

ART + PRACTICE

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 08/17/2021

Art + Practice and Getty Research Institute Present *Blondell Cummings: Dance as Moving Pictures* in Leimert Park

This collaboration and exhibition, part of Getty's African American Art History Initiative, will present the first retrospective survey of choreographer and video artist Blondell Cummings.

Art + Practice: 3401 W. 43rd Place, Los Angeles, CA, 90008

Exhibition Dates: September 18, 2021 - February 19, 2022

Press Walkthrough: Friday, September 17, 2021, times available from 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

For high-resolution photos, please send an email to: office@artandpractice.org

Opening Reception: Saturday, September 18, 2021, 2:00 - 5:00 p.m.

Regular Hours: Wednesday - Saturday, 12:00 - 6:00 p.m.



Blondell Cummings. Gelatin silver print. Photo © Beatriz Schiller 2021. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2014.M.6). Courtesy the Estate of Blondell Cummings.

LOS ANGELES, CA; August 17, 2021 —

Art + Practice and the Getty Research Institute (GRI) are pleased to present the exhibition [*Blondell Cummings: Dance as Moving Pictures*](#) at A+P's exhibition space in Leimert Park. The exhibition, which is set to open on September 18, 2021, is co-curated by the GRI's Kristin Juarez, Research Specialist; Rebecca Peabody, Head, Research Projects and Academic Outreach; and Glenn Phillips, Senior Curator, Head of Exhibitions, and Head of Modern & Contemporary Collections, with curatorial and research assistance from Samantha Gregg and Alex Jones. This will be the first exhibition and publication presented by the GRI's African American Art History Initiative.

Blondell Cummings: Dance as Moving Pictures sheds new light on the pivotal work of African American choreographer and video artist Blondell Cummings (American, 1944-2015). Through a unique movement vocabulary that she called "moving pictures", Cummings made dances that combined the visual imagery of photography and the kinetic energy of movement in order to explore the emotional details of daily rituals as well as the

intimacy of Black home life. Her gestures often stemmed from personal memories, community workshops, and photographs, and her career reflects a dynamic interest in moving images - along with movement that bridged post-modern and Black dance forms.

Cummings found rhythms in daily tasks, using the mundane as a structure from which to improvise. We hear the voices of communities layered throughout her soundtracks: in the oral histories that became voiceovers, in the exchanges with the audience that prompted her improvisational talking dances; and in her groundbreaking collaborations with avant-garde musicians, poets, and writers.

For Cummings, the found gesture often provided a bridge between post-modern dance and local communities. As she noted in a 1994 interview: "I think all of my work has had some connection to the community... For instance, maybe someone will give me a particular excited gesture that a family member does. I might take it up into the air or put it down on the floor or turn it around and then give it back to them... I can take liberties because that's my job as the artist: to show them how I can take their information and transform it into even more of an involved kinetic movement phrase that they might not have seen before."

A+P and the GRI's presentation of Cummings's work represents the first museum exhibition dedicated to the artist. The exhibition draws largely from Cummings's personal video archive of rarely seen works; alongside performance documentation, it also features interviews, photographs, and her lesser-known dance films, including *Cycle* (1978) and *In Night Stir* (1983). Together they reveal the artist's commitment to multidisciplinary art-making that often combined dance with elements of theater, text, photography, and the moving image. Cummings's archive is in the special collections of the Jerome Robbins Dance Division of The New York Public Library.



Cherry Kim, Contact Sheet for Blondell Cummings in Ms. Magazine, 1994, Copyright: Cherry Kim, Courtesy of Cherry Kim.

The GRI's African American Art History Initiative is an ambitious program that aims to establish the GRI as a major center for the study of African American art history. In addition to acquiring archives and related original sources, the initiative includes a dedicated curatorship in African American Art History, a bibliographer with a specialty in the subject, an oral history program, research projects, annual fellowships, public programs, and partnerships with other institutions, including A+P.

The GRI has developed an [online research guide](#) to support the study of Cummings. This guide supports an extensive research project dedicated to Cummings, which has resulted in not only the exhibition at A+P, but a companion volume titled *Blondell Cummings: Dance as Moving Pictures* that includes texts by Sampada Aranke, Blondell Cummings, Thomas F. DeFrantz, Veta Goler, Ishmael Houston-Jones, Meredith Monk, Marjani Forte-Saunders, Elizabeth Streb, Edisa Weeks, Tara Aisha Willis, and Jawole Willa Jo Zollar. This book is being published by X Artists' Books, Los Angeles and will be distributed in fall 2021. Together these resources, along with a public program series, enact the work of the GRI's African American Art History

Initiative and reflect a more inclusive American art history as well as A+P's mission of championing the work of artists of color.

"A+P is grateful for the collaboration with Getty's team, including Glenn, Rebecca, Kristin, Samantha and Alex, to bring and make accessible their curatorial vision of Blondell Cummings's practice to our campus and community in South Los Angeles, after two years of developing the exhibition, and with great support from Cummings's family and Estate. The exhibition, publication, and public program series are all a reflection of Cummings's important legacy," said A+P's Public Programs and Exhibitions Manager Joshua Oduga. "The exhibition presents A+P and GRI's shared vision of caring for artists's practices through honoring Cummings's work by digitizing the performances she created during her lifetime through archiving and preserving her work," Oduga further stated.

