

NEH-funded INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM: CALL FOR PAPERS

**"In a Speculative Light:
The Arts of James Baldwin and Beauford Delaney"
February 19-21, 2020**

Deadline for Proposals: November 1, 2019
SMALL BURSARIES OF \$250 AVAILABLE FOR SPEAKERS

**Confirmed Keynote:
Frederick Moten,**

Professor of Performance Studies, NYU Tisch School of the Arts & Professor, The European
Graduate School

Confirmed Plenary Speakers:

- Stephen M. Best, University of California, Berkeley
 - Mary Campbell, University of Tennessee
- Michelle Commander, Lapidus Center for the Historical Analysis of
Transatlantic Slavery
 - Brent Hayes Edwards, Columbia University
 - Michele Elam, Stanford University
- Douglas Field, Manchester University; editor, *James Baldwin Review*
 - David Leeming, biographer
- Walton M. Muyumba, Indiana University Bloomington
 - Robert Reid-Pharr, Harvard University
- Magdalena J. Zaborowska, University of Michigan

Location: University of Tennessee, Knoxville and Knoxville Museum of Art

Host: The University of Tennessee Humanities Center

Contact: Amy J. Elias, Director, UT Humanities Center

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The UT Humanities Center welcomes proposals for 20-minute presentations concerning the arts of James Baldwin and Beauford Delaney. "In a Speculative Light" will be a symposium held in Knoxville, TN that will use the optic of the Baldwin/Delaney friendship to explore new genealogies of postwar Black arts. The framing idea for the symposium will be the idea of "speculative light." Alluding to the obsessions with light and color in both artists' works, the phrase also builds from the notion of "speculative arts," currently redefined in Africana studies.

The symposium will include an opening-night reception and visit to the spring 2020 Knoxville Museum of Art's NEH- and Luce-funded Baldwin/Delaney exhibition "Through the Unusual Door." The KMA is currently the holder of the largest collection of Delaney materials in the world and works with the Delaney estate.

Presenters are asked to explore intersections between the work and lives of Baldwin and Delaney; we are less interested in single-artist papers though will consider these if they address the following research questions in important ways:

- **Art History and Black Aesthetics:** How should we understand the delight in, and despair with, the exploration of light and color in Baldwin's and Delaney's works and lives? What frame is needed to understand their fascination with and withdrawal from pellucidity? In what ways do expressionism and abstraction contend for voice? In what ways do their uses of light and color harbor the self, the body, the arts of the future? How might the works of Baldwin or Delaney be seen to presage new definitions of Black aesthetics, such as new definitions of synesthesia or opacity or contemporary re-visionings of Black abstraction? Whom did they influence, and how? In what ways might emerging theories of Black aesthetics and creative existence today re-form our understandings of their works or the late modernism that they operated within and without?
- **Music and Sonic Arts:** How might we reconfigure our understandings of the arts of these two mid-century artists—or the aesthetics of their artistic surround—in relation to the sonic arts, specifically jazz and blues but also other kinds of sonic signification? In what ways does “transmedial consonance” resonate through their respective works or shared aesthetics? What roles do the sonic arts play in Black modernism and postwar arts and how might these resituate Delaney and/or Baldwin historically, artistically, bodily, politically—and vice versa?
- **Philosophy and Social Values:** How might the friendship between these men be reassessed through the lens of Black care? In what ways might care ethics “in the wake” help us to situate their expatriation and chosen diasporas? In what ways do mentorship and love become redefined as an aesthetic relation *and* a relation of care? What is a formal consequence of this friendship in their works and on their philosophies of art and life? Whom do they influence, and how?
- **Style and Genre:** What are the contexts and framing discourses that might allow us to reevaluate Baldwin's and/or Delaney's promiscuous play with genre, style, and form? How might their expatriate wanderings and their generic wanderings demand a new descriptive vocabulary? What are the stakes of their wager on a multiplicity of expression, a polyphony of discourse, or a "categorical blur"?
- **Gender and Sexuality:** What can queer theory now bring to our understanding of these artists and their productions, and vice versa? On what are they speculating in their cross-generational and improvisational familial / lovers' relation? What role does gender, sexuality, love, or the reproductive future play in the lives of these men and in their arts? In their lives and aesthetics, what is the interplay and resonance of exile as the basis for "creative erotics?"
- **Biography and Legacies:** How might Baldwin and Delaney see the theory that now wishes to include them? Are our current theories congenial to them, or is a

more radical re-visioning of discourse and aesthetics required to merge their speculations with our own time and desires? What arts/artists today are influenced directly by their work and/or philosophies of art? What new arts, such as digital arts, have adopted their aesthetic practices or philosophies?

Proposals should be sent via email and should contain a title, a 1-2 page abstract, and the presenter's CV of no more than 5 pages.

Deadline for proposals is November 1, 2019.

Inquiries may be directed to Amy J. Elias, Director, at <humanitiesctr@utk.edu>.