

# Identity Crises

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Skyla Janus

# Exhibit

The exhibit explores the immense issue of identity struggles regarding race and gender through a collaboration of relevant artifacts. In the play, *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, Adrienne Kennedy emphasizes the negative results of identity crises by exemplifying the dreams and alter-egos of her protagonist. The storyline behind this complex play is alluded to Kennedy's past, revealed throughout the interviews. Contrastingly, Camille Billops' artwork represents the portion of the population that embraces their identity. Identity is a powerful thing that could have positive or negative effects dependent on one's perception. A negative perception or disconnect with identity will lead to low self esteem and much confusion whereas by embracing identity one is empowering themselves to become a strong individual. If one does not embrace their innate characteristics, such as race and gender, many obstacles will arise. The inequalities and injustices that prevailed the nation in the 1960s inevitably led individuals to question their identities.

# Exhibit

❏ Funnyhouse of a Negro

❏ Interviews

❏ I am Black, I am Black, I am Dangerously Black

❏ The Festival of Small Collections



FUNNY HOUSE OF A NEGRO

by  
ADRIENNE KENNEDY

Theater 1964  
38 Commerce Street  
New York, New York

Rec'd 4/21/66

Dear Joe, - copied - you

Here is

Funnyhouse,

I have two  
more very short

one acters -

my fifth  
isn't ready yet  
and won't be  
for at least a  
year.

Sincerely  
Adrienne



## Artifact 1

Adrienne Kennedy

*Funnyhouse of a Negro*

New York, New York Theater

1964

Stuart A. Rose Library

# Funnyhouse of a Negro

This play is an unbound, book made of old, stained paper. When opened, the papers must be carefully handled to ensure they will not get out of order. Additionally, there is a note on the front cover which suggests that this original copy of the play was given to Emory as a gift. This play was a reflection and result of Adrienne Kennedy's many encounters with racism at The Ohio State University as well as her struggles of being an African American woman. Kennedy portrays these views and struggles through the protagonist, Sarah's, alter-egos that appear in her dreams. These alter-egos represent Sarah's desire to be someone else, particularly a white male. This desire stems from Sarah's internal identity struggles due to societal standards and inequalities. These struggles are significant as they are told from an inside perspective of someone who is ashamed of their heritage.

# Artifact 2/3

James V. Hatch

*New York City Interview in her Home (Part 1)*

New York, New York January 25th 1978

Camille Billops and James V. Hatch Archives at Emory  
University

James V. Hatch

*New York City Interview In Her Home (Part 2)*

New York, New York January 25th 1978

Camille Billops and James V. Hatch Archives at Emory  
University

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HB 450 – Adrienne Kennedy. Interviewed in her home in New York City on January 25, 1978 by James V. Hatch. TAPE 1 – SIDE 1.

BASF reel to reel, Speed 3 ¾, ferric  
Dubbed April 21, 2007  
Rec. level on CD –10dB, analog input  
All tracks approx. 2 min.

Adrienne Kennedy is a playwright. She was born on September 13, 1931 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She lives in New York City. Adrienne Kennedy is Black.

1. Father was a social worker. Mother was a teacher. Both parents were graduates of Morehouse College. Family was originally from Georgia. Father was always very interested in social issues.
2. Father founded the "K" Club in Pittsburgh in 1932. Father was Cornell W. Hawkins; mother was Etta. One younger brother, Cornell, Jr.
3. Kennedy's family moved to Cleveland, Ohio after father received a position as Assistant YMCA Secretary. Worked in the "Cedar Area" of Cleveland (one of two Black areas in Cleveland). Kennedy received her secondary education in Cleveland and attended Glenville High School.
4. During World War II, Kennedy's mother worked in a war factory for the money and then returned to teaching. Kennedy found her high school had a healthy competitiveness to it.
5. Kennedy was exposed to a great deal of culture as a child while living in Cleveland. Took a course in drama in high school. Eugene C. Davis was her drama teacher.
6. Participated in the Choral Club in high school. Felt racism more while in elementary school (which was in a predominately Italian neighborhood) than in high school.
7. Kennedy's mother was highly protective of her. Kennedy was able to deal with the racism in elementary school because it was "out in the open" and not subverted.
8. Kennedy felt secure because of Cleveland's tight-knit Black community. However, her security left once she started at Ohio State University in 1949 (located in Southern Ohio). Faced extreme prejudice and racism while attending Ohio State.
9. Dorms were segregated; therefore, she had a Black roommate. First time that Kennedy felt an extreme rage towards white women. Studied social work while at Ohio State and had hopes of becoming a psychiatric social worker. At the age of 12, Kennedy wanted to become one of two things: either a newspaper journalist or movie star.
10. Many of Kennedy's childhood friends attended Ohio State which is what helped her remain there. Had "nothing to do with the theatre" during her childhood (i.e., never participated). Never even attended Karamu Playhouse.
11. Saw The Glass Menagerie at age of 16 and was "spellbound." Began reading plays especially Tennessee Williams. Most of Kennedy's childhood friends remained in Cleveland and became doctors, lawyers, teachers, etc.

