

How the Studio Museum in Harlem Transformed the Art World Forever

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Saya Woolfalk



JOHN EDMONDS

Gucci vest, shirt, pants, and belt.

When Saya Woolfalk was admitted to the artist-in-residence program in 2007, she was coming off a two-year period of living in Brazil, where she studied folkloric performance traditions. “I was encouraged to apply by mentor, Candida Alvarez, who is a painter based in Chicago,” Woolfalk says. “I applied three times, and when I finally got in, I was elated. I needed a community. I needed a group of people—like-minded people—who could help me parse through this information I’d collected over the course of two years.”



SAYA WOOLFALK

Saya Woolfalk, *ChimaCloud Access Point*, 2019. Mixed media with digital video animation. 96 x 30 x 18 in. *Expedition to the ChimaCloud*, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, 2019. © Saya Woolfalk, Courtesy Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects

Woolfalk says that she felt at home right away. “I almost immediately began to invite people to my studio. I invited people to my studio to do studio visits. And one of the first people that I invited was Dr. Lowery Stokes Sims, and she accepted,” Woolfalk remembers. “It was ridiculous. This titan of the art world was coming to my studio, which I had painted. I painted the ceilings. I painted the walls. I carpeted the floor. I had turned it into a multimedia installation and stage set. And she and I just had a conversation. We sat together. I was sitting on the floor, and she was sitting in a chair, and we talked. She told me about other artists. She talked to me about history. And for me, that was a threshold moment, a gateway moment—a moment that turned something that had always been a fantasy into something that was a reality. I had entered the art world.”