Much of black history recorded in Western art is summarized visually by three roles: enslaved, in servitude, or impoverished. But beyond this limited social order lies a people of dignity and strength, whose survival is nothing less than miraculous. “Visual Quotations” investigates that survival.

“Visual Quotations” is a painted adaptation of the portrayal of black people in nineteenth-century Western painting. Though picaninnies and minstrels dominated much of popular imagery in this era, these kinds of overly brash characterizations were deliberately excluded from this survey in order to observe the more subtle effects of race in painting. A fundamental theme explored in this survey is the implication of hierarchy through compositional positioning (that is, the implication of one’s social stature through his or her placement relative to other figures in the composition.)

Within the context of 19th Century paintings most black characters play, at best, secondary roles in the composition. The prototypical image of a black person was as a slave or servant, just outside of illuminated areas of importance. Artists used the dichotomies of the physical world: dark vs. light and up vs. down, to visually reinforce institutionalized views of race and hierarchy.

Throughout the nineteenth-century the representation of hierarchical roles changed very little in painting, but a new context referred to as “the Orient” placed black women in “erotic” and "mysterious" environments. During the late 1800s, the West developed a peculiar preoccupation with the " Orient," and whether consciously or unconsciously, the so-called "Orientalist" painters began to visually address a mythology of black sexuality. This change in the representation of black women creates a sub-text for many of the paintings in this series.

This series is ongoing and at present includes 20 paintings. The original paintings were selected for their relevance within the “canon” of Western art history, and the compositional theme of black and white people portrayed in close proximity. Each piece in this series is painted in oil on dry-erase whiteboards. White figures and all remnants of the original environment are removed from the composition. What remains is the black figure on a white ground in compositional isolation. Through the process of painting, this survey attempts to deconstruct these environmental contexts in order to allow the viewer the visual space to consider the individual represented.
Visual Quotation, Kuhn
2003, 45.5" x 56.25"

Visual Quotation, I Copley
2003, 43" x 45.5"
Visual Quotation, 1 Mount
2003, 25.6" x 22.125"

Visual Quotation, Deas
2003, 49.25" x 32.5"
Visual Quotation, 2 Mount
2003, 37" x 30.875"

Visual Quotation, Leutze
2003, 49.375" x 35.312"
Visual Quotation, Duncanson
2003, 28.25" x 40.5"

Visual Quotation, Edmonds
2003, 13.187" x 14"
Visual Quotation, Spencer
2003, 25.25” x 22”

Visual Quotation, Johnson
2003, 17.375” x 14.5”
Visual Quotation, Blake
2003, 36.5" x 50"

Visual Quotation, Manet
2003, panel #1, 36.375" x 50"
Visual Quotation, Eakins
2003, 11.25" x 14"

Visual Quotation, Hill
2003, 32" x 20.75"
Visual Quotation, Anshutz
2003, 13.187" x 14"

Visual Quotation, Brown
2003, 32.125" x 27.875"
Visual Quotation, Gerome
2003, 24.5" x 30.25"

left to right (details):
Henry Darnall III as a Child, Justus Kuhn, 1710
Watson and the Shark, John Copley, 1778
Death of Major Peirson, John Copley, 1783
Women of Algiers, Eugene Delacroix, 1834
Farmers Nooning, William Mount, 1836
left to right (details):
The Turkey Shoot, Charles Deas, 1836
Eel Spearing at Setauket, William Mount, 1845
George Washington Crossing the Delaware, Emmanuel Leutze, 1851
Uncle Tom and Little Eva, Robert Scott Duncanson, 1853
All Talk, No Work, Francis William Edmonds, 1856

left to right (details):
Dixieland, Lilly Martin Spencer, 1862
The Ride for Liberty—The Fugitive Slaves, Eastman Johnson, 1862
A Negro Hung Alive by the Ribs to the Gallows, William Blake, 1863
Olympia, Edouard Manet, 1863
La Toilette, Frederic Bazille, 1870
Selected Historical Timeline...

1710- Justus Kuhn paints Henry Darnall III as a Child
1778- John Copley paints Watson and the Shark
1783- John Copley paints Death of Major Peirson
1800- Jefferson elected president
1803- Louisiana Purchase
1804- Lewis and Clark expedition
1820- Missouri Compromise
1823- Monroe Doctrine
1825- Erie Canal completed
1828- Andrew Jackson elected president
1831- Nat Turner's slave revolt
1834- Eugene Delacroix paints Women of Algiers
1836- Battle of the Alamo
- William Mount paints Farmers Nooning
- Charles Deas paints The Turkey Shoot
1838- Native Americans forced west to reservations
1840- Harriet Tubman begins work on Underground Railroad
1845- William Mount paints Eel Spearing at Setauket
1849- Gold Rush
1850- Compromise of 1850
- Fugitive Slave Law enacted
1851- Emmanuel Leutze paints George Washington Crossing the Delaware
1856- Gregor Mendel starts research on genetics
- Francis William Edmonds paints All Talk, No Work
1857- Dred Scott Decision
1859- Darwin publishes On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life.
1860- Lincoln elected president
- 4 million people are slaves in U.S.
1861- Civil War begins
- 200,000 blacks serve in Union forces
1862- Lilly Martin Spencer paints Dixieland
- Eastman Johnson paints The Ride for Liberty: The Fugitive Slaves
- William Blake paints A Negro Hung Alive by the Ribs to the Gallows
- Edouard Manet paints Olympia
1865- 13th Amendment (abolished slavery)
- Lincoln assassinated
1866- White civilians and police kill 46 blacks, burning 90 houses, 12 schools and four churches in Memphis
- Ku Klux Klan formed
1867- Reconstruction Act passed
1868- 14th Amendment (citizenship granted to all persons born in U.S.)
- Opelousas Massacre in Louisiana, 200-300 blacks killed
1869- First Transcontinental Railroad completed
1870- 15th Amendment (voting rights regardless of race)
- Frederic Bazille paints La Toilette
1875- Civil Rights Act prohibiting discrimination of blacks in public places
- 20 blacks killed in Clinton, Mississippi
1876- Thomas Eakins paints Will Schuster and Black Man Going Shooting (Rail Shooting)
1878- Thomas Hill paints Palo Alto Springs
1879- Edison invents electric light
- Thomas Anshutz paints The Way They Live
1880- John George Brown paints The Card Trick
- Jean-Leon Gerome paints The Bath
1896- Plessy vs. Ferguson (separate but equal)
- George Washington Carver appointed director of agricultural research at Tuskegee Institute
- 78 black Americans are known to have been lynched
1898- Spanish-American War
- American army invades Puerto Rico
- White rioting in Wilmington, North Carolina; eight blacks killed
- American helps Cuba become "independent" from Spain
- 131 blacks known to have been lynched
1899- June 4- National Day of Fasting declared by Afro-American Council to protest lynchings and massacres
1901- Roosevelt becomes president

left to right (details):
Will Schuster and Black Man Going Shooting (Rail Shooting), Thomas Eakins, 1876
Palo Alto Springs, Thomas Hill, 1878
The Way They Live, Thomas Anshutz, 1879
The Card Trick, John George Brown, 1880
The Bath, Jean-Leon Gerome, 1880
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