

History Will Not Spare Trump's Cronies *By Frank Rich* / A Climate-Doom Diary *By Emily Raboteau* / 100 Women vs. Harvey Weinstein *By Irin Carmon & Amanda Demme*

January 6-19, 2020

# NEW YORK



## Why Compromise?

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez  
*changed Washington.  
So far, it hasn't changed  
her all that much.*

*By David Freedlander*



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# NEW YORK

JANUARY 6-19, 2020



*Tourists take refuge from wildfires on the beach at Lake Conjola, Australia, on New Year's Eve.*

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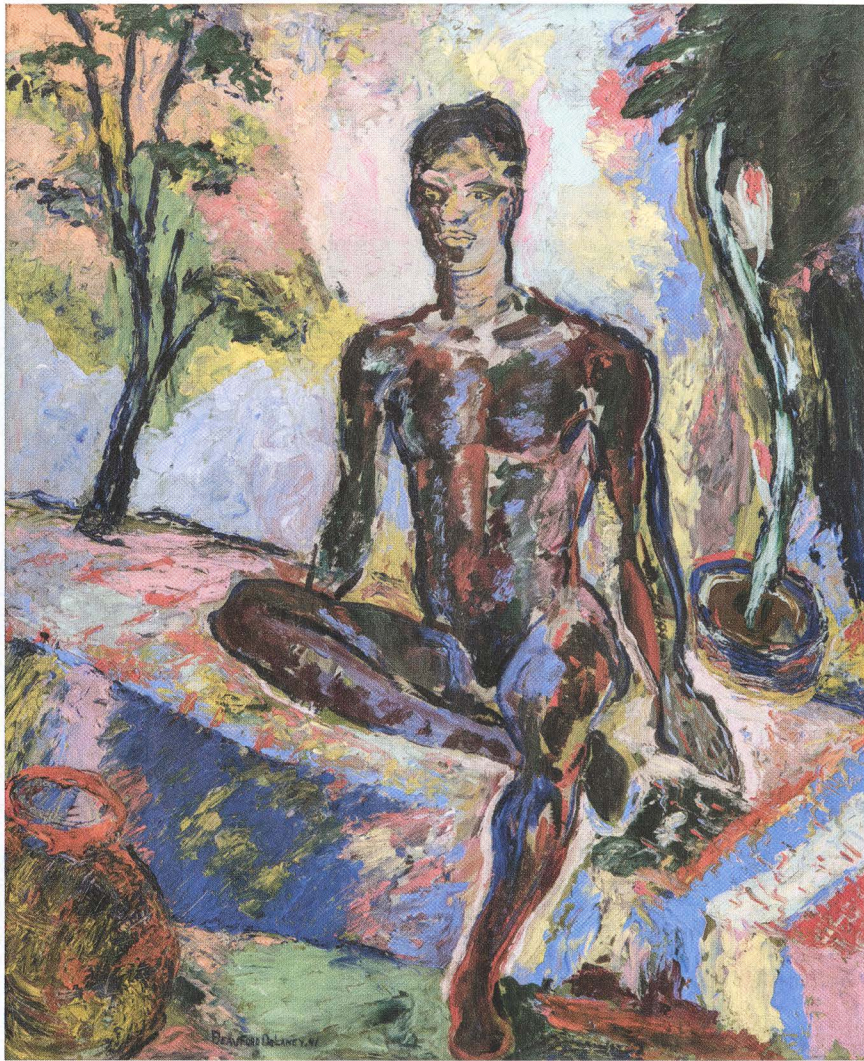
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A 1941 portrait of James Baldwin by the artist Beauford Delaney. For more from our critics on their unheralded inspirations, see page 53.

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Alexandria

Ocasio-Cortez.

Photograph by

David Williams for *New York Magazine*.



Joe Hamilton, and Lucy had Desi; Anne Beatts has chutzpah.”

The series was *Square Pegs*. With the exception of *The Facts of Life*, the majority of teen-focused TV comedies in the late 1970s and early '80s—*Happy Days*, *What's Happening!!*, *Welcome Back, Kotter*—focused on male protagonists. *Square Pegs* was shaped by a girl's point of view and featured misfit heroines Patty Greene, played by Sarah Jessica Parker (it was her big break), and Lauren Hutchinson, played by Amy Linker. Half of the 20 episodes in its first and only season, which aired in 1982 and 1983, were directed or co-directed by a woman, Kim Friedman. At Beatts's insistence, the writing staff was initially composed of five women and just one man, Andy Borowitz.

