

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Watts Happening Cultural Center **DRAFT**

Other names/site number: Watts Neighborhood Center, Mafundi Institute, Robert Pitts Westminster Neighborhood Center

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

## 2. Location

Street & number: 1827 E. 103<sup>rd</sup> Street

City or town: Los Angeles

State: California

County: Los Angeles

Not For Publication:

Vicinity:

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this \_\_\_ nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

\_\_\_ **national**      \_\_\_ **statewide**      \_\_\_ **local**  
Applicable National Register Criteria:

   **A**         **B**         **C**         **D**

_____ <b>Signature of certifying official/Title:</b>	_____ <b>Date</b>
_____ <b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b>	

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.	
_____ <b>Signature of commenting official:</b>	_____ <b>Date</b>
_____ <b>Title :</b>	_____ <b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b>

Watts Happening Cultural Center  
Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA  
County and State

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**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

**Category of Property**

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

Watts Happening Cultural Center  
Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA  
County and State

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	_____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
<u>1</u>	_____	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/auditorium

COMMERCIAL/restaurant

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCIAL/restaurant

VACANT/NOT IN USE

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**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT/Late Modern

**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Concrete; stucco; wood; glass; and aluminum

Watts Happening Cultural Center

Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA

County and State

### **Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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### **Summary Paragraph**

Located at the northwest corner of E. 103<sup>rd</sup> Street and Wilmington Avenue in the City of Los Angeles, the Watts Happening Cultural Center is a two-story building designed in the Late Modern style. The wood-framed structure has a concrete foundation, flat roof, and stucco exterior. The building has an irregular plan comprised of two main intersecting wings. The primary façade faces east. The remainder of the block includes a surface parking lot and an apartment complex. The building is in overall good condition and retains all aspects of integrity.

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### **Narrative Description**

#### ***Exterior***

The building is located at 1827 E. 103<sup>rd</sup> Street in the Watts area of Los Angeles. Completed in 1970,<sup>1</sup> it has a wood-framed structure sheathed in rough-textured stucco and a flat roof surrounded by a low parapet. The roof is covered with a rolled composition material. The building has an irregular plan comprised of two main intersecting wings. The south wing is rectangular in shape with a north-south orientation and the north wing is rectangular in shape with an east-west orientation. Aluminum-framed doors, storefronts, and windows are used throughout the building.

The south wing contains offices, classrooms, and workshops that are connected by a stairway within the rounded bay that projects from the south façade. The south wing is further characterized by a second story overhang on the east and west facades. The overhang is supported by three evenly spaced, narrow columns that extend up and protrude from the second story, terminating just below a set of horizontal ribbon windows. The columns are flanked by non-original vinyl double-hung windows set within original narrow openings. The first story is occupied by multi-paned storefront windows and slab doors that open onto the patios that flank the south wing.

The main entrance to the building is located on the east façade at the intersection of the two wings. The entrance is approached from a concrete ramp and sheltered by an awning, neither of which are original. A square concrete planter in front of the entrance has been filled with gravel and boulders. The entrance itself consists of a storefront with a door in the center flanked by sidelights and topped by transom windows. Above the entrance on the second story is a band of windows.

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<sup>1</sup> Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety Permit No. 1969LA83435.

Watts Happening Cultural Center

Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA

County and State

The north wing is divided into east and west sections by an atrium. The east section is essentially windowless because it contains a double-height, multi-purpose space. The west section contains the Watts Coffee House in a two-story space and a kitchen in a one-story space. The Coffee House opens on to the atrium through a storefront system. The east facade is characterized by a mural, which was painted by Elliot Pinkney in 1972 as the Mafundi Institute's logo. The mural depicts a ripple of artisans in silhouette with a young Black man in the center, painted with the colors of the Pan-African flag (red, green, and black). The west façade is mostly a solid wall but includes a slab door and an arrangement of narrow fixed windows on the second story. The windows may represent the = sign, which was the logo for the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE).<sup>2</sup> The north façade is also utilitarian in design and includes a one-story bay, metal slab doors, and a few windows.

