

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

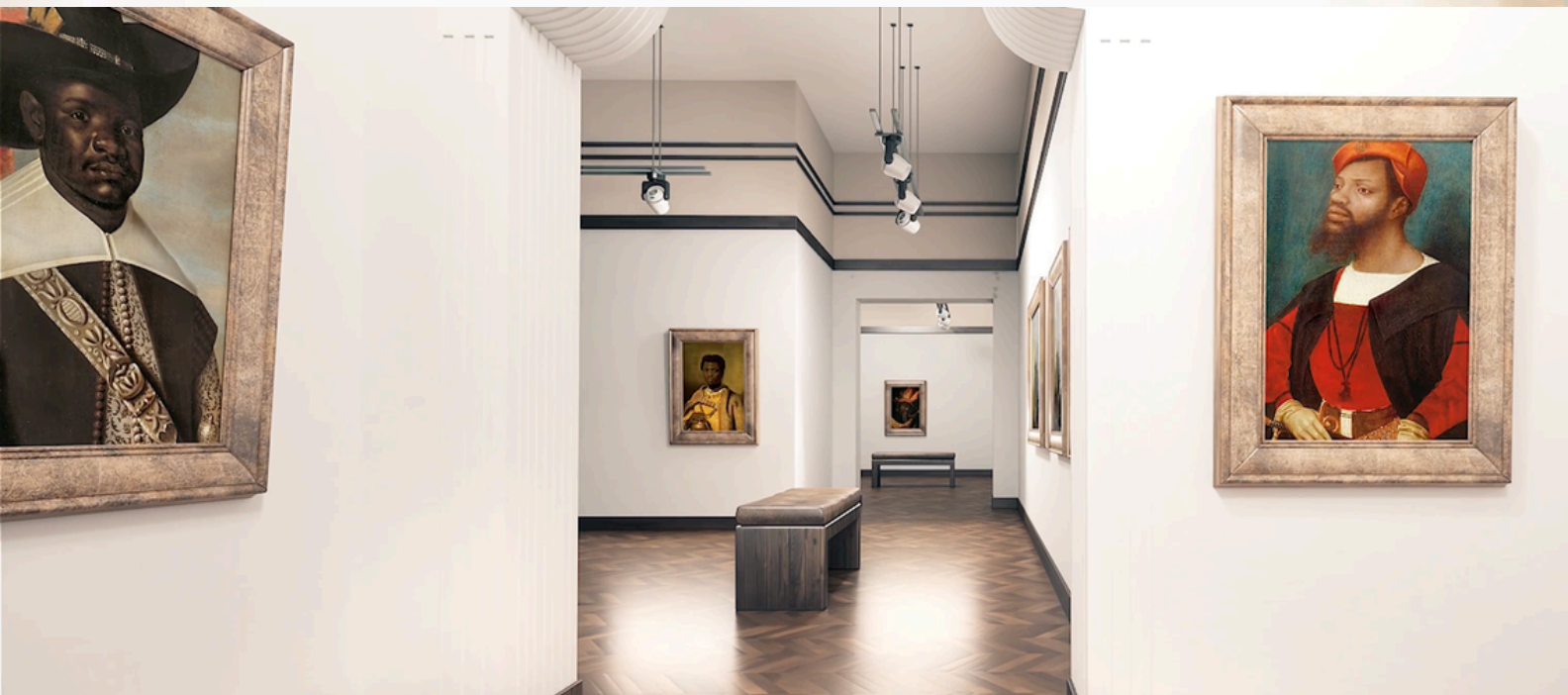
THE UNTOLD HISTORY OF
BLACK AFRICANS IN RENAISSANCE EUROPE

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

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.

