

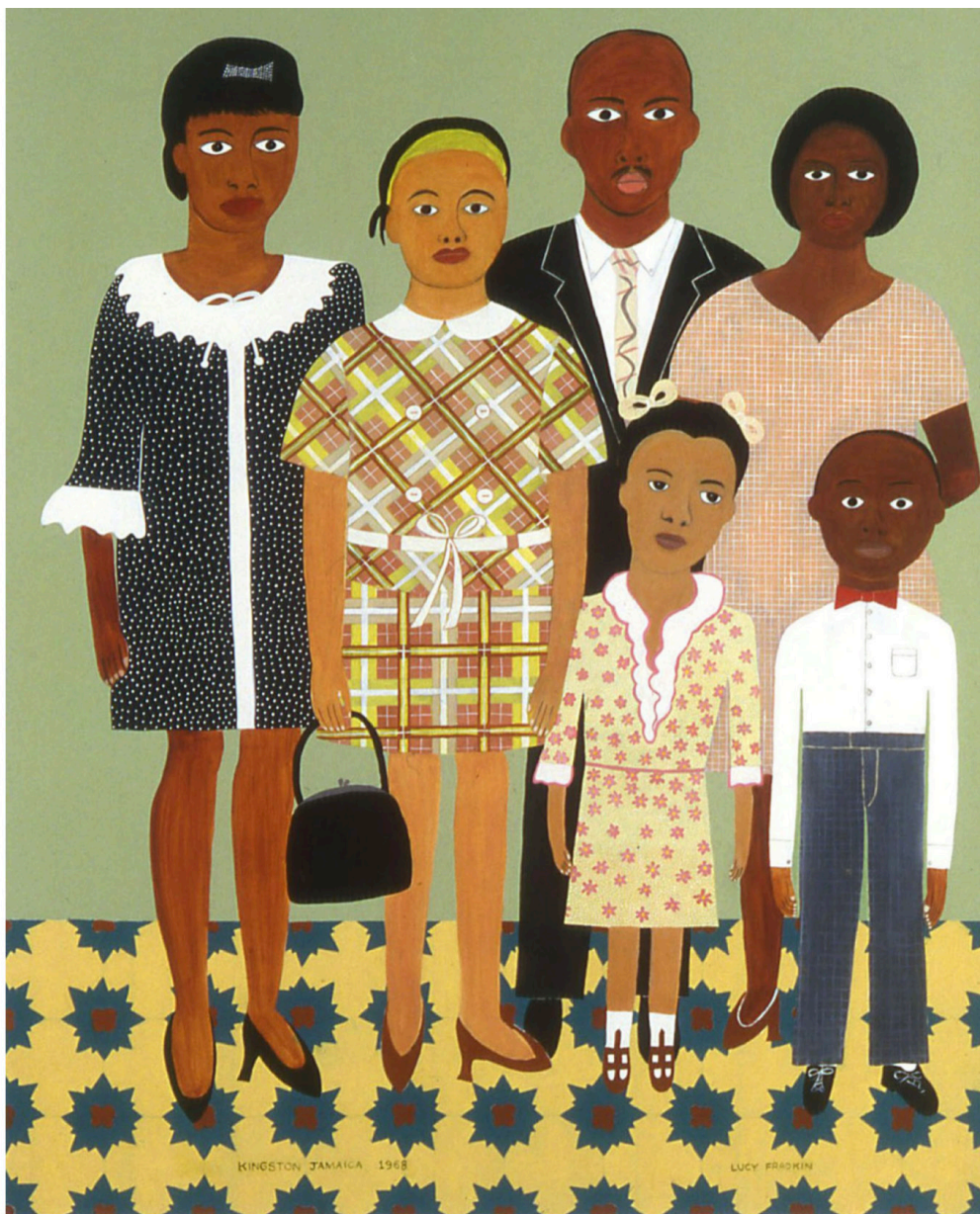
Artists Quarantine With Their Art Collections

“Since the start of the pandemic I’ve hung onto fleeting moments of beauty.”



Stephen Maine January 30, 2021

AUTHOR’S NOTE: Trauma changes our view of the world, down to some of its finest details. The density of meaning we value in artworks sets them up for reinterpretation as our context shifts and, with it, the mind that each of us perceives with. In this series of articles, I’ve been asking artists these questions: In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, do you look at your personal collection differently now, and which works in particular? Is there one that especially resonates with you in this weird, frightening time? And does it take on new meaning?



Lucy Fradkin, “Kingston, Jamaica 1968” (2000), oil on paper, 50 x 39 inches (image courtesy Arthur Simms)

MARTOS GALLERY

Arthur Simms (Staten Island, New York): This large oil painting on paper by my wife, Lucy Fradkin, is titled “Kingston, Jamaica 1968.” It is a portrait of my family based on a photograph that was taken at that time and place. The painting and the photograph are on opposite walls in my living room, where I now spend a great deal of time. The portraits are of my mom, dad, three older sisters and me, the little guy with the red bowtie. Lucy spent a year working on the painting, which was completed in 2000. Consequently, I have lived with this work for more than two decades.

The photograph is a treasure with lots of meaning from our past in Jamaica. I grew up with this photograph. Lucy’s painting based on the photograph is like a member of the family.

The painting itself is a delightful make-up of colors, patterns and familiar faces. It touches on a history of Matisse, Japanese painting, medieval painting, Greek icon painting, and Haitian and outsider art.



Photograph of Simms family, photographer unknown (image courtesy Arthur Simms)

MARTOS GALLERY

After the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 was enacted, my mom was able to immigrate to the US by herself. My parents decided that it was more practical for my mom to come by herself to set up a base in Brooklyn and then sponsor the rest of the family.

We had not seen her for almost three years when she came back to Kingston in 1968 for a wedding. The photograph that inspired Lucy's painting was taken a day before my mom was to return to the States by herself. This is why everyone in the photo is sad. One year later, the family was able to immigrate to New York to re-connect with my mother.

In May of this year, my middle sister, Grace, passed away from cancer. She was 64. Her death was a collateral death of COVID-19. She could not go to her needed therapy because of the pandemic. In November, her husband Douglas passed away. He was 63. I had known him since I was 11 years old.

I look at the painting quite often while sitting on my couch. I reflect on my sister, her husband, our past together, and life during this time of the pandemic. The work evokes melancholy feelings for me. But overall, it makes me happy.