

David C. Driskell Center Archives
David C. Driskell Center
University of Maryland, College Park

**A Finding Aid to the Michael D. Harris Collection, 1829-2022
(bulk dates 1970-2010)**

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Table of Contents

Collection Overview.....	3
Administrative Information.....	4
Biographical Note.....	5
Scope and Content Note.....	6
Name and Subject Terms.....	8

Collection Overview

Repository:	David C. Driskell Center Archives
Creator:	Michael D. Harris
Title:	Michael D. Harris Collection Collection
Dates:	1829-2022 (bulk dates 1970-2010)
Accession No.	MS2022.02
Quantity:	24 linear feet

Abstract: The Michael D. Harris Collection was compiled and organized by Michael D. Harris over the course of his career and documents his contributions to African American art history as an artist, scholar, curator, and educator. The papers of artist Michael D. Harris measures approximately 24 linear feet with an additional 90GB of digital files and dates from 1829 to 2022, with a majority of the materials coming from the years 1970-2010. A large portion of the collection focuses on Harris' personal art career, specifically on his prolific photography and his participation in AfriCOBRA, as well as his work as a scholar and educator at Emory University, specifically his scholarship and writings on the reexamination of the depictions of Black individuals, communities, and cultures as they are represented in art and daily life, as well Yoruba language, art, and culture. The collection includes correspondence; taped interviews and transcriptions; photographic prints and 35mm slides; field notes from Harris' study in Ile-Ife, Nigeria; publications and unpublished writings by and about Harris, including his poetry; records of his curation and participation in AfriCOBRA; books; newspaper clippings; and ephemera.

Language: Most of the collection is in English.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information:

The Michael D. Harris Collection was donated to the David C. Driskell Center Archives by the estate of Michael D. Harris. Materials were received by the Driskell Center Archives during the fall of 2022 from his home in Atlanta, Georgia. The deed of gift was signed in October of 2022.

Separated Materials:

The Michael D. Harris Collection is kept in the Archives of the David C. Driskell Center. Materials that are oversized or restricted for any reason have been separated from the collection and housed in boxes adjacent to the main collection.

Processing Information:

The collection has been inventoried to the folder level. The processing for this collection began in 2023 and is ongoing. Arrangement into series and subseries is complete, and folder level arrangement has begun. This work is being done by the Center's Archivists and archives interns from the University of Maryland, College Park.

During the initial inventory of the Michael D. Harris Collection, paper materials were rehoused in acid-free folders and rusty staples and paperclips were removed if deemed necessary. Completed folders were placed in acid-free Hollinger boxes.

Preferred Citation:

Courtesy of the Michael D. Harris Collection at the David C. Driskell Center at the University of Maryland, College Park. Gift of The Estate of Michael D. Harris.

Restrictions

Most material is available for research by scheduling an appointment with the David C. Driskell Center Archives team. Some materials have been restricted following the donor's request, or because of legal restrictions due to their contents. These materials have been separated into "restricted boxes" and labeled accordingly.

Ownership & Literary Rights:

The records of the Michael D. Harris Collection are owned by the David C. Driskell Center. Literary rights as possessed by the donor have been dedicated to public use for research, study, and scholarship. The collection is subject to all copyright laws.

Biographical Note

Michael DeHart Harris(1948-2022) was a distinguished scholar and artist whose work across academic and fine arts institutions was instrumental in the development of African and American Art as fields of study, criticism, and artistic practice.

Born on July 14, 1948, Harris developed an interest in art as a boy in Cleveland, Ohio, where he took Saturday classes at the Cleveland Museum and frequented the Cleveland Art Institute. He excelled in athletics before redirecting his focus to artmaking. An all-city shortstop, Harris enrolled at Bowling Green State University to play baseball for the Falcons while earning a BA in Education—his first of five academic degrees. He went on to earn an MFA in Painting from Howard University, an MA in African American Studies from Yale University, and an MA, MPhil, and Ph.D. in Art History, also from Yale. His dissertation, "Contemporary Yoruba Art in Ile-Ife: History, Continuum, Motive, and Transformation" (1996), was perhaps the first at Yale to center African contemporary art. Michael D. Harris' accomplishments included earning six degrees in subjects ranging from Studio Art, Art History, and Philosophy to African American and

African Studies. He worked at institutions such as the High Museum, the Harvey Gantt African American Cultural Center, Emory University, UNC Chapel Hill, and many more. His master's thesis and dissertation focused on the kanaga mask of the Dogon peoples and contemporary Yoruba art, respectively. Dr. Harris was a scholar of the Yoruba language as well and was known to some by his Yoruba name "Olusina," which means "the Lord opens the way." Harris's scholarship mined the connections between Western and African art traditions and examined the formation and impact of racialized images on American visual culture. His artwork has been displayed in the United States, Europe, and the Caribbean.

