

The Philadelphia Inquirer

ARTS & CULTURE



Two fall shows use sculpture and photographs to fold past into present

Hanne Friis and Lynda Benglis play off one another at Locks. At Rowan, Wendel White presents an evocative, era-spanning photography exhibit of Black American history.

by Amy S. Rosenberg

Published Sept. 14, 2024, 5:00 a.m. ET



New Jersey photographer Wendel White's image of the Indiana Avenue School in Atlantic City, part of a series of images of segregated schools in the "Up South" part of the exhibition "Folding ... [Read more](#)
Courtesy of Wendel White

Veiled history through the photography of Wendel White

Wendel White, a New Jersey photographer who currently teaches at Stockton University, says his photographs of structures that operated as segregated schools are a continuation of his “journey through the African American landscape.”

“The photographs depict the buildings and surrounding landscapes that were associated with the system of racially segregated schools established at the southern boundaries of the Northern United States,” White said in an artist statement for the exhibition provided by Rowan. “This area, sometimes referred to as ‘Up-South,’ encompasses the Northern ‘free’ states that bordered the slave states.”

Among the schools depicted in the exhibition are the Indiana Avenue School in Atlantic City (which became Atlantic City High School’s East Campus alternative school, now closed, and [was criticized in 2014 for being racially segregated](#)); the Douglass Singerly School in North Philadelphia (now Frederick Douglass Mastery Charter School); and the Manual Training and Industrial School for Colored Youth in Bordentown, N.J., [which closed in 1955 after unsuccessful efforts at integration](#).



New Jersey photographer Wendel White's Manual Training and Industrial School for Colored Youth in Bordentown, N.J.

Courtesy of Wendel White

In White's photography, the landscapes surrounding the schools are digitally obscured, creating a "veil," which White says is "a visual representation of the W.E.B. Du Bois literary metaphor of the veil as a social barrier."

"Some of the images depict sites where the original structure is no longer present, and, as a placeholder, I have inserted silhouettes of the original building or what I imagine of the appearance of the original building.

"The remains of the 'colored schools' are not simply ghostly apparitions of our segregated past but the unresolved ideologies [neither living nor dead] that still haunt the American landscape," White writes.

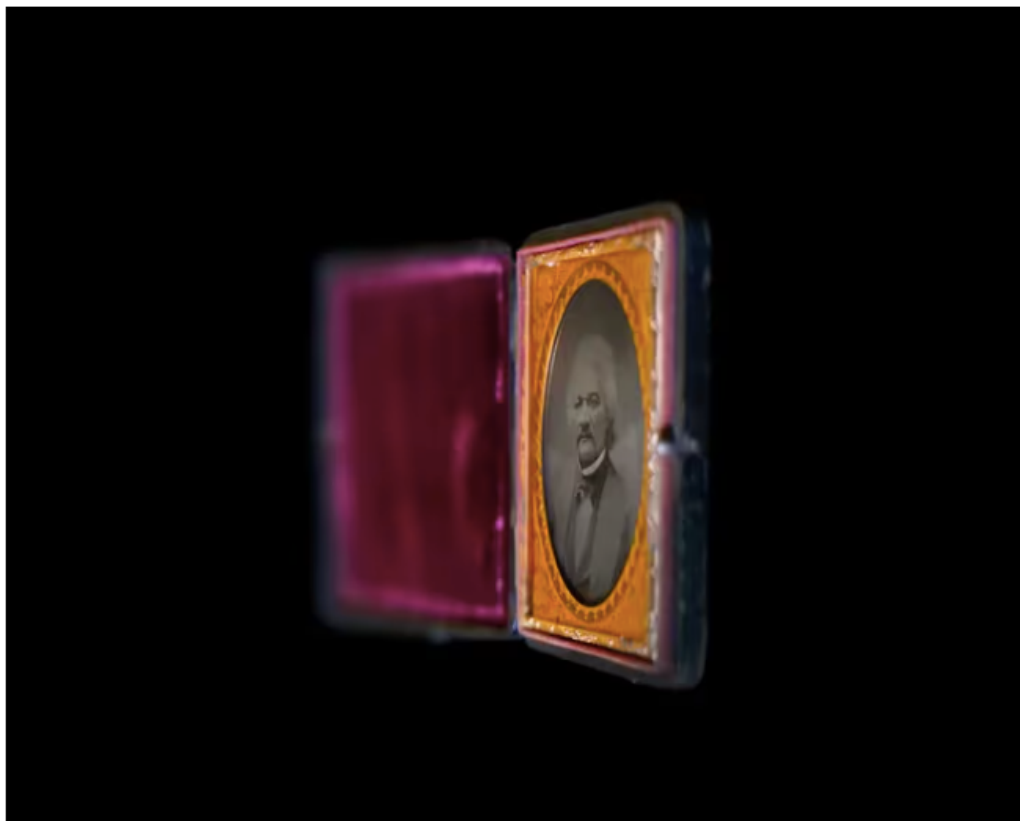


Wendel White's Donora, PA, Oct 9, 1919, Bridgeport Times and Evening Farmer, Bridgeport, part of the "Folding Time," exhibition of the photographer's work at the Rowan University Art Ga ... [Read more](#)
Courtesy of Wendel White

The exhibition also draws from White's "Red Summer" portfolio, representing the stories in the American landscape where racial violence erupted between 1917 and 1923.

"Though the events of the early 20th century seem to be remote and fading apparitions of an American past, my work is concerned with the power and influence of our shared historical narrative upon the present," White writes.

The project combines photographs of the contemporary landscape made at or near the sites of racial conflict, with selections of newspaper reporting from the time. The juxtaposition, White writes, "is a rupture and a conversation on the timeline between past and present."



New Jersey photographer Wendel White's ambrotype of Frederick Douglass from the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington is part of the n ... [Read more](#)
Courtesy of Wendel White

In “Manifest: Thirteen Colonies,” White produces photographs of Black material culture within public collections in the original 13 English colonies and Washington, D.C., including diaries, documents, receipts for the purchase of humans, musical instruments, doors, hair, photographs, and souvenirs.

“The ability of objects to transcend lives, centuries, and millennia suggest a remarkable mechanism for folding time, bringing the past and the present into a shared space,” he writes. “I am drawn to the stories ‘dwelling within’ a spoon, a cowbell, a book, a photograph, or a partially burned document.”

“Folding Time,” an exhibition of photographs by Wendel White, is on view through Oct. 26 at the Rowan University Art Gallery & Museum, 301 High Street West, Glassboro, N.J. 08028.



Amy S. Rosenberg  

I'm a feature writer based at the Jersey Shore but roaming to Philly, covering Atlantic City, beach culture, power grabs, arts, and maybe never again, Miss America.

<https://www.inquirer.com/arts/lynda-benglis-hanne-friis-locks-gallery-wendel-white-rowan-20240914.html>