

b. 1938 Gonzales, Trinidad and Tobago; lives and works Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

Clarke, a self-taught artist, author, and poet, has developed in his work a manifesto of the struggles and triumphs of the people of the African diaspora, and in particular of Caribbean people. Born to a working-class family, in the late 1960s he left Trinidad and Tobago to expand his art practice in New York City. Between 1971 and 1974, Clarke was one of the first artists in residence at the Studio Museum. He had two solo exhibitions in the 1970s, *Fragments of a Spiritual* at the Studio Museum in 1972 and *Douens* at Howard University, in Washington, DC, in 1976.

*Now* depicts a masked man in the center of the canvas; a woman clutching a child appears at right, while several animal-like figures are aligned along the bottom to the left, and a pair of enlarged hands clutching broken chains dominates the upper-left quadrant. The style of the work is typical of Clarke's repertoire from that period, with thick, dark lines, especially outlining the figures; intense color contrasts; and a bold palette. This painting distills the lives, events, and traumas that the artist encountered during his time in Harlem. In *Now* Clarke has made a historical document that carries the weight of a troubled era in US history.

Ralph Campbell, playwright and friend of the artist, writes about Clarke's time in New York City: "In the Bronx, away and alone, the traditional West Indian artist in exile, LeRoy Clarke painted and cried and sweated, propelled by a nostalgia and sentiment that only sharpens pain and brings the revolution nearer."<sup>1</sup> Clarke has repeatedly claimed that his art is war, a statement that is evident when looking at the artwork he created in New York. Since those early years, Clarke has remained committed to social activism through his work, and, though his style has changed and developed over the decades, works such as *Now* continue to define the essence of this prolific and talented Caribbean painter. —Daniela Fifi

1. Ralph Campbell, "A Fragment of a Spiritual," in *LeRoy Clarke: Of Flesh and Salt and Wind and Current; A Retrospective*, ed. Caroline C. Ravello, exh. cat. (Port of Spain: National Museum and Art Gallery of Trinidad and Tobago, Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2003), 38–39.



*Now*, 1970  
Oil on canvas  
48¼ × 72¾ in. (122.6 × 183.8 cm)