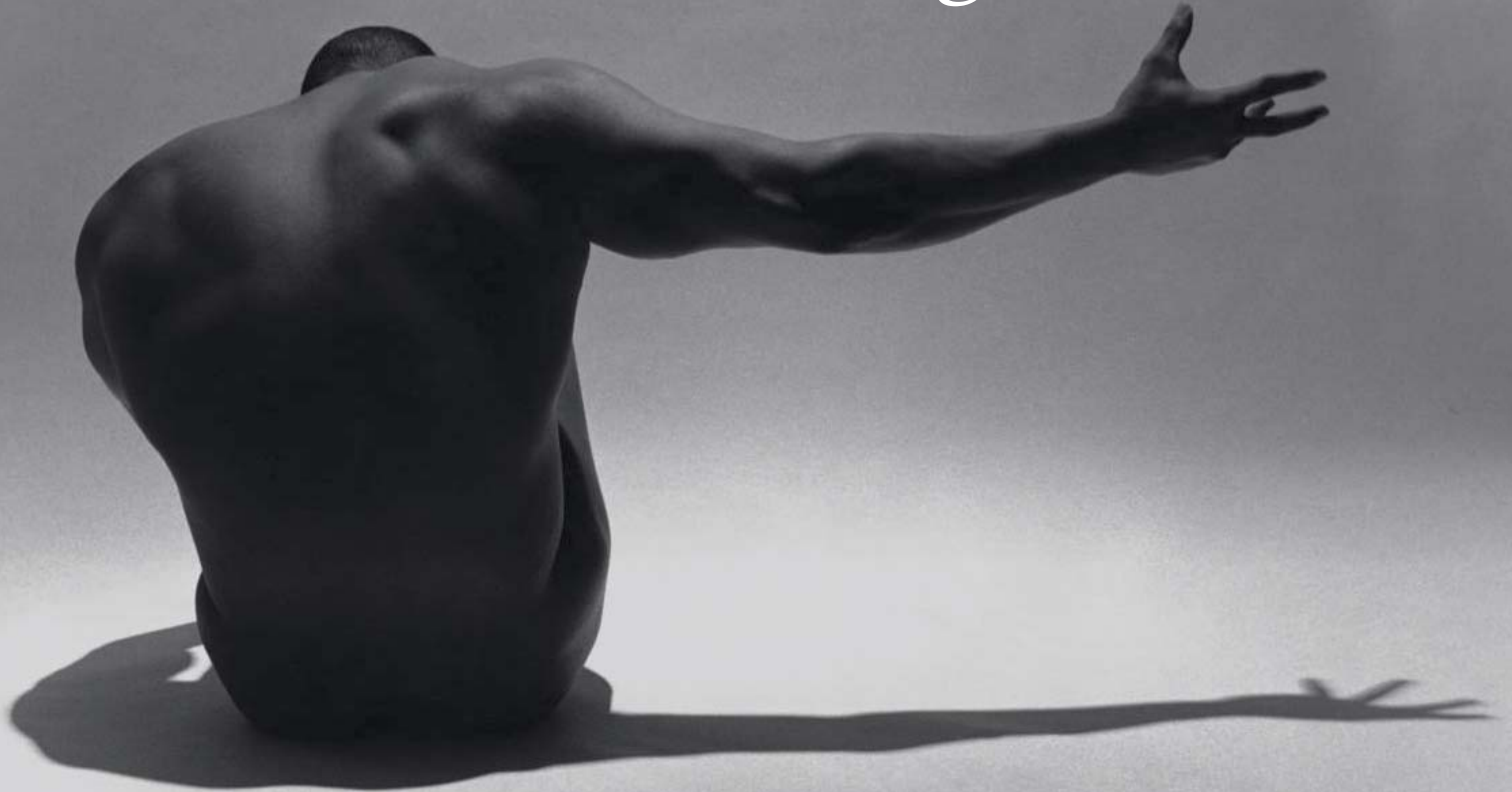


Vanderbilt's Carlton Wilkinson explores the African-American spirit and heritage

Images of Man

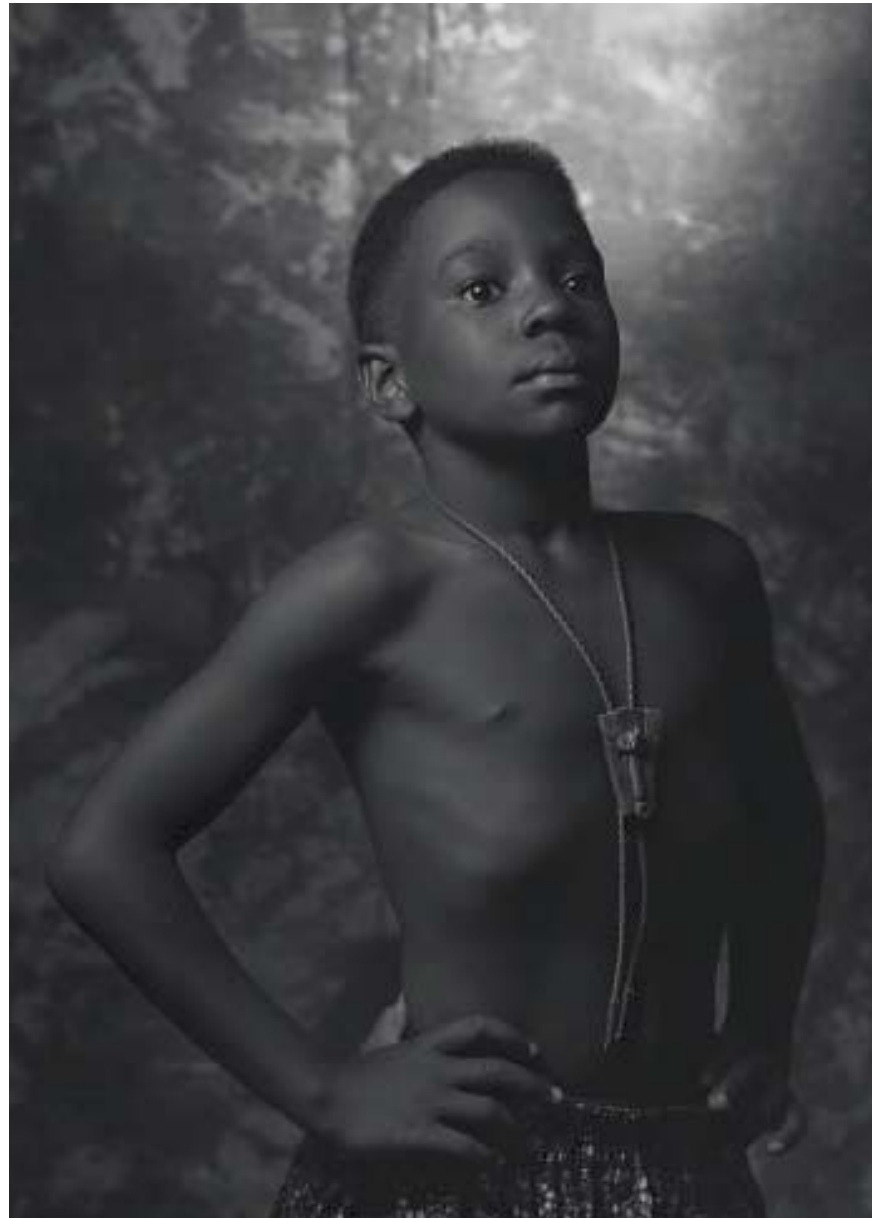


from African Male Museum series

Editor's Note: Vanderbilt fine arts faculty member Carlton Wilkinson's work recently was featured on the cover of *Harper's Magazine*. His photography is included in major collections, including those of the Schaumburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York, Gaylord Entertainment Co., Bell-South and Sen. Bill Frist. His photographs are featured in the Frist Center for the Visual Arts exhibit "Reflections in Black: Black Photographers from 1840 to the Present," and in 2003 will be included in a major traveling exhibit curated by the International Center for Photography.

My photography represents over 20 years of creating a series that reflects my inspirations as an African-American male in the United States. As a child in Nashville, I remember the last stand of Jim Crow laws and the beginning of integration in the South. As the first black student to attend a Nashville private school, I remember my favorite teacher sporting George Wallace's "For President" bumper stickers on her car. The contrast of freedom and overt racism hung in the balance between reality and revolution.

My interest in photography mirrors my interest in the evolution of humanity. In 1990 I wanted to further my exploration of the black male image, which I felt had been long tarnished by racism and prejudice. My goal



Sun One, 1992



Can I Fly?, 1992



Final Comfort, 1992

was to further the spirit and diversity of the black male. Also, I looked to expose the true beauty and majesty of the black male. These figurative studies, many of which are accompanied with poetry, address the inner thoughts and historical references of the black male. This work I entitled "The African Male Museum."

