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Yet Another Fight for Remembrance: Titus Kaphar's Representation of Race

in the Past and the Present

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On August 9, 2014, protests and riots erupted in Ferguson, Missouri after the fatal shooting of an unarmed African American teenager, Michael Brown, by a white police officer, Darren Wilson. The tensions between law enforcement and African Americans became a critical discussion across the country. Protesters adopted the phrase, "Hands up, don't shoot," in reference to Brown allegedly raising his hands to surrender before he was killed. The Ferguson protests played an integral part in the Black Lives Matter activist movement and the notion of a new civil rights era in the U.S.[1]

At the end of that year, the Ferguson protesters were collectively considered runners-up for Time's "2014 Person of the Year." Time commissioned Titus Kaphar, an American artist, to create a potential cover of the Ferguson protesters in the event that they were selected. He fulfilled the commission by creating *Yet Another Fight for Remembrance*, a 4ft by 5ft oil painting of the activists (Figure 1). Kaphar used a source photo of the protesters and applied a "whitewashing" technique to mask their identities. He overlaid strokes of white paint across the bodies and faces of those in the foreground of the crowd, not only to respond to what was already highly visible – thousands of photos of the protesters shared across social media platforms – but also to capture their erasure by market-driven mainstream media. When asked about his image, he explained that he wished to capture how the nature of the media cycle erases the impact of a situation, as if it were another brief moment quickly flashing across the screen.[2]

Throughout Kaphar's career, his practice has centered on looking to the past to give a voice to those historically oppressed. In the majority of his work, he reconstructs and critiques the art

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[1] For more information on the Ferguson shooting, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/special/national/ferguson-grand-jury-findings/

[2] Priscilla Frank, "Artist Addresses Racial Injustice, From 1700s Europe To Present Day America," *Huffington Post*, January 21, 2015, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/01/21/titus-kaphar_n_6511444.html.

historical canon by looking back to 18th and 19th century American and European art and creates works based on hidden narratives of minority subjects, particularly of African Americans.[3] He cuts out figures and manipulates imagery to "reveal something of what has been lost."[4] Kaphar reinterprets iconic portraits of famous historic figures, such as Thomas Jefferson and Christopher Columbus, and questions how repressed histories have shaped our understanding of these individuals and, more importantly, of United States history.

Through an investigation of dialogue between the past and the present, the invisible and the visible, Kaphar explores the representation of race in contemporary art and challenges the viewer's initial perception of history. When analyzing how he shifts the focus of the Western art historical canon, we must ask: how does Kaphar disrupt the visual field and, simultaneously, reimagine narratives across distinct time periods? And how does his historically grounded practice shift when engaging with current events? Kaphar's style and conceptual methods raise larger questions of perspective and identity politics. This paper will investigate the visual and contextual components of Kaphar's works, as they take on unprecedented forms of political activism. By comparing the different approaches Kaphar takes to redefine visibility in his historical works versus *Yet Another Fight for Remembrance*, we can gain a deeper understanding of how minorities have been and continue to be represented within mainstream U.S. visual culture.

In one of his most prominent works, *Behind the Myth of Benevolence*, a portrait of Thomas Jefferson dangles from the corner of the canvas, both revealing and concealing an image of an African American woman (Figure 2). Her captivating gaze draws in the viewer as she peers from around the draped canvas. Her limbs jut out from the curtain as she twists her body towards the

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[3] For the purpose of this paper, I will refer to these as his "historical works."
[4] "Titus Kaphar", Artists, Jack Shainman Gallery, accessed September 5, 2018, http://www.jackshainman.com/artists/artists-2/titus-kaphar/

onlooker. Nicole Fleetwood, author of *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness*, states, "Blackness troubles vision in western discourse… the visible black body is always already troubling to the dominant visual field."[5] She claims the trouble to the dominant visual field stems from, "how racialized heteronormativity structures the gaze and the field of vision."[6] Kaphar responds to this by dismantling the iconic portrait of Jefferson to uncover the portrait of the woman. While it is implied that she may be naked beneath the surface, Kaphar simultaneously compromises Jefferson's image and prevents her from enduring further objectification from the viewer by obscuring her exposed body. As the woman is revealed in the piece, her presence counteracts a discourse founded on the innate construction of whiteness.

