



SAY IT LOUD: BLACK ART FOR BLACK POWER

THE BLACK POWER MOVEMENT

The Civil Rights Movement began in the mid-1950s. It aimed to end racism and segregation in the United States. National civil rights leaders, like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., wanted equal rights for African Americans. They wanted the same freedoms as white people. Dr. King believed integration would unite people of different races. It would allow them to live in peace.

By the mid-1960s, younger African Americans were unhappy with the Civil Rights Movement. They felt change was not coming fast enough. They wanted equal rights and safer, healthier Black neighborhoods faster. They wanted African Americans to unite, learn, and take pride in their history. They chose to develop their own movement. Their national leaders were people like Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael. They told stories of African American contributions to the country. Many had never heard those stories. A new movement for equal rights had started. They named it the **Black Power Movement**. "Black" included people of African heritage worldwide. They wanted the movement to include Black people living abroad, too. In big cities, African Americans made bold art. They also built arts organizations to support the new movement.

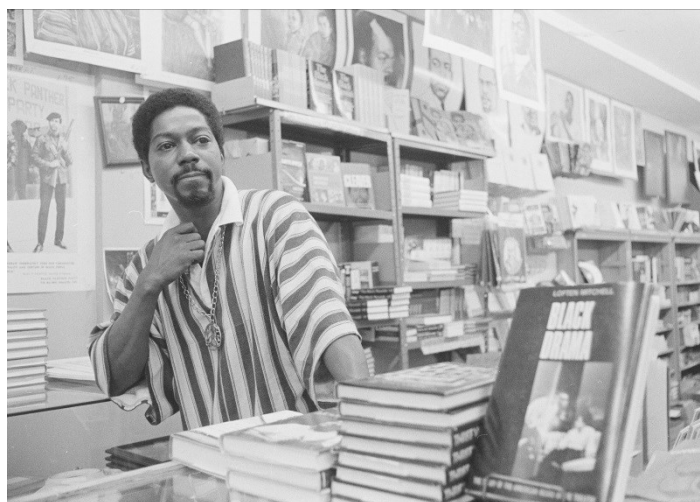
THE BLACK ARTS MOVEMENT (BAM) IN CHICAGO

Chicago had a very talented group of Black artists in the 1960s. Some of these artists studied at top colleges. These colleges included the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the Illinois Institute of Technology. The artists used their training to make positive images of Black people. They wanted their art to support the Black Power Movement. They decided to combine African American history and African art into their work.

To make a bold statement with their art, they formed groups to help create a unique Black art style. They also created spaces for people to discuss Black history and culture and to share their art. Dr. Margaret Burroughs and artist groups like AfriCOBRA made key art for Chicago's Black Arts Movement. Ellis' Bookstore carried books on African American history and art. It became a key place that supported the Black Power Movement.

ELLIS' BOOKSTORE: BOOKS FOR BLACK HISTORY, ART, AND CULTURE

In 1967, Curtis Ellis founded Ellis' Book Store in Woodlawn, a neighborhood on Chicago's South Side. His store had a wide range of books by top African American authors. These books were not found in mainstream white-owned bookstores. Ellis' store brought in many authors for book signings. In the picture of Curtis Ellis in his bookstore, you can see some of the books on Black history and art behind him. Curtis is also wearing West African clothing and has an afro hairstyle. People even wore art, like hairstyles and clothes, to support the movement.



Curtis Ellis, photograph by John White, July 17, 1969, from the Chicago Sun-Times collection, CHM, ST-18991901-0023

DR. MARGARET BURROUGHS: AN ARTIST, EDUCATOR, AND PRINTMAKER FOR A PURPOSE

In 1961, Dr. Margaret Burroughs opened the city's first African American history museum. Dr. Burroughs was an artist, teacher, and poet. She wanted to build a place to collect African American art and [artifacts](#). Dr. Burroughs wanted to achieve key goals of the Black Power Movement. She wanted to make and share positive art about African Americans. She wanted to use her art to share the contributions African American people had made to America. Her art also challenged negative stereotypes about them.



"Crispus Attucks" by Margaret Burroughs and appeared in *Figures in Black History*, by Margaret Burroughs and Eugene Feldman, CHM, ICHI-182533b

Dr. Burroughs used an art technique called **linocut printmaking**. In the example, Dr. Burroughs made a print of Crispus Attucks. Crispus Attucks was a person with both African American and Indigenous heritage. He was also the first American to die during America's Revolutionary War. Crispus Attucks's story was often left out of history books and teachings because he was African American. By making her print, Dr. Burroughs helped to share his story.