Author highlights:

- Co-curator *Astonishment and Power: Kongo Minkisi and the Art of Renee Stout* (1993) – accompanied exhibition at the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art (1991-1993)
- Contributing author for the first textbook on African Art, *A History of Art in Africa* (2000)
- *Sanctuary: Conjuring and African Art Aesthetic*
- Co-editor, *ASHE: Poetics in Africana Expressivity* (Routledge, 2022)
- His book *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation* was published by the University of North Carolina Press in 2003. Awarded the 2004 Outstanding Contribution to Publishing Citation from the Black Caucus of the American Library Association.

Curator highlights:

- 9 years as curator at the Harvey B. Gantt Center in Charlotte, NC
- Consulting Curator for African American Art at the High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA
- *TransAtlantic Dialogues: Contemporary Artists In and Out of Africa*, Ackland Museum of Art University of North Carolina Chapel Hill (1999), Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, Tampa Museum of Art (2000).

Professorship highlights:

- In 2020, Harris retired as Associate Professor Emeritus from Emory University, where he taught art history in the African American Studies Department beginning in 2007. Before Emory, Dr. Harris taught at UNC-Chapel Hill, Georgia State University, Duke University, Morehouse College, and Spelman College.

His art practice encompassed painting, mixed media, textiles, and poetry. He was a longtime member of AfriCOBRA, or the African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists, which began in Chicago in the 1960s.

Scope and Content Note

The collection has been arranged into seven series. The first five are paper-based, with some photographs appearing in situ to preserve their context. The final two series comprise additional photographic, A/V, and digital materials.

Series 1: Personal is divided into eight subseries relating to Harris's art practice and personal life. *Subseries 2 and 3* chronicle Harris's participation in solo and group exhibitions, including catalogs, ephemera, interviews, reviews, and news coverage. *Subseries 4: Clippings and Ephemera about Dr. Harris* features additional interviews, articles, and announcements regarding Harris's work and provides

researchers additional context for Harris's career achievements, artistic pursuits, and interests. While primarily recognized for his work in the visual arts, Harris maintained a creative writing practice. *Subseries 5: Poetry and Writings* includes chapbooks, manuscripts, short stories, and essays. These materials may be especially valuable to researchers exploring Harris's early work or interested in his interdisciplinary art practice and artmaking philosophy.

In addition to the exhibitions included in this series, Harris participated in multiple group shows with the artist collective AfriCOBRA. Exhibitions affiliated with AfriCOBRA have been placed in *Series 5: AfriCOBRA—Subseries 2: Exhibitions*.

Series 2: Scholar and Educator encompasses Harris's extensive academic career as a teacher, writer, and art historian. This series includes his graduate coursework and dissertation, manuscripts and materials related to his 2003 text *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation*, instructional materials, and research. In Subseries 7, researchers will find extensive subject files (clippings, excerpts, book synopses, field notes, articles, and more) spanning topics from Yoruba art and language to artmaking practices in the African diaspora, the production and impact of racialized images in American visual culture, Black American aesthetics, spirituality, class, music, politics, and more.

Series 3: Curator focuses on Harris's work as a curator, which he pursued alongside his academic activities.

Materials on specific artists and exhibitions outside AfriCOBRA, including correspondences, exhibition files, ephemera, articles, and other publications, are arranged in alphabetical order by surname in *Series 4: Artists and Exhibitions*. *Series 4—Subseries 1* consists of artists' files for individuals with substantial materials represented in the collection, such as ephemera, interviews, C.V.s, exhibition pamphlets, and correspondence. Other ephemera related to artists and exhibitions may be found in *Series 4—Subseries 4*.

The collection is robust in materials documenting the artist collective AfriCOBRA, or the **African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists**, which Harris joined in 1979. Materials include meeting minutes, exhibition catalogs and reviews, publications, clippings, and personal correspondence with AfriCOBRA members. Materials related to AfriCOBRA and its associated artists have been gathered into *Series 5: AfriCOBRA* to provide researchers with a dedicated concentration of resources on the collective. This includes group AfriCOBRA exhibitions featuring Harris's work, as well as artists' files for individuals associated with the collective.