Maurice Berger explores this concept in *White: Whiteness and Race in Contemporary Art.* He explains how the vagueness of white identity and whiteness has contributed to its subscription of normalcy that can be traced back for generations. This privilege and power are acting components of oppression inflicted upon nonwhites.[7] Berger contests that, "it is precisely the invisibility of whiteness that has allowed white intellectuals to obliterate black people from the history of art and ideas."[8] Through this lens, Kaphar's work becomes not only a visual metaphor for whiteness that continues to obscure the history of African Americans, but also an attempt to counteract that whiteness through the affirmation of blackness.

Behind the Myth of Benevolence further considers the roles of those that are eclipsed by the presence of the founding fathers, in this instance, Thomas Jefferson. A couple of critics have

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[5] Nicole Fleetwood, Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 6.
[6] Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision*, 6.
[7] Maurice Berger, White: Whiteness and Race in Contemporary Art (Baltimore: University of Maryland, 2004), 25-45
[8] Berger, *White*, 25.

questioned the identity of the figure, wondering if she may represent Sally Hemings, a woman of mixed race enslaved by President Jefferson and speculated to have bore his children.[9] While Sally Hemings was documented to have been lighter skinned than the woman in this image, Kaphar states:

> This painting is about Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings, and yet it is not… The woman who sits here is not just simply a representation of Sally Hemings, she's more of a symbol of many of the black women whose stories have been shrouded by the narratives of our defied founding fathers.[10]

Kaphar thus represents race within historical portraiture by repurposing the image of an unspecified, African American woman in juxtaposition to the renowned presidential figure. It is both a singular and collective portrait, despite the impossibility of knowing Hemings' exact likeness. Bridget Cooks, author of *Exhibiting Blackness: African Americans and the American Art Museum*, claims that the image of African Americans in American art, "has served a didactic and supportive role in national history and art history" while simultaneously being marginalized from the discourse.[11] Kaphar transfers that supporting role from the woman to Jefferson through physical manipulation of the work. He loosens Jefferson's image from the frame, which becomes a curtain that reveals the hidden narrative underneath. In an interview with Studio International, Kaphar articulates his motives behind his reconstruction of portraiture, "After a lifetime of seeing these images from one perspective, it seems important to take them apart to get close to something

[9] Cara Ober, "Titus Kaphar and Ken Gonzales-Day Reveal the Fictions in Depictions," Hyperallergic, June 15, 2018,
https://hyperallergic.com/446801/titus-kaphar-and-ken-gonzales-day-reveal-the-fictions-in-depictions/
Victoria Valentine, "National Portrait Gallery: Titus Kaphar and Ken Gonzales-Day Explore 'Unseen' Narratives in Historic Portraiture," *Culture Type,* March 28, 2018,
 https://www.culturetype.com/2018/03/28/titus-kaphar-and-ken-gonzales-day-explore-unseen-narratives-in-historic-portraiture-in-new-national-portrait-gallery-exhibition/
[10] Valentine, "National Portrait Gallery: Titus Kaphar."
[11] Bridget Cooks, *Exhibiting Blackness: African Americans and the American Art Museum* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011, 2.

that could accurately be called a portrait."[12] By removing the founding fathers from an elevated status and recognizing their flaws, it becomes possible to recover substantial stories that were once hidden by their ideological reputations.

The title itself refers to the idea of "benevolent slavery," which deceptively claims that some slave masters were "caring" for black slaves by providing food, clothing, and shelter out of kindness. In this piece, Kaphar challenges Jefferson's reputation as a "benevolent" slave owner. Therefore, the title, *Behind the Myth of Benevolence,* mirrors Kaphar's action of revealing a truth to the concept of benevolent slavery and Jefferson's role within that framework. Kaphar creates a visual metaphor for the contradiction of a man who bore the face of liberty, yet remained a slaveholder until his death. The pull back of Jefferson's heroic portrait reveals a symbol of the "systematic degradation" that Jefferson's legacy, and the rest of this country, profited from.[13]

