

June 1–August 25, 2019

# 30 AMERICANS

Race.  
History.  
Identity.  
Beauty.

Contemporary art by  
30 of the most important  
African American artists  
of the past four decades.



#30AmericansKC |    

## **30 Americans Conversation Starters**

Welcome to The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art! Here, you'll find an introduction to *30 Americans*, several suggested works to look at with young visitors, and questions about the exhibition's themes that can be used with any work of art. A list of related books for young people is also included.

No single artist in this exhibition presents the definitive view on race, identity, history, or beauty. Instead, the exhibition invites visitors of all ages to look at the artworks as a starting point for conversations that explore these concepts on a personal, community, and national level.

You're invited to explore this exhibition using the conversation prompts below.

### **Introduction to the Exhibition**

Drawn exclusively from the acclaimed Miami-based Rubell Family Collection, this exhibition features works by 30 of the most significant African American artists of the past four decades. These artists are major contributors to the complex dialogues that surround America's past, inform life today, and shape our collective futures.

Whether overtly or subtly, *30 Americans* is about **RACE**.

Although composed of contemporary art, it addresses **HISTORY**.

Its artists explore multifaceted issues of **IDENTITY**.

They embrace and challenge the nuanced concept of **BEAUTY**.

Together, their art resonates with celebration and critique, triumph and tragedy, and reckons with what it means to be American.

The art in this exhibition includes uplifting messages, expressions of pride, and moments of great beauty. Please note that it also contains nudity, references to trauma, and racial epithets. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art welcomes a range of artists' voices and expressions that reflect the diversity of the human experience.

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Race. History. Identity. Beauty.

## Conversation Starters

Explore the suggested works of art using any of the conversation starters.

*The work is intended to be inclusive and everyone is welcomed, but we live in a world where not everyone believes in equality. The world is my home, too, regardless of my skin color, gender, sexual orientation...*

*-Kalup Linzy*

## RACE

The experience of race in America is varied and complex, and talking about race can elicit many different responses.

- Find a work of art that expresses an emotion to you.
- How do you feel when you look at it?  
What about the work makes you feel that way?
- Ask others in your group to share their feelings.  
How are their responses similar to or different from yours? Do their views change your impression of the work?



Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Bird On Money*, 1981.



Kerry James Marshall, *Vignette #10*, 2007.

## HISTORY

We often remember the past through stories and images. Some artists are inspired by personal or historical events. Find a work of art that tells a story.

- What is happening in the story?
- Are there characters in the work of art?  
What might each be saying or thinking?
- What just happened?  
What might happen next?

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*By portraying real women with their own unique history, beauty, and background, I'm working to diversify the representations of black women in art.*

—Mickalene Thomas

## IDENTITY

Art can help us express who we are, where we come from, and what we believe. Choose one work of art to look at more closely. What do you think the artist is telling us about themselves?

Imagine you could ask one of the artists in this exhibition to make a work of art that represents YOU.



Mickalene Thomas, *Baby I Am Ready Now*, 2007.

- Which artist would you choose, and why?
- What would the work look like? What materials would be used?
- Basquiat used an image of a bird to represent Charlie Parker in "Bird on Money." (image on page 2) How would you want to be represented? What images or objects might represent you?



Kehinde Wiley, *Triple Portrait of Charles I*, 2007

## BEAUTY

Art is often described as beautiful, but our ideas about beauty are shaped by a variety of factors. Look closely at a work of art that appeals to your sense of beauty.

- What makes the work beautiful to you? Be specific.
- What does "beauty" mean to you?
- How do you know if something is beautiful?

## **Keep learning with these books**

### **Books about artists featured in *30 Americans*:**

*Radiant Child: The Story of Young Artist Jean-Michel Basquiat*, Javaka Steptoe

### **Books about African American artists represented in the Nelson-Atkins collection:**

*My Hands Sing the Blues: Romare Bearden's Childhood Journey*, Jeanne Walker Harvey

*Jake Makes a World: Jacob Lawrence, a Young Artist in Harlem*, Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts

*Henry Ossawa Tanner: His Boyhood Dream Comes True*, Faith Ringgold

*Gordon Parks: How the Photographer Captured Black and White America*, Carole Boston Weatherford

*Take a Picture of Me, James VanDerZee!*, Andrea J. Loney

### **Books about African American history:**

*Freedom Over Me: Eleven Slaves, Their Lives and Dreams Brought to Life*, Ashley Bryan

*The Undeclared*, Kwame Alexander

*The Parker Inheritance*, Varian Johnson

### **Websites about talking with children about race:**

Teaching Tolerance | [teachingtolerance.org](http://teachingtolerance.org)

Anti-Defamation League | [adl.org](http://adl.org)

EmbraceRace | [embracerace.org](http://embracerace.org)

Please find a *30 Americans* reading list on the Kansas City, Kansas Public Library website [kckpl.org](http://kckpl.org) for kids, teens, and adults.

## **Image Captions**

Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Bird On Money*, 1981.

Acrylic and oil on canvas, 66 x 90 inches.

Courtesy of Rubell Family Collection, Miami.

Art © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Kerry James Marshall, *Vignette #10*, 2007.

Acrylic on fiberglass, 74 x 110 inches.

Courtesy of Rubell Family Collection, Miami.

Art © Kerry James Marshall.

Mickalene Thomas, *Baby I Am Ready Now*, 2007.

Acrylic, rhinestone and enamel on wooden panel, diptych: 72 x 132 inches.

Courtesy of Rubell Family Collection, Miami.

Art © Mickalene Thomas/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Kehinde Wiley, *Triple Portrait of Charles I*, 2007

Oil and enamel on canvas, 82 x 125 inches.

Courtesy of Rubell Family Collection, Miami.

Art © Kehinde Wiley.

Nick Cave, *Soundsuit*, 2008.

Fabric, fiberglass and metal, 102 x 36 x 28 inches.

Courtesy of Rubell Family Collection, Miami.

Art © Nick Cave.



Nick Cave, *Soundsuit*, 2008.

**The  
Nelson-Atkins  
Museum  
of Art**