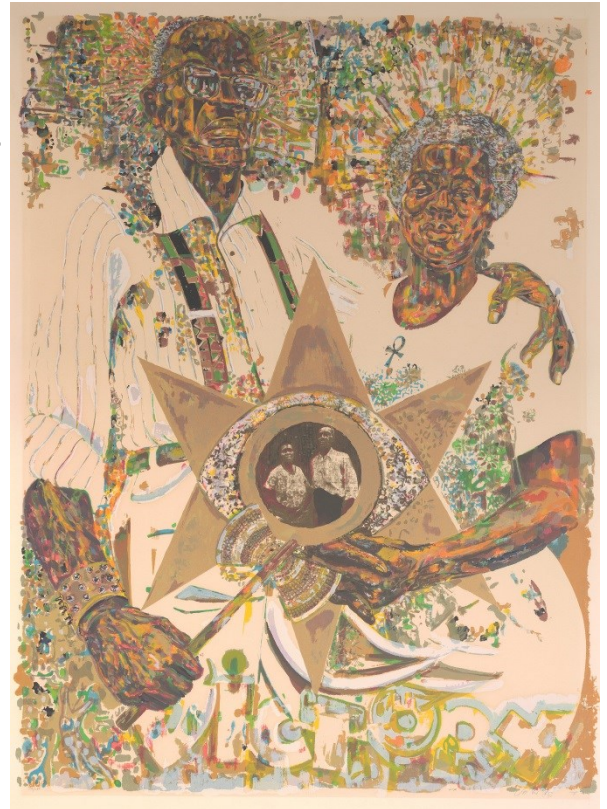
THE AFRICAN COMMUNE OF BAD RELEVANT ARTISTS (AFRICOBRA): A BLACK ART STYLE FOR BLACK POWER

In 1968, artists formed AfriCOBRA. It was an important artist group during the Black Arts and Black Power Movements. They chose their name to connect their African heritage and their goal to be "bad" artists. At the time, "bad" was a slang word for cool! AfriCOBRA's members made their own design rules. They wanted their work to be impactful and recognizable to African Americans. They chose to make art that included:

- ◇ Vibrant colors
- ◇ Positive words
- ◇ Positive images of Black people
- ◇ African American and African cultures
- ◇ African American history

Artist Jeff Donaldson was a member of AfriCOBRA. One of his most famous and impactful pieces of art is *Victory in the Valley of Eshu*. In this painting, Donaldson painted his parents

using vibrant colors. He added African symbols like the ankh on his mother's necklace. The ankh symbol stood for "life" in ancient Egypt. Donaldson's father is holding a Shango dance wand with a six-pointed star on it. Eshu, the West African god of fate, often carried a Shango wand in art. Donaldson's father has on suspenders painted red, black, and green. These colors represent the **Pan-African flag**. The designers created this flag to inspire global African pride and empowerment. Donaldson has spelled out the word VICTORY at the bottom of his painting. Together, Donaldson's symbols, vibrant colors, and words share an important message. His art tells us that his parents faced racism and inequality with courage and dignity.



Victory in the Valley of Eshu, (c) Jeff Donaldson, 1971, from the collection of Lynn and Ty McDaniel

There were many people who supported the Black Power Movement. People made art, established African American bookstores, and museums. They helped to build Black pride and to share African American history. Their artwork reminds us that art is a powerful tool for spreading messages of change.



VOCABULARY IN "SAY IT LOUD: BLACK ART FOR BLACK POWER"

Artifact - An artifact is something made or used by humans in the past, such as a tool or a work of art. Artifacts often be found in museums.

Black Power Movement - The goal of the Civil Rights Movement was integration or the bringing together of people of different races to live and work. Black Power was a movement that wanted to create Black pride, healthy Black communities, Black businesses and institutions more than integration.

Linocut Printmaking - A form of art where designs are carved into a piece of linoleum then rolled with ink and pressed onto paper. Linoleum is a hard, washable floor covering made of sawdust and resin. Resin is a hard sticky substance that can come from trees or plants.

Pan-African Flag - A red, black, and green colored flag that is a symbol for Black freedom, pride, and political power across the world.