

2022 Media Release

STUDIO
MUSEUM
HARLEM

**THE STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM PUBLISHES
SMOKEHOUSE ASSOCIATES, A GROUNDBREAKING STUDY
OF THE ART COLLECTIVE THAT TRANSFORMED
HARLEM IN THE LATE 1960s**

Celebrated on December 8 with a Conversation between Editor Eric Booker and Contributors Charles L. Davis II, Ashley James, and James Trainor at Storefront for Art and Architecture. Official publication date is December 13, 2023.



Smokehouse Associates Publication. Photo: Jens Mortensen. Courtesy The Studio Museum in Harlem

NEW YORK, NY, December 1, 2022 – The Studio Museum in Harlem today announced the publication, on December 13, of ***Smokehouse Associates***, the first critical examination of the artist collective that transformed Harlem, between 1968 and 1970, with vibrant, community-oriented abstract murals and sculptures. Established by **William T. Williams** and including **Melvin Edwards, Guy Ciarcia, and Billy Rose**, Smokehouse Associates grew to encompass a range of creative practitioners united around the revolutionary potential of public art.

Published by the Studio Museum and distributed by Yale University Press, *Smokehouse Associates* is the first book to document and critically explore the work of this groundbreaking

artist collective, which has long been underrepresented in art history. Developed over the course of five years in close collaboration with the artists, the publication is edited by **Eric Booker**, former Assistant Curator and Exhibition Coordinator at the Studio Museum and now Associate Curator at Storm King Art Center. In addition to its scholarly study of the collective's work, *Smokehouse Associates* features essays by **Charles L. Davis II** and **James Trainor** that delve into the historical context of public art, urban design, and architecture. The book includes an astonishing collection of previously unpublished photographs documenting Smokehouse's work outdoors, which Williams preserved in his personal archive for more than fifty years, as well as archival ephemera. Also included is a roundtable discussion with the Smokehouse artists moderated by **Ashley James**, and a rich chronology that provides a framework in which to consider the group's work.

"This groundbreaking publication brings to light the integral artistic and cultural work of the Smokehouse Associates within the Harlem community," said **Thelma Golden**, Director and Chief Curator of the Studio Museum. "Laying the foundation for public arts programs in our community on which institutions like the Studio Museum stand, Smokehouse invigorated the neighborhood's creative, collaborative spirit by establishing art as a medium under which the people of Harlem could unite."

Eric Booker said, "The Smokehouse Associates transformed Harlem's urban landscape through collective action and vibrant abstraction. Today, their work holds a similar transformative potential, inviting us to consider history anew. Boldly envisioned by William T. Williams amid the struggle for civil rights, the group's astonishing work outdoors remains entirely distinct—a vivid blueprint for art's ability to foster community, collaboration, and change."

Smokehouse believed art could seed change. Emphasizing the participatory process, the artists completed approximately nine projects throughout the Harlem community over the course of three summers. Smokehouse projects were community affairs. The collective not only sought to engage Harlemites through cleaning out and painting each site, but the work itself also reflected the surrounding environment. The artists keyed their hard-edged forms to the movement and geometries of the city, and the colors from neighborhood shop signs, storefront displays, and residents' clothing informed their vibrant compositions.

Smokehouse Associates serves as a sourcebook that expands the narrative of public art and social practice in the United States to include the contributions of artists of African descent. Over fifty years later, the collective's work feels particularly important amid another period of upheaval, offering collective creation as a means of transformation and unification.

Upcoming Programs

The Smokehouse Associates Writers Forum: Eric Booker, Charles L. Davis II, Ashley James, and James Trainor in Conversation

December 8, 2022, at 7:00 pm

Storefront for Art and Architecture, 97 Kenmare Street, New York, NY 10012

To celebrate the publication of *Smokehouse Associates*, the editor, Eric Booker, and contributing writers Charles L. Davis II, Ashley James, and James Trainor will be in conversation at Storefront for Art and Architecture. The authors will contextualize *Smokehouse* within larger histories of public art, abstraction, and architecture. The writers will discuss their contributions to the book, providing entry points into their individual artistic or academic practices in the process.

Live ASL interpreters will be present.

This program is free to attend, but capacity is limited. To register, please click [here](#).

Publishing Details

Smokehouse Associates

Edited by Eric Booker

With contributions by Charles L. Davis II, Ashley James, and James Trainor

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About the Authors

Eric Booker is former Assistant Curator and Exhibition Coordinator at The Studio Museum in Harlem and is now Associate Curator at Storm King Art Center. Charles L. Davis II is Associate Professor at UT Austin's School of Architecture. Ashley James is Associate Curator of Contemporary Art at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. James Trainor is a writer, educator, and scholar based in Maine

About William T. Williams

William T. Williams (b. 1942, Cross Creek, NC) has been committed to abstraction for more than fifty years. He is known for his bold color and daring compositions, cultivating a process-based approach to painting that synthesizes autobiographical reference, social narrative, and formal motifs sourced from specific cultural histories of the American South as well as New York. Williams has continually sought to engage communities in dialogue about art through various undertakings, including a forty-year teaching career, initiation of the Studio Museum's signature *Artist-in-Residence* program, and his founding of the Smokehouse Associates.

About The Studio Museum in Harlem

Founded in 1968 by a diverse group of artists, community activists, and philanthropists, The Studio Museum in Harlem is internationally known for its catalytic role in promoting the work of artists of African descent. The Studio Museum is now constructing a new home, designed by Adjaye Associates in collaboration with Cooper Robertson, at its longtime location on Manhattan's West 125th Street. The building—the first created expressly for the institution's program—will enable the Studio Museum to better serve a growing and diverse audience, provide additional educational opportunities for people of all ages, expand its program of world-renowned exhibitions, effectively display its singular collection, and strengthen its trailblazing *Artist-in-Residence* program.

While closed for construction, the Studio Museum is working to deepen its roots in its neighborhood through *inHarlem*, a dynamic set of collaborative initiatives. The Museum's groundbreaking exhibitions, thought-provoking conversations, and engaging art-making workshops continue at a variety of partner and satellite locations in Harlem and beyond. For more information, visit studiomuseum.org.

Find us on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube: @studiomuseum

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