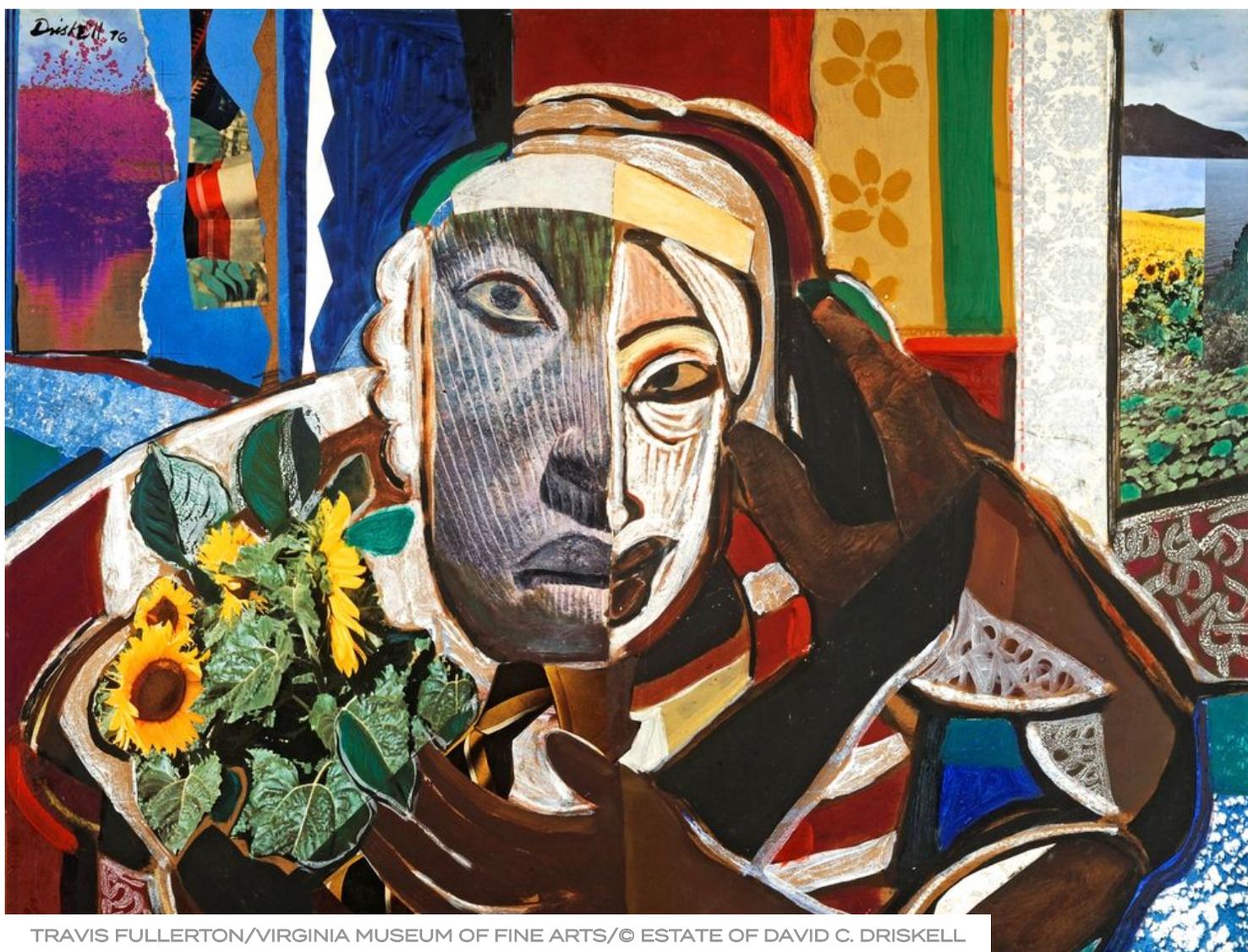


# David Driskell Was a Curator, Artist, Scholar, and Fervent Champion of Black Art

The late Driskell—and his decades-long career as an artist—is the subject of a major retrospective at Atlanta's High Museum of Art.

BY LEENA KIM

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TRAVIS FULLERTON/VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS/© ESTATE OF DAVID C. DRISKELL

**A**s a curator, David C. Driskell fervently championed Black artists. In 1976 he organized a watershed exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art that brought together the works of more than 60 African-American painters,

sculptors, and artisans spanning 200 years (1750–1950), which definitively changed the course of American art history.

The show, “**Two Centuries of Black American Art**,” made stops in Dallas, Atlanta, and Brooklyn, becoming the first traveling museum exhibition of works made exclusively by African-American artists.



The multi-hyphenate artist David C. Driskell in his studio, 2004.

PORTLAND PRESS HERALD / GETTY IMAGES

As a scholar and professor—most notably at the University of Maryland, where he taught for 20 years—Driskell mentored young talent and turned Black art into a legitimate field of study. As an artist he created a wide-ranging oeuvre, incorporating themes and influences of the African diaspora, that has been featured in museums around the world, from the Tate Modern in London to the Broad in Los Angeles.

“It would be nice to have been born three people,” Driskell told the *New York Times* in 2001.

**The fans:** Oprah turned to him for advice on choosing art, as did the Clintons while they were in the White House.

**The news:** Driskell, who died of the coronavirus last April, at age 88, is currently being honored in a major retrospective at Atlanta's High Museum of Art. "**David Driskell: Icons of Nature and History**," which opened on February 6 and is on view until May 9, is the most comprehensive survey of his prolific seven-decade career. Among the showstoppers: *Homage to Romare*, seen above, a 1976 painting in honor of one of Driskell's heroes, the influential 20th-century collagist Romare Bearden.

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