



Hanif Abdur-Rahim, *Ubiquitous Swag*, 2010

Dandy Lion:

(RE) ARTICULATING BLACK MASCULINE
IDENTITY

APRIL 6–JULY 12, 2015

Educator's Guide

This guide serves as a viewer supplement to the exhibition *Dandy Lion: (Re) Articulating Black Masculine Identity*. It includes information about the works on view, questions for looking and discussion, classroom activities, and suggested readings. You may download this guide from the museum's website [here](#). A PDF with images that can be projected for classroom use can also be found there. To schedule a free docent-led tour, please complete the form [here](#). In addition to exhibition curator Shantrelle P. Lewis and MoCP manager of education, Corinne Rose, Amy M. Mooney, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Art History, Columbia College Chicago contributed to this guide.

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Dandy Lion: (Re) Articulating Black Masculine Identity

Introduction

The men photographed in this exhibition reflect a current and growing movement among men of African descent—a manner of dress, attitude, and biting sense of humor with both historical antecedents and contemporary motivations. These images also demonstrate that the medium of photography has become an effective platform for the self-representation of sartorial Black men.

The roots of Black Dandyism can be traced back to attempts by 15th-century African rulers to mix African attire with European fashions, and also to the “dressing up” of enslaved Africans in Europe and the Americas during the transatlantic slave trade. Black Dandyism is thus an assimilation of European menswear intertwined with an African aesthetic of performance and ritual of dress. In a continental African context, clothes are extremely important—for royalty and commoners alike. Scholar Monica Miller notes that articles of clothing on Black men during slavery (and colonialism) often signified one’s station in life: freedom or subjection. In response to the widespread stereotype of Black men as brutes, by the early 20th century, fashion became a means for men of African descent to exert control over self-presentation and craft new identities, and thus a new phase of the dandy movement was born.

Today, artists from various regions around the African Diaspora are using still photographs and moving images to depict young sartorial Black men in urban, rural, literal, and abstract landscapes across the globe. These trickster Dandy Lions are high-styled rebels. They defy stereotypical and monolithic understandings of masculinity within the global Black community.

The first comprehensive exhibition of its kind, *Dandy Lion: (Re) Articulating Black Masculine Identity* thus explores a contemporary conversation about nuanced sartorial expressions and the fluidity of Black masculinity. In creative collaboration with the photographers and filmmakers who document them, these present-day dandies are using a formal means of style and dress not only for innovative self-expression, but also to disrupt convention and advance change.

-Shantrelle P. Lewis

Note to Educators: The histories and cultures that inform Black Dandy culture are vast and complex. Some of that history is touched upon here but additional knowledge and reading on the following histories is recommended: The Transatlantic Slave Trade; African Colonialism; the African Diaspora; Pan-Africanism; and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Scholar Monica Miller’s book *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity* (2009) is an excellent introduction to concepts explored in this exhibition.

It is important to note that the exhibition’s curator, Shantrelle P. Lewis, says that not all of the men shown in this exhibition would identify themselves as dandies and some might be put off by that title or possibly any other label. Lewis identifies these men under this umbrella for the purpose of discussing a cultural phenomenon.



Allison Janae Hamilton, *Tell Me No Tales*, 2013

Dandy Lion: (Re) Articulating Black Masculine Identity

Introductory Questions for Looking and Discussion

Essential Question: How can a portrait communicate information about our identity and standing in society?

1. Look carefully at the individual works in the exhibition. Describe what you see. What pulls your attention? Why?
2. Personal expression and representation through fashion is a central theme of this exhibition.
 - What do you notice about the clothing and personal style of the subject of the photograph?
 - What do you notice about their body language and facial expression? How do they present themselves to the camera?
 - What might those details communicate about the subject? What do you think he or she was hoping to communicate based on what you see in the photograph?
3. What can you tell about how the photographer made this image? How did he or she use techniques such as framing and composition and vantage point?
 - What do you think the photographer wanted to communicate about his or her subject? Why?