Through in depth, contextual analysis, the work reveals numerous components to Kaphar's concept of representation. Fleetwood defines the term *iconicity* as, "the ways in which singular images or signs come to represent a whole host of historical occurrences and processes."[14] She is critical of iconicity in how dominant imagery of blackness establishes an historical account that promotes a white vision subduing the black experience. Fleetwood suggests an aesthetic of "non-iconicity" to oppose the reductive effects of the racial icon. As she states, the non-iconic image "resists singularity and completeness in narrative" and that "exposes the limitations of its

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[12] Allie Biswas, "Titus Kaphar: 'My subconscious mind had created a fiction that masqueraded as a memory,'" *Studio International,* November 1, 2017,
https://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/titus-kaphar-interview-shifting-skies
[13] Annette Gordan-Reed, "Excerpt: 'The Hemingses of Monticello,'" *NPR*, September 22, 2008,
https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=94828368
[14] Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision*, 2.

framing."[15] The woman in *Behind the Myth of Benevolence*, with no explicit identity attached to her, troubles this prescription of the iconic image as she remains anonymous.

Kaphar eloquently embeds multiple facets of history into one work. Cara Ober said it best in her article published in *Hyperallergic* that, "the best of his [Kaphar's] works hit like a sucker punch and make you feel history like a phantom limb: an aching, tingling sense of what we've lost."[16] Kaphar achieves this sense of resurrection throughout his practice by reshaping what is expected of historical paintings that influenced Western art history and providing a new perspective. However, when Kaphar looks to the present for inspiration, he takes a drastically different approach than his paintings that reclaim invisible black historic figures.

In Kaphar's painting, *Yet Another Fight for Remembrance,* he captures the magnitude of the Ferguson protesters in action (Figure 1). He utilizes the stark color contrast of white and black to create a visual commentary on the clashing racial tensions in Ferguson at that moment. The anonymous protesters hold their hands above their heads, alluding to the iconic phrase "hands up, don't shoot." An arm extends above the crowd, holding up an outline of a phone to record the event unfolding on the canvas. Alex Altman, editor at Time, stated, "Protest is a performance that can make the unseen visible."[17] Like the rest of Kaphar's practice, these figures are pushed to the foreground, confronting viewers with their outrage for the death of Michael Brown and the reoccurring case of black lives killed by law enforcement. As Kaphar created this piece, his intended audience differed from his previous works. Instead of museum goers and art lovers, the piece was to be seen by the readers of Time magazine. The viewer is presumably placed in the

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[15] Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision*, 64.
[16] Cara Ober, "Titus Kaphar and Ken Gonzales-Day."
[17] Alex Altman, "Ferguson Protesters, The Activists," *TIME*, December 10, 2014,
 http://time.com/time-person-of-the-year-runner-up-ferguson-protesters/

position of a viewer watching a video of the Ferguson protests, or even law enforcement facing the front line of the demonstrators. In either scenario, the white viewer cannot identify with them and the protesters are casted as the role of the "other", a fundamental element to the construct of whiteness, as their identities are immersed in white paint. As the central figure demands your attention, his presence is unapologetic, and determined to be seen. However, the rest of his body and the other figures are washed over, as if to diminish their significance.

Kaphar applies this signature technique of "whitewashing" to the work. In an interview with *Huffington Post*, Kaphar explained that, "The whitewashing functions as a kind of erasure. I wanted to make something that didn't feel like an illustration of an idea but an expression of a feeling."[18] Time documented Kaphar applying the whitewashing technique to *Yet Another Fight for Remembrance*. In the short video, Kaphar ponders the painting as clips of Ferguson protests flash on the screen while he is lost in thought. Quickly, Kaphar gets up and mixes oil with white paint and applies quick swipes of paint to the work. He moves the canvas from the easel to the ground and continues applying the whitewashing technique. His abrupt brush movement seems to follow his own instinct as the outcome of the painting appears to be a carefully constructed composition.[19] The whitewashing technique applied to *Yet Another Fight for Remembrance* exudes a sense of controlled chaos. The dynamic slashes of white paint literally erase portions of the figures in the painting, but also symbolize the whitewashing and erasure that continuously impacts the representation of minorities within visual culture. Outlines of the bodies push through the white brushstrokes, alluding to the fact that their bodies are still present and not completely erased from the space. In addition to the visual metaphor, Kaphar adds a poetic element to the technique by