### ***Interior***

The massing of the building expresses the interior spaces and uses. As previously stated, the south wing contains offices, classrooms, and workshops. The north wing contains a multi-purpose space in the west section, the Coffee House with an attached kitchen and toilet rooms in the east section, and an atrium in the center. An entrance lobby is situated between the two wings. Throughout the interior the finishes are simple with carpeted and linoleum tiled floors, metal slab doors and frames, and acoustical ceiling panels that resemble the exterior stucco in texture. In some second-floor spaces ceiling joists are exposed.

The lobby walls are painted with a student mural depicting the life and history of Watts. A partition separating the toilet rooms from the lobby was turned into a history wall that currently displays portraits of influential groups at the Mafundi Institute. From the lobby there is access to the toilet rooms, the west patio, stairway leading to the second floor, the south wing's first-floor offices, the northeast wing's multi-purpose space, the atrium, and the northwest wing's Coffee House.

The double-height multi-purpose space features a maple floor, a stage at the east end, and a catwalk at the west end. The original aluminum-framed doors and sidelights along the west end of the space that led to the atrium have been removed. The wall is now infilled and punctuated by a pair of slab doors. In the atrium adjacent to the multi-purpose space, there is a concrete fountain at the north side.

The Coffee House is also a double-height space, but the ceiling is pitched instead of flat. The east end of the space is connected to the atrium through a storefront system. There is a step-up platform for seating near the entrance, a small raised stage originally used for performances but now used for seating in the center of space, and a step-down seating area near the kitchen.

The south wing has a double loaded corridor with offices, classrooms, and workshops to each side. In the workshop spaces the partition tracks that once divided the rooms are still visible in

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<sup>2</sup> The architect Arthur Silvers was president of the Los Angeles Chapter of CORE in the 1960s.

Watts Happening Cultural Center

Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA

County and State

the ceiling. The southernmost portion of the wing enclose the curved stairway that connects the first and second floors.

### ***Alterations***

The property has not been substantially altered from the period of significance, 1970 to 1975. Permits for an interior remodeling were issued in 1976 under the ownership of the Bureau of Public Buildings. The precise nature of the work is unknown but appears to have involved the replacement of finishes. In 1997, Pinkney restored the mural and slightly changed the design in the center. In 1998, a restroom extension was added to the south façade of the one-story portion of the northwest wing and a wheelchair ramp was constructed to provide access to the main entrance.<sup>3</sup> On the second story of the south wing, the aluminum casement windows were replaced with vinyl double-hung windows; however, the size of the original openings is still apparent. When this alteration occurred is unknown but likely took place after 2000. The large wall of aluminum storefront windows and doors between the multi-purpose space and atrium were removed and infilled at an unknown date but likely took place after 2000. During a 2014 beautification project carpeted floors in the lobby were replaced with ceramic tile. The mural in the lobby may have been painted at this time.

### ***Integrity***

As discussed below, the property retains all aspects of integrity. The building retains its integrity of location, as it has not been moved from where it was constructed in 1970. In the late 1960s, virtually all of the buildings along 103<sup>rd</sup> Street were demolished in preparation for redevelopment after the Watts Uprising. The Cultural Center was the only building on the block until the construction of the adjacent apartment complex in 1979. The integrity of setting is intact, however, as the building is still surrounded by low-rise residential buildings. Alterations to the fenestration are minor and the integrity of design remains intact including the overall massing, plan, structure, and style of the building. The integrity of materials and workmanship is intact. There has been some replacement of materials on the interior, however, the key exterior material, rough textured stucco, remains. The integrity of association is principally expressed through the Mafundi Institute's logo painted on the east façade, which remains. The integrity of feeling is intact, as the building and its physical characteristics still invoke the feeling of a 1970s neighborhood center designed in the Late Modern style.

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<sup>3</sup> Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety Permit No. 97014-10000-00414.

Watts Happening Cultural Center  
Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA  
County and State

## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ETHNIC HERITAGE: African American

PERFORMING ARTS

ART, LITERATURE

Watts Happening Cultural Center  
Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA  
County and State

**Period of Significance**

1970-1975

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1970 – Building completed

1975 – Mafundi Institute closed

\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Kennard, Robert and Arthur Silvers (architects)

Marks, Robert (engineer)

\_\_\_\_\_

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Watts Happening Cultural Center is eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion A in the areas of Ethnic Heritage, Performing Arts, Art, and Literature. It is significant at the local level in the context of African American history as a cultural center for predominately local Black artists, writers, musicians, filmmakers, dancers, and poets that played an important role in the community after the Watts Uprising of 1965. The Cultural Center was managed by the Mafundi Institute, a Black cultural academy focused on community empowerment. The history and origin of the Center is intertwined with other important Black arts institutions; the first and foremost being the Watts Happening Coffee House. The period of significance is 1970 to 1975, the date the building was completed to the date the Mafundi Institute closed.



