

# Infinite Hope

Kwame Brathwaite

Renée Cox

Gordon Parks

Ming Smith

January 21 - March 01, 2025

Opening Reception: Tuesday, January 21, 2025

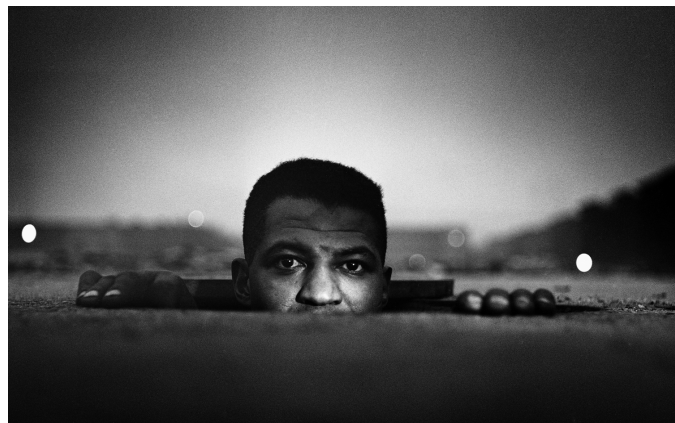
5-8pm

Artists Talk 6:30pm, moderated by Key Jo Lee, Chief of Curatorial Affairs and Public Programs, Museum of the African Diaspora, San Francisco

“We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope.” Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., 1968, three months before his assassination. Profound and timely when delivered during the Civil Rights Movement; this positivity has helped shape the landscape of Black American ethos. In times of uncertainty and disappointment, Dr. King’s passage is a reminder that hope is evergreen.

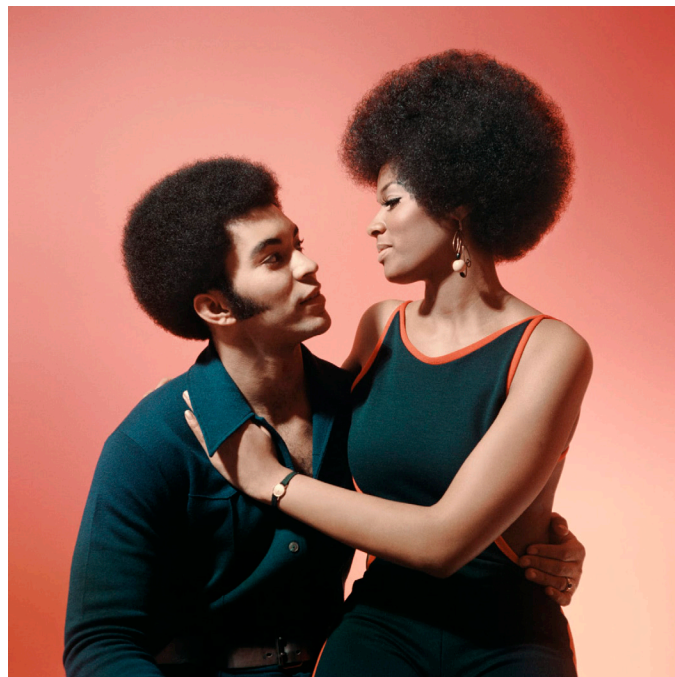
Jenkins Johnson Gallery is pleased to present *Infinite Hope*, an exhibition of historical photographs by groundbreaking, internationally renowned artists Kwame Brathwaite, Renée Cox, Gordon Parks, and Ming Smith. The exhibition opens following Martin Luther King Jr. Day and remains on view through February, Black History Month. Jenkins Johnson Gallery will present this ambitious museum-scale exhibition at 1150 25th Street, San Francisco, a 6,000 square foot venue formerly housing the McEvoy Foundation.

Spanning the late 20th century, *Infinite Hope* presents a discourse around philosophical, social, and aesthetic developments for African Americans. Starting in the 1950s with Parks, and Brathwaite, it continues through the present with Smith and Cox. The multigenerational artists address the unique social circumstances of their lives and times. Each artist represents the triumph over the challenges faced by their ancestors, with “hope” as the torch passed from one to the next. Leaning on the exhibition’s central theme of unity, the artists reject the notion of the Black family as fragmented, and the Black male is present and celebrated. The images emphasize both the power and endurance of hope, as well as the disquiet, friction, and doubt that hope dispels.



Gordon Parks, *Emerging Man, Harlem, New York*, 1952. Image courtesy of Jenkins Johnson Gallery. ©The Gordon Parks Foundation. Used with permission.