12. Kennedy wrote her first play during the winter after she graduated from Ohio State; at which time she was newly married and pregnant. Her husband, Joseph Kennedy, had been dispatched to Korea and she lived at home with her parents during this time. Became intrigued with Street Scene by Elmer Rice and tried to fashion her first play after that script.
13. Kennedy's husband returned from Korea one year later and they moved to New York City where her husband was pursuing his master's in social psychology at Columbia University. Kennedy began taking writing courses. Edward Mabley was one of her writing instructors at American Theatre Wing.
14. The Pale Blue Flowers, one of her first plays, closely fashioned after The Glass Menagerie. Mildred Cooner, teacher at The New School.
15. Kennedy was encouraged by Cooner to develop The Pale Blue Flowers.
16. Lived the life of a typical middle-class housewife life for a long time. Attended the theatre often during these years. William Marshall in In Splendid Error. Attended writers' workshop at Circle in the Square School led by Edward Albee.
17. Went to Africa with her husband for a year where she was very restless and "alone." Traveled to Rome where Funnyhouse of a Negro was written. Second son was born in Rome. Michael Kahn was one of Kennedy's writing instructors.
18. Diana Sands, Yaphet Kotto, Andre Gregory and others were in Funnyhouse.
19. Kahn was instrumental in getting Funnyhouse on its feet (which he also directed). Funnyhouse not very well received initially.
20. Funnyhouse was a lot about Kennedy's family. Albee chastised Kennedy about Funnyhouse because she cut out much of the original text. He convinced her to "restore" it to its original version. The script written in Rome is the script most often performed.
21. Ellen Holly, Billie Allen and Cynthia Redgrave all played in Funnyhouse. Blacks in the theatre picketed rehearsals of Funnyhouse because they felt it was "anti-Black."
22. Kennedy admits that she had romanticized ideas about being a playwright and working in the theatre. Jet Magazine refused to review the play because they felt that the main character's life did not parallel the lives of most Black people. Cast members of Funnyhouse also received much criticism. Billie Allen received most of the attacks regarding the condition of her hair in the play. Willa Kim designed wigs for Sands and Belgrave.
23. Many people offended by the use of the word, "black." "To make matters worse, lots of white people" liked the play.
24. By the time Funnyhouse closed, the response was overwhelmingly positive. Dutchman was running at the same time as Funnyhouse (both of which won Obies during that season). Kennedy became very reclusive after the closing of the play; as she was very bitter and confused after the closing.

25. Rumors circulated about Kennedy and Albee having a romantic affair during the development of Funnyhouse. Kennedy was too naïve to understand the politics involved. She began writing The Owl Answers started six months after Funnyhouse was written. Became a member of the Actors' Studio.
26. Kennedy began receiving grants to write. Wrote Beast Story for Lincoln Center at the request of Herbert Baum.
27. Kennedy left for England for a time. Joseph Papp secured Beast Story to produce at The Public Theatre and commissioned Kennedy to write another, Cities in Bezique, which he didn't like. Papp combined Beast Story and The Owl Answers into an evening entitled, Cities in Bezique.
28. Kennedy did not like Beast Story and was embarrassed by it. Cities in Bezique led Kennedy to receive another Rockefeller Grant. Kennedy, while separated from her husband, moved to London, England (a city which she had long been fascinated). Kennedy's maternal grandfather came from England.
29. Received much criticism from the Black American community who felt that her plays were embarrassing. A Rat's Mass appeared in an anthology edited by Stanley Crouch and was panned. The Black community felt that her work was irrelevant.
30. Nikki Giovanni was the only one who offered words of encouragement to Kennedy at this time. In the early 1970's, college students (i.e., Ntzoke Shange and her Shange's contemporaries) began studying Kennedy's plays. **END OF TAPE 1 – SIDE 1.**

# Interview 1



HB 450.1 – Adrienne Kennedy. Interviewed in her home in New York City on January 25, 1978 by James V. Hatch. TAPE 1 – SIDE 2.