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[18] Frank, "Artist Addresses Racial Injustice."
[19] Horacio Marquinez, dir., "Behind Titus Kaphar's Ferguson Protesters Painting," filmed December 2014 with Time Magazine, video, 1:57,
http://time.com/time-person-of-the-year-ferguson-painting/

mixing linseed oil into the white paint, "which, over time, makes it more transparent, allowing the character to become fully whole again."[20] Zeena Feldman, editor of *Art and the Politics of Visibility*, points out, "invisibility and the lack of identity can act as sources of even greater power."[21] Through this whitewashing technique, Kaphar effectively captures the movement by erasing individualities and highlighting the role of a collective identity.

This is not the first time Kaphar has integrated these visual techniques into his practice. He has previously implemented the element of the obscured identity that is seen in *Yet Another Fight for Remembrance,* in which he layers strokes of white to cover portions of the protesters' faces. In one series, *The Jerome Project*, small individual portraits of African American men are each submerged in tar, only revealing the top half of their faces (Figure 3). These portraits draw from mugshots of men named Jerome, resulting from Kaphar's search for his father's prison records and finding an abundance of imprisoned men with the same name as his father. *The Jerome Project* "considers the overrepresentation of African American males in the prison system."[22] By obscuring their identity, he not only illustrates "the silencing of the incarcerated men" but also "provides a kind of privacy not afforded to them on the mugshot websites."[23] Like the mugshots, the images of protesters are accessible through media. However, in *Yet Another Fight for Remembrance*, he masks the protesters' identities to capture the anonymity of a movement.

Additionally, Kaphar has applied the whitewashing technique to several of his historical works, such as *Fight for Remembrance I & II* (Figures 4 and 5). In this series, he washed over

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[20] Alicia Ault, "Two Artists in Search of Missing History," *Smithsonian.com*, April 4, 2018,
 https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/two-artists-search-missing-history-180968651/
[21] Zeena Feldman, "Introduction: Why Visibility Matters," in *Art and the Politics of Visibility: Contesting the Global, Local and the In-Between*, ed. Zeena Feldman (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2017), 12.
[22] Laura Mallonee, "Portraits of Prisoners in Gold Leaf and Tar," *Hyperallergic,* March 2, 2015,
https://hyperallergic.com/183665/portraits-of-prisoners-in-gold-leaf-and-tar/
[23] "Titus Kaphar: The Jerome Project," Studio Museum,
https://www.studiomuseum.org/exhibition/titus-kaphar/the-jerome-project

portraits of black Civil War soldiers, leaving their guns to become the focal points of the works. The chaotic brushstrokes cover the lower half of the soldier's face and alludes to his own repressed history through the role of the black Union soldier that goes largely overlooked in the American narrative. As this whitewashing technique is incorporated into several of his paintings, *Yet Another Fight for Remembrance* is the first time he began to use the whitewashing technique in a contemporary context.

The title for the Time magazine cover refers to this *Fight for Remembrance* series. By adding "Yet Another" to the beginning of the title, Kaphar is associating the present issue of police brutality as a reoccurring form of oppression, which stems from years of systematic racism embedded into the nation's history. Kaphar states, "The act of painting itself becomes a fight to remember the names of all the young black men who were taken too soon. A fight to remember that when this issue disappears from the media, it is not permission to forget."[24]

Through its commission by Time magazine, *Yet Another Fight for Remembrance* becomes a product of media culture itself. The inescapable force of the media has the power to shape how social groups are represented and understood outside of white, mainstream America. Particularly, the news media plays a large role in debates of civil rights by controlling racial representations (or lack thereof) that are fed to the public. In Chapter 2 of *The Routledge Companion to Media and Race*, Frank Ortega and Joe Feagin explain how media framing through the bias of journalists and editors can shape audience perceptions.[25] The benefits reaped from this power of control

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[24] Time Staff, "TIME Person of the Year 2014: Titus Kaphar's Ferguson Protester Art," *Time*, December 10, 2014, http://time.com/time-person-of-the-year-ferguson-painting/

[25] Frank Ortega and Joe Reagin, "Framing: The Undying White Racial Frame," in *The Routledge Companion to Media and Race*, ed. Christopher Campbell (New York: Routledge, 2017), Chapter 2, VitalSource.

subsequently contribute to ideals of racial hierarchy and the white racial frame, a concept based on the superiority of the white race over other races.