Watts Happening Cultural Center

Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA

County and State

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**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

***Introduction***

The Watts Happening Cultural Center was constructed in 1970 to house the Mafundi Institute, a much needed and well-respected organization. Founded in 1967, the Mafundi Institute made an important impact on the community in the aftermath of the 1965 Watts Uprising. The 1960s Civil Rights movement had ushered in a political atmosphere of Black Power and cultural alternatives to middle-class assimilation. The Watts community used the momentum of that movement to take responsibility for healing their neighborhood, taking advantage of government funding and political expression through art. This, along with discrimination in areas of producing all forms of art, fueled the creation of Black arts institutions like the Mafundi Institute, where students could express African aesthetics freely. The Mafundi Institute supplied the programs that taught social as well as artistic skills, while the Cultural Center provided a safe space to carry out those programs.

***Brief History of Watts***

The Watts Happening Cultural Center is located in an area once known as Mudtown, a part of the Mexican land grant (Rancho La Tajuata) given to Anastasio Avila in 1843. Shortly after the U.S. defeated Mexico, the land was subdivided and sold to western settlers including C.H. Watts, who purchased 220 acres of the southernmost portion in 1886.<sup>4</sup> When the time came for the Pacific Electric Railroad to obtain a right-of-way for its Long Beach line, it acquired acreage from his family and, in turn, named the station that served the area after him.<sup>5</sup> The Pacific Electric began service from the Watts Station in July of 1902. The east-west country road serving the stop – today’s 103<sup>rd</sup> Street – became the Main Street for the settlement that grew around the stop . At the southeast intersection of Main Street and the tracks the Pacific Electric constructed a combination passenger depot and freight house.<sup>6</sup>

The railroad also had a social impact on the population. Watts was where the Pacific Electric placed its company-owned camp for unskilled laborers, mostly Mexican Americans, and their families. The small and relatively inexpensive lots also attracted German immigrants, Japanese farmers, and Blacks leaving the South who worked for the Pullman Car Company.<sup>7</sup> By 1906 the

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<sup>4</sup> Mary Ellen Bell Ray, *The City of Watts, California: 1907 to 1926* (Los Angeles: Rising Publishing, 1985), 5-6.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Watts Station is one of the few buildings on 103<sup>rd</sup> Street that was not destroyed by the 1965 Watts Uprising. It was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1974.

<sup>7</sup> Lawrence Brooks De Graaf, "Negro Migration to Los Angeles, 1930 to 1950" (Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1962), 78-88; Ray, *The City of Watts*, 15; Teresa Grimes et al., *Historic Resources Associated with African Americans in Los Angeles*, Multiple Property Documentation Form, U. S.

Watts Happening Cultural Center

Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA

County and State

settlement had about 1,400 inhabitants and decided to incorporate as a sixth-class city. Circa 1912, the Watts Chamber of Commerce adopted the slogan, "Watts: The Hub of the Universe," because of Southern Pacific Railroad's four-track electrical line that connected Los Angeles to Redondo Beach, San Pedro, Long Beach, Huntington Beach, and Santa Ana.<sup>8</sup>

The demographics of Watts were shaped largely by the two Great Migrations of the twentieth century. 1910 to 1940 marked the First Great Migration of Blacks who left the South to escape segregation laws and to pursue better economic opportunities. They found work in industrialized areas of the North, Midwest, and West because of the persistent labor shortages caused by men enlisting to serve in World War I. By 1920, Blacks made up 14 percent of the Watts population, a number that continued to grow after Watts was consolidated into the City of Los Angeles in 1926.<sup>9</sup>

