

# ACADEMY AWARDS® 2026

*Officially admitted to the Oscars® 2026  
competition for Best Documentary Feature*

**WINNER DAN DAVID PRIZE 2025**

## **HOW DID THEY COME TO EUROPE? WHY WERE THEY PORTRAYED? WERE THEY TRULY ALL SERVANTS AND SLAVES?**



## **IF THE BLACK FACES PORTRAYED IN THESE RENAISSANCE MASTERPIECES COULD SPEAK, WHAT WOULD THEY TELL US?**

*We Were Here* would make an excellent addition to public libraries' collections, particularly in the context of educational resources on history, art, and African diaspora studies -- **J. Zimmerman Video Librarian**

DO THE  
RIGHT  
FILMS

Exhibited throughout the **60th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia** in the **Central Pavilion** and admitted to the **Academy Awards® (Oscars)2026** competition for Best Documentary Feature, *We Were Here* continues to engage audiences at museums, universities, and cultural institutions worldwide.



# WE WERE HERE

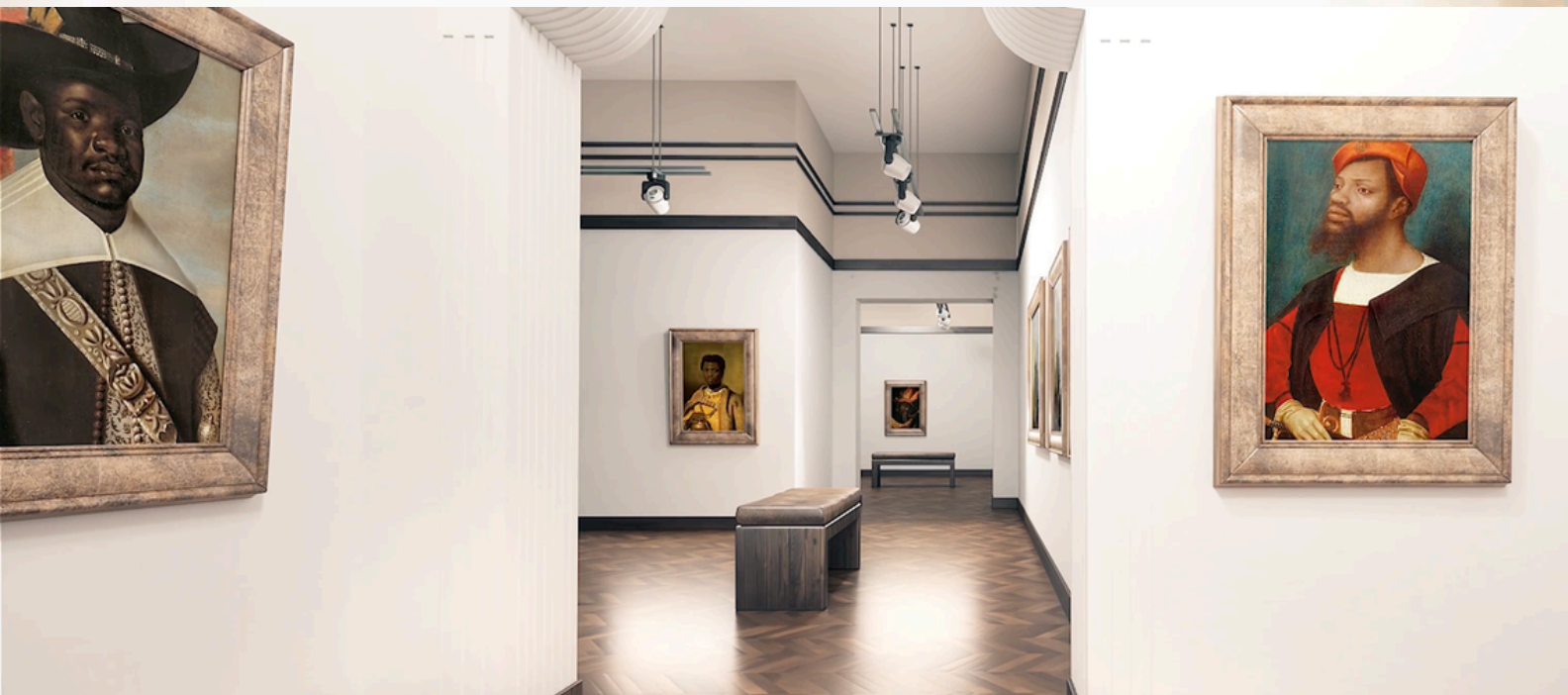
THE UNTOLD HISTORY OF  
BLACK AFRICANS IN RENAISSANCE EUROPE

A FILM DIRECTED BY FRED KUDJO KUWORNU PRODUCED BY DO THE RIGHT FILMS CINEMATOGRAPHER: LUIGI BENVISTO, M.C.  
WRITTEN BY FRED KUDJO KUWORNU EDITED BY LUIGI BENVISTO & FRED KUDJO KUWORNU  
PRODUCED BY FRED KUDJO KUWORNU, LORENZO FABBRI, PETER MANU EXECUTIVE PRODUCER FRED KUDJO KUWORNU  
WITH THE SUPPORT OF AFRICA NO FILTER, OSF & UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA IN COLLABORATION WITH CANTIERI METICCI

[www.wewereherefilm.com](http://www.wewereherefilm.com)

Directed by acclaimed filmmaker Fred Kudjo Kuwornu and produced by Do The Right Films, this multilingual journey spans the UK, Italy, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, and France, offering a fresh perspective on European art history and cultural heritage. The documentary features interviews with prominent worldwide scholars of Art History, History, and Black Studies, as well as Black activists and Art Curators, providing a comprehensive and nuanced view of this under-explored aspect of European history.

# SYNOPSIS



"We Were Here" uncovers the hidden presence of African and Black individuals in Renaissance Europe, revealing their representation in masterpieces by iconic artists of the time. How did they come to Europe? Why were they portrayed? Were they all servants and slaves? The film challenges the conventional narrative that has long overlooked their significance in the works of these celebrated Renaissance masters, telling the unknown exceptional stories of African-Europeans who were princes, ambassadors, saints, artists, professors, and knights.

