

Valerie Cassel Oliver Black Ontology: The Subversive Beauty of Soul



December 11, 2023
6:30–8:00 pm

Presented by AICA-USA and the Vera List Center for Art and Politics
The Auditorium at The New School
66 West 12th Street, New York

Program

AICA-USA is pleased to present *Black Ontology: The Subversive Beauty of Soul*, the seventeenth annual AICA-USA Distinguished Critic Lecture at The New School, delivered by writer and curator Valerie Cassel Oliver. It is presented in partnership with the Vera List Center for Art and Politics. In *Black Ontology: The Subversive Beauty of Soul*, Cassel Oliver discusses her curatorial practice through a series of defining exhibitions that refute monolithic framings of Black art and artists.

PROGRAM

Welcome

Carin Kuoni, Senior Director/Chief Curator, Vera List Center for Art and Politics

Introduction

Norman Kleeblatt, President, AICA-USA; VLC Board Secretary

Lecture

Valerie Cassel Oliver, *Black Ontology: The Subversive Beauty of Soul*

Q&A

The lecture is followed by a reception at Lang Cafeteria.

Biography

Valerie Cassel Oliver is the Sydney and Frances Lewis Family Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Prior to her position at the VMFA, she was Senior Curator at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston. Over the past two decades, Cassel Oliver has organized numerous exhibitions, including the acclaimed *Double Consciousness: Black Conceptual Art Since 1970* (2005), *Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art* (2012), and major survey exhibitions for Donald Moffett; Benjamin Patterson, Jennie C. Jones, Angel Otero, and Annabeth Rosen.

Her debut at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts was the critically acclaimed retrospective entitled *Howardena Pindell: What Remains to be Seen*, co-organized with Naomi Beckwith (2018). Most recently, she opened the groundbreaking exhibition *The Dirty South: Contemporary Art, Material Culture and the Sonic Impulse* (2021), which toured nationally, and the exhibition *Dawoud Bey: Elegy* (2023), which looks at the artist's preoccupation with histories of place. The work includes commissioned photographs of Richmond's Historic Slave Trail.

Cassel Oliver is the recipient of numerous fellowships and awards, including a fellowship from the Center of Curatorial Leadership (2009); the High Museum of Art's David C. Driskell Award (2011); the James A. Porter Book Award from Howard University (2018) as well as the Alain Locke International Arts Award, Detroit Institute of Art; the College Arts Association's Excellence in Diversity Award; the Audrey Irmas Award for Curatorial Excellence from the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College; and Brandywine Workshop and Archives' Lifetime Achievement Award (all 2022).

Cassel Oliver holds an Executive MBA from Columbia University, New York; an MA in Art History from Howard University in Washington, DC; and a BS in Communications from the University of Texas at Austin.

Credits

The AICA-USA Distinguished Critic Lecture at The New School is an annual event during which an exemplary writer addresses seminal issues in contemporary art criticism. The Distinguished Critic Lectures are co-presented by the Vera List Center for Art and Politics at The New School. Previous lecturers have been Siddhartha Mitter, Legacy Russell, Carolina A. Miranda, Courtney J. Martin, Aruna D'Souza, Paul Chaat Smith, Negar Azimi, Naomi Beckwith, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, Lucy Lippard, Michelle Kuo, Peter Schjeldahl, Holland Cotter, Roberta Smith, Linda Nochlin, and Michael Brenson. Videos of previous lectures can be found on the Vera List Center website (www.veralistcenter.org).

AICA-USA is the United States section of the Association Internationale des Critiques d'Art, which was founded in 1950 in Paris to revive the critical discourse that had suffered under fascism and the Second World War and to develop international cooperation in the fields of artistic creation and cultural development. At present, there are sixty-three member nations representing more than 5,000 art critics. Headquartered in New York, AICA-USA is one of the association's largest national sections, with over 500 distinguished critics, curators, scholars, and art historians working throughout the United States. www.aicausa.org

The Vera List Center for Art and Politics is a research center and a public forum for art, culture, and politics. It was established at The New School in 1992—a time of rousing debates about freedom of speech, identity politics, and society's investment in the arts. A leader in the field, the center is a nonprofit that serves a critical mission: to foster a vibrant and diverse community of artists, scholars, and policymakers who take creative, intellectual, and political risks to bring about positive change. www.veralistcenter.org.

The Fall 2023 programs of the Vera List Center for Art and Politics are generously supported by members of the Vera List Center Board, the VLC Producers Council, Vera's List, and other individual donors, and the following institutional donors: Australian Consulate-General of New York; The Boris Lurie Art Foundation and the Schaina and Josephina Lurje Memorial Foundation; Bridge Philanthropic Consulting; The Dayton Foundation; The Ford Foundation; The Kettering Fund; Mellon Foundation; The Native Arts and Cultures Foundation; and Pryor Cashman LLP. We also acknowledge the support of The New School, our academic home.

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Notes

UPCOMING

SEMINAR

Correction* Seminar 9: Of Bodies and Sound with Astrit Ismaili

Monday, December 18, 2023, 12–1:30 pm EST
Online

Amsterdam-based Kosovar artist Astrit Ismaili's central interest is how bodies are constructed, modified, and interpreted through contemporary society, but also how they are heard, asking what it means to sonify a body politic. Exploring the politics of the body and voice, they aim to disrupt prevailing narratives around representation, imagining new and radical ways of thinking; how bodies inhabit and occupy space.

EXHIBITION

In Common: New Approaches with Romare Bearden

November 9, 2023–January 15, 2024
Parsons School of Design, Sheila C. Johnson Design Center
Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen Gallery
66 5th Avenue at 13th Street

Black Quantum Futurism, Kahlil Robert Irving, Lorraine O'Grady, Hank Willis Thomas, Mickalene Thomas, and Charisse Pearlina Weston contribute to a multigenerational dialogue with Romare Bearden's work on the political agency of art.

PUBLISHING SERIES

Post/doc

Post/doc is a biannual digital publishing series by the Vera List Center for discursive, speculative, experimental writing and artistic practices. Fall 2023 commissions forthcoming by artist and writer Lara Atallah and artist TJ Shin.

For video documentation of this talk, visit www.veralistcenter.org where you can also find additional information and documentation of previous AICA-USA Distinguished Critic Lectures.



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*Correction**