Migration slowed during the Great Depression but picked up again during World War II. During what is called the Second Great Migration, Blacks flooded the West Coast looking for work in defense factories that were now open to people of color. The population of Blacks in Los Angeles exploded, causing overcrowding as restrictive housing covenants forced Blacks into already crowded areas like Watts. When the City of Los Angeles built housing projects for defense workers, three of them were constructed in Watts (Jordan Downs, Nickerson Gardens, and Imperial Courts). By the 1960s, these housing projects and the Watts area became predominately Black as Whites still remaining moved out. After the 1965 Watts Uprising, Blacks who could afford it moved out as well. Those exiting were for the most part employed in white-collar occupations, were generally much better educated, and had higher incomes than those who remained. In the 1980s and 1990s, Latinx immigrants from Mexico and Central America moved into the area. Today Watts has a population of approximately 60% Latinx, 37% Black, and less than 5% Asian, White, and other.<sup>10</sup>

### ***1965 Uprising<sup>11</sup>***

Leading up to the 1965 Uprising, Watts and other disenfranchised ethnic enclaves were plagued by inadequate public services, joblessness, discrimination in local hiring, substandard and overcrowding in schools and housing, teen homelessness, police harassment, and the out-migration of Whites and middle-income Blacks, all of which led to what was known as the "long

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Department of the Interior, National Park Services, February 11, 2009:  
Section E, 8.

<sup>8</sup> Ray, *The City of Watts*, 27; Curtis L. Carter, *Watts: Art and Social Change in Los Angeles, 1965-2002* (Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 2003), 7; Ray, *The City of Watts*, 26; Thomas Harrison, "Without President: The Watts Towers," *California Italian Studies*, Vol. 1 No. 2, 10.

<sup>9</sup> Grimes et al., *Historic Resources Associated with African Americans in Los Angeles*, Section E, 8.

<sup>10</sup> "Mapping L.A., South L.A.," *Los Angeles Times*, accessed on December 28, 2022, <http://maps.latimes.com/neighborhoods/neighborhood/watts/>.

<sup>11</sup> For an in-depth and complex examination of social history of the Watts uprising and its meaning, see Gerald Horne, *Fire This Time, The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995).

Watts Happening Cultural Center

Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA

County and State

hot summers” of domestic turmoil.<sup>12</sup> After the 1964 Civil Rights Act was signed, years of civil unrest broke out across the country due to systemic racism in the form of segregation, discrimination, and police brutality.<sup>13</sup>

In August of 1965, South Los Angeles exploded with racial and socio-economic frustration. It began when the Los Angeles Highway Patrol stopped Marquette Frye and his brother, alleging that the two young black men were speeding. Backup was called from the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) as a crowd of African Americans gathered to watch the scene at 116<sup>th</sup> Street and Avalon Boulevard. Since the incident was close to Frye’s home, his mother emerged to find her son resisting arrest. Fearful that his arrest may ignite a riot, one LAPD officer drew his firearm. Catching a glimpse of the gun, Mrs. Frye jumped onto the officer’s back, causing the crowd to cheer. LAPD officers arrested all three of the Fryes. Enraged by the family’s arrests and the aggressive manner in which the officers chose to respond to the situation generally, residents protested as the police cars drove away. Less than an hour later, black Angelenos took to the streets. Six days later, 34 people were dead, hundreds more injured, and a wide swath of South Los Angeles was scarred with burned-out buildings and looted stores.<sup>14</sup>

Although the Uprising did not begin or end in Watts, the media focused on Watts which created a false impression of history that has been difficult to correct. It was reportedly the worst insurrection in U.S. history and the worst civil unrest since the Civil War at the time.<sup>15</sup> After the dust cleared, America was forced to deal with its history of racial inequality when the report prepared by the Governor’s Commission on the Los Angeles Riots<sup>16</sup> concluded, “...[o]ur nation is moving toward two societies, one [B]lack, one [W]hite – separate and unequal. White racism

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<sup>12</sup> Eric Arnesen, “Long, Hot Summers: Rethinking 1960s Urban Unrest Half a Century Later: Introduction,” *Labor: Studies in Working Class History*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (2017): 13-16.

<sup>13</sup> The Harlem Race Riots occurred two weeks after the signing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, other race-based uprising followed. Spencer Stultz, “The Harlem Race Riot of 1964,” *Blackpast*, December 4, 2017, accessed on December 28, 2022, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/harlem-race-riot-1964/>.

