

How is an artist's work valued? What is "Black art"? How does culture sustain a community?

These are some of the questions posed by Just Above Midtown—or JAM—a New York gallery that functioned like a laboratory for artists. Opened in 1974, JAM was fueled by the extraordinary drive of its founder Linda Goode Bryant, who launched the venture when she was a twenty-five-year-old mother of two. With a loyal group of staff and friends, Goode Bryant aimed to create a “forum that presented Afro-American artists on the same platform with other established artists.” JAM proposed an expansive concept of Black art that included artists of different races, generations, and educational backgrounds.

The gallery's first location was a compact space in the heart of the commercial gallery district in Midtown Manhattan, a center of power and wealth filled with glass high-rises. After five years, JAM moved to a former meatpacking storefront in Tribeca—then the center of the city's alternative art movement. In 1985 it relocated a final time to SoHo, where it expanded to include studios for artists to make and distribute their work. To keep its doors open, JAM relied on what Goode Bryant described as “our innate ability to use what we have to create what we need.” The gallery was evicted from each of its homes, prioritizing collaboration and the needs of living artists over paying its bills. It closed in 1986, after twelve years of serving as a community hub.

Debate flourished at JAM—fostered in its program and incited by its mere existence. The exhibition, organized as a collage, extends its experimental spirit in the present. By recognizing the relationships the gallery cultivated, this presentation asks how we might work together to create what Goode Bryant has described as “an infrastructure for art with real-life consequences.”

Organized by Thomas (T.) Jean Lax, Curator, with Lilia Rocio Taboada, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Media and Performance, in collaboration with Linda Goode Bryant and Marielle Ingram. With thanks to Amber Edmond and Brandon Eng, Curatorial Fellows, and Argyro Nicolaou, former Curatorial Intern, Department of Media and Performance.

RALPH LAUREN

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We invite you to explore the accompanying publication, *Just Above Midtown: Changing Spaces*, which is available in the Museum Store.

For related content, programs, and audio, visit moma.org/justabovemidtown.
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