

Art World

What Art Defined the Civil Rights Era? We Asked 7 Museum Curators to Pick One Work That Crystallized the Moment

Curators from across the country share the works that capture the ethos of the era.

Katie White, January 20, 2020

Frank Bowling's *Night Journey* (1969–70)



Frank Bowling, *Night Journey* (1969–70).
Courtesy of the
Metropolitan Museum of
Art.

It's a tall—even impossible—task to summarize the Civil Rights Era with a single work of art. The best I can do is to highlight a few of my favorites (across media) and admit to a particular favorite in the Met collection. I love so many of Gordon Parks's photographs from the period, especially *Department Store, Mobile, Alabama* (1956), an image that never loses its power. Elizabeth Catlett's *Black Unity* (1968) is a great sculptural icon of the period. David Hammons's body prints, such as *The Door (Admissions Office)* (1969), are difficult to surpass in their inventiveness and visceral impact. A favorite of mine at the Met is Frank Bowling's *Night Journey* (1969-70), a beautiful painting in the artist's "Map" series. Bowling masterfully employs his staining and pouring techniques to ruminate on the forced sea journeys endured by enslaved people taken from West Africa to the Americas and West Indies.

—*Randall Griffey, curator, the Metropolitan Museum of Art*