

HYPERALLERGIC

Follow-Up to My Review: Does the Museum of Modern Art
Even Know About This Great Photographer?

By John Yau

February 13, 2016



Very soon after my [review](#) of Louis Draper was published in Hyperallergic Weekend (February 7, 2016), I got an email from the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts and from the Museum of Modern Art. Pryor Green, who sent the email from Virginia, included her office phone and official email, should I wish to speak to her. This is what I learned from the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts:

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I was intrigued by today's Hyperallergic article about Louis Draper but I also realized I needed to tell you about news from the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. During our recent acquisition meeting, we acquired 35 photographs by the Richmond native and the complete archive of his photographic career, including his papers, working prints, negatives, and camera equipment.

I have been working on a press release, but here is more information:

The joint acquisition of Draper's photographs and archive offers an important opportunity to expand the museum's representation of African American photographers from the 1960s while leading the field in research on a key period in photographic history. The acquisition of the research archive from Draper's estate is significant in that the archive includes his complete papers, as well as all known negatives, contact sheets, and working prints. This material is vital for understanding Draper's body of work as currently many of his photographs are untitled and undated. With his notes and negatives, it will be possible to establish dates for many of his printed works as well as gain a fuller sense of his working process. The acquisition will allow VMFA to become a center for research on Louis Draper, as well an important site for research on Kamoinge and will result in new scholarship related to these subjects.

We would very much like to be included in your article, or possibly help provide additional information for future articles. Please let me know if you would like more information!

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This is the entire email I got from Margaret Doyle, director of communications at the Museum of Modern Art:

Hi John,

I just saw your story about Louis Draper and wanted to let you know that everything in our collection is not necessarily on MoMA.org. Having said that, we have works by him and other Kamoinge photographers in our study collection. Let me know if you would like any more details.

Thanks,

Margaret

I researched “study collection,” since it is apparently quite separate from “the collection.”

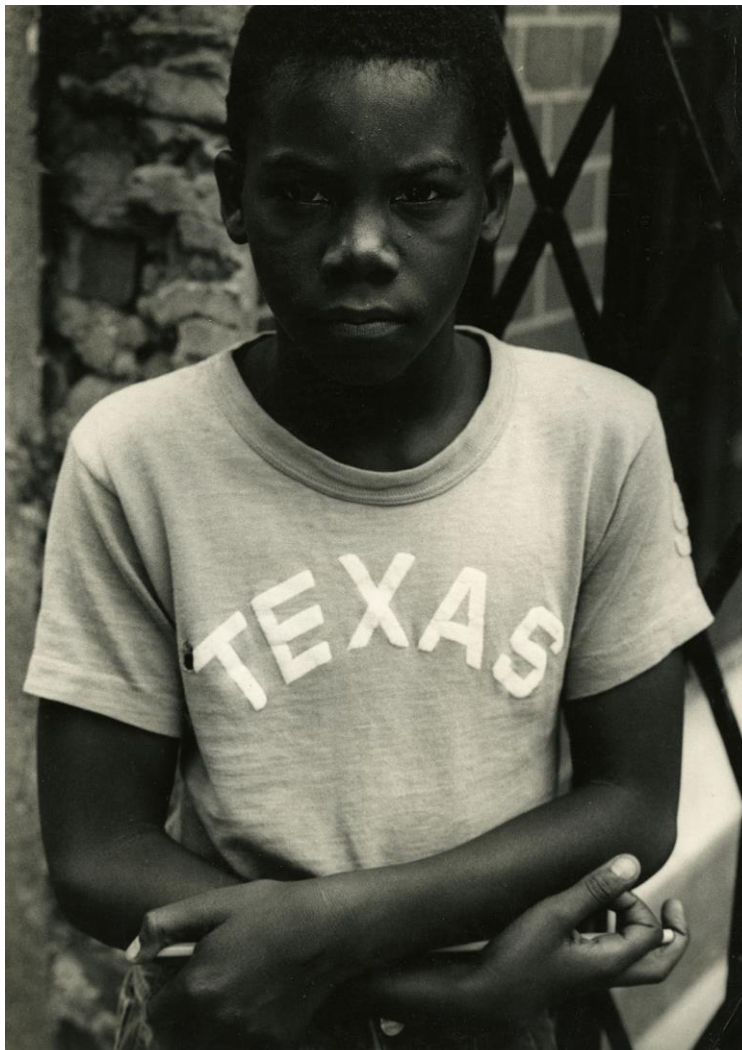
According to the following statement, “COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT POLICY THE

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MUSEUM OF MODERN ART,” which was approved by the board of trustees on October 5, 2010, this is the purpose of the museum’s “study collection”:

If a work is not appropriate for acquisition to the Collection, it may be acquired for a study collection. In such cases, the donor should be notified that the work will be acquired for the study collection.

I wonder why the museum doesn’t consider Louis Draper’s work “appropriate for acquisition to the collection.”



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I suppose I should be happy to receive a dismissive email from the director of communications at MoMA, because it is better than nothing. Back in the late 1980s, when I criticized the museum's relegation of Wifredo Lam's "The Jungle" to the lobby coat check in an article called, "Please Wait by the Coatroom" (*Arts Magazine*, December 1988), the response was to take down the painting and put it in storage. A few years ago, "The Jungle" reappeared on the wall next to the restrooms on the second floor. James Meyer, who was recently appointed deputy director and chief curator of the Dia Art Foundation, pointed it out to me while we were taking the escalator to the third floor. It wasn't there the last time I looked. Maybe it is back in the basement with the stash of Louis Draper photographs in a room marked "Not appropriate for acquisition to the Collection."