# FROM DUKE TO ARTIST: **BLACK EXCELLENCE** IN RENAISSANCE EUROPE



## **Alexander de Medici**

The Duke of Florence:  
The first Black head of state in modern Western history, Alexander was the illegitimate son of Lorenzo II de' Medici and an African slave. He ruled Florence from 1531 to 1537.



## **João de Sá Panasco**

A 16th-century African knight and nobleman, João de Sá Panasco served in the Portuguese court and was a member of the prestigious Order of Saint James.



## **Ambassador Ne Vunda**

A 16th-century African diplomat who served as an ambassador from the Kingdom of Kongo to Portugal and the Vatican, playing a crucial role in diplomatic relations between Africa and Europe.

*"We Were Here" highlights the erasures of history that feed nationalist politics today by recovering the presence of Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*

-- **Ocula Magazine**



**Saint Benedict the Moor**

Born to African slaves in Sicily, he became a Franciscan friar known for his piety and miracles. He was canonized in 1807 and is considered the patron saint of African enslaved in the Americas.



**Juan Latino**

Born a slave in Granada, Spain, he became a renowned scholar and poet, eventually becoming a professor of Latin at the University of Granada in the 16th century.



**Juan de Pareja**

A Spanish painter of African descent who was initially a slave and assistant to Diego Velázquez before gaining his freedom and becoming a notable artist in his own right.

DO THE  
RIGHT  
FILMS

# UNVEILING FORGOTTEN LIVES



"PORTRAIT OF AN AFRICAN WOMAN"  
BY ANNIBALE CARRACCI (1560) PRIVATE COLLECTION



A SCENE FROM "WE WERE HERE"



**"THE KITCHEN MAID" BY DIEGO VÉLAZQUEZ (1618) ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO**

"We Were Here" masterfully interweaves reenactment scenes inspired by the most celebrated Renaissance paintings of Velázquez, Carpaccio, Mantegna and others. These meticulously crafted reenactments serve as powerful narrative devices, enabling the long-silenced Black figures to recount their true stories.

