



## **Exhibition spotlights black visual culture**

By [Samuel Lee](#)

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In an upcoming exhibition, visual images — both historical and contemporary — converse with each other in an unprecedented survey of over 90 years of visual culture bearing witness to the black experience.

Black Pulp!, curated by William Villalongo, a lecturer at the School of Art, and Mark Thomas Gibson ART '13 opens this week at the School of Art's 32 Edgewood Gallery. The exhibition brings together artifacts and artworks from Emory University's Stuart A. Rose Library, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, the Library of Congress and the Yale University Art Gallery. According to the exhibition's press release, Black Pulp! focuses on print media, historical documents and contemporary art that foreground the creative use of highly disseminated visual images to "leverage limited notions of black subjectivity and humanity."

"Essentially, the show tells the story of how, over a period of time spanning from 1920s [onward], black artists and publishers have sort of been able to rebuff and overturn the stereotypical imagery of black people through a strategy of printed media," Villalongo explained.

With more than 60 rarely seen objects on view, including collages, comics, art journals, periodicals, prints, sculptures, video art pieces and performance art, the show offers a wealth of voices from the past and present that critically engage with the derogatory history surrounding representations of the black body in mainstream American culture. As Gibson explained, the show points to the intersection between the print culture of the Harlem Renaissance and the art and comics produced in the more recent decades — they all use "heroic, dynamic, lurid and satiric imagery to define or comment on the complex nature of the black experience." Villalongo also noted the show's overarching narrative of the black community "owning their own identity and their own image" across history.

Villalongo added that highlights of the show's selection of print media include Counter Attack, a newspaper produced by the New Haven chapter of the Black Panther party, Fire!! Devoted to Younger Negro Artists, a publication edited by Wallace Thurman in 1926 that opened up discussions of homosexuality and other subject matter that was taboo at the time, as well as a rare first-edition copy of Lobo No. 1, the first African-American standalone comic book.

Surrounding these artifacts on display, the artwork on show includes rarely displayed collaged works on postcards by Wangechi Mutu ART '00 from her personal collection, a site-specific installation in ink, pencil and wash on paper by Firelei Baez titled "Memory, Like Fire, is Radiant and Immutable," and a video piece by William Pope.L where, dressed as Superman with a skateboard on his back, he crawls all the way to the Bronx from the base of the Statue of Liberty.

Villalongo explained that although the exhibition was conceived almost a year ago, the show will enlighten the community about the history and struggle of the black community in light of ongoing conversations on race in Yale and other institutions in the country.

“I hope ... that it will educate us as to the history and struggles that black people have had to deal with in relationship to identity, coming out of slavery, post-reconstruction, through Jim Crow, through their migration from the South to the North, finding jobs, avoiding lynching,” Villalongo said. “It’s an epic, epic story and it’s one that our community needs to take the time to better understand.”

Sam Messer, associate dean of the School of Art, said he thinks the exhibition ties in to the visual, political and social conversations that take place within the school.

“It’s a really appropriate show to have now on so many levels,” he said, adding that the show is a good example of how the space can be used educationally, “tapping into and broadening” the visual histories shared among students and the community.

Black Pulp! is on view from Jan. 19 to March 11 at 32 Edgewood Ave. There will be a public reception on Jan. 21 at 6 p.m.