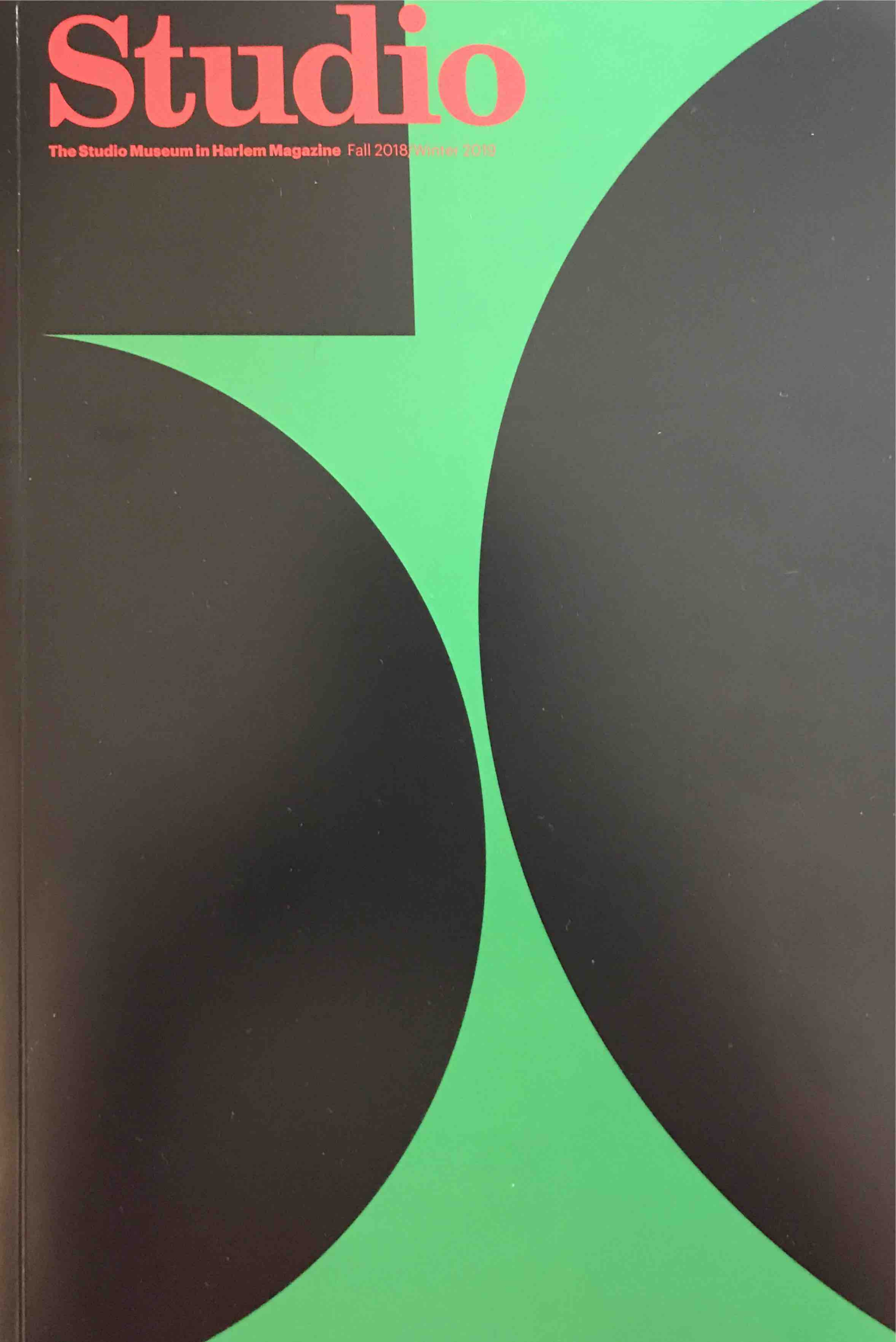


Studio

The Studio Museum in Harlem Magazine Fall 2018/Winter 2019





Karyn Olivier, 2005–06

It was the subtlest, most natural, but obvious thing—being surrounded by black artists, curators, educators, administrators, staff. It felt so normal, pedestrian even, but in actuality was in stark contrast to my experiences in the art world up until then. At my small graduate school, I was the only black student. But the experience at the Studio Museum elevated that experience to another level. It is difficult to articulate the specific impact it had on me, but I know it acted as a salve, an experience that challenged my practice while allowing my confidence to blossom.

I had the privilege of being in residence with amazing artists—Rashawn Griffin and Clifford Owens. They both had such strong, clear-eyed visions of their work, while being infinitely malleable and fluid. My practice was much more rigid; I conceived of an idea and then just worked to realize it. Through observation and many conversations, they taught me the joy of play in the studio and of making room for the unexpected.

During my residency I was thrilled to be part of *Frequency* and later several group shows with rosters of artists I truly admire and love. Though I don't get to visit the Museum regularly anymore, I can honestly say that when I do, as corny as it sounds, it still feels like home. This feeling was instilled from the moment we entered our studios—we knew we were being “embraced” and would forever be a part of the Studio Museum family. This sense of community—of folks having your back, being invested in you and your practice, and expecting the best from you—is how I approach teaching young artists. I tell them that if we don't care about each other and each other's art and development, how can we expect it of others?

Paul Mpagi Sepuya, 2010–11

The Studio Museum was transformative in giving me the physical space and significant financial help to dedicate myself to making artwork full-time for the first time. I had not yet attended graduate school and had been making work mostly in my home in Brooklyn. So the *Artist-in-Residence* program is where I learned how to work over the long term in a studio, as a photographer who is interested in the expanse of related material generated by my portrait projects. There, I developed the methods of production, accumulation, revision, and reincorporation that I continue to work with.

Looking out of my window each day at 125th Street really kept me in sync with the rhythms of the neighborhood. The plaza outside the Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Building—African Square as it's now called—has a great cycle of music and sound and people over the days and seasons. But I also looked out at that building across from my studio and contemplated Powell Sr.'s role in ousting Bayard Rustin from Dr. King's civil rights work because of his homosexuality, and the queerness of my own work, and the complicated generations of struggle within the black community.

Besides the community of everyone who works with and maintains the Museum, there's a sense of community among the alumni of the program, no matter where we find ourselves. I have since moved back to Los Angeles after fourteen years in New York and still feel connected to the Studio Museum. I learned immensely from Simone Leigh and Kamau Amu Patton. Just watching what materialized in their studios, or having conversations and asking questions ... it all helped me grow and mature as an artist, and put the residency into perspective.