Researchers searching for materials related to Harris's career as a fine artist are encouraged to consult *Series 1—Subseries 2: Solo Exhibitions* and *—Subseries 3: Group Exhibitions* and *Series 5—Subseries 2: Group Exhibitions and Events*.

When a subject is intersectional and has elements related to AfriCOBRA, those materials have been placed in *Series 5: AfriCOBRA*. In the case of group shows that are not about AfriCOBRA but feature one or more of its associated artists, those materials have been placed in *Series 5—Subseries 1: Collective and Individuals* under the name of the participating AfriCOBRA artist.

Other elements to consider include that correspondences have remained in their original context wherever possible. The collection also chronicles the development of African American Art History as a discipline, directly due to the advocacy and initiative of scholars like Harris and David Driskell,

who was one of his mentors. Continuing the legacy of his mentor David C. Driskell, Harris was instrumental in the development of African American Art History as a discipline.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into seven series, many of which are currently being further arranged into sub-series. The first five series are all paper-based and the final two series are devoted to photographic (Series 6) and audio and video materials (Series 7).

Series 1: Person and Artist

- Subseries 1: Biographical materials*
- Subseries 2: Solo Exhibitions*
- Subseries 3: Group Exhibitions*
- Subseries 4: Clippings and Ephemera about Dr. Harris*
- Subseries 5: Poetry and Writings*
- Subseries 6: Proposals, Commissions, and Grants*
- Subseries 7: Correspondence*
- Subseries 8: Miscellaneous*

Series 2: Scholar and Educator

- Subseries 1: Graduate Studies*
- Subseries 2: Dissertation*
- Subseries 3: Colored Pictures*
- Subseries 4: Publications and Manuscripts*
- Subseries 5: Lectures and Symposia (Scholarly Activities?)*
- Subseries 6: Teaching Materials*
- Subseries 7: Research materials*
- Subseries 8: Correspondence*

Series 3: Curator

- Subseries 1: Exhibitions and Institutions*

Series 4: Artist Files

- Subseries 1: Artists*
- Subseries 2: Exhibitions and Institutions*
- Subseries 3: Miscellaneous*

Series 5: AfriCOBRA

- Subseries 1: Collective and Individuals*
- Subseries 2: Group Exhibitions and Events*
- Subseries 3: Correspondence*

Series 6: Photographic Materials

Subseries 1: Photographs and Negatives

Subseries 2: Slides and Transparencies

Series 7: Audio and Video Materials

Subseries 1: Audio Recordings

Subseries 2: Moving Image Recordings

Names and Subject Terms

Subjects:

African American art

African American folk art

African American painting

African American photography

African American art--20th century--Exhibitions

African American art-- 21st century-- Exhibitions

African American artists

Art, American

Art museum curators, African American

Canon (Art)

Art criticism

Types of Materials:

Clippings

Correspondence

Course Materials

Ephemera

Exhibition catalogues

Exhibition promotional material

Memorabilia

Newsletters

Photographs

Slides

Sound recording

Video recording

Writings

Names:

Campos-Pons, Maria Magdalena

Clark, Sonya

Harris, Michael D.

Okediji, Moyosore

Tucker, Curtis

Series Description/Container Listing

Series 1: Personal, year-year (_boxes)

The records in this series are divided into eight subseries relating to Harris's art practice and personal life. Harris maintained an active, multimodal artmaking practice in oil painting, mixed media collage, textiles, and mural arts throughout his career, and all are represented in the collection's exhibition ephemera and news clippings. Alongside coverage of his visual work is an intimate collection of poems, short stories, chapbooks, and photographs, as well as early artist statements. With many materials dating to the 1970s, this series conveys Harris's stylistic progression and philosophical outlook as he navigated the art world and provides an intimate keyhole into his emotional and intellectual life. (For all AfriCOBRA exhibitions featuring Harris's work, please see Series 5: AfriCOBRA.)

Subseries 1: Biographical Materials, 1979-1989 (1 box)

This subseries gathers materials related to Michael D. Harris's biography, including artist statements from 1979 and 1998, his curriculum vitae, and an incomplete bibliography of his work (not compiled by Harris). Though limited in scope, researchers seeking an overview of Harris's career or artistic philosophy will find this series useful.

