



KIRBY GRIFFIN

ISAAC JULIEN'S BALTIMORE

Top right: Isaac Julien. *Baltimore*. 2003. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Purchase with exchange funds from the Pearlstone Family Fund and partial gift of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc., BMA 2018.83. © Isaac Julien. Courtesy the artist, Victoria Miro Gallery, and Metro Pictures, New York.

Bottom right: Isaac Julien. *Baltimore Series (Angela in Blue, No. 2)*. 2003. Film still from *Baltimore*. © Isaac Julien. Courtesy the artist, Victoria Miro Gallery, and Metro Pictures, New York.



With its gritty visuals and nods to '70s-era Blaxploitation cinema, Isaac Julien's film installation, *Baltimore*, reminds cinematographer Kirby Griffin of childhood walks to the candy store with his grandmother along North Avenue in West Baltimore. His eye for visual storytelling grew from a desire to document these everyday moments through a cinematic lens.

"There's not a greater looking city that you could film or photograph than Baltimore," Griffin said. "There's a certain way that black culture looks up against the rowhomes in Baltimore. It's a perfect marriage when you see it. That's what I love photographing the most. [The City] has a certain aesthetic and time just kind of stands still in some spots, for good and for bad."

Baltimore City's at once timeless and time-traveling qualities anchor *Baltimore*, acquired by the BMA in 2018. The triptych stars iconic actor and director Melvin Van Peebles as he traverses through Baltimore cultural sites with an Afro-Cyborg

woman embodied by actress Vanessa Myrie. Each institution tells a different history, and each screen presents a different timeframe, exploring the many ways that history is made, documented, silenced, or foretold.

Julien's lyrical approach to storytelling and diverse cast of black figures, at once contemporary, historical, and futuristic, appealed to Griffin, who also uses his camera to document and elevate the experiences of black people, he said, in documentaries, music videos, and films of his own. "It's not a rich Baltimore that [Julien] shows you, and that's the Baltimore I'm familiar with. I'm only into telling the story of people who otherwise would be exploited or not have their story told at all."

A self-taught photographer and filmmaker, Griffin was inspired by the artist's deft cropping, framing, and editing to push the limits of his own creativity and "to protect our knowledge, to protect our image. To make sure we are the ones in control of our image because media is the greatest tool or weapon in today's world."

In conjunction with *Every Day: Selections from the Collection*, *Baltimore* is on view through January 5, 2020.

Baltimore is generously sponsored by Bunting Family Foundation.

Curated by The Eddie C. and C. Sylvia Brown Chief Curator Asma Naem.