<sup>14</sup> GPA Consulting and Alison Rose Jefferson, “African American History of Los Angeles Historic Context Statement,” *Los Angeles Citywide Historic Context Statement* (City of Los Angeles: Office of Historic Resources. February 2018), 91-92. For an in-depth and complex examination of social history of the Watts uprising and its meaning, see Gerald Horne, *Fire This Time, The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995).

<sup>15</sup> McCone Commission, “Report by the Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riot,” December 2, 1965, accessed on December 28, 2022, <https://archive.org/details/mcconeocommission00cali>.

<sup>16</sup> Gov. Edmund G. Brown assembled what became known as the McCone Commission, named after Chairman John A. McCone, an industrialist and former head of the Central Intelligence Agency. Charged with ensuring that such violence never again touched the city, the commission launched an inquiry into the riot and its causes, fashioning a 101-page white paper filled with ambitious remedies for many of Watts’ ills.

Watts Happening Cultural Center

Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA

County and State

is essentially responsible for the explosive mixture which has been accumulating in our cities.”<sup>17</sup> As a result of this report, Watts became one of the first communities to benefit from new social welfare legislation in an anti-poverty agenda known as the War on Poverty under the presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson.<sup>18</sup> Grants and organizational support poured in as federal affirmative action programs, business owners, civil rights groups, social service organizations, and churches became involved in Watts.<sup>19</sup>

### ***Watts Happening Coffee House***

In October, two months after the 1965 civil unrest, while the City assembled commissions and secured emergency funding to help Watts rebuild, the youth in the community converted the abandoned Nat Diamond’s Furniture Store at 1802 E. 103<sup>rd</sup> Street into a performing arts center called the Watts Happening Coffee House.<sup>20</sup> The Coffee House would become the place where a number of groups and programs formed with the objectives of developing opportunities for artists and using the arts to make a difference in the lives of community residents. Groups like the Watts Repertory Theater, Watts Writers Workshop (founded by novelist/screenwriter Budd Schulberg), and the Mafundi Institute used the Coffee House as their headquarters.<sup>21</sup> These and other groups were part of an ethnic revival that was occurring throughout the country but was particularly robust in Watts.

William Tut Hayes, a community activist, was the first director of the Coffee House and held the position until 1968. Hayes was vice president of the Afro-American Association prior to that and a member of the Afro-Americans for Goldwater and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.<sup>22</sup> The Coffee House had a bakery that sold coffee and pastries, and it doubled as an art gallery when it wasn’t being used for community services or taken over by local musicians

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> The War on Poverty was U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson’s attempt to equal the playing field of impoverished Americans through expansive social welfare legislation in the 1960s that created new federal programs and agencies including the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. Dylan Matthews, “Everything You Need to Know About the War on Poverty,” *Washington Post*, January 8, 2014.

<sup>19</sup> David Colker and Marc Lacy, “From Watts Riot Ashes: Bright Hopes, Heartaches,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 10, 1992.

<sup>20</sup> Richard Meyer, “The Story of Michael: A Child of the Watts Riots,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 10, 1980.

<sup>21</sup> Daniel Widener, *Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 134.

<sup>22</sup> The Afro-American Association was founded in 1962. The organization stressed self-help and shunned orthodox civil rights doctrine. Hayes was involved with the organization at the same time as future revolutionaries like Huey Newton and Bobby Seale. Mike Davis and Jon Wiener, *Set the Night on Fire: L.A. in the Sixties* (London: Verso Books, 2020); Bob Holt, “Negro Leader Urges His Race to Accept Own Responsibility,” *Ventura Star Press*, June 15, 1965; Darrell Dawsey, “He Won’t Give Up Till CRA Backs Down: Government: William Tut Hayes takes his fight with the Community Redevelopment Agency personally,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 29, 1989; “Supporters of Goldwater Stage Street Fight,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, October 8, 1964.

Watts Happening Cultural Center

Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA

County and State

and poets.<sup>23</sup> The Commission on Church and Race of the Council of Churches in Southern California paid the rent and the salary for two staff members. A musician named Walter Savage was hired and organized performances at the Coffee House. Savage invited the Underground Musicians Association (UGMA) – a well-known jazz group led by Horace Tapscott that incorporated spoken word, theater, and dance into their performances – to play at the Coffee House, which led to them helping manage the venue.<sup>24</sup>

The Coffee House became a popular hangout for some of the city's most talented artists, free of racial hindrances and an ad hoc community redistribution center. It was described by Hayes as a place where people who had a lot to say could say it; where people who were treated differently could be a part of the community, whether they were mentally ill or wheelchair bound.<sup>25</sup> He explained that what the people/youth in Watts really wanted was the feeling of being worthwhile, so "[t]he goal of the center [was] to help people achieve a sense of self-worth."<sup>26</sup> Hayes summed up the Coffee House as a place to promote Black pride.