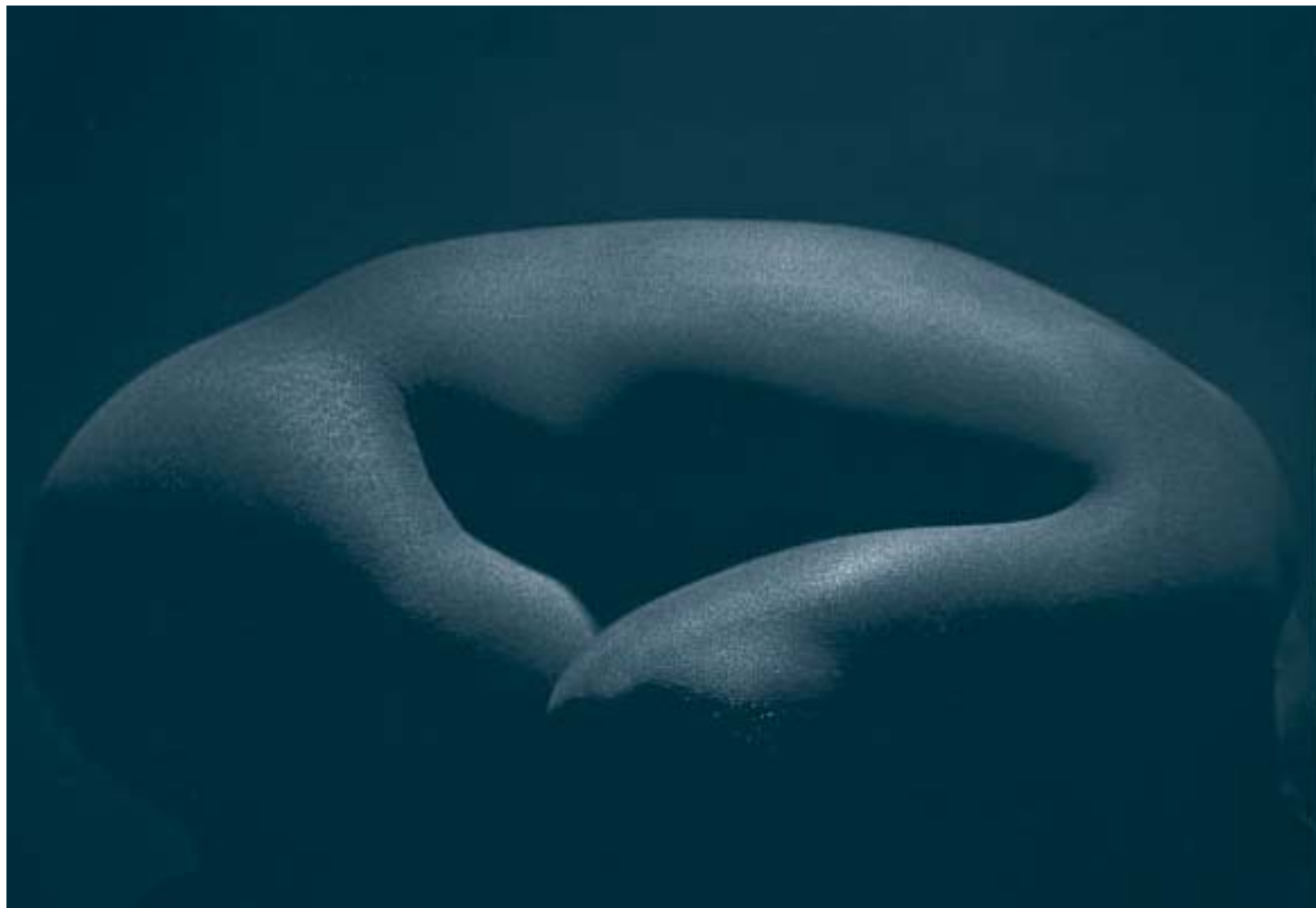
"Museum" has many directions, as I also photographed the Million Man March in Washington, D.C., in 1996. Additionally, I interviewed and photographed black men in a variety of vocations and interests. This sub-series I call "Contemporary Voices."

My "Supernal Impressions" series was inspired by my visit to various galleries in the Los Angeles area. During my visit to one gallery, I encountered the photography of Robert Mapplethorpe. I was first taken aback by the artful, yet stereotypic, images he created of the black male figure. I returned to campus to explore what other images there are of the black figure, only to be dismayed by the limited availability of images pertaining to black people. Further, the few images I did see did little to address a more classical view of our aesthetic. I decided that I should empower myself to address this most underserved subject.

from Supernal Impressions series



Supernal Impressions #3, 1982



Supernal Impressions #1, 1982



Supernal Impressions #5, 1982

from **On the Altar of Liberty** series

“On the Altar of Liberty” has its roots in my childhood, as I thought of my growing up in a composite of the southern United States, Nashville and the black church. It was the black church that served as architect of the Civil Rights Movement. Under the leadership of Nashvillians Jim Lawson, C.T. Vivian, John Lewis and my pastor, Rev. Kelly Miller Smith, I witnessed how the churches served as the spiritual and practical force to integrate the South. It is my recall that inspired me to travel the South in 1984 to photograph



Woman Praying at 16th Street Baptist Church, 1984



Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Montgomery, Ala., 1984



Mount Zion AME,
Meridian County, Miss.,
1984

churches involved in the history of the Civil Rights Movement. This became the subject of my master’s thesis at UCLA.

I am proud to note that these series have been shown in several colleges and universities, as well as in public and private galleries around the country. Through them, I invite audiences to experience the spirit and heritage of the African-American diaspora. ▼



Man Praying at Wheat Street, 1984