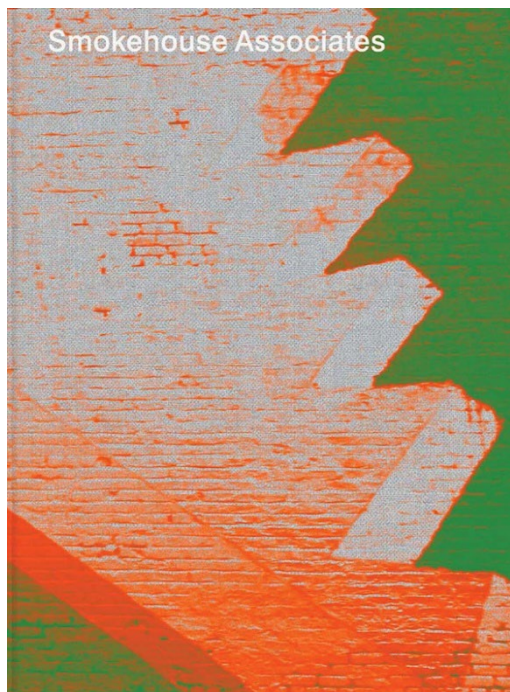


## Review: Smokehouse Associates

by Eric Booker. Yale University Press, December 2022. 258 p. ill. ISBN 978-0-300-26720-4 (h/c), \$55.00. <https://yalebooks.yale.edu/book/9780300267204/smokehouse-associates/>.

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This publication provides the first critical examination of Smokehouse Associates, a community-oriented artist collective that used public art to transform empty walls and lots throughout central and east Harlem. Envisioned by artist William T. Williams, additional artists include Melvin Edwards, Guy Ciarcia, and Billy Rose. From 1968 to 1970, the collective collaborated with members of the Harlem community to both conceptualize and execute abstract murals and sculptural works that reflected the vibrant energy of the city. Williams' belief in the power of art to transform the Harlem community spilled over into his work with the Studio Museum of Harlem. After its opening in 1968, Williams helped establish the Museum's renowned Artist-in-Residence program and in 1969, curated one of the Museum's first exhibitions, *X to the Fourth Power*. Ciarcia, Rose, and Edwards served on the Museum's board for nearly twenty years.

The beauty of *Smokehouse Associates* is in its inclusion of scholarly and first-person accounts of the collective's work and practice. In the forward, Thelma Golden, Director and Chief Curator of The Studio Museum of Harlem, briefly contextualizes the fervent socio-political moment surrounding both the collective and the Museum's founding. Following are essays by Eric Booker, former Assistant Curator and Exhibition Coordinator at The Studio Museum in Harlem; Charles Davis II, Associate Professor at UT Austin's School of Architecture; and James Trainor, a writer, educator, and scholar based in Maine. The longform writing concludes with a conversation

between Smokehouse Associates members Williams, Edwards, and Ciarcia, and is moderated by Ashley James, Associate Curator of Contemporary Art at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

The publication essays are broken up with archival reproductions of interview excerpts and correspondence, as well as photo documentation of murals in process and photo mockups of unrealized works from Williams' archival collection. A timeline spanning 1962-1978 is included to further contextualize the Black activist and artistic movements surrounding the collective's activity. The book wraps up with a photo index, list of artists, contributors, and credits. From a material culture perspective, the textured orange and green image reproduction of a mural in process on the publication's front and back covers makes the publication an interesting object in itself. Overall, *Smokehouse Associates* is a book that can be enjoyed by students, scholars, and art-curious readers. The publication provides an engaging mix of historical overview of the collective and contextual histories of public art, urban design, and architecture.