As these subjects come alive, they reveal the complex tapestry of their identities, challenging conventional historical narratives and offering viewers a window into the authentic lives and experiences of Black individuals in Renaissance Europe



**A SCENE FROM "WE WERE HERE"**

# DIRECTOR



Fred Kudjo Kuwornu is a multi-hyphenate, socially engaged artist and scholar, recognized internationally for his groundbreaking work exploring the intersections of history, identity, and the African diaspora. Born and raised in Italy, Kuwornu is based in New York and holds triple citizenship—Italian, Ghanaian, and U.S.—a unique background that deeply informs his creative vision and cultural approach. In 2025, he was awarded the prestigious **Dan David Prize**, often referred to as the “Nobel Prize for History,” which honors exceptional contributions to historical research and storytelling. He is also a 2025 Artistic Research Fellow at the renowned Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C.

By consistently bridging *past* and *present*, *seen* and *unseen*, *hegemonic* and *subaltern*, Kuwornu's practice emerges as a vital contribution to contemporary visual culture, understanding the complex interplay between history, identity, race, and representation in our globalized world.

Kuwornu's curatorial vision can be understood as a form of *historical remixing* in which he reconfigures archival materials and contemporary narratives to enlighten a rethinking of perspectives

# DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT



*I was born and raised in Europe, yet throughout my school years, I never saw myself reflected in our history lessons. The only mention of Black people came in the context of the slave trade, and when we studied the Renaissance, there were no stories or images of African descent in our textbooks. Discussions about Black people in the 15th and 16th centuries typically focus solely on their condition as enslaved individuals, overlooking the remarkable figures who lived in Europe during that time. This film aims to empower the Black diaspora by highlighting their presence as an integral part of Renaissance Europe's societal fabric. It seeks to address the gaps in our historical education and challenge the narrow narrative that has long shaped our understanding of this period*

**---Fred Kudjo Kuwornu.**

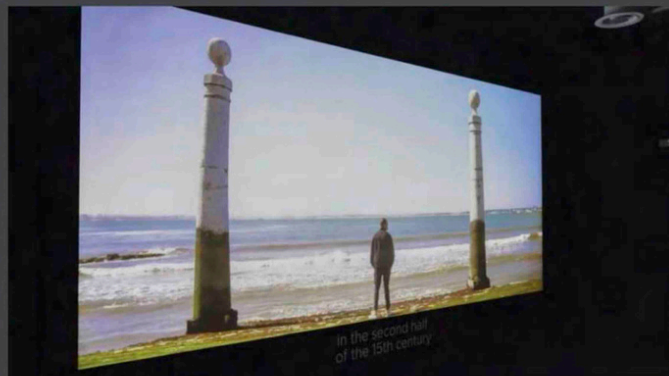
# Unveiling Hidden Histories

**A groundbreaking documentary that reveals the overlooked presence of African figures in Renaissance Europe, challenging perceptions of art, history, and identity**