In 1966, the fate of the Coffee House was imperiled. By City ordinance, the unreinforced masonry building at 1802 E. 103<sup>rd</sup> Street was not permitted to contain more than 50 people at a time. In May of that year, the City Council gave the Coffee House 60 days to find a new home or close its doors.<sup>27</sup> The Coffee House somehow managed to stay open a little longer, while the leaders applied for federal funding. Some sources characterized the project as the rehabilitation of the existing building, while others described it as a new building that would be a community center as well as a coffee house.<sup>28</sup> Although the project received a grant of \$180,000 from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), a lack of funds from other sources delayed the plans. The Commission on Church and Race withdrew their support after a disagreement with the Coffee House directors.<sup>29</sup> Eventually, the Mafundi Institute moved to a new space a few blocks away at 1772 E. 103<sup>rd</sup> Street. Meanwhile, the Watts Writers Workshop received a grant from the Frederick Douglas Foundation and converted the building at 1690 E.

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<sup>23</sup> Rita Cofield phone interview with Anthony (Father Amde) Hamilton, July 31, 2020.

<sup>24</sup> Steven L. Isoardi, *The Dark Tree: Jazz and the Community Arts in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 100; Tapscott later changed the name of the group to the Union of God's Musicians and Artists Ascension (UGMAA).

<sup>25</sup> Horace Tapscott, *Songs of the Unsung: The Musical and Social Journey of Horace Tapscott* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 106.

<sup>26</sup> Isoardi, *The Dark Tree*, 99.

<sup>27</sup> "Coffee House Shuttered," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, May 19, 1966; "Issue of Watts Coffee House Only 'Put Off,'" *Los Angeles Times*, May 23, 1966.

<sup>28</sup> "Watts Gets Funds for Coffee House," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, December 22, 1966; "U.S. Finances Watts Coffee House, Center," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, February 9, 1967; "Watts Happening Extension Backed," *Los Angeles Times* July 25, 1967.

<sup>29</sup> Jack Jones, "Plans to Build New Watts Coffee House Gain Support; Sponsor OK'd," *Los Angeles Times*, February 20, 1968.

Watts Happening Cultural Center

Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA

County and State

103<sup>rd</sup> Street into a 366-seat theater with offices and classrooms, where they taught acting in addition to writing.<sup>30</sup>

***The Mafundi Institute***

In 1967, two years after the Watts Happening Coffee House opened, a Black cultural academy called the Mafundi Institute was founded and made the Coffee House its home. A brochure issued in 1969 summarized the origins of the Institute:

The Mafundi Institute was born in the Watts Happening Coffee House and was the answer to the need for professionalism and the creation of skilled artisans in the cultural arts. The Institute was and is the first creation of a permanent performing arts training program in the Watts community.<sup>31</sup>

Mafundi means artisans, creative people, or craftsmen in Swahili. The Mafundi in Tanzania are street artists who, out of economic necessity in an environment with scarce resources, assemble art from what is around them.<sup>32</sup>

The Mafundi Institute evolved out of discussions surrounding a student film, *Johnny Gigs Out*, produced in 1966 by the Charles F. Kettering Foundation. *Johnny Gigs Out* was about a trumpeter in Watts played by Paris Earl, a local actor. The film was written by Jimmie Sherman, a product of the Watts Writers Workshop, along with other classmates. Interest in the film indicated a need for a permanent program under community control. So, the Charles F. Kettering Foundation provided seed money for the development of such a program.<sup>33</sup>

In January of 1967, the Mafundi Institute was established, and an interracial board of directors was created. The Institute was founded through the collaborative efforts of Maulana Karenga, Tommy Jacquette Halifu, and J. Alfred Cannon, M.D. Karenga is a scholar of African American history who was active in the Black Power movement. He is best known as the creator of the African American cultural celebration of Kwanzaa. He was born Ronald McKinley and during this period was known as Ron Karenga. Later he would change his name to Maulana Karenga, which means master teacher. In 1965, he co-founded the still operational Organization Us. Halifu was a community activist and a member of the Self-Leadership for All Nationalities/SLANT

