

In spring 2016, I visited *David Hammons: Five Decades* at the Mnuchin Gallery on the Upper East Side several times. The show featured well-known Hammons works and photographs of early pieces—specific objects, ephemeral actions, outdoor interventions—as well as images more loosely connected to his work. I remember several that interested me: shoes hanging from a Richard Serra sculpture, a car flying his African-American flags, a picture of the curator Jan Hoet, and an old photo of an all-white male college basketball team. Each time I went, I noticed the images on display changed a bit. Some were taken down, while others were added. To keep track of these photos and how they changed, I started taking pictures of them with my phone. I thought they could make a great publication, especially since they weren't included in the exhibition's catalog.

After my last visit, as I left the gallery, I saw a flyer for a lost dog on the street and took a photo of it, too. Later, while editing my reflection out of the exhibition images, I decided to include the picture of the sad white dog in the set as well. I thought it might be a way to start a conversation with Hammons, just in case I ever reached out to him about publishing them. Although the image wasn't mine, including it with the other photographs felt like an extension of the ownership I'd already taken by rephotographing Hammons' works.

At the time, I printed a set of the images, but I never reached out to Hammons to publish a book of them. The whole project felt out of place; I didn't know him or have any connection to his practice, and considering the particular challenges and rewards of publishing a Hammons book, I realized I wasn't in a position to pursue it.

From September 2016 to July 2017, I received a series of newsletters about a yearlong program at the Wattis Institute dedicated to David Hammons. Based on the wording, it seemed like they were thinking about Hammons without having direct access to his work. I liked the idea behind the program, and after about seven months of receiving their newsletter, I decided to send my own photographs of Hammons' work to the Wattis. This isn't unusual for me; I often use the mail to mediate my work to an audience—who may not be aware they are an audience engaging with an artwork. I placed my photographs in an envelope without a note, copying the initials "D. H." and a P.O. box number for the return address from a framed envelope that had been on view in *Five Decades*. I wasn't certain whether or not it was Hammons' real address; I meant to refer to the envelope in the exhibition, just as my photographs referred to the works themselves. The photos arrived on April 20, 2017, and were delivered to the front desk, according to the tracking notification. I wondered what might happen, but I heard nothing. Eventually, the Wattis program ended, and the photographs slipped my mind.

A year later, I saw that the Wattis had published a book on the Hammons program, *David Hammons is on our mind*. When the copy I had ordered finally arrived, I found inside it a transcript of a rare 1994 artist's talk by Hammons at SFMOMA, without the images from his slideshow; texts by Tongo Eisen-Martin and Fred Moten; and a section titled *Photographs Sent by David Hammons to the Wattis Institute, April 2017*, beginning with the image of the lost, sad white dog.

—Ricardo Valentim, 2026