Christopher Campbell, editor of *The Routledge Companion to Media and Race*, asserts, "Journalism, advertising, and the entertainment industry all have long histories of symbolically annihilating and stereotyping people and communities that exist outside of the dominant culture."[26] The media played the same role previously seen in the civil rights movement of the 1950's and 60's through their misconstrued choice of photography to visually represent events occurring at that time and portray their own perspective of reality. Martin Berger, author of *Seeing Through Race: A Reinterpretation of Civil Rights Photography,* explains the phenomenon of civil rights photography and reinterprets it through its original context of the white media outlet that continuously reinforced racial ignorance to a largely white audience. Berger contests that white media outlets were explicitly interested in illustrating the conflict, which received more attention, and ultimately, increased sales.[27] Berger also states, "The determined efforts of the white press to frame the civil rights movement as nonthreatening had the collateral result of casting black in the role of limited power. With great regularity, iconic photographs show white actors exercising power over blacks…"[28] By understanding the foundations for civil rights photography, it becomes easier to see what is still repeated in the present. As the white media controlled the white population's understanding of the civil rights movement then, today's media can appear to follow along those same lines. In Chapter 6 of *The Routledge Companion to Media and Race*, Kim LeDuff theorizes, "that many of the old challenges that society faced in pre-Civil Rights America are

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[26] Christopher Campbell, "Introduction," in *The Routledge Companion to Media and Race*, ed. Christopher Campbell (New York: Routledge 2017), Introduction, VitalSource.
[27] Martin Berger, *Seeing Through Race: A Reinterpretation of Civil Rights Photography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 3.
[28] Berger, *Seeing Through Race*, 7.

coming back to haunt us with a new and different twist."[29] The immense accessibility to information and the constant turn of the media cycle has pushed the media to take on an immersive form in daily life. New kinds of social media have provided accessible platforms for discussions frequently omitted from the mainstream media, slowly working to eradicate the digital divide.

The protests in Ferguson were met with a media frenzy and became a turning point for discussing racialized police violence. Campbell argues that American news coverage of Michael Brown's death "continued to rely on problematic journalistic processes that fail to reflect the complexities of contemporary racism" while the younger generations that followed the event on social media "embarked on a kind of post-modern media criticism."[30] Social media sites, like Twitter, allowed people, especially people of color, exposed to the events to spread information and images that otherwise may not have received national attention. Most of the time, these images revealed more of an incident than what was reported to the public. One study called it "a form of citizen journalism."[31] This continues to play a large role in the immense speed of the news media cycle. Accessibility to information continues to expand and evolve through social media platforms. Important movements, like Black Lives Matter, grew out of this multitude of new media coverage and awareness.

Black Lives Matter stemmed from the social media hashtag, #BlackLivesMatter. It quickly gained traction as photos and videos captured tangible proof of racism and violence inflicted upon black Americans as they attempted to gain control of their own image and shift the dialogue to a

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[29] Kim LeDuff, "Critical Race Theory: Everything Old is New Again," in *The Routledge Companion to Media and Race*, ed. Christopher Campbell (New York: Routledge 2017), Chapter 6, VitalSource.

[30] Campbell, *The Routledge Companion to Media and Race*, introduction.

[31] Ginger E. Blackstone, Holly S. Cowart, and Lynsey M. Saunders, "Picture a Protest: Analyzing Media Images Tweeted From Ferguson," *Social Media + Society*, (October-December 2016): 4, https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305116674029

discussion about law enforcement's actions to unharmed black men. The phone became a powerful tool of visual evidence in recording and spreading documentation of injustice. Through this increased spread of information and advocacy, #AllLivesMatter was explicitly created in opposition to the #BlackLivesMatter movement, criticizing what it interpreted as a lack of inclusivity. The problematic slogan implies that all lives are equally valued by the state, despite the systematic oppression of racialized minorities. Additionally, the movement, #BlueLivesMatter, was also created in a defensive response to the Ferguson protests and the Black Lives Matter campaign. However, it advocated for the protection of law enforcement officers in the alleged "war on cops" and promoted legislation that classified attacks on police as a "hate crime."[32] While statistics contradict the claim of a "war on cops", Blue Lives Matter equates the choice of a profession with racial status.[33] All Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter are, in a sense, whitewashing the movement and dismissing the original mission of Black Lives Matter.

