

echoes

reframing collage

Collage, by its very nature, is a cunning and dexterous art form. It uses discontinuity and rupture to mystify and prod—each work an act of construction by destruction. With its clever rearticulations of the imagery of other media, collage enables artists to capitalize on the fact that the meaning of an image always depends on context. And with its ability to defy and include all art forms, collage can force unexpected juxtapositions, activate viewing, spark reconsiderations, and spawn new discourse, making it an extremely effective tool for politically and socially engaged artists. Ultimately, it allows for a multiplicity of suggestions over fixed statements, even if the cumulative effect hammers home one overriding idea.

The exhibition *Echoes: Reframing Collage* is designed to extend and enrich *The Many Hats of Ralph Arnold: Art, Identity & Politics* by inviting visitors to further reflect upon many of Arnold's primary concerns—race, sexuality, masculinity, advertising, and media—through works by seven contemporary artists. The artists were selected for their embrace of collage techniques or effects, their use of appropriated and pop cultural imagery, and their possession of thematic interests similar to those of Arnold. Notably, all of them use the structure of collage as a framework for layering popular histories and personal narratives. Yet while many of their works expand on cut-and-paste paper collage and apply the logic of collage to photographs, none of these seven artists work in digital collage. Like Arnold, materiality matters to them, and their compositions are made in real time and space, even if they are abstracted at the end through the flattening effect of photography.

Both **Krista Franklin** (American, b. 1970) and **Derrick Adams** (American, b. 1970) use traditional techniques of cut-and-paste collage to explore black archetypal figures from popular culture. Franklin uses images of female activists and freedom fighters culled from spreads that originated in *Ebony* magazine. Adams's monumental and multihued *Don't Come for Me Unless I Send for You* (2016/17) probes the power of television to manipulate the viewer and shape identity.

Other artists with works in the exhibition explore the idea of identity through fragmentation.

Paul Mpagi Sepuya (American, b. 1982) makes complex compositions by pointing his camera at a mirror covered with images and paper scraps mined from not only his personal archive but also our collective cultural trove, exploring intimacy, gender, and sexuality. **Nathaniel Mary Quinn** (American, b. 1977) creates paintings of figures whose body parts are copied from an assortment of magazine clippings, developing characters who are depicted as a complex sum of parts.

Xaviera Simmons (American, b. 1974) and **Wardell Milan** (American, b. 1978) make sculptures for their cameras using a variety of sourced materials. Simmons's *Index, Composition* works (2011–ongoing) reveal a panoply of ethno-cultural artifacts under a shrouded woman's skirt, suggesting the performative and multilayered nature of identity. Milan devises intricate, miniature fantasy worlds on tabletops that he photographs and then enlarges, revealing provocative references to art history, popular culture, and his personal story.

And finally, the two paintings created for the exhibition by **Ayanah Moor** (American, b. 1973), *Seventy-Three* (2018) and *Someone You Know* (2018), respond directly to the style, era, and concerns of Arnold's work. Both works combine advertisements from 1970s *Ebony* magazines, also a favorite source for Arnold, with abstraction, probing the links among consumerism, art history, and black identity.

Like Arnold and the many collage artists before him, the seven artists represented in *Echoes* are spirited—even exuberant—while also expressing political and social concerns. In a world where identity can be much more nuanced, layered, and public than in Arnold's time, these artists, as well as countless other artists working today, do not shy from using all the materials, experiences, and points of view at their disposal to address issues of self and society in a way that is as restorative as it is radical. Surely that shift portends a progression that Ralph Arnold would celebrate.

Karen Irvine
Chief Curator and Deputy Director