Harness Hamese, *Khumbula Family Portrait*, 2014



Rose Callahan
*Barima Owusu-Nyantekyi at the
King's Head Club, London,
2013*

GLOBAL BLACK DANDY CULTURE

As much as Western society has influenced the rest of the world, through a process that is not always viewed positively, it has likewise experienced changes through immigration and globalism. The subjects of these photographs are all Black men, yet, like the exhibition's photographers, they come from diverse ethnicities and cultures. The portraits in this exhibition were shot in various places around the African Diaspora, including locales throughout the United States, Africa, and Europe, from urban to rural, prosperous to impoverished. This amalgamation of cultures and ethnic groups created the Black Dandy. Black Dandies assimilate, acculturate, and in many ways, dominate Western fashion. Like sampling in Hip Hop music, they mine and combine inspiration from a wide range of sources and thus create style trends. These images remind us that Blackness is not monolithic.

4. Are there clues in the image that suggest when and where this portrait might have been made? What can you tell about this place? How? What might we learn about the subjects based on where we find them?
 - How does what we see here challenge or conform to our concepts of these places (nations/states/cities)?

LA SAPE

While Black dandyism was evolving in Europe and America, a parallel movement was developing in Central Africa—Le Société des Ambianceurs et Personnes Élégantes (La SAPE), which translates as the Society of Ambiance and People of Elegance (or Sapeur). Originating in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Sapeur movement dates back to the early colonial era. Sapeurism derives from a variety of factors, including developments in popular culture, the imitation of Frenchmen, and the so-called acculturation of educated Black servants. In *Dandy Lion*, the work of Caroline Kaminju, Daniele Tamagni, and Radcliffe Roye depicts the Congolese Sapeur.

Sapeurism is a complicated, performed, sociocultural movement of dandyism that intersects colonization, independence, class, identity, and fashion. Since the early 20th century, the Sapeur movement has experienced different phases and grown in both significance and influence. The Democratic Republic of Congo is a nation rich in natural resources with a long history of political instability. In recent years, between 1998 and 2008, a series of civil wars and resulting violence, displacement, poverty, and disease has resulted in the death of over 5 million people in DRC. One might assume from the elegant clothing of the Sapeur that they are men of financial means, but that is not the case. The Sapeur spend a large proportion of their earnings on fashion at times choosing between purchasing clothes and eating or providing for their children's education. They also trade, borrow and rent clothes to look their best. Lewis says that in many African cultures cloth is connected to spirituality and the ritualistic donning of cloth/clothes can be viewed as deeply transformative.

La SAPE in Popular Culture

The aspirational image of Sapeur culture, with a focus on rising above difficult circumstances with flare and style, has increasingly garnered attention on the world stage. Congolese Sapeur have made numerous recent appearances in popular culture including in a music video by Solange Knowles and in an uplifting ad for Guinness beer. Knowles says that she saw Congolese Dandies in a book of photographs of La SAPE by Daniele Tamagni, whose work is featured in this exhibition, and decided that she wanted to style her video *Losing You* after the look of Tamagni's images.

In 2014 Guinness produced a video advertisement featuring images of Congolese Dandies, whose impeccably styled, clean, and colorful clothing stands in sharp contrast to their harsh living conditions. Because there is little infrastructure to support film crews in Congo, Guinness flew Congolese Sapeur to South Africa and filmed much of the ad there with a British stylist and trunks of clothes brought in to "heighten" the men's fashions. This ad is the second video in an inspirational campaign launched by Guinness called *Made of More*. The first video in this series featured a basketball game in which able-bodied players used wheelchairs to compete more fairly with a disabled friend.

Guinness also produced what they refer to as a short documentary, *The Men inside the Suits*, that shows La SAPE at home talking about their lifestyle, strutting through their communities, and dancing and drinking Guinness beer in a night club.



Radcliffe Roye, *Untitled No. Five*, 2011

La SAPE in Popular Culture

Activity

1. Watch and read about the making of Solange Knowles' music video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CScqFDtelrQ>

<http://africasacountry.com/when-solange-filmed-a-music-video-in-a-cape-town-township/>

2. Watch and read about the Guinness Sapeur *Made of More* ad and the documentary *The Men inside the Suits*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CScqFDtelrQ>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-magazine-monitor-25783245>

- What do you notice about how La SAPE were portrayed in each example?
- In each video, how is the Dandy used to sell a product?
- In *The Men inside the Suits* do you think Guinness has crossed a line between educating the public about Sapeur culture and exploiting that culture? Why or why not?
- Do you think it is accurate to call this short film a documentary?