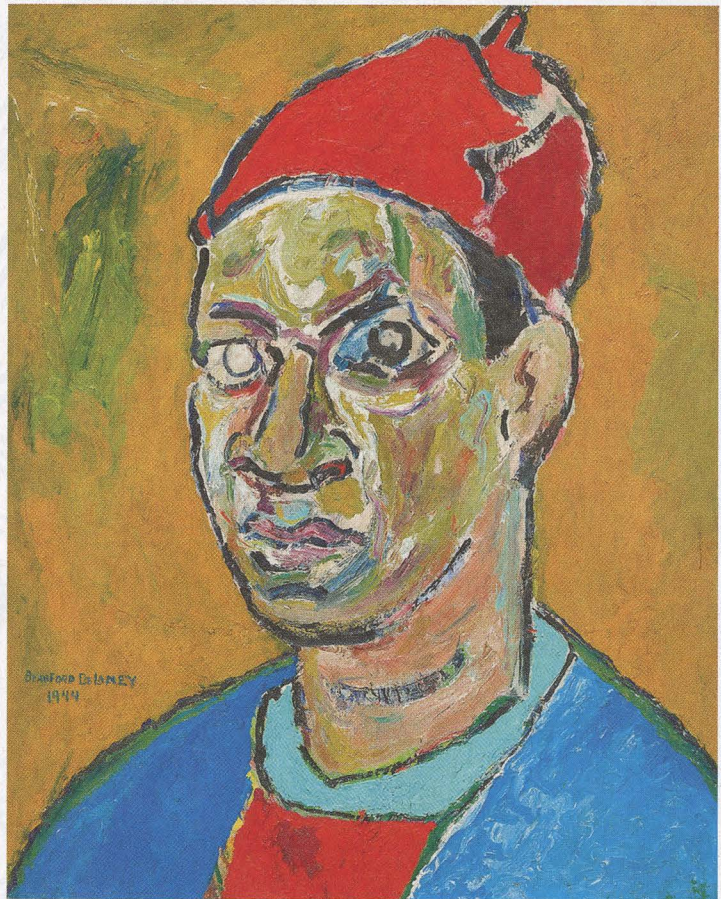
*Square Pegs*, which focused on ongoing efforts by Patty and Lauren to “click with the right clique,” was innovative in other ways. Shot single-camera style in an abandoned high school, it looked messy rather than three-camera, Hollywood-set slick. Its characters often spoke in catchphrases (“Totally different head—totally”), but the story lines effectively illustrated how small things—wearing glasses, getting invited to a slumber party—are a very big deal in adolescence. Anne Beatts, a self-proclaimed nerd in high school, understood that.

The show was also just plain cool, speaking to teens with a shared interest in their interests that made young people feel seen before the Hughes movies would have a similar effect. No other show on TV back then would have focused an entire episode on a *Pac-Man* addiction or a New Wave-themed bat mitzvah that featured the actual band Devo performing “That's Good.” (The music on this show was on point.)

At least according to a 1984 *TV Guide* exposé titled “Anatomy of a Failure: How Drugs, Ego, and Chaos Helped Kill *Square Pegs*,” the show ended messily. Beatts moved on, eventually becoming an executive producer for *A Different World* and, more recently, co-developing an animated take on *The Blues Brothers*. *Square Pegs* arrived on TV a month after Amy Heckerling's *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* hit theaters, and it aired its final episode more than a year before Hughes's *Sixteen Candles* was released. Those and other more obvious touchstones of the era have overshadowed the importance of the show she created. But whether they realize it or not, every teen series and movie that followed *Square Pegs* owes it, and Anne Beatts, a debt of total gratitude. Totally. ■

# Beauford Delaney, black and gay, very nearly disappeared from art history.

BY JERRY SALTZ



Self-portrait, 1944.

➔ “HE IS AMAZING ... this Beauford,” the novelist Henry Miller wrote of his lifelong friend Beauford Delaney in a 1945 essay that helped make the painter (whom Miller called a “black monarch” capable of making “the great white world ... grow smaller”) a legendary attraction in Greenwich Village. So much so that people often gathered outside Delaney's building at 181 Greene Street, where he lived and worked on the top floor—a walk-up lit only by a wood-burning potbellied stove.

Born in Knoxville, Tennessee, in 1901, Delaney migrated north to Boston in 1923 to study art, then moved to New York in November



1929, days after the onset of the Great Depression. That first day in New York, he slept on a Union Square bench, where someone stole his shoes. The next morning, he set out on foot, in newly bought shoes, to walk uptown to Harlem. When he reached Central Park, he stopped because of his severely blistered feet.