PUBLIC PROGRAM SERIES

On the occasion of *Blondell Cummings: Dance as Moving Pictures*, A+P is organizing a series of public programs. Programs will take place digitally and in-person at A+P's Public Program Space at 4334 Degnan Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90008 as COVID restrictions permit. Admission to all programs is free. Please visit artandpractice.org/publicprograms for more information.

A+P PUBLIC PROGRAM SPACE

4334 Degnan Boulevard
Los Angeles, CA 90008
Free Admission | Open for scheduled programs

ABOUT BLONDELL CUMMINGS

Blondell Cummings (1944-2015) was a choreographer and video artist who mined everyday experiences like washing, cooking and building to create works celebrated for their rich characterizations and dramatic momentum. According to Wendy Perron, Cummings crossed over from modern to postmodern, from the Black dance community to the avant-garde community. Cummings referred to her stop-motion movement vocabulary as "moving pictures," which combined her interests in the visual imagery of photography and the kinetic energy of movement. Her dances drew from an accumulation of character studies that often began with photography and workshops, and included poetry, oral histories, and projection. Her interest in moving pictures is also evidenced in her commitment to dance films. She both supported the documentation of dance, and created many experimental dance films. Several of these works will be on view in the exhibition *Blondell Cummings: Dance as Moving Pictures*.

Cummings was born in Effingham, South Carolina but was raised in Harlem, New York City and began



Blondell Cummings, *Chicken Soup*, 1985. Gelatin silver print.
Photo: Kei Orihara. Courtesy The New York Public Library.

dance study in the New York public schools. She attended New York University's School of Education, did graduate work in film and photography at Lehman College, and continued serious dance study at the schools of Martha Graham, José Limón, and Alvin Ailey, along with Eleo Pomare, Thelma Hill, and Walter Nicks. She was also deeply influenced by choreographers who worked across mediums, including Meredith Monk, Yvonne Rainer, and Elaine Summers. In 1969, she became a founding member of Monk's company The House, where she danced for ten years. In 1978 Cummings formed the Cycle Arts Foundation, a discussion/performance workshop focused on familial issues including menopause, caregiving, rituals of the everyday, and art-making—emphasizing her commitment to relating the arts to everyday life. She toured extensively in the 1980s and 90s, and by the 2000's she was a fixture of New York City's downtown dance community and a committed educator. In 2006, her dance *Chicken Soup* (1981) was deemed an American Masterpiece by the National Endowment for the Arts.

CREDIT

This exhibition is co-organized by Art + Practice and the Getty Research Institute, and co-curated by Kristin Juarez, Research Specialist; Rebecca Peabody, Head, Research Projects & Academic Outreach; and Glenn Phillips, Senior Curator, Head of Exhibitions, and Head of Modern & Contemporary Collections, with curatorial and research assistance from Samantha Gregg and Alex Jones.

Blondell Cummings: Dance as Moving Pictures is generously supported by Maria Hummer-Tuttle and Robert Holmes Tuttle, with additional support from Gary and Kathi Cypres, and Michael Rubel and Kristin Rey. Special acknowledgement is given to the Jerome Robbins Dance Division of The New York Public Library and the Blondell Cummings Estate.

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ABOUT ART + PRACTICE

Art + Practice is a private operating 501(c)3 foundation based in the neighborhood of Leimert Park in South Los Angeles. A+P encourages education and culture by providing support services to transition-age foster youth living predominately in South Los Angeles through its collaboration with the nonprofit social service provider First Place for Youth. A+P also provides Angelenos with free access to museum-curated art exhibitions and diverse public art programs.

A+P INFORMATION

Admission to all exhibitions and public programs is free and available to the public. To learn more visit artandpractice.org. Hours are Wednesday – Saturday, 12:00 – 6:00 p.m. A+P's exhibition space is located at 3401 W. 43rd Place, Los Angeles, CA 90008. There is metered parking available on Degnan Boulevard and W. 43rd Place. Free street parking can be found in the neighboring residential area with a two-block walk to A+P. Bus lines that stop nearby are 40, 102, 210, 705, 710 and 740. The Leimert Park metro stop is scheduled to open in 2022.

ABOUT GETTY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

The Getty Research Institute is an operating program of the J. Paul Getty Trust. It serves education in the broadest sense by increasing knowledge and understanding about art and its history through advanced research. The Research Institute provides intellectual leadership through its research, exhibition, and publication programs and provides services to a wide range of scholars worldwide through residencies, fellowships, online resources, and a Research Library. The Research Library—housed in the 201,000-square-foot Research

Institute building designed by Richard Meier—is one of the largest art and architecture libraries in the world. The general library collections (secondary sources) include almost 900,000 volumes of books, periodicals, and auction catalogues encompassing the history of Western art and related fields in the humanities. The Research Library's special collections (primary sources) include rare books, artists' journals, sketchbooks, architectural drawings and models, photographs, and archival materials.

ABOUT THE J. PAUL GETTY TRUST

The J. Paul Getty Trust is an international cultural and philanthropic institution devoted to the visual arts that includes the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Getty Research Institute, the Getty Conservation Institute, and the Getty Foundation. The J. Paul Getty Trust and Getty programs serve a varied audience from two locations: the Getty Center in Los Angeles and the Getty Villa in Pacific Palisades.

PRESS CONTACTS

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