

# Titus Kaphar

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Race is always an awkward subject at the art museum. That's a dilemma that 33-year-old African-American artist [Titus Kaphar](#) addresses squarely in his paintings. His "History in the Making" exhibit comes courtesy of the first [Gwendolyn Knight and Jacob Lawrence Fellowship](#). During a recent gallery walk-through, the Yale-trained painter explained how he rearranges the narratives in old canvases that contain black faces. After faithfully copying them, he performs "investigations into these characters in these paintings" by whitening out, cutting out, or repositioning the peripheral African-American figures. In the startling *Conclusive*, for instance, which dominates the center of the gallery, the fabric from a 17th-century French original by [Simon Voet](#), upright in its frame, lies excised and draped onto the floor in neat silhouette. The work was "performance based" Kaphar says, when he originally "pulled out a ladder and some razor blades" and started slicing away while gallery goers watched nervously. This is the first time it's been displayed properly, "more as a sculpture instead of a two-dimensional object." Nearby, he's performed the same trick on a [Thomas Eakins](#) (you can see the original upstairs in the ongoing "Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness" show.) "I'm very much inspired by our history," says Kaphar. Then he takes a knife to it. (Closed Mon.) BRIAN

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