



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**HIGH MUSEUM OF ART NAMES NAIMA J. KEITH  
2017 RECIPIENT OF DAVID C. DRISKELL PRIZE**

*Keith to be honored at the 13th annual Driskell Prize Dinner on April 28*

ATLANTA, Feb. 21, 2017 – The [High Museum of Art](#) today announces Naima J. Keith as the 2017 recipient of the [David C. Driskell Prize](#) in recognition of her contributions to the field of African-American art history. Through her work as a curator and arts administrator, Keith has advanced scholarship of contemporary art of the African Diaspora, growing awareness and appreciation of its role within the broader canon of modern and contemporary art.

Named for the renowned African-American artist and art scholar, the Driskell Prize was founded in 2005 as the first national award to celebrate an early- or mid-career scholar or artist whose work makes an original and important contribution to the field of African-American art or art history and related Diaspora studies. Keith will be honored at the 13th annual [Driskell Prize Dinner](#) at the High on Friday, April 28 at 7 p.m.

“The level of passion and dedication Naima has applied to providing a platform for contemporary African American artists is extraordinary,” said Rand Suffolk, Nancy and Holcombe T. Green, Jr., director of the High. “We are proud to welcome her among the impressive group of past Driskell Prize recipients and to support her work, which has introduced audiences to important artists of our time and will continue to make a significant impact in years to come.”

In 2016 Keith was appointed as the first deputy director of exhibitions and programs at the [California African American Museum](#), where she is responsible for directing the development and growth of the permanent collection, a dynamic exhibitions program and the Museum’s research and scholarship. Previously, she served as an associate curator at The Studio Museum in Harlem and as a curatorial fellow at the Hammer Museum.

Keith’s exhibitions have explored the intersections of race, class, gender and socioeconomic policy, focusing on artists who have been underrepresented in the museum field. At the California African American Museum, Keith conceived and executed the solo museum exhibitions for contemporary mixed media artists [Hank Willis Thomas](#) and [Genevieve Gaignard](#), each of which examined themes of racial identity and inequality in America. At The Studio Museum in Harlem, Keith curated more than 12 exhibitions including “Rodney McMillian: Views of Main Street” (2016), “Samuel Levi Jones: Unbound” (2015), “Titus Kaphar: The Jerome Project” (2014), “Glenn Kaino: 19.83” (2014), “Robert Pruitt: Women” (2013), and “The Shadows Took Shape” (co-curated with Zoe Whitley, 2013). Her exhibition “Charles Gaines: Gridwork 1974–1989” at The Studio Museum was the first major museum survey of the

influential Los Angeles-based conceptual artist. In her catalogue essay for the exhibition, Keith offers a scholarly investigation into Gaines' work and challenges the notion that African-American artists of the period focused predominantly on figurative expression. In other published articles, Keith has explored the work of prominent artists Firelei Baez, David Hammons, Sheila Pree Bright and Henry Taylor, among others.

The selection process for the 2017 recipient of the Driskell Prize began with a call for nominations from a national pool of artists, curators, teachers, collectors and art historians. Keith was chosen from among these nominations by review committee members assembled by the High: [Dr. Kellie Jones](#), the inaugural Driskell Prize recipient and associate professor and director of undergraduate studies in the department of art history and archaeology at Columbia University; [Valerie Cassel Oliver](#), the 2011 Driskell Prize recipient and senior curator of the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston; and the High's Wieland Family Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, Michael Rooks.

The 2017 Driskell Prize Dinner is co-chaired by Spring Asher and Brenda Thompson with Honorary Chair Curley M. Dossman, Jr. Tickets for the black-tie event may be purchased by contacting Rhonda Matheison at [rhonda.matheison@high.org](mailto:rhonda.matheison@high.org) or 404-733-4403.

