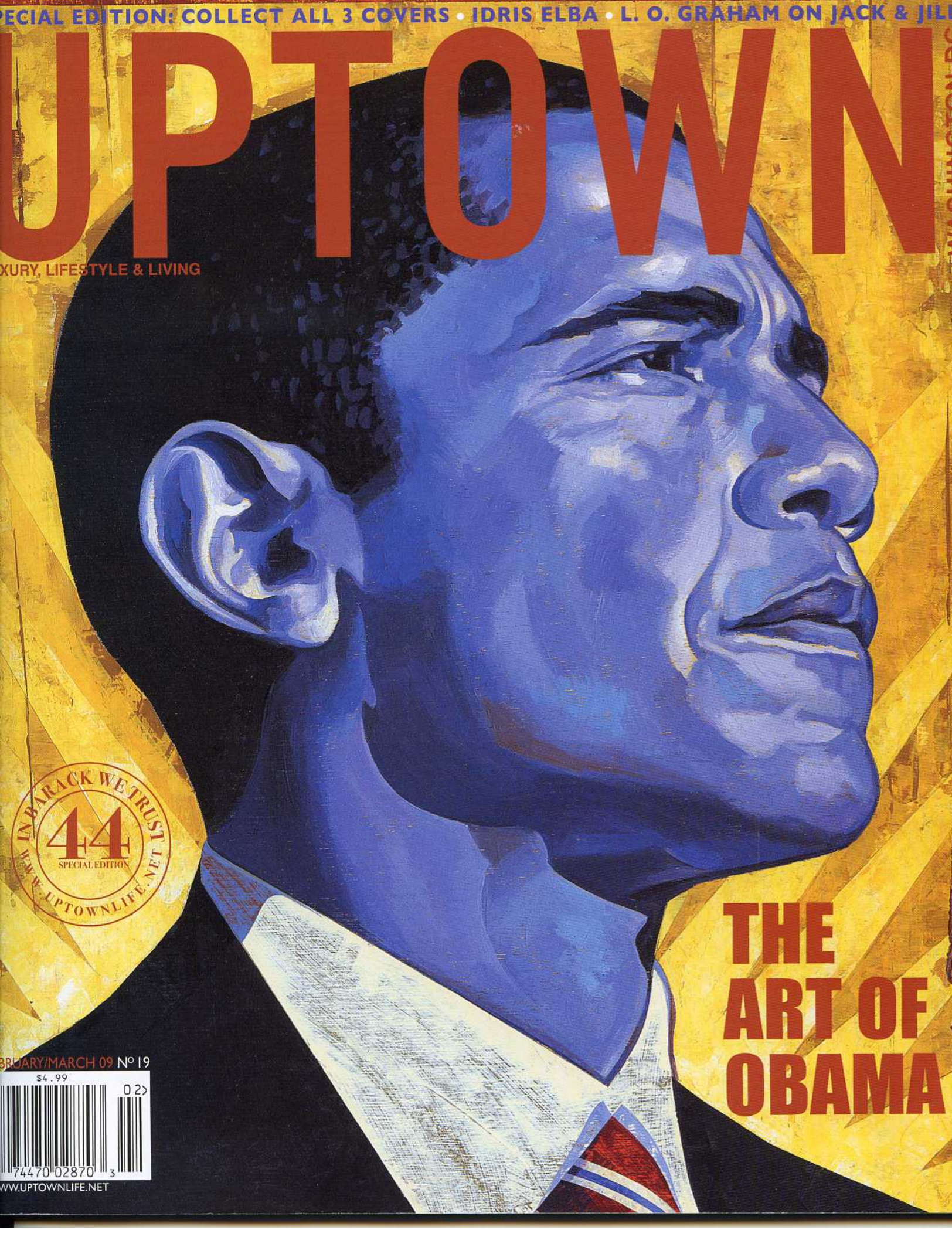


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Art: Family Portrait

Passing down the family business is nothing new. What most of us don't appreciate is that it happens in the art world as well. Want to know if that young artist you found is the next hot thing? You may want to check his or her family tree. By Cheryl R. Riley



SOMETIMES I SEE MYSELF IN YOU, HANK WILLIS THOMAS IN COLLABORATION WITH DEBORAH WILLIS, 2008, DIGITAL C PRINT, 50" X 21"

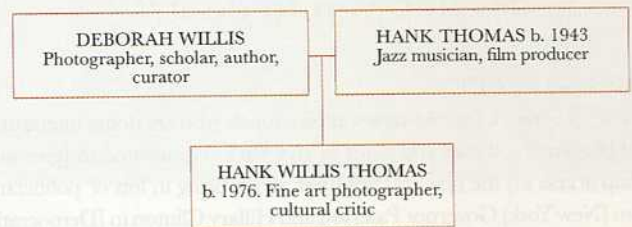
The Picassos (Pablo and Paloma) and the Wyeths (N.C. and Andrew) are proof that creative genes often run in the family. But there's a rich history of African-American art dynasties as well. The winter of 2007 marked the first time two African-American artists, Kara Walker and Martin Puryear, had solo surveys simultaneously in major Manhattan museums. Is it a coincidence that Walker, with her acclaimed Whitney Museum of Modern Art exhibition, is the daughter of painter and educator Larry Walker? Or that Puryear, whose monumental wood sculptures at the Museum of Modern Art clearly influenced Michael, his furniture-making younger brother?

If you're looking to build a collection that connects beyond aesthetics, check out these family members who follow in one another's artistic footsteps.



ABSOLUTE 187: A MEMORIAL FOR THE 183 VICTIMS OF HOMICIDE IN SAN FRANCISCO AND OAKLAND IN 2003, HANK WILLIS THOMAS WITH ROSA CASTRO, 2004, MIXED MEDIA, 13" X 9" X 5"

PHOTO FINISH



Deborah Willis' parents were not artists, yet they supported her talent by exposing her to cultural events in their Philadelphia community. She parlayed that into a career that includes a MacArthur "Genius" Award for her beautiful photographic art and book about photography. As chair of the department of photography and imaging at New York University, she has organized seminal conferences that deal with art in the African diaspora.

Expert guidance: Deborah pushed son Hank into art school and immersed him in museums, theater, and music because she knew he was a natural artist—his creative play gave him away, even though he protested that he couldn't draw. Now a rising star in the art world, he calls on her as a sometime collaborator for his work, which subverts advertising that depicts and distorts African-Americans.

Shadowboxing: "For a long time, I tried to work somewhat more remote from my mother until I produced work she could respect," says Hank, who calls his relationship with his mother symbiotic. "I didn't realize I was following in Mom's footsteps until my late 20s. I thought I was doing it on my own—that's how good of a teacher she is."