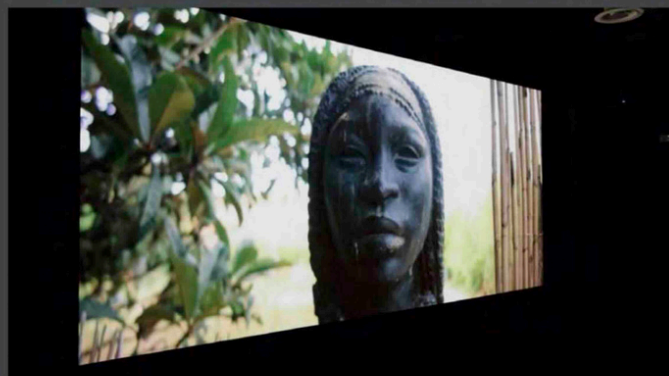
Fred Kudjo Kuwornu's *We Were Here* offers a groundbreaking exploration of the often-overlooked presence of Black Africans in Renaissance Europe. This compelling documentary, produced by Do The Right Films, journeys through six European nations—Italy, Spain, Portugal, the UK, France, and the Netherlands—to uncover the extraordinary stories of African Europeans who were not merely servants or enslaved people but also diplomats, artists, scholars, and knights. Combining reenactments of Renaissance masterpieces with modern cinematic techniques, Kuwornu brings historical figures to life, challenging conventional narratives and encouraging audiences to reevaluate the Eurocentric portrayal of art and history. Through interviews with renowned scholars, curators, and activists, *We Were Here* delves into identity, representation, and cultural heritage questions. With its powerful visual archaeology and thought-provoking commentary, the film seeks to reshape our understanding of Europe's multicultural past while sparking vital dialogue about race, art, and history in today's world.



Still from *We Were Here*. ©Fred Kudjo Kuwornu.



In the second half of the 15th century



Screenshots of *We Were Here*. ©Fred Kudjo Kuwornu.

**“The primary contribution is to encourage the audience and students to think critically about the hidden details in representations—not just about how Afro-descendants are portrayed but also the historical depiction of other ethnic or social groups.”**

The primary contribution is to encourage the audience and students to think critically about the hidden details in representations, not just about how Afro-descendants are portrayed. The same principle applies to the historical representation of other ethnic or social groups.

**What were some of the most surprising or challenging aspects of uncovering and portraying the stories of Black figures as leaders, artists, and diplomats in Renaissance Europe?**

Some of the challenges we faced were iconographic. For instance, to accompany the in-depth exploration of specific stories, such as that of Juan Latino, the first African professor to teach at a Spanish university in the 1500s, or the João de Sá Panasco, a knight of the Order of Saint James in Portugal, there weren't enough paintings available. Conversely, there were numerous representations of figures like Alessandro de' Medici. Therefore, in the film, while considering historical accuracy fundamental in demonstrating the existence of these stories, we had to allocate more space to historical reconstruction.

Another challenge that limited the film concerns the stories of Afro-descendant women. We recounted their dramatic experiences as sexual objects in the 1500s and as domestic workers, unfortunately lacking different narratives. Only in the 1700s and 1800s did we begin to have more detailed female stories that could become richer narratives. This limitation profoundly saddens me, and I hope that over the years, scholars will uncover stories through texts that emphasize the experiences of Afro-European women.

**Following the Venice Biennale and the film's upcoming international tour, what are your hopes for *We Were Here's* legacy? Are there other historical narratives you're eager to explore in future projects?**

I am thrilled about the film tour starting in 2025. The Venice Biennale, directed by the brilliant Adriano Pedrosa, whom I thank again for this excellent visibility and opportunity given to *We Were Here*, is now ready to engage in dialogue with the world tour. I'll begin in February with the Minneapolis Institute of Art, followed by Louvre Abu Dhabi, Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid, Museum of Art and Cultural History Schloss Gottorf, and other venues in Germany, and 40 art university museums and museums in North America before from the second half of 2025 we will approach Europe and Africa. The film will be accessible on different exhibition platforms, including museums, film festivals, and cultural hubs.

My artistic practice has always led me to work on historical subjects. I'm already working on my next project, which will be 100% African as it will focus entirely on Ghana and be based on Adinkra symbolism combined with A.I. 2025 has been a pivotal year for me. The news of Koyo Kouoh's appointment as director of the Venice Biennale, which came at the end of the year, could only make this year and the coming years more significant for both Afro-descendant artists and those dealing with themes of African art. I believe this edition of the Biennale has hosted, in my opinion, some of the most interesting pavilions, such as the one from Benin, curated by Azu Nwagbogu, and the Nigerian pavilion, curated by Aindrea Emelife. It would be great if, in the next edition in 2026, Ghana could return with its pavilion as well.