Black Representation: Connecting Past to Present

In the introduction to her book *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity* (2009) Monica Miller says, “I position the black dandy explicitly among other racialized performers and performers of masculinity in order to read the dandy as a complicated figure that can at once, subvert and fulfill normative categories of identity at different times and places as a gesture of self-articulation.”



Russell K. Frederick, *Untitled*, 2014

Scholar and activist W. E. B. du Bois and his contemporaries including the political activist and orator Marcus Garvey, were adamant about influencing the position and mainstream image of Black people during the 20th century in large part through self-actualization. The work of Black portrait artists including James Van der Zee and Archibald Motley often pushed political agendas and asserted Black liberation and pride.

These traditions carry through to the photographers in *Dandy Lion*. For example, Jody Ake uses the delicate and antiquated ambrotype process to create formal portraits of contemporary Black men evoking their identity and self-actualization. Working primarily with medium- and large-format black and white film, both Jati Lindsay and Russell K. Frederick have spent the past few decades documenting their communities. Lindsay’s images give us a glimpse of the life and times of contemporary jazz musicians. Frederick illustrates the dwindling community of proud Black men as gentrification dominates Brooklyn. Laylah Amatullah Barrayn photographed well-known Black Arts pioneer Che Baraka in his studio.

To read more about the additional artists featured in *Dandy Lion* read the complete exhibition essay [here](#).

- In terms of fashion, why do you think the suit has become so strongly associated with power? Can you think of other examples of fashions that could represent Black power?



James Van der Zee, *A Member of Garvey's African Legion with his Family*, 1924
From the collection of the Museum of Contemporary Photography
Columbia College Chicago

James Van Der Zee

Dandy Lion exhibition curator Shantrelle Lewis cites photographer James Van Der Zee (1886-1983) as an influence on the photographers as well as the Dandies seen in this exhibition. The image to the left by Van der Zee, *A Member of Garvey's African Legion with his Family*, 1924 is held in the MoCP's permanent collection. Born in Lennox, Massachusetts, Van Der Zee (1886-1983) settled in New York City in 1916 and established the Guarantee Photo Studio in Harlem shortly afterward. The studio brought him immediate commercial success as a portrait photographer, and over the next two decades he photographed numerous members of the Harlem community during the height of the Harlem Renaissance. Van Der Zee portrayed his subjects as they chose to be represented and remembered through photography often working with them to select clothing, objects, props and elaborate backgrounds that reflect among other things fashion trends, religious and political affiliations, and social standing. Van der Zee's work is noted for showing the emergence of an African-American middle class.

In addition to photographing individuals and families, Van der Zee photographed weddings, funerals, clubs, and school groups. He also photographed celebrities. As the official photographer for Marcus Garvey, Van Der Zee captured numerous Universal Negro Improvement Association members posing in their military-like garb.

Activity

In Context: Marcus Garvey (1887-1940)

- Research Marcus Garvey. What can you learn about his beliefs and impact on Black culture? How is knowing Garvey's history important to understanding Van der Zee's image?

Visitors to Dandy Lion: (Re) Articulating Black Masculine Identity are invited to further explore the themes of representation and fashion in the exhibition *Archibald Motley: Jazz Age Modernist* currently on display at the Chicago Cultural Center (78 E. Washington at Michigan Avenue). Columbia College collaborated with the City of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events to curate a dynamic series of city-wide programs through August 31st, 2015 connecting contemporary musicians, artists, and authors with Motley's depictions of jazz and Chicago's Bronzeville. For more information, please see www.colum.edu/motley

Archibald Motley, “The New Negro” and the Black Dandy

Presenting oneself as the epitome of style and formality has long precedent within the practice of photography and painting. Looking at the work of Chicago painter Archibald Motley (1891-1981) and photographer James van Der Zee demonstrates the connection between the past and the present in a way that helps us to better understand the artists’ intent. The conceptualization of the new and its distinction from the old is always purposeful. It signals an innovative way of thinking, a desire to be different and the intent to affect change. For black intellectuals at the turn of the twentieth century, a “new Negro,” could have entirely life experience, as he (or she) did not grow up in slavery. Booker T. Washington and several colleagues published an anthology called, *A New Negro for a New Century: An Accurate and Up-to-date Record of the Upward Struggles of the Negro Race* (1901). Importantly, the text included both essays addressing the political and social goals of the “new” and photographs of those whose work and appearance would inspire the future. Not only did the photographic portraits of accomplished individuals model what to wear, but also how to perform for the camera. From their likenesses, one could study how to hold one’s head, gaze, and arrange one’s countenance for the public consumption of others, particularly audiences who were not yet aware of the “charge” for the “new” to help others gain access to education, to further the cause of civil rights, and to believe in themselves as agents of change.