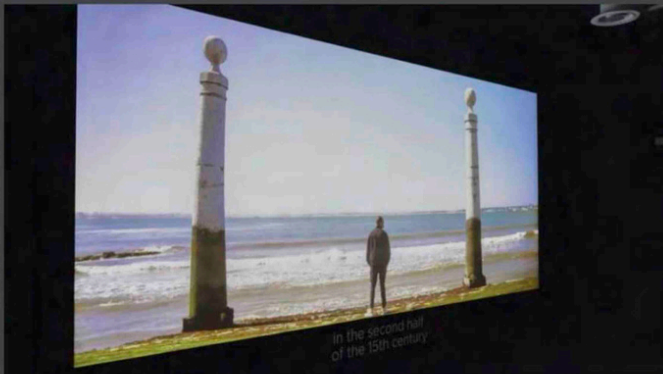
Unveiling Hidden Histories

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

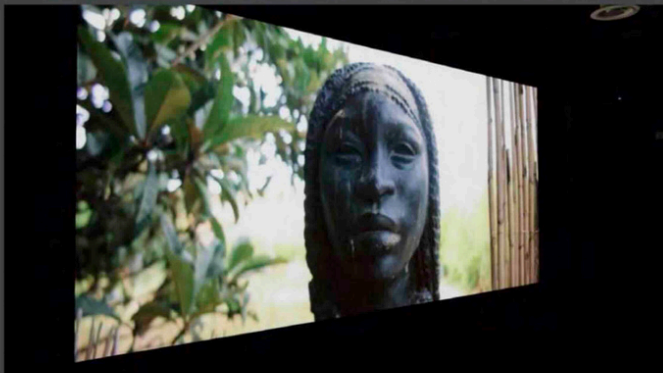
Fred Kudjo Kuwornu's *We Were Here* offers a groundbreaking exploration of the often-overlooked presence of Black Africans in Renaissance Europe. This compelling documentary, produced by Do The Right Films, journeys through six European nations—Italy, Spain, Portugal, the UK, France, and the Netherlands—to 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**](#)



- *Offers a diverse perspective on Renaissance art and representation*
- *Encourages critical examination of how diversity and Blackness have been depicted in classical artworks*
- *Could attract new students by highlighting underexplored aspects of art history*
- *Provides insight into the little-known history of Black presence in 16th century Europe*
- *Develops understanding of slavery's history and impact*
- *Contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the global Black experience*
- *Linguistic and cultural enrichment*
- *Exposure to multiple European languages*

LIST UNIVERSITIES SCREENING

1. Princeton University, Princeton (United States)
2. Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester (United States)
3. University of California, San Diego (United States)
4. University of California, Berkeley (United States)
5. University of California, Los Angeles (United States)
6. University of Toronto, Toronto (Canada)
7. Chapman University, Orange (United States)
8. Brock University, St. Catharines (Canada)
9. University of Guelph, Guelph (Canada)
10. University of Toronto (Canada)
11. University of California, Santa Barbara (United States)
12. Indiana University, Bloomington (United States)
13. San Diego State University, San Diego (United States)
14. Michigan State University, East Lansing (United States)
15. Duke University, Durham (United States)
16. University of Tennessee, Knoxville (United States)
17. University of Arkansas, Lafayette (United States)
18. Santa Clara University, Santa Clara (United States)
19. Emory University, Atlanta (United States)
20. University of Georgia, Athens (United States)
21. Morgan State University, Baltimore (United States)
22. Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw (United States)
23. California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo (United States)
24. Franklin & Marshall College (United States)
25. Rice University, Houston (United States)
26. University of Maryland, Baltimore County, Baltimore (United States)
27. Brigham Young University, Provo (United States)
28. Hamilton College, Clinton (United States)
29. Fairfield University, Fairfield (United States)
30. ETH Zurich / Federal Institute of Technology (Switzerland)
31. Vrije Universiteit Brussel (Belgium)
32. Oxford University, Oxford (United Kingdom)
33. UMBC (United States)
34. University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia (United States)
35. Syracuse University, Florence, (Italy)
36. Boston College, Boston (United States)
37. Fairfield University, Fairfield (United States)
38. Ohio State University, Columbus (United States)
39. Macalester College, Saint Paul (United States)
40. Gustavus Adolphus College, Saint Peter (United States)
41. Sewanee: The University of the South, Sewanee (United States)
42. Stanford University, Stanford (United States)
43. Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles (United States)
44. University of California, Los Angeles (United States)
44. Stanford University (United States)
45. Simon Fraser University (Canada)
46. Portland State University (United States)
47. University of California, Los Angeles (United States)
48. The University of the South (United States)
49. Hamilton College (United States)
50. Gustavus Adolphus College (United States)
51. Macalester College (United States)
52. Boston College (United States)
53. Bowdoin College (United States)
54. University College London (United Kingdom)
55. Durham University (United Kingdom)
56. Wake Forest University (United States)
57. Syracuse University (United States)
58. ETH Zurich (Switzerland)
59. Humboldt University of Berlin (Germany)
60. University of Massachusetts Boston (United States)
61. American Historical Association (AHA) (United States)
62. Kenyon College (United States)
63. American University (United States)
64. University of Maryland, College Park (United States)
65. Messiah University (United States)
66. Bucknell University (United States)
67. Tufts University (United States)
68. Boston University (United States)
69. Texas A&M University (United States)
70. Rice University (United States)
71. Weber State University (United States)
72. University of Puget Sound (United States)
73. Brock University (Canada)
74. University of Western Ontario (Canada)
75. University of Rhode Island (United States)
76. Oberlin College (United States)
77. Case Western Reserve University (United States)
78. Brown University (United States)
79. Saint Joseph's University (United States)
80. Hunter College (CUNY) (United States)
81. African American Intellectual History Society (AAIHS) (United States)
82. Rochester Institute of Technology (United States)
83. Hobart College (United States)
84. University of Rochester (United States)
85. University of Kent (United Kingdom)

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

to organize a screening

screenings@dotherightfilms.nyc

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