Box	Folder	
1	1	Artist Statement and resume, circa 1998
1	2	Artist Statement, 1979
1	3	Bibliography in Progress for Michael Harris, 1995
1	4	Business Cards, [undated]
1	5	Curriculum Vitae, [undated]
1	6	Southern Poverty Law Center - Certificate of Appreciation, [undated]

Subseries 2: Solo Exhibitions, 1978-2017 (1 box)

This subseries contains material related to exhibitions that feature Michael D. Harris's artwork in a solo exhibition, meaning there is no work by other artists included in the show. Folder titles include the exhibition name, the host gallery or space, and the exhibition year. Materials include exhibition ephemera and catalogs, news clippings, and some photographs.

Box	Folder	
1	1	"Oriki" - Center of Pan African Culture Kent State University, 1991
1	2	"Scat": New Works by Atlanta Artist Michael D. Harris - The Highland Gallery, 1983
1	3	A Few Hot Licks: A Jazz Solo - Norfolk State College, 1979
1	4	Art Portraits: Portrait of the Artist - September Gray Art Gallery, 2017
1	5	Crossroads and Confluences: Journeys of Spirit, An Exhibition of New Paintings by Michael D. Harris - Hammonds House Galleries, 1998

1	6	Crossroads and Confluences: Recent Work by Michael D. Harris - Diggs Gallery at Winston-Salem University, 1999
1	7	Equal Rights - Hammonds House Museum and Tubman African American Museum, 2011-2012
1	8	Michael D. Harris: Color Struck - Sandler Hudson Gallery, 2008
1	9	Michael D. Harris: Icons and Ideograms - Noel Gallery, 1997
1	10	Michael Harris: "Eye Jazz" - Wesleyan College, [undated]
1	11	Progressions - Banks Haley Gallery, 1977
1	12	Spirits, Rituals, and Incantations - Neighborhood Arts Center, [undated]
1	13	Sun Dance: Michael D. Harris - The Walks of Peachtree Gallery of Fine Arts, 1978

Subseries 3: Group Exhibitions, 1974-2012 (1 box)

This subseries contains material related to Michael D. Harris's participation in group exhibitions, meaning he is one of multiple artists included in the show. Materials include catalogs, ephemera, interviews, reviews, and news coverage.

Box	Folder	
1	1	"Brothers": Recent Art Works - Phoenix Cultural Arts Center, 1982
1	2	1994 Nexus Biennial - Nexus Contemporary Art Center, 1993
1	3	48th North Carolina Artists Exhibition - North Carolina Museum of Art, 1999
1	4	8 State Annual: Painting - J. B. Speed Art Museum, 1974-1975
1	5	Afrohio Art 78 - Cleveland State University Art Gallery, 1978
1	6	Art Black Ohio - New Organization for the Visual Arts and Cleveland State University, 1990
1	7	Art: Knowledge and Arts Initiative - Atlanta University Center Robert W. Woodruff Library, 2012

- 1 8 Artificial Afrika - Gigantic ArtSpace [GAS], 2006
- 1 9 Atlanta in France Exhibition, 1985
- 1 10 Choosing: An Exhibit of Changing Perspectives In Modern Art and Art Criticism By Black Americans 1925-1984 - Hampton University, 1986
- 1 11 Contemporary Textiles - Association of Community Based Artists of Westchester, 1985
- 1 12 Cowans Harris Phillips - International Visions Gallery, 2008
- 1 13 Descendants of Nigeria: Artistic Expressions - Miles College, 1984
- 1 14 Destinies: Yoruba Art in America - Victoria H. Myhren Gallery University of Denver, 2003
- 1 15 Dimensions and Directions: Black Artists of the South - Mississippi Museum of Art, 1980
- 1 16 Eight + One From Atlanta - Tangeman Gallery University of Cincinnati, 1993
- 1 17 Fourteen Black Georgia Artists - Fine Arts Gallery Valdosta State College, 1981
- 1 18 Gateway to the World: Art and Architecture of Concourse E - Hartsfield Atlanta International Airport, 1995
- 1 19 Georgia Quilts - Museum of Arts and Sciences, 1985
- 1 20 Jacob Lawrence, Ed Dwight, Nanette Carter, Ulysses Marshall, Beverly Buchanan, Michael Harris, Michael Ellison - McIntosh Galleries, 1987
- 1 21 Know Thy Art: African-American Faculty Exhibition - African-American Cultural Center, 1997
- 1 22 Locating the Spirit: Religion and Spirituality in African American Art - Anacostia Museum and Center for African American History and Culture, 1999
- 1 23 Prints and Drawings - Emory University, [undated]
- 1 24 So We Too: Contemporary African-American Printmakers, Contemporary African Sculpture from Zimbabwe - Lyman Allyn Art Museum, 1989