Gordon Parks (b. 1912, Fort Scott, KS - d. 2006, New York, NY) was one of the seminal figures of twentieth-century photography. A humanitarian with a deep commitment to social justice, he left behind a body of work that documents the most important aspects of American culture from the early 1940s until his death, with a focus on race relations, poverty, civil rights, and urban life. In *Infinite Hope*, Parks’ works reflect the turbulence of the 1950s and 1960s, but also offer insight into joy, leisure, and celebration, as well as vulnerability. For example, following the publication of Ralph Ellison’s novel *Invisible Man*, Parks collaborated with Ellison on “A Man Becomes Invisible,” a ground-breaking photo essay addressing the emotional damage inflicted by racism on Black lives. *Emerging Man*,

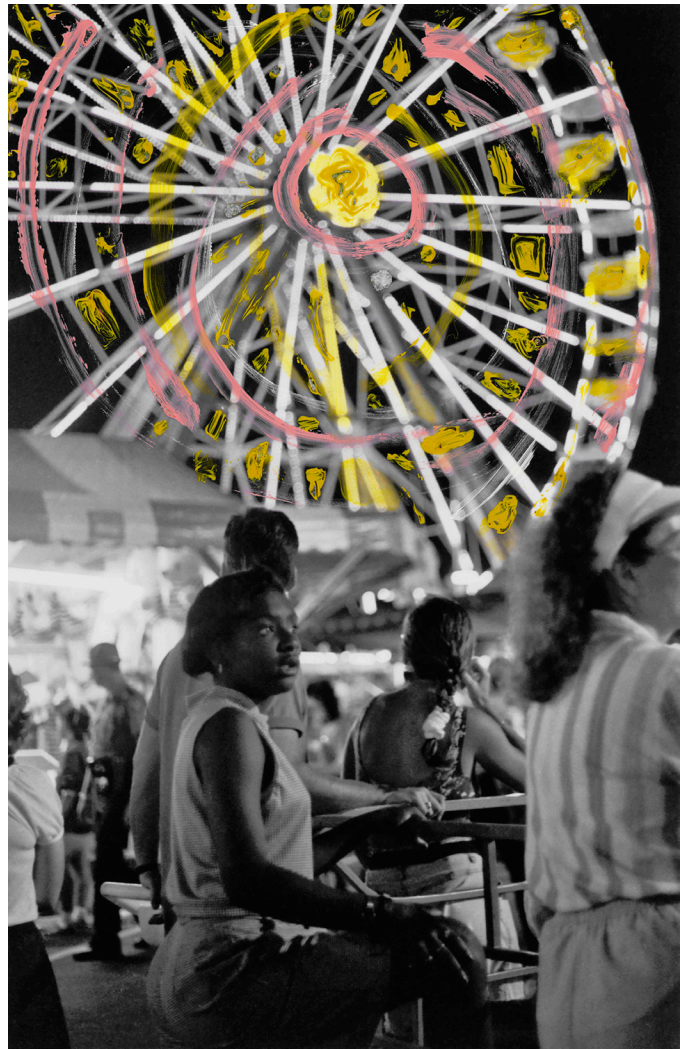


Kwame Brathwaite, *Untitled (Couple's Embrace)*, 1971.

*Harlem, New York* (1952), from that project, depicts the narrator emerging from a manhole on a street in Harlem. Parks' most recent solo museum exhibition, *Gordon Parks: Camera Portraits from the Corcoran Collection* at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., will be open through January 15, 2025.

Kwame Brathwaite's (b. 1938 – d. 2023, New York, NY) photography was a catalyst for the Black is Beautiful Movement in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Brathwaite spread this idea through his writings and photographs, as well as the activities of the two organizations he helped co-found: African Jazz-Art Society & Studios (AJASS) (1956) and the Grandassa Models (1962). His career, spanning over six decades, allowed him to document the intersection of music, fashion, activism, and art globally throughout the diaspora. Brathwaite's contributions to *Infinite Hope* underscore the new Black consciousness which emerged in the late 1960s and manifested throughout the 1970s. Photographs like *Untitled (Couple's Embrace)* (1971) and *Changing Times* (1973) are illustrative of a new vision for Black America, proudly celebrating the togetherness and love of community as well as the worth of the individual. Recent exhibitions featuring Brathwaite's work include *Project a Black Planet: The Art and Culture of Panafrica* at the Art Institute of Chicago, IL, through March 22, 2025, and *Re/Presenting: Art Beyond the Color Line* at Amherst College, Amherst, MA, through July 6, 2025.

