

# Art

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## FOUR THINGS

TO SEE AT

# Soul of a Nation

Tate Modern's new show explores a turbulent period of activist artmaking. *Matt Breen* picks the highlights

**THE 150 PIECES** in 'Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power' were made in the US between 1963 and 1983, a time marked by Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Black Power rallies and a constant struggle for change. It was a time when black artists sought to assert their own voices in an art world whose gatekeepers were white artists and gallerists. That still resonates, as movements like Black Lives Matter gain momentum and repoliticise artists and filmmakers. So this show feels like a timely reminder of a particularly febrile chapter of American art. Here are some of the most striking works in it.



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### 1 Elizabeth Catlett 'Black Unity', 1968

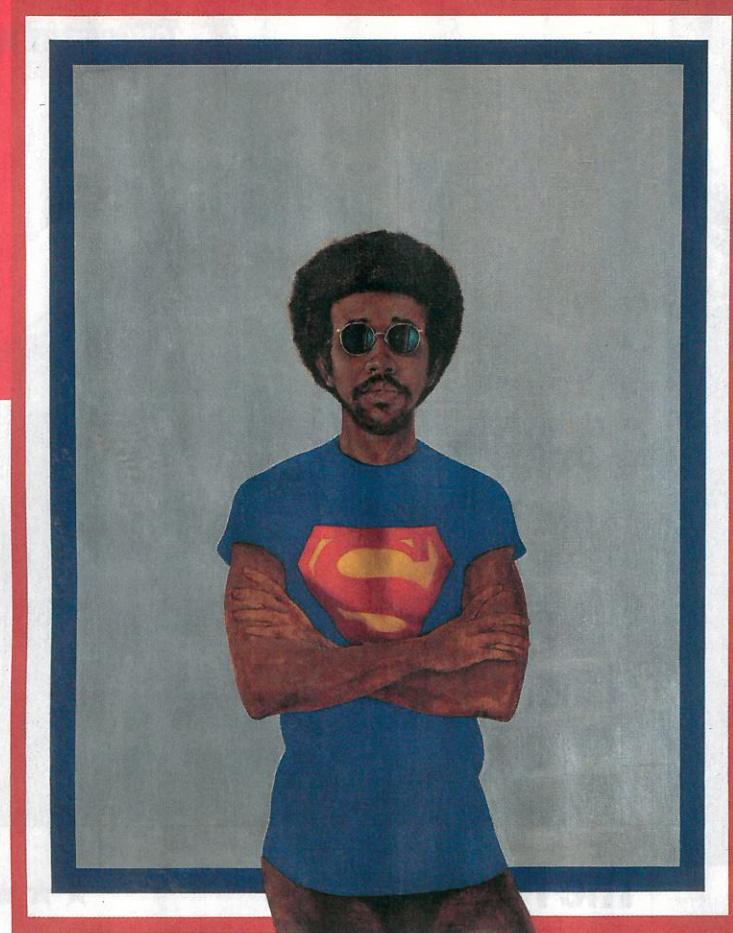
Catlett's organic forms have a lot in common with other modernist-era sculptors, but her work comes complete with a strong social message, as she portrays the African-American experience. One side of this mahogany piece is a raised fist – a symbol of defiance and solidarity that was adopted by the Black Power movement. The other side has two joined faces to represent the black community's spirit of togetherness.

### 2 Barkley L Hendricks 'Icon for My Man Superman (Superman Never Saved Any Black People - Bobby Seale)', 1969

Hendricks belonged to the school of postmodern realism and painted sleek, life-size portraits of black friends, acquaintances and anyone else who happened to pique his interest. Though he never considered his work overtly political, this self-portrait's title refers to a quote from one of the founders of the Black Panther Party.



DISCOVER!



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### 3 Emory Douglas '21 August 1971, We Shall Survive Without a Doubt', 1971

Douglas was the art director of the Black Panthers' newspaper, and the party's Minister of Culture, and so had a real understanding of the importance of strong images in the service of a political cause. Essentially creating an aesthetic for the movement, his bold, super-hard-hitting graphic style has had far-reaching influence – think that iconic 2008 Obama poster by Shepard Fairey.

### 4 Lorraine O'Grady 'Art Is... (Girlfriends Times Two)', 1983/2009

O'Grady's image reflects the struggle for the control of black representation in mainstream US culture, which was all too frequently as victims of oppression or fetishised sexual objects. O'Grady recognised that it was important for African-Americans to take their portrayal into their own hands – and this jubilant photograph of joyful black girls framing themselves takes that idea to a literal conclusion. ■

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## THREE SHOWS YOU HAVE TO SEE

Still on and still great



### ↑ Bernar Venet: Looking Forward: 1961-1984

Grubby, elemental, brutal monochromes that take in things like the stock market and maths. Oh, and they're made from super-shiny, glistening tar.

→ Blainsouthern. ☉ Oxford Circus. Until Jul 22. Free.



### ↑ Hokusai: Beyond the Great Wave

The brushstrokes of Japanese master Katsushika Hokusai lead you on a journey through mythological worlds, lush landscapes, ghost stories and scenes of everyday life.

→ British Museum. ☉ Holborn. Until Aug 13. £12, £10 concs.



### ↑ The RA Summer Exhibition

Chaotic, eclectic, sprawling and a whole lot of fun! The walls of Burlington House are given over to more than 1,200 artworks by big names and recent graduates alike.

→ The Royal Academy of Arts. ☉ Piccadilly Circus. £14, £10 concs.

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