



The Only Thing That Lasts:

An Oral History of Robert Blackburn's Printmaking Workshop interview with Dindga McCannon

Dindga McCannon grew up in Harlem and began her career studying under Harlem Renaissance artists such as Jacob Lawrence, Charles Alston, Richard Mayhew, and Al Loving at the Art Students League of New York and The Printmaking Workshop. She was an early member of Weusi Artist Collective, and later a co-founder of Where We At Black Women Artists with Kay Brown and Faith Ringgold. In 2022, she received the Blackburn Legacy Fellowship.

In this excerpt, Dindga reflects on how Blackburn provided Black artists with the space and opportunity to create prints. She also shares the story behind her 1972 print *Musician and His Lady*, inspired by jazz clubs.

**Interview conducted by Camille Crain Drummond
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Dindga McCannon:

But yeah, because Bob, you know, Bob was an artist and I know as a Black artist he had to understand the struggle and what it means to be a Black artist, and the fact that he opened up the space to all of us with no charge showed you that he understood, and he cared, and he wanted to do something. And sometimes as human beings, we can't change things. But Bob took it upon himself to begin to implement something. And when we came here, the fact that we were Black artists, it was still important, but we became part of a larger picture because there were people from all over the world here. And in my memory, there was never any racial or any other issues going on. It was the fact that we came together with the common thing, that we were all artists and we wanted to create beautiful prints.

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I have a lot of "couple" things going on here. There's another couple. Musicians. What had happened—this is '72. It's called *A Musician and His Lady*. Particularly with WEUSI, we were spending a lot of times with different musicians. Pharoah Sanders, Leon Thomas would come through on a regular basis, and I—back down to my Afrodesia Mod Shop in the Village—I must have been like 21, 22—I would go to the shop like 8:00 or 9:00 in the morning and I'd see my buddies, they'd be going wherever they were going. And when they came back about 7:00 or 8:00 o'clock at

night, I'm still sitting there working. And in order to have some kind of social life, I probably started going out to the jazz clubs, and from going out to the jazz clubs and just watching musicians, visually for me as an artist is very exciting. Number one, some of the clothes that they wear, and then the compositions that they create, just making music. And so a lot of musicians have showed up in my work over the years. Still to this day.

And also here, this is '72, the woman's hair. You know, in our community, natural hair was an invitation to disaster. I used to have these little part-time jobs and I'd have to wear a wig or I'd have to cover my hair up, because it simply was just not allowed and not what you were supposed to do. But then, there was a whole movement towards natural hair. When Bob Marley came to town, which I think was, let me see, a little bit later than that, all of a sudden people started wearing locks, and it's like we kind of graduated from natural hair to locks. And it was a movement that was not only in New York, but it kind of went across country. And not a lot of people talk about that. And also, Bob Marley had gone to Senegal, where I think in the early 80s, I actually managed to get to Africa, which was one of my dreams. And myself and my partner at the time, we would go to the village and people would come out and they would say, "Oh my God! It's Bob and Rita, you're back!" What do you mean, "back?" And Bob Marley and Rita had gone through the country, and what his going through the country did, I think it kind of woke the youth up, and there were all these young men—not the women, for some reason—they had like, little baby locks. But anyhow, that's the hair story. Let's see what else I got here.