1	25	Soweto Uprising Exhibition - United Nations, 1980
1	26	Swift Currents: New African-American Art - Horace Williams House, 1998
1	27	The 3rd Annual Atlanta Life National Art Competition and Exhibition - Atlanta Life Insurance Company, 1982
1	28	The 5th Annual Atlanta Life National Art Competition and Exhibition - Atlanta Life Insurance Company, 1985
1	29	The Neighborhood Arts Project: Art for the People's Sake - City of Atlanta, [undated]
1	30	Visual Exegesis: Religious Images By African American Artists from the Jean and Robert E. Steele Collection - David C. Driskell Center, 2008
1	31	We Who Believe...Songs of Our Fathers - Washtenaw Community College Art Gallery, 1995

Subseries 4: Clippings and Ephemera about Dr. Harris, 1981-2010s (1 box)

This subseries features additional interviews, articles, and announcements regarding Harris's work and provide researchers additional context for Harris's career achievements, artistic pursuits, and interests.

Box	Folder	
1	1	A Momentum of Perception - UNC Chapel Hill Endeavors, 2001
1	2	Art Journal Announces 15 Grants - The Atlanta Journal, 1981
1	3	Clippings - The Day, 1989
1	4	Feature article, [undated, circa 2010s]
1	5	Mayor's Fellowship in Arts, 1987
1	6	Michael Harris: The Art of History (Interview) - Africa's Children, 1995

Subseries 5: Poetry and Writings, 1974-2000 (1 box)

Box	Folder	
1	1	April Thursday, [undated]
1	2	Atlantis by Michael D. Harris, 1977
1	3	Becky, [undated]
1	4	Correspondence, 1979, [undated]
1	5	Moonchild, 1978, [undated]
1	6	Oms and Akras: a travelogue by Michael D. Harris with guest poems by Marion P. Hill, 1978
1	7	Poems by others, 1981-2000, [undated]
1	8	Poems, [undated]
1	9	Poems, 1978-1987
1	10	POME: Young Thoughts, poems and photos by Michael D. Harris, [undated]
1	11	The Extension of Expression by the Coordinated Use of Additional Forms of Expression by Michael D. Harris, 1974

Subseries 6: Proposals, Commissions, and Grants, 1984-1998 (1 box)

Box	Folder	
1	1	Dear Granddaddy - UNC Charlotte Cone Center, 1998
1	2	Fulton County Arts Council, 1987
1	3	Mayor's Fellowship in the Arts, 1987
1	4	Movement: The Wings of Kings - Georgia Council for the Arts and Humanities, Morehouse College, 1984

Subseries 7: Correspondence, 1980-2019 (1 box)

Box	Folder	
1	1	David C. Driskell Center, 2009
1	2	General Correspondence, 1980-1981

1	3	General Correspondence, [undated]
1	4	General Correspondence, 1985-1987
1	5	General Correspondence, 1988-1993
1	6	General Correspondence, 2000-2008
1	7	General Correspondence, 2011-2019
1	8	H-NET List for African Expressive Culture, 1998-1999
1	9	Jones, Montanette T., 1994-1998

Subseries 8: Miscellaneous, 1978-2018 (1 box)

Box	Folder	
1	1	Boston Library Consortium, 1990
1	2	Business cards, [undated]
1	3	Call to Artists - Joysmith Gallery
1	4	Cartoons and Comics, 1980-1987, [undated]
1	5	Dallas Museum of Art - James Phillips loan request, 1989
1	6	Ephemera, 2008, [undated]
1	7	In Memoriam - Anna Miles, 1978
1	8	In Memoriam - Asa Grant Hilliard, III, Ed.D., 2007
1	9	In Memoriam - Dr. Sylvia Ardyn Boone, 1993
1	10	In Memoriam - Murray N. DePillars, [undated]
1	11	Invoice, 1990
1	12	Job announcements, 1986
1	13	Nikon camera receipts, 1991
1	14	Scanner and printer guides, 1988-1989
1	15	Spirit Woods Productions Calendar of Religious Themes - press release, 1993

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|---|----|--|
| 1 | 16 | Telecom procedures, 1991 |
| 1 | 17 | The American Assembly - Report on Art, Technology, and Intellectual Property, 2002 |
| 1 | 18 | United States Army Research Office Broad Agency Announcement Set-Aside for Historically Black Colleges and Universities - Centers of Excellence in Information Science, 1991 |
| 1 | 19 | William DeHart Hubbard, 2008-2018 |