BASF reel to reel, Speed 3 ¾, ferric  
Dubbed April 21, 2007  
Rec. level on CD –10dB, analog input  
All tracks approx. 2 min.

Adrienne Kennedy is a playwright. She was born on September 13, 1931 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She lives in New York City. Adrienne Kennedy is Black.

1. First production of A Rat's Mass was 1969 at LaMaMa with Mary Alice and Gilbert Price; which was highly successful. Ellen Stewart then toured the play extensively throughout Europe. Animal imagery of the play was well received. The play was inspired by one of Kennedy's many nightmares (from which she still suffers).
2. Kennedy was fascinated with Nazi Germany (given that she was raised during World War II); the theme of which pervades A Rat's Mass.
3. Kennedy and her brother always discussed a possible invasion of the Nazis and how and where to hide from them. Kennedy was particularly pleased with the performance of actress, Mary Alice.
4. Seth Allen, director of A Rat's Mass brought Alice to the cast of the play.
5. Cecil Taylor composed the music for the musical adaptation of A Rat's Mass (after Ellen Stewart received a lot of pressure to use a Black composer). Kennedy and Taylor "clashed enormously." Director, André Serban backed out of the production due to the enormity of the "blackness" of the play.
6. Wilford Leach called in to replace Serban. Taylor was hesitant to have "his music tampered with" and wanted the play to "fit his music." Taylor offered to direct the musical version.
7. Kennedy felt helpless as the rehearsals began to spiral out of control as she couldn't communicate with Taylor, who ultimately took over the entire production, which was ultimately panned by the critics.
8. Due to her experience with A Rat's Mass, Kennedy said she would never work with a jazz musician again. Lesson in a Dead Language written in 1969.
9. Kennedy does not believe that "language is the end all, be all." Lesson in a Dead Language is Kennedy's favorite play, which was directed by Gabby Rogers Leber at Theatre Genesis.
10. Son written in 1968 while Kennedy was in England. Kennedy was deeply affected and inspired by the death of Malcolm X.
11. Wrote Theatre Lab for Jerome Robbins. The play was eventually made into a piece about Malcolm X, which was retitled Son. Kennedy considered Son to be a bad play.
12. An Evening With Dead Essex, well-received, which ultimately went to Yale Repertory Theatre; due in part to her friendship with Robert Brustein.

13. Kennedy had a long time interest in the Beatles. She was able to secure several pages of John Lennon's *In His Own Write* and adapted the text into The Lennon Play.
14. Nan Laneer, co-founder of the American Place Theatre, shepherded The Lennon Play via Victor Spinetti, who contacted Kenneth Tynan on behalf of Kennedy.
15. As a result, much interest was generated in The Lennon Play. Lennon was very enthusiastic about the project. Laurence Olivier brought on board as a possible producer and Kennedy was subsequently ejected from the project.
16. Lennon ultimately took over the entire project (or so Kennedy thought); thus, Kennedy had no protective rights or recourse. Kennedy and Lennon eventually spoke one-on-one and Kennedy was invited to rejoin the project.
17. After several months, Kennedy didn't hear anything from anyone until she read about the production in the paper.
18. Kennedy had lots of delusion of grandeur regarding The Lennon Play, but was ultimately very disappointed.
19. Much controversy regarding the rights, etc. of the production of The Lennon Play.
20. For many years, Kennedy lived on grants and then alimony after divorcing from her husband. Much of her anxiety over money came from her refusal to obtain a full-time teaching job.
21. Kennedy has taught writing workshops at Yale, Princeton, Frank Silvera Writers' Workshop and other places to support herself.
22. *Diary of a Young Marriage* one of her two novels; the other being about Victor Hugo.
23. Kennedy considered all of her plays to be very sad. Became more interested in writing adaptations as opposed to always about herself.
24. XX
25. Film version of Funnyhouse.
26. END OF INTERVIEW. TAPE 1 – SIDE 2.