Yet Another Fight for Remembrance is revolutionary in comparison to the rest of his works. Kaphar responds to the present issue of racism and police brutality, which speaks to his core as an African American man living in the United States today. Instead of reconstructing the representation of the protesters, he evokes his own experience as a black man to create a piece that demonstrates his personal reaction to the events that occurred in Ferguson. Kaphar explains:

> Like so many others, I've been struggling with what to do in response to what is happening in Ferguson and throughout the rest of this country… I've been trying to make paintings that speak to the gravity of the situation… What I make ends up feeling more like catharsis than communication.[34]

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[32] Julia Craven, "32 Blue Lives Matter Bills Have Been Introduced Across 14 States This Year," *Huffington Post*, March 1, 2017,
https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/blue-black-lives-matter-police-bills-states_us_58b61488e4b0780bac2e31b8
[33] Martin Kaste, "Is There A 'War On Police'? The Statistics Say No," *NPR*, September 17, 2015,
https://www.npr.org/2015/09/17/441196546/is-there-a-war-on-police-the-statistics-say-no
[34] Time Staff, "Time Person of the Year."

Kaphar's articulated struggle to fully capture present issues is what leads to the creation of such an aesthetically striking piece. One could speculate an emotional connection links the artist, Titus Kaphar, to the subjects, the Ferguson protesters.

Kaphar takes on multiple approaches and visual techniques to communicate his perceptions of representation and visibility. In the analyzed artworks, he utilizes composition, portraiture, and references to photography and painting to achieve a heightened sense of revelation in his works. Through a combination of these components, Kaphar takes on an innovative approach to critiquing a visual culture that is historically based on the omission and erasure of minority subjects.

Throughout his practice, Kaphar elicits a central theme of exposing and revealing a truth. He pushes figures to the foreground and forges a connection with the onlooker, in which they're forced to confront the subject and the context of the painting. In *Behind the Myth of Benevolence* and *Yet Another Fight for Remembrance*, the viewer is faced with the representation of race, one that is left out of the historical narrative and the other that is overtly visible in today's media. His works are meant to elicit discomfort, with, especially, the white viewer. Kaphar forces the viewer to confront the trauma, slavery, and oppression that U.S. history has normalized.

In a majority of his work, he reclaims the art of portraiture by altering representations of race. Wendy Wick Reaves examines the history of portraiture through a collection of essays in *Beyond the Face: New Perspective on Portraiture*. Reaves explains, "Portraits reflect codes of social and political environments…portraits are subject to new modes of interpretation and audiences."[35] *Behind the Myth of Benevolence* not only calls on the past depiction of the black woman as a servant but reinterprets her in the form of a modern-day revisionism in the context of

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[35] Wendy Wick Reaves, "Introduction," in Beyond the Face: New Perspective on Portraiture, ed. Wendy Wick Reaves (Washington D.C.: National Portrait Gallery, 2018), 16.

portraiture. Kaphar took the objectified figure of the enslaved African American woman who is persistently marginalized in the art historical discourse and brought her to the foreground. This act reflects the present-day awareness of the fiction that has been projected onto the perceptions of history and society's initiative to uncover such hidden truths. Kaphar seamlessly blends a recollection of the past through his own contemporary translation. However, *Yet Another Fight for Remembrance* recalls images of present day protests, reflecting on an intense point in the political atmosphere. As Kaphar navigates current events and the weight of history on the present, he assembles the protesters into a collective portrait and implements the whitewashing technique to mask their individualities. While there seems to be a central character to the piece, due to the clarity of his form and his closer proximity to the viewer, there seems to be no hierarchy, a component that was previously established in group portraits throughout art history. The entirety of the protesters is not recognizable to create the essence of the movement, in which the unit as a whole is fighting for the same justice.

