

RENA BRANSTEN GALLERY

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Wendel A. White: *Schools for the Colored & Manifest*

April 5 – May 31, 2025

Reception and Artist in Conversation with Makeda Best: May 10, 2025



Rena Bransten Gallery is pleased to announce our representation of photographer Wendel A. White. Celebrated by artists and scholars including Dawoud Bey, Deb Willis, & Sandy Phillips*, White's inaugural show, a selection from two bodies of work: *Schools for the Colored & Manifest*, opens April 5, 2025. We are honored to host an Artist in Conversation with Makeda Best, Deputy Director of Curatorial Affairs at the Oakland Museum of California, May 10 in the Gallery.

Schools for the Colored, carefully selected from a larger portfolio of the same name, looks at the physical structures – both standing and demolished – of segregated schools of New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. In these black and whites prints, the buildings that still exist are photographically represented, and the schools that have been destroyed are depicted by black silhouettes of those structures, nodding to the way space can hold invisible memories of the past. While the former schools and silhouettes are sharply in focus, the surrounding landscape is masked as if faded, a reference to W. E. B. DuBois' literary metaphor (from *The Souls of Black Folk*) of the veil as a social barrier.

"The architectural remains of the 'colored schools' are not simply ghostly apparitions of our segregated past; they are the unresolved ideologies (neither living nor dead) which still haunt the American landscape." -Wendel White

*"I often remind people that history explains everything. If one wants to know the basis of a particular condition, one need only look to history for a clear explanation. And so it is with the disparity in the allocation of educational resources between white and Black students in America's schools." - Dawoud Bey (from *Excavating Histories: Wendel White's Schools for the Colored*, Nueva Luz)*

On view in our south gallery is a selection from White's ongoing project *Manifest*. Here we see archival objects from various public collections throughout the U.S. photographed in rich color on uniformly black backgrounds. The objects included are examinations of material culture – books, daguerreotypes, lunchboxes, tape recorders, stain

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glass shards from the 16th Street Baptist Church, records. Some of these items hold great significance, while others are simply quotidian representations of daily life in the history of the African American community. While the selections for this exhibition shift focus to the 20th century, the histories of slavery, abolition, and the U.S. Civil War are a few of the narratives present in the project at large. White maintains a keen interest in the residual power of the past to inhabit material remains, and the ability of objects to transcend lives, centuries, and millennia, suggesting a remarkable mechanism for folding time, bringing the past and the present into a shared space that is uniquely suited to artistic exploration.

White has, for several decades, investigated the complex narratives held within landscapes, objects, and communities. Looking at the often-disconnected histories of Black life and how the ghosts of the past permeate present-day America, his in-depth photographic inquiries are exemplified in his careful, and thoughtful oeuvre. The works on view in the gallery are White's unique combination of the objective eye of an architectural photographer, the investigative spirit of photojournalism, and the attention and curiosity of a historian.

Wendel A. White was born in Newark, New Jersey and grew up in New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. He was awarded a BFA in photography from the School of Visual Arts in New York and an MFA in photography from the University of Texas at Austin. He is currently Distinguished Professor of Art at Stockton University, NJ. White is the recipient of numerous awards including an honorary Doctor of Arts from Oakland University, MI; Robert Gardner Fellowship in Photography, Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology, Harvard University; and a Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship in Photography. His work is represented in museum, public, and private collections including National Gallery of Art, DC; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, CA; The Museum of Fine Art, Houston, TX; Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago, IL; and Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, NY, among many others.

*Dawoud Bey is a celebrated photographer, educator, and MacArthur genius. Deborah Willis, Ph.D. is an art historian, photographer, curator, & author. Sandra S. Phillips, curator & author working in the field of photography, is the Curator Emeritus of Photography at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

For image requests and press related inquiries, contact china@renabranstengallery.com

Image: Wendel A. White, *Bruce School, Future City, Illinois*, 2008, pigment inkjet on paper