Archibald J. Motley Jr., *Self-Portrait (Myself at Work)*, 1933.
Oil on canvas, 57.125 x 45.25 inches (145.1 x 114.9 cm).
Collection of Mara Motley, MD, and Valerie Gerrard Browne.
Image courtesy of the Chicago HistoryMuseum, Illinois.
© Valerie Gerrard Browne.

The idea of a “new” continues to be developed by leaders such as Alain Locke, who in 1925 published another anthology titled, *The New Negro*. This text brought in more from the arts, including poetry, music, and hyper-realistic portraits drawn by German-born artist, Winold Reiss. Unlike the earlier photographs of specific individuals, these portraits of everyday people extended the agency of the “new” to all and worked to recognize and celebrate the uniqueness of black culture. Author Alain Locke called to artists and audiences alike to understand the legacy of African art and its lasting impact on modernism. It’s within this context that the portraits of Archibald Motley need to be considered. Painting in Chicago during the 1920s-40s, this academically trained artist focused on portraits of black subjects with the intent of his subjects seeing themselves and other African Americans as “fine art.” Like many of his era, Motley believed that “Art” was the highest cultural achievement and that as such, black art could counter and dispel racism. His self-portraits convey the consciousness of self-presentation from his formal dress to his inclusion of the tools of his profession. Like the later representation and performance of the Black Dandy, Motley’s portraits of himself communicate his own education and social status with the intention of breaking with past expectations. He saw himself as an innovator, both in terms of his choice of black subjects and his own unique style of depiction. Motley imaginatively experimented with the formal qualities of his craft, imbuing his canvases with intense chroma, exaggerative gestures, and rhythmic compositions. Like the contemporary Black Dandy, Motley synthesized the traditions of European art historical representation with a more global sense of modernism, creating art forms that address and defy our understandings of race, gender, and class.

Black Representation: Connecting Past to Present

Questions for Looking and Discussion

How do these earlier portraits by Motley and Van der Zee compare with the contemporary depictions of Black men in *Dandy Lion*?

1. In what way do you think the subjects seen in these earlier examples as well as the artists represented in *Dandy Lion* are similar in their “performance” of identity? How do they differ?
2. What visual strategies did Motley and Van Der Zee employ to emphasize their subject’s agency?
 - In what ways do these images defy social expectations of race and gender? In what ways do they seem to conform?
 - Which of the artists featured in *Dandy Lion* reference these same conventions and expectations?
3. How do these representations shift between representing individual and group identities?
4. Why does self-presentation matter? What is at stake?
5. How do expectations of race and gender inform our understanding of these images?

Resources:

National Public Radio *Fear of Black Men: How Society Sees Black Men And How They See Themselves* <http://www.npr.org/player/v2/mediaPlayer.html?action=1&t=1&islist=false&id=396415737&m=396505336>

Adams, Nathaniel (Author); Ehmann, Sven (Editor); Callahan, Rose (Photographer) *I Am Dandy: The Return of the Elegant Gentleman*. Berlin Germany: Gestalten (2013)

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. “The Trope of a New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black.” *Representations* 24 (1988): 129-55.

Locke, Alain. *The New Negro: An Interpretation*. New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925.

Miller Monica. *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, (2009)

Mooney, Amy. *Archibald J. Motley, Jr.: Volume 4 of The David C. Driskell Series of African American Art*. San Francisco: Pomegranate Press, 2004.

Richard Powell, ed. *Archibald Motley: Jazz Age Modernist*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, (2014).

Thaggert, Miriam. *Images of Black Modernism: Verbal and Visual Strategies of the Harlem Renaissance*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press (2010).

Washington, Booker T., et al. *A New Negro for a New Century*. Chicago: American Publishing House, (1900).