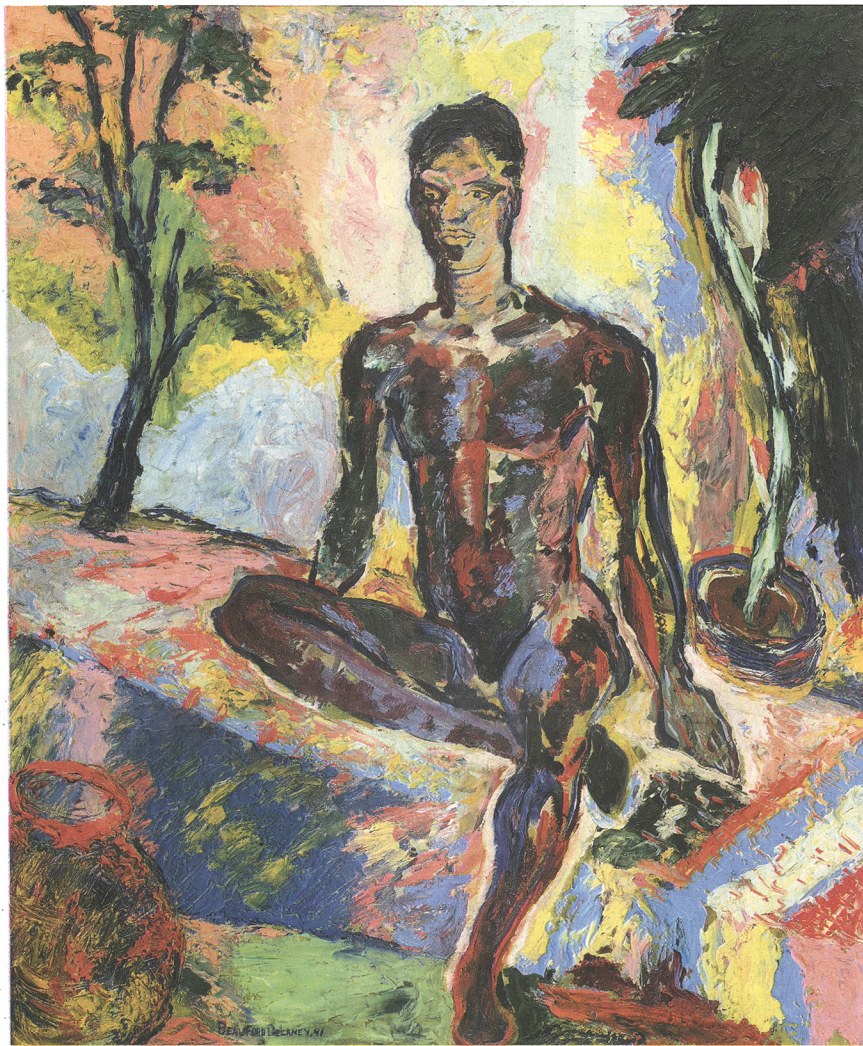


The New York Times

HOLLAND COTTER | CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK



VIA MICHAEL ROSENFIELD GALLERY AND DAVID ZWIRNER

Under the Influence of James Baldwin

A group exhibition is part personal narrative, part study of the writer's importance in the lives of contemporary artists.

"MY FATHER SAID, during all the years I lived with him, that I was the ugliest boy he had ever seen, and I had absolutely no reason to doubt him." So wrote James Baldwin in 1976, and he repeated his father's words often. He did have reason to doubt them though. They didn't jibe with my impression of the writer's appearance as taken from a photograph on the cover of the 1955 paper-

back edition of "Notes of a Native Son," which I owned and treasured when I was a teenager, and a copy of which you'll find on display toward the start of the exhibition "God Made My Face: A Collective Portrait of James Baldwin" at David Zwirner.

I would have first seen that photo at some point in the early 1960s. Baldwin was African-American; I was a white kid in the process of working my way through the so-

ciopolitical dynamics of all that through reading him. What I mainly saw in the photo, though, was a young man, sloped-shouldered in a floppy sweater, looking warily self-contained, and emphatically un-butch. I could relate.

As a young person, I was a constant, precocious reader, as he had been — binging on Dickens at 11, Shakespeare at 12; that kind

Beauford Delaney's "Dark Rapture (James Baldwin)," from 1941.

CONTINUED ON PAGE C18