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<sup>30</sup> Los Angeles Building Permit No. 1969LA83991, application to remodel market into theater and offices; Charles Baireuther, "Watts Gets \$100,000 Theater on 103<sup>rd</sup> Street," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, February 12, 1970; the building was destroyed by a fire set by FBI informant Darthard Perry (a.k.a. Ed Riggs) who began to confess his activities in 1975; Los Angeles Building Permit No. 1974LA99197, application to demolish building.

<sup>31</sup> Mafundi Institute," 1969 [brochure] available at California Index, Los Angeles Public Library.

<sup>32</sup> Makeda Easter, "The Broad's 'Soul of a Nation': Art from the rubble of Watts," *Los Angeles Times*, March 22, 2019.

<sup>33</sup> "Mafundi Institute," circa 1969 brochure, available at California Index, Los Angeles Public Library.

Watts Happening Cultural Center

Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA

County and State

organization. He is best known as the executive director of the Watts Summer Festival.<sup>34</sup> Dr. Cannon was a psychiatrist on the faculty of the University of California, Los Angeles and was also co-founder of the Inner City Cultural Center (ICCC).<sup>35</sup> He is best remembered as a crusader for better mental health facilities for minority communities and was instrumental in establishing the Drew Medical School.

The Institute provided a space where Black artists were encouraged to promote and explore their own artistic creativity and refine their artistic skills apart from European influence and constructs. The officers included Dr. Cannon who served as President and James Taylor who functioned as Executive Director and Treasurer. Taylor was an accountant who became an activist after the Watts Uprising. He was the principal organizer of the Watts United Credit Union and served as its chief executive officer. Taylor was also active in the Watts Chamber of Commerce and the Watts Towers Project as well as a pioneer in developing the Food for All program.<sup>36</sup>

After the Institute moved out of the Coffee House and into their own building at 1772 E. 103<sup>rd</sup> Street, they expanded their program of free classes such as drama, dance, painting music, filmmaking, and broadcasting.<sup>37</sup> This space, adapted from yet another commercial building that had been abandoned after the 1965 Uprising; however, would only be temporary.

### ***Watts Happening Cultural Center***

While it was the leaders of the Watts Happening Coffee House who initiated the plans for a new cultural center in Watts, it was the directors of the Mafundi Institute who brought it to fruition. In 1968, the Institute agreed to co-sponsor the project and raise \$60,000 for the first year's operating budget. One fundraising program was organized around benefit performances of *The Great White Hope* at the Ahmanson Theater and *The Blacks* at the Mark Taper Forum. Both plays exposed racial prejudice and explored Black identity, although they were written by White men: *The Great White Hope* (1967) by the American screenwriter and playwright Howard Sackler and *The Blacks* (1958) by the French novelist and playwright Jean Genet. The dancer and choreographer Marge Champion and the actress Diahann Carroll co-chaired the fundraising committee.<sup>38</sup> Champion's teaching partner at the Institute was none other than Marie Bryant, a multi-talented nightclub, film, and television performer. Marge and Marie had remained friends since they were cast in the Broadway show *Beggar's Holiday* in 1946. The duo was credited with "getting Mafundi off the ropes and back into the ring."<sup>39</sup> At the time, Carroll was breaking

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<sup>34</sup> Yussuf J. Simmonds, "In Memory of Tommy Jacquette Halifu," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, December 3, 2009.

<sup>35</sup> Widener, *Black Arts West*, 208-209.

<sup>36</sup> "James Taylor Jr. Watts Community Activist," *Los Angeles Times*, January 3, 1996.

<sup>37</sup> Arlene Van Breems, "Times Woman of the Year," *Los Angeles Times*, December 19, 1969.

<sup>38</sup> Gene Handsaker, "Champion in Watts, Using Dance to Bridge Gap," *The San Francisco Examiner*, September 10, 1970.

<sup>39</sup> Maggie Savoy, "It Grooves and It's Cold," *Los Angeles Times*, June 5, 1969.