### **About Naima J. Keith**

Naima J. Keith joined the California African American Museum (CAAM) in 2016 as the deputy director of exhibitions and programs to guide the curatorial and education departments as well as marketing and communications. During her tenure at CAAM, Keith has curated "Hank Willis Thomas: Black Righteous Space" (2016), "Genevieve Gaignard: Smell the Roses" (2016) and "Kenyatta A.C. Hinkle: The Evanesced" (2017). As an associate curator at The Studio Museum in Harlem (2011–2016), Keith's notable exhibitions include "Rodney McMillian: Views of Main Street" (2016), "Artists in Residence 2014–2015" (2015), "Samuel Levi Jones: Unbound" (2015), "Titus Kaphar: The Jerome Project" (2014), "Glenn Kaino: 19.83" (2014), "Robert Pruitt: Women" (2013), "The Shadows Took Shape" (co-curated with Zoe Whitley, 2013) and "Fore" (co-curated with Lauren Haynes and Thomas J. Lax, 2012). Her historical survey "Charles Gaines: Gridwork 1974–1989" (2014), which traveled to the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles in spring 2015, was nominated in 2014 for a Best Monographic Museum Show in New York award by the International Association of Art Critics (AICA-USA). From 2008 to 2011, Keith worked as a curatorial fellow at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, serving as the primary contact for the groundbreaking exhibition "Now Dig This! Art and Black Los Angeles 1960–1980," organized by guest curator Kellie Jones. Keith has lectured at the Zoma Contemporary Art Center, Columbia University, The Museum of Modern Art and the Brooklyn Museum. Her essays have been featured in publications for The Studio Museum in Harlem, Hammer Museum, Pérez Art Museum Miami, LAXART, MoMA PS1 and Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art. Keith holds degrees from Spelman College and UCLA and is a proud native of Los Angeles.

### **About the David C. Driskell Prize**

Established by the High in 2005, the David C. Driskell Prize is the first national award to honor and celebrate contributions to the field of African American art and art history. Past recipients include [Mark Bradford](#) (2016), [Kirsten Pai Buick](#) (2015), [Lyle Ashton Harris](#) (2014), [Andrea Barnwell Brownlee](#) (2013), [Rashid Johnson](#) (2012), [Valerie Cassel Oliver](#) (2011), [Renee Stout](#) (2010), [Krista A. Thompson](#) (2009), [Xaviera Simmons](#) (2008), [Franklin Sirmans](#) (2007), [Willie](#)

[Cole](#) (2006) and [Dr. Kellie Jones](#) (2005). A cash award of \$25,000 accompanies the prize. Proceeds from the High's annual Driskell Prize Dinner go toward the David C. Driskell African American Art Acquisition Endowment Fund, the David C. Driskell African American Art Acquisition Restricted Fund, exhibition support, and expenses associated with planning and activities for the David C. Driskell Prize and Dinner. Through the David C. Driskell African American Art Acquisition Restricted Fund, the High has acquired works by artists including Romare Bearden, Rashid Johnson, Radcliffe Bailey, Nick Cave, Willie Cole, John T. Scott and Renee Stout.

### **About David C. Driskell**

[David Driskell](#) (American, born 1931) is a practicing artist and scholar whose work on the African Diaspora spans more than four decades. The High's relationship with Driskell began in 2000, when the Museum presented the concurrent exhibitions "To Conserve a Legacy: American Art from Historically Black Colleges and Universities" and "Narratives of African American Art and Identity: The David C. Driskell Collection," which examined African American art in the broad historical context of modern and contemporary art. Born in 1931 in Eatonton, Ga., Driskell is distinguished professor emeritus at the University of Maryland, College Park. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Howard University in 1955 and his Master of Fine Arts degree from Catholic University in 1962. He also attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine in 1953 and studied art history in The Hague, the Netherlands, in 1964. More information about Driskell is available at [www.driskellcenter.umd.edu](http://www.driskellcenter.umd.edu).

### **About the High Museum of Art**

The High is the leading art museum in the southeastern United States. With more than 15,000 works of art in its permanent collection, the High Museum of Art has an extensive anthology of 19th- and 20th-century American art; a substantial collection of historical and contemporary decorative arts and design; significant holdings of European paintings; a growing collection of African American art; and burgeoning collections of modern and contemporary art, photography, folk and self-taught art, and African art. The High is also dedicated to supporting and collecting works by Southern artists. Through its education department, the High offers programs and experiences that engage visitors with the world of art, the lives of artists and the creative process. For more information about the High, visit [high.org](http://high.org).

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