# SCREENINGS DISTRIBUTION



Photo courtesy of La Biennale di Venezia

"We Were Here" was part of the 60th International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia, showcased in the Central Pavilion curated by Adriano Pedrosa. The Biennale concluded in November 2024, attracting over 70,000 visitors. Following this prestigious exhibition, the film will have its North American premiere in February 2025 during Black History Month, featuring over 100 screenings in carefully selected museums, hybrid cultural spaces, and university venues, including **Minneapolis Institute of Art, Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, Thyssen Museum Madrid, Spain** and others.

Its hybrid distribution plan will also include a global tour of exhibitions, with museums, cultural hubs, and film festivals worldwide hosting exclusive showcases. [\*\*Link La Biennale Venezia\*\*](#)

# WHY MUSEUMS PRESENT WE WERE HERE

- *Offers new perspectives on Renaissance art and the interpretation of historical collections*
- *Expands understanding of Renaissance Europe through overlooked African presence in art and history*
- *Enhances the interpretation of classical and Renaissance collections through new historical research*
- *Invites audiences to reconsider Renaissance masterpieces through a broader and more inclusive historical lens*
- *Provides fresh insights into the multicultural realities of Renaissance Europe*



# LIST MUSEUM PRESENTATION

- La Biennale di Venezia (Central Pavilion), Venice, Italy curated by Adriano Pedrosa
- Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, Minnesota, United States
- Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
- Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, Spain
- Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio, United States
- Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin, Ohio, United States
- Schloss Gottorf Museum, Schleswig, Schleswig-Holstein, Germany
- Georgia Museum of Art, Athens, Georgia, United States
- Cincinnati Art Museum, Cincinnati, Ohio, United States

## Fred Kudjo Kuwornu

Fred Kuwornu ist ein ghanaisch-italienischer und US-amerikanischer, sozial engagierter Künstler, Filmemacher und Wissenschaftler mit Wohnsitz in New York. Seine Arbeiten beschäftigen sich mit dem Verhältnis von Geschichte, Identität, Ethnie und Repräsentation in unserer globalisierten Welt.

**We Were Here** ist 2024 auf der Internationalen Biennale von Venedig gezeigt. Das Museum Schloss Gottorf setzt mit der Filmreihe **Performing Postkoloniale Identität in der zeitgenössischen Kunst** fort.

**We Were Here** beleuchtet die lange Zeit verdrängte Geschichte afrikanischer schwarzer Künstler im Europa der Renaissance und hebt ihre Darstellungen in den Meisterwerken einiger der größten Künstler der Epoche hervor. Wie kamen sie nach Europa? Warum wurden sie porträtiert? Waren sie wirklich Künstler, die in diesen Museen dargestellt schwarze Menschen zeigen? Was sagen sie über die Welt?

Fred Kudjo Kuwornu ist ein ghanaisch-italienischer und US-amerikanischer Künstler, Filmemacher und sozialer Aktivist, der sich mit der Geschichte und der Rasse auseinandersetzt.

**We Were Here** – The Venice Biennale 2024 exhibition series

**We Were Here** shows the Renaissance Europe's celebrated artists they truly all served, what would

## WE WERE HERE

DIE UNERZÄHLTE GESCHICHTE DER SCHWARZEN AFRIKANER IM EUROPA DER RENAISSANCE



# UNTOLD STORIES

## DO THE RIGHT FILMS

Do The Right Films, founded in New York in 2013, produces award-winning documentaries, film showcases and exhibitions that expose injustice, illuminate the power of community and tell a history seldom told. Kuwornu named his production company Do The Right Films as a nod to Lee's influential 1989 film *Do the Right Thing*. This suggests a shared commitment to using visual story-telling as a tool for social change and challenging injustice.

[www.dotherightfilms.nyc](http://www.dotherightfilms.nyc)

to organize a screening

**[screenings@dotherightfilms.nyc](mailto:screenings@dotherightfilms.nyc)**

to purchase Digital Site License

**[catalog@dotherightfilms.nyc](mailto:catalog@dotherightfilms.nyc)**

