

David Hammons: Body Prints, 1968–1979

February 5–May 23, 2021



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Free Admission
Wednesday–Sunday: 12–6pm

New York, NY... The first museum exhibition dedicated to David Hammons's pivotal early works on paper, *David Hammons: Body Prints, 1968-1979* brings together the monoprints and collages in which the artist used the body as both a drawing tool and printing plate to explore performative, unconventional forms of image making. On view from February 5 through May 23, 2021, the exhibition features a significant number of Hammons's large-scale body prints, including *Pray for America* (1974), as well as two sculptural objects, *Black Boy's Window* (1968) and *The Door (Admissions Office)* (1969). In addition, the exhibition presents examples of a lesser known, but no less important, series of Hammons's body prints that utilize colored papers and inks. Together, the thirty-two works highlighted in the exhibition argue for the ingeniousness of Hammons's series—a project which introduced the major themes of a fifty-year career that is central to the history of postwar American art.

Hammons's body prints represent the origin of his artistic language, one that has developed over a long and continuing career and that emphasizes both the artifacts and subjects of contemporary Black life in the United States. Hammons created the body prints by greasing his own body—or that of another person—with substances including margarine and baby oil, pressing or rolling body parts against paper, and sprinkling the surface with charcoal and powdered pigment. The resulting impressions are intimately direct indexes of faces, skin, and hair that exist somewhere between spectral portraits and physical traces. Drawn, silkscreened, and collaged American flags, maps, pieces of clothing, and other found objects complicate the narratives of these works, as do their often-punning titles that offer pointed commentary. In a decade that was an inflection point for racial tension and racial justice in the United States, Hammons chose to use his own body to depict the quotidian joys and entrenched injustices of living as a Black man in midcentury America. More than a half century after they were made, these early works on paper remain a testament to Hammons's desire to reinterpret notions of the real; his celebration of the sacredness of objects touched or made by the Black body; his biting critique of racial oppression; and his deep commitment to social justice.

Born in 1943 in Springfield, Illinois, Hammons moved to Los Angeles in 1963 at the age of twenty and began making his body prints several years later. He studied at Otis Art Institute with the great draftsman Charles White and became part of a younger generation of Black avant-garde artists who were loosely associated with the Black Arts Movement. In the development of his technique of using a body to make a one-to-one likeness, Hammons was inspired by a number of sources including the use of naked female models as living brushes by the French artist Yves Klein; the assemblage and collage practices of Angeleno artists Noah Purifoy, John Outterbridge, John Riddle, and Betye Saar; and the performance work of Studio Z, a cohort of artists that included Senga Nengudi, Maren Hassinger, Houston Conwill, and others. Hammons was also deeply affected by Marcel Duchamp's

readymade art object and use of the pun to expose language as the unstable information system that it is. Following his move to New York in 1978 Hammons's work became more three dimensional, but the fundamental tenets expressed in the body prints remain in his work to this day.

David Hammons: Body Prints, 1968-1979 is organized by Laura Hoptman, Executive Director, with Isabella Kapur, Curatorial Assistant.

Images: David Hammons, *Pray for America*, 1974. Screenprint and pigment on paper, 60 1/2 x 30 inches (153.7 x 76.2 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and The Studio Museum Harlem. Gift to The Museum of Modern Art and The Studio Museum in Harlem by the Hudgins Family in honor of David Rockefeller on his 100th birthday, 2015; David Hammons, *The Wine Leading the Wine*, c. 1969. Grease and pigment on paper, 40 x 48 inches (101.6 x 121.9 cm). Hudgins Family Collection, New York.

Publication

The exhibition is accompanied by a publication with full-color illustrations of the works on view, as well as an introduction by Laura Hoptman; a conversation between curator, gallerist, and activist Linda Goode Bryant and artist Senga Nengudi; and an illuminating photo essay and text by photographer Bruce W. Talamon, who documented David Hammons at work on his body prints in his Los Angeles studio in 1974. The publication is available for purchase at The Drawing Center and in its online bookstore at drawingcenter.org. As with every publication produced by The Drawing Center, *David Hammons: Body Prints, 1968-1979* is also available at drawingcenter.org to read in a digital format, free of charge.

Credits

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