Things had never been tougher for American artists—let alone black ones. Art schools didn't take black artists, and independent-studio classes banned black artists from figure-drawing sessions with white models. Undaunted, Delaney began drawing at a midtown dance studio. Somehow, his career took off almost overnight. Four months after he arrived in New York, an article appeared in the New York *Telegraph* about portraits Delaney had done of dancers and society figures.

He met and charmed everyone. A list of his friends and acquaintances includes Stuart Davis—his closest painter compatriot—W.E.B. Du Bois (whose portrait he did), Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Jacob Lawrence, Alfred Stieglitz, Georgia O'Keeffe (who did a portrait of him), Edward Steichen, Dorothy Norman, Anaïs Nin (who intimidated him), Jackson Pollock, and Jean Genet. His closest lifelong friend, however, was James Baldwin—who, while fleeing a strict father at 16, looked up Delaney in the Village. He later called the artist his “principal witness.” Delaney was a kind of surrogate nurturing father to the writer. Judging by his 1941 *Dark Rapture* (James Baldwin), a steamy nude portrait of the 16-year-old writer (as well as from subsequent Baldwin portraits over the decades), Delaney seems to have been in love with the lithe young man 22 years his junior.

In October 1938, more than a decade before Pollock graced the same pages, *Life* magazine featured Delaney, picturing him beatifically smiling at the Washington Square Outdoor Art Exhibit. The caption read, “One of the most talented Negro painters.” Yet by the time he died in 1979, Delaney was alone, alcoholic, hallucinating, paranoid, and penniless in a Paris psychiatric hospital. What started as a great American story is now a near absence in the history of American art and an American Dream forestalled.

I love his work—especially his highly colored, optically intense, dense figurative paintings. He is almost an exact contemporary of, and the New York counterpart to, another great painter-portraitist, an artist who captured the power and magic of being poor stylishly, who lived on the margins but eventually came to be recognized as a visionary: Alice Neel. Delaney

should be regarded as such as well.

Through the 1930s and 1940s, while most American artists were either being fifth-rate Cubists, regionalists, or academics or desperately looking for ways around Picasso via Surrealism, Delaney made his own thoroughly contemporary way. In street and park scenes, still lifes, and por-

traits, he built upon the work of his good friend Davis, arriving at his own compact, flat fields of creamy, opaque color. His sense of visual, jigsawing geometry and strong, graphic distillation of structure is second only to Davis's. Delaney's work, however, has a much more human aura, atmosphere, and arc, almost to a mystical degree, seen only in Marsden Hartley.

So why has Delaney been disappeared from collective memory? Partly, it is the racial bias of art history, which, among other things, meant that even while he was celebrated, it was less as a painterly equal to his contemporaries than as some kind of Negro seer or spiritual black Buddha. And in 1953, at the age of 51, Delaney left New York at per-

haps the worst possible time. When other American artists, like Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Cy Twombly, John Cage, and Merce Cunningham, were meeting and staying up late together (many of them open and uncloseted in their sexuality), Delaney was in Paris, where Baldwin had told him he could

escape the long American night of racism. Baldwin was right, but Delaney struggled with French and became even more isolated. Twombly, Baldwin, and Miller returned often to New York, while Delaney never did. So he never got to rejoin the conversation.

By the 1960s, Delaney's abstraction was more connected to the French Art Informel—a primarily European response to Abstract

Expressionism—and his paintings, influenced as they were by Monet's *Water Lilies* and Turner's glowing color, had few of the ironic, systemic, direct qualities of Pop Art and minimalism. At a distance, Delaney's work seemed passé—an artist painting in a void, outside the canon. ■

**BEAUFORD DELANEY**  
Artist (1901–79)

Currently, MoMA has “Composition 16” (1954–56) on view, a glowing bioluminescent yellow abstraction kitty-corner across the gallery from that other (until recently) missing modernist, Hilma af Klint. Both are in the company of de Kooning, Kline, and the other giants of mid-century painting.

## Clare Torry's voice is seared into your brain whether you know it or not.

BY CRAIG JENKINS



SUCCESS IN THE music industry is a spurious concept. You can keep a low profile on the charts but stay afloat through ad placements and endorsement deals, as the rapper Vince Staples does creating lean, anthemic music that kills in clubs, movie trailers, and Sprite commercials. You can have an inescapable presence on TV and radio and still be functionally penniless, as the R&B singing group TLC revealed at the 1996 Grammys, where they won two awards for the multiplatinum 1994 album *CrazySexyCool*, then shocked journalists by announcing that they were “broke as broke can be” at a postshow presser. The British singer Clare Torry knows the biz's peaks and valleys; a life-changing evening