## Interview 2



# Interviews

Adrienne Kennedy's childhood and past are discussed during her interview with James V. Hatch, who asks Kennedy various questions about her past. He is first curious about her upbringing, in general, then relates her early childhood to her current feelings regarding inequality. These interviews inform the audience of Kennedy's origin and where her identity came from, including her encounters with racism. It is evident that she grew up in a diverse neighborhood with minimal racism thus was appalled at what she experienced when she entered college. At the Ohio State University, she was greeted as inferior and acknowledged the white supremacy factor. She was offended by the inequality and racial remarks tying her to other African Americans eventually leading to her interest in writing. Kennedy was able to find her true self through writing and watching plays which are a couple of the many reasons she chose to pursue it. Kennedy received much criticism for her play, yet, followed through with her plan showing great courage and perseverance.



## Artifact 4

Camille Billops

*I am Black, I am Black, I am  
Dangerously Black*

Atlanta, Georgia 1990

Camille Billops as an Artist

# I am Black, I am Black, I am Dangerously Black

This is a drawing by Camille Billops of a woman in the center of the page which is half shaded and half outlined. The shaded part represents dark times and obstacles with the light, the drawn objects, shining through as a promise for hope.

Contrastingly, the side which is outlined represents growth and progression. The outlined side is larger than the shaded side and appears to be taking it over signifying that the end of internal struggle is near. This piece of artwork could be an illustration of the woman's thoughts. The title also signifies Camille Billop's pride of her heritage, further supported by a woman surrounded by sharp, geometric shapes. The overpowering outlined portion of the picture shows that women are powerful and can take on anything in the world if they just believe so. This piece of artwork completely refutes Kennedy's statement of the oppression she associates with being an African American woman. This provides an alternative internal perspective from someone who embraces their heritage, as opposed to being ashamed of it, which is extremely interesting to explore in relation to *Funnyhouse of a Negro*.

<http://billops-hatch.library.emory.edu/impact-of-archives.html>

## Artifact 5

Terrace Reese

*The Festival of Small Collections*

New York, New York 1980

Billops-Hatch Exhibition

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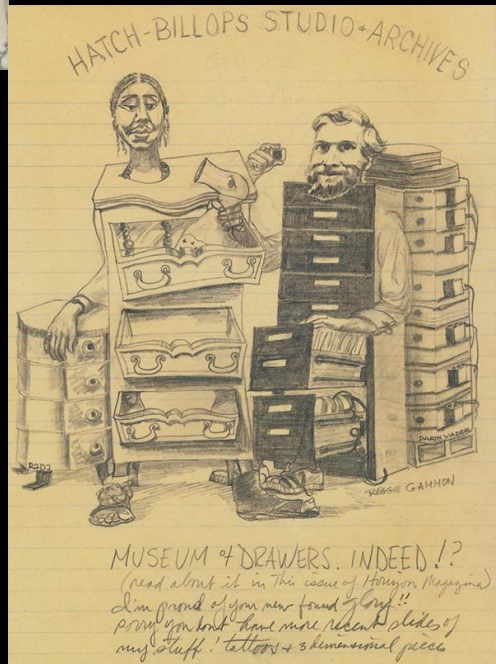




## HATCH-BILLOPS COLLECTION



ARCHIVES of BLACK AMERICAN  
CULTURAL HISTORY  
New York City



# The Festival of Small Collections

This collection consists of 2 photographs and 2 drawings that illustrate the change over time as well as the oppression felt by African Americans. The sketch of the African American woman stuck in beauty supply drawers and the white men in desk drawers, illustrates the stereotypes of African American gender roles. The woman is trapped with her beauty supplies trying to abide to social norms, feeling confused, while the man is immersed in his intense work environment. The cover of the Hatch-Billops Collection is an illustration of a devil and angel splitting the center of the page. The devil is represented by the man and the angel the woman, which is clear due to the shoes of the respective figures. This message implies that men are apparently the repressing figure over women causing them to face many internal struggles. The photo of the white man and African American woman shows that people of different races are able to have a civil conversation. The picture with many African Americans sitting and, what appears to be waiting, is a representation of the hardships African Americans went through during times of injustice. This is evident because each person in the room looks anxious and uneasy. This relates to *Funnyhouse of a Negro* because the message the play sends solely focuses on the divide between races and genders, but does not focus on the connection or interaction between them.