) coincides with the exhibition of the same name. [“David C. Driskell: Artist and Scholar”](#) by Julie McGee documents the life and work of David C. Driskell. [“Two Centuries of Black American Art”](#) coincided with the landmark exhibition guest curated by Driskell in 1976 at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Driskell co-authored the exhibition catalog [“Harlem Renaissance: Art of Black America.”](#) These volumes consider David Driskell’s artistic practice: [“Creative Spirit: The Art of David C. Driskell.”](#) [“David Driskell Painting Across the Decade 1996-2006.”](#) and [“Evolution: Five Decades of Printmaking by David C. Driskell”](#) by Adrienne Childs with contributions by Ruth Fine, Deborah Willis, and Julie McGee. Driskell documents his own art collection in [“Narratives of African American Art and Identity: The David C. Driskell Collection.”](#)