

BIO

Desmond Beach: Artist, Educator, Intercessor



Desmond Beach is an artist and educator based in New York City. His journey began at the Maryland Institute College of Art, where he earned his Master of Fine Arts and Bachelor of Fine Arts degrees. Beach's artistic pursuits have taken him across the country, participating in fellowships at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, Skidmore College, and the Bayard Rustin Art Fellowship in New York City. He has also shared his artistic vision through residencies at the Women Housing Coalition in Baltimore, Pyramid Atlantic Art Center in Silver Spring, and a teaching fellow at the College of the Atlantic in Bar Harbor, Maine. His artistic influence extends beyond studios and galleries, as he has served as a visiting artist/lecturer at institutions like Coppin State University and Emerson College.

An Interdisciplinary Voice for Black Joy and Healing

Born and raised in Baltimore, Maryland, Beach's identity as the middle son of three boys informs his artistic perspective. He identifies as an interdisciplinary artist, meaning his creative expression transcends singular mediums. His work often tackles specific social issues and historical injustices. Using his experiences as a Black man and the complexities of Baltimore's history, Beach's art creates sacred spaces for reflection and healing. He achieves this through diverse mediums, including sculpture, costume, fiber arts, installations, performances, and mixed media.

Transforming Pain into Power

Beach's artistic mission is profoundly personal and purposeful. He views his art as a calling, embracing the roles of intercessor, activist, preacher, healer, and prophet. His work delves into the darkest chapters of American history, confronting the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade and the Jim Crow era. Yet, he doesn't shy away from the present, acknowledging the ongoing presence of white supremacy. Beach transforms these painful realities through his art into vibrant expressions of Black life, resilience, and joy.

Desmond Beach, New York, NY

EDUCATION

MFA, Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, MD

BFA, Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, MD

PROFESSIONAL APPOINTMENTS

Higher Education

2022 - 2023 Teaching Fellow, College of the Atlantic, Bar Harbor, Maine

2004 - 2009 Adjunct Fine Art Professor, Baltimore City Community College, Baltimore, MD

2002 - 2004 Instructor, Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, MD

Visiting Artist / Guest Lecturer

Coppin State University, Baltimore, MD

Morgan State University, Baltimore, MD

Emerson College, Boston, MA

Howard County Community College, Columbia, MD

Sidwell Friends School, Washington, DC

Secondary Education

2016 - 2021 Dean of Community and Culture, The Field School, Washington, DC

2014 - 2019 Studio Department Chair, The Field School, Washington, DC

2006 - 2016 Middle & Upper School Visual Art Teacher, The Field School, Washington, DC

AWARDS, RESIDENCIES, AND FELLOWSHIPS

2021-22 Bayard Rustin Residency Fellow, New York, NY

2021 Independent Arts Award Maryland State Art Council

2018 Covenant Baptist United Church of Christ, Artist-in-Residence, Washington, DC

2013 Pyramid Atlantic Art Center, Artist-in-Residence, Silver Spring, MD

2010 Skidmore College Summer Art Teacher Fellow, Saratoga Springs, NY

2004 Joan Mitchell MFA Award Nominee

2004 Fine Arts Work Center Summer Fellow, Provincetown, MA

2002 Women's Housing Coalition, Artist-in-Residence, Baltimore, MD

PUBLICATIONS

2018 The 47th Emerson Review, Emerson College

PRESS

Three Artists Follow The Moves By Container: New Haven Independent Year: 2023

Desmond Beach's Vintage-Style Photographs Shine Light on the Long History of Institutionalized Racism
By Morgan Laurens Container: Not Real Art World Year: 2021

PERMANENT COLLECTIONS

The Phillip Collection, Washington, DC

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2023 *Threads of Memory*, Ely Center of Contemporary Art, New Haven, CT
Time Is Filled With Swift Transition, Delaware Valley Arts Alliance, Narrowsburg, NY
- 2020 *Works by Desmond Beach*, Chesapeake Gallery, Bel Air, MD
- 2019 *Color Me This*, Evanston Art Center, Evanston, IL
- 2005 *Wanted*, Hudson D. Walker Gallery, Provincetown, MA

SELECTED JURIED MUSEUM EXHIBITIONS

- 2023 *POUR, TEAR, CARVE*, The Phillip Collection, Washington, DC
- 2021 *Inside Outside, Upside Down*, The Phillip Collection, Washington, DC
Cladogram, Katonah Museum of Art, Katonah, NY
- 2008 *Person Of The Crowd: The Contemporary Art Of Flânerie*, Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase, NY
- 2004 The Contemporary Museum, Baltimore, MD