In his historical works, Kaphar looks back to paintings and portraiture in 18th and 19th European and American art. However, in *Yet Another Fight for Remembrance*, he referenced a specific photograph of the Ferguson protesters taken by Scott Olson, a Getty Images photographer (Figure 6). Distinguishing the difference of the two mediums and how they represent the subject strongly contributes to Kaphar's artistic choices. Roland Barthes differentiates the medium of photography and painting in his book, *Camera Lucida*. He contends that photography offers a realness and truth that a painted portrait could never capture.[36] Photography encompasses an actual event, while painting constructs its own reality. Through a collection of essays in *Shared Intelligence: American Painting and the Photograph*, Jonathan Weinberg and Suzanne Hudson,

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[36] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 77.

along with other scholars, dispute the alleged "rivalry" of photography and painting. Weinberg states, "… the ways painters in the past exploited the camera to heighten depiction and create narratives, or the ways photographers have tried to imitate the scale and function of painting, rather than being peripheral to modernism, are central to its history."[37] As each medium borrows from the other to enrich itself in an evolving digital society, the division between the two modes of expression begin to blur.

When Kaphar translated the original photograph into oil paint, he essentially altered how the image functioned. Weinberg states, "Paradoxically, camera-based paintings have the effect of making us attend to photographs in surprising ways." [38] The relationship between painting and photography essentializes the realistic vision of the photograph. However, Kaphar does not aim for a photographic quality to the piece as he applies the whitewashing technique over the image. The technique mimics gestural brush strokes of Abstract Expressionism yet lack in its quality of spontaneity, as he deliberately obstructs their identities with streaks of white. Suzanne Hudson claims that, "one medium may not only provide a direct image source for another but can offer up a malleable – and broadly instrumental – representational model."[39] Kaphar molds what was once a documentary photograph, an image available for the public, into his own vision of protest art.

Kaphar highlights critical moments of African American oppression through particular time periods in U.S. history. As he continues to disrupt the visual field through recontextualization of the subject, it can lead to greater discussions of representation, or lack thereof. By employing a variety of visual components and not-so-subtle innuendos, Kaphar demonstrates the ability to

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[37] Jonathan Weinberg, "Introduction," in *Shared Intelligence: American Painting and the Photograph*, ed. Barbara Buhler Lynes and Jonathan Weinberg (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), 4.
[38] Weinberg, "Introduction," 23.
[39] Suzanne Hudson, "Ghosts of Ghosts," in *Shared Intelligence: American Painting and the Photograph*, ed. Barbara Buhler Lynes and Jonathan Weinberg (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), 149.

critique the past and reflect on the present. Until we can understand what influences the representation of race and who is excluded from the grand narrative, we will continue to consume the whitewashed version of American history. Through an integration of powerful techniques and challenging conceptions, *Yet Another Fight for Remembrance*, and the rest of his works, project a desire to be seen, heard, and acknowledged within the scope of U.S. visual culture.

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Figure 1: Titus Kaphar. *Yet Another Fight for Remembrance*, 2014 (oil on canvas) 60 in x 48 in. Commissioned by Time magazine. Represented at Jack Shainman Gallery.

Figure 2: Titus Kaphar. *Behind the Myth of Benevolence*, 2014 (oil on canvas) 59 x 34 x 7 in. Represented at Jack Shainman Gallery.

Figure 3: Titus Kaphar. *The Jerome Project* series, 2014 (Oil, gold leaf, and tar on wood panel) 76.5 x 59.5 in. Private collection, The Studio Museum Harlem.

Figure 4: Titus Kaphar. *Fight for Remembrance I,* 2013 (oil on canvas) 62 x 50 in. Represented at Jack Shainman Gallery.

Figure 5: Titus Kaphar. *The Fight for Remembrance II*, 2013 (oil on canvas) Dimension unknown. Represented at Jack Shainman Gallery.

Figure 6: Demonstrators protest the killing of Michael Brown on August 12, 2014 in Ferguson, Missouri. Photo by Scott Olson/ Getty Images.