Ming Smith (b. 1947, Detroit, MI) captures everyday life through a transcendent and ethereal lens. Her work often features legends of the art, music, and literary world of Harlem and beyond. Smith documents everyday moments of Black life, whether it be legends such as Grace Jones and James Baldwin, or an anonymous passerby on the street. She creates a dreamlike poignancy for each subject. Smith played an integral role in the New York art scene in the later decades of the 20th century. Smith's presentation in the exhibition begins with some of her earliest work in the 1970s, such as *Setting out to Sea (Hoboken, New Jersey)* (1972), as well as glimpses of the 1980s and 1990s, with works like *Brown Girl Dreaming (Transcendence Series), Columbus, Ohio* (1991). Ming Smith has been the subject of numerous recent solo museum exhibitions, including both *Ming Smith: August Moon* and *Ming Smith: Transcendence* at the



Ming Smith, *Brown Girl Dreaming (Transcendence Series), Columbus, Ohio*, 1991.

Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, OH, on view through January 26, 2025; *Ming Smith: Wind Chime* at the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH, on view through January 05, 2025; and *Ming Smith: Jazz Requiem—Notations in Blue* at the The Gund, Gambier, OH, June 27 - December 15, 2024.

Renée Cox (b. 1960, Colgate, Jamaica), a photographer, and political activist, fearlessly explores concepts of empowerment, identity, and injustice; often achieved through the striking and controversial use of herself. Photographing her clothed and nude body serves as a celebration of black womanhood, and a critique of a racist and sexist society. She challenges racial and gendered stereotypes by confronting and subverting them through the lens of the 1990s and touching into the early 21st century. Cox's staged compositions



Renée Cox, *Mother of Us All* (from *The Queen Nanny of the Maroons* series), 2004.

explore a wide variety of possibilities for Black identity, ranging from the fantastic with *Chillen with Liberty* (from the *Rajé Series*) (1998) to the exploration of real-world heroes with *Mother of Us All* (from *The Queen Nanny of the Maroons* series) (2004). Cox's most recent solo museum show, *Renée Cox: Revolution/Revelation*, was on view June 15 through October 6, 2024, at the Newport Art Museum in Providence, Rhode Island.

*Infinite Hope* opens Tuesday, January 21, 2025, from 5-8pm, accompanied by an artists talk at 6:30pm, with panelists Kwame Brathwaite Jr., Director, Kwame Brathwaite Archive; artist Renée Cox; Michal Raz-Russo, Programs Director, Gordon Parks Foundation; and artist Ming Smith; moderated by Key Jo Lee, Chief of Curatorial Affairs and Public Programs, Museum of the African Diaspora, San Francisco.

In her role at MoAD, Lee leads the Museum's curatorial vision. She is responsible for the overall direction and management of its exhibitions, publications, residencies, arts initiatives, as well as its public, family, school, and university programs. As she conceptualizes, develops, and supervises the museum's curatorial initiatives, Lee focuses on identifying and promoting emerging artists, and works to expand MoAD's reach locally, nationally, and internationally through a robust schedule of external public panels, lectures, and publications.

Lee's latest slate of exhibitions include, *Liberatory Living: Protective Interiors and Radical Black Joy*, *Helina Metaferia: What We Must Carry to Get Free*, and, Jessica Monette's *Unveiling Histories: A Fabricated Archive* demonstrate the breadth of her knowledge and the museum's scope.

Lee has a dual master's degree in history of art and African American Studies from Yale University. Her expertise is in American Art from the revolutionary period to the present, modern and contemporary African American art, histories and theories of photography, performance historiography and contemporary African diasporic art. Her first book, *Perceptual Drift: Black Art and an Ethics of Looking* (Yale University Press), was published in January 2023 and she also recently published the essay, *Gesturing Towards Infinitude: Painting Blue/Black Cosmologies*, in *Going Dark: The Figure at the Edge of Visibility*, the catalogue accompanying the critically acclaimed Guggenheim exhibition from the fall of 2023.

For more information about the exhibition, please contact [press@jenkinsjohnsongallery.com](mailto:press@jenkinsjohnsongallery.com). All images copyright the artist, and courtesy Jenkins Johnson Gallery unless otherwise stated. The exhibition will be on view at 1150 25th Street, San Francisco through March 1, 2025. Gallery Hours: Tuesday-Friday 10-6; Saturday, 10-5.



Key Jo Lee (Photo Credit: Tinashe Chidarikire)