SELECTED JURIED GALLERY EXHIBITIONS

- 2023 *Counting the Seconds Between Lightning and Thunder*, Wassaic Project, Wassaic NY
To Be Made Whole, Pace University Art Gallery, New York, NY
- 2022 *Voices of Freedom*, Kennedy Heights Arts Center, Cincinnati, OH
High Contrast, Trolley Barn Gallery, Poughkeepsie, NY
tet[R]ad: Cultivating Collaborative Creative Community, Maryland Art Place, Baltimore, MD
SALLY, The Brickbottom Gallery, Somerville, Massachusetts
- 2021 *Grey Area*, Treat Gallery, New York, NY
Repercussions, Eubie Blake National Jazz and Cultural Center, Baltimore, MD
- 2019 *1st Annual Juried Exhibition*, Hudson Valley MOCA, Peekskill, NY
rag mad soft, Waller Gallery, Baltimore, MD
Duplexity, M6 Annual Juried Exhibitions, MINT Gallery, Atlanta, GA
Contemporary 2019: Contemporary Figure Biannual, The Art Center, Grand Junction, CO
- 2018 *Alteration*, LoosenArt, Rome, Italy
- 2016 *I AM ART NYC*, Industry City, Brooklyn, NY
Self & Subject, Photoworks, Glen Echo Park, MD
- 2011 *Black Male Identity Project*, Baltimore City Community College, Baltimore, MD
- 2010 *Studio 312*, Case Gallery, Skidmore College
"Pinch" A Sculptural Invitational, The Rouse Company Foundation Gallery, Columbia, MD
- 2007 Artscape Outdoor Sculpture Visual Arts Exhibition, Baltimore, MD
- 2006 Artscape Baltimore 06 Visual Arts Exhibition Current Gallery, Baltimore, MD
- 2005 Tribes Gallery, New York, NY
25th Anniversary, School 33, Baltimore, MD

2004	<i>Artscape Baltimore 05 Visual Arts Exhibition</i> , Baltimore, MD Creative Alliance, Baltimore, MD <i>Celebrating the Spirit</i> , Carroll Arts Council, Carroll County, MD <i>Strange Land</i> , Meyerhoff Gallery, Baltimore, MD Artscape Visual Arts Exhibition, Maryland Art Place, Baltimore, MD Creative Alliance, Baltimore, MD <i>Strange Land</i> , Meyerhoff Gallery, Baltimore, MD
2003	Artscape Visual Arts Exhibition, Rosenberg Gallery <i>Window and Door Project</i> , Baltimore Office of Promotion & Arts, Baltimore, MD <i>FreeStyle</i> , Meyerhoff Gallery, Baltimore, MD <i>Jazz</i> , Mt. Lebanon Baptist Church, Baltimore, MD Artscape Visual Arts Exhibition, Outdoor Sculpture, Baltimore, MD
2002	<i>Remembering 911</i> , Meyerhoff Gallery, Baltimore, MD

Artist Statement

Desmond Beach

As an artist, I am continually drawn to the powerful words of James Baldwin, whose statements about the struggle of being a conscious Black individual in America resonate deeply with me. "To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a rage almost all the time" (Baldwin). My work is an authentic expression of my lived experience, a quest to explore and illuminate the complexities of the Black experience through art.

My work is rooted in the rich tradition of African storytelling, a thread that runs through each piece I create. My ancestors and those of the African Diaspora are honored in my work, and through performance and installation art, I build sacred spaces for their souls to rest.

My ultimate goal as an artist is to transform the horrific into the beautiful, to take the pain and trauma of the Black experience and turn it into something that inspires and uplifts. Recent and historical events related to the African-American experience and anti-Blackness inspire my work, driving me to explore these themes in new and thought-provoking ways.

I draw inspiration from a wide range of sources, including images of Black people during the Middle Passage and the Jim Crow South and their representation in today's mass media. My work often addresses the racial stereotypes that affect Black people. My deliberate remixing and reexamining of the Black struggle and their resilience is an invitation to dialogue about these issues.

My work spans a variety of media, including performance, sculpture, mixed media, installation, fiber art, costume, painting, and photography. Each piece is a unique expression of my artistic vision, a forum for illuminating the existence of the nameless and amplifying the voices of the marginalized.

Beloved Tapestry Project

Initiated amidst the backdrop of the pandemic, the project unfolded as a poignant response to the inundation of images depicting black bodies strewn across the streets during a period of heightened racial tension. The haunting recollection of Michael Brown's lifeless form abandoned and neglected like an animal, weighed heavily on my heart. In contemplating a meaningful response to such brutality, the idea of a quilt emerged, drawing inspiration from the rich history of quilts within Black culture, liberation, and resilience.

The resilience of Black individuals transforming seemingly discarded materials into precious safeguards resonated deeply with me. Imagining one of these beloved tapestries covering Michael Brown's body became a symbolic gesture—an act of care and protection amid his vulnerable repose.

Delving into the historical significance of quilts during the era of enslavement in the United States, I considered the embedded messages and codes that served as conduits to liberation. The powerful symbolism inherent in quilts transcended their domestic utility. Reflecting on my mother's lifelong passion for creation through crocheting and my father's supportive role in preparing the yarn, I observed a metaphorical manifestation of love in the blankets that adorned our home.

Memories of my grandmother meticulously crafting layered fabric pieces and stitching them together by hand fueled my deep connection to textiles and tapestries in my artistic endeavors. This particular project, centered around the creation of tapestries, became an act of love and a conceptual exploration into the historical underpinnings of this tradition.

Navigating the delicate and precise nature of textile and fabric work, I found myself, as a man, contributing to a conversation that has traditionally been associated with women. This exploration not only tapped into Black masculinity and vulnerability but also challenged conventional notions of what masculinity entails.

At its core, my artistic expression is a tribute to Black individuals, aimed at instilling pride despite the challenging nature of the depicted images—ranging from lynchings to protests. The endeavor is driven by a desire to treat these images with utmost care and respect, restoring dignity and confronting the gaze with a restorative intent.

Conceptually, the project delves into how discarded fabrics, laden with difficult histories of pain, sadness, and oppression, can coalesce to create something beautiful and commendable. It beckons audiences to reconsider their values surrounding the dichotomy of "what is discarded and what is valued," challenging them to envision a narrative where even our scarred past converges toward a greater, more redemptive whole.