Watts Happening Cultural Center

Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA

County and State

racial barriers as the star of *Julia*, the first American television series to chronicle the life of a professional Black woman. Each benefit was preceded by cocktail parties hosted by Hollywood celebrities such as the actresses Polly Bergen, Leslie Caron, and Barbara Stanwyck, the singers Nancy Wilson and Robert Goulet, the composer Quincy Jones, and the director George Cukor.<sup>40</sup> Even with this private fundraising and the previously allocated federal funding, the Institute lacked the necessary money for construction. Therefore, they sought support from the Los Angeles City Council through the councilperson for South L.A., John S. Gibson Jr. Eventually, additional funds were committed by the City and HUD to cover the \$400,000 cost of construction.<sup>41</sup> The building may have been officially called the Watts Neighborhood Center instead of the Watts Happening Cultural Center as originally planned, because the leaders of the Coffee House had been labeled as militants by the Los Angeles Police Chief Tom Reddin.<sup>42</sup> By the time the building opened in 1970, the individuals associated with the Coffee House had either dispersed or affiliated with the Mafundi Institute.<sup>43</sup>

The Mafundi Institute moved into its newly constructed building on June 1, 1970. The building was officially owned by the Economic Youth Opportunities Agency, which served as a coordinating agency and prime contractor for many federal anti-poverty programs.<sup>44</sup> Designed by the Black-owned architecture firm of Kennard and Silvers, the building was the first major construction on 103<sup>rd</sup> Street after the 1965 Uprising.<sup>45</sup> The two-story, 12,000 square foot building included a large multi-purpose space with a stage and dance floor, flexible classrooms and studios, and a room with a piano and seating that was called the "Coffee House" in remembrance of the Institute's original setting.<sup>46</sup> The cost of the dance floor was paid for by Champion.

The Mafundi Institute continued to expand the course catalogue from the move into the new building until its closing in 1975. Courses included acting, dance, literature, painting, sculpture, art history, music history, singing, and filmmaking. There were also sewing and self-improvement classes and even a preschool. The Watts Mafundi Choir (formed by a neighborhood mother) and an interracial rock group called the Southeast Intersection used the Center for rehearsals.<sup>47</sup> A martial arts class for dance and theater in the form of fencing was

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<sup>40</sup> Connie Moore, "Stairs Raise Funds for Watts Program," *Los Angeles Evening Citizen News*, May 15, 1970; Dan Sullivan, "'Blacks' Given as Benefit for Watts Center," *Los Angeles Times*, May 27, 1970; "'White Hope' Benefit Set for Sunday," *Los Angeles Times*, December 27, 1969; "Stars Join Fund-Raiser," *Valley Times*, December 24, 1969.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid; "Funds Approved For Watts Site," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, May 7, 1970.

<sup>42</sup> "Reddin Charge Against Church Council Denied, Official of Organization Says It Has No Connection with Anti-Government Groups," *Los Angeles Times*, April 25, 1969.

<sup>43</sup> J. Otis Williams, a musician associated with the Watts Happening Coffee House, was on the board of directors of the Mafundi Institute.

<sup>44</sup> "Poverty Funds," *Los Angeles Times*, May 14, 1968.

<sup>45</sup> Jones, "Creativity Begins to Bloom."

<sup>46</sup> Esther Hovey, "The Mafundi Preschool: A Case Study," (Dissertation, University of Southern California, 1974), 105.

<sup>47</sup> Jones, "Creativity Begins to Bloom."



Watts Happening Cultural Center

Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA

County and State

taught by Raymond St. Jacques, the first African American to play a regular role in a western television series. Eartha Kitt – after she received her star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame – may have used the multi-purpose space for her dance company, Kittsville (founded in 1965).<sup>48</sup> The Mafundi Institute was supported by other Hollywood professionals including Roger E. Mosley, who studied at the Institute under Raymond St. Jacques before becoming a teacher and television celebrity; William Marshall, a Shakespearean actor and opera singer known for his roles in Blaxploitation films like *Blacula*; and Paula Kelly, an actress and dancer known for her role in *The Women of Brewster Place*.<sup>49</sup> The teaching artists were not only mentors to the Watts youth; they also provided them work as artists. Forty of Champion's students were extras in the film version of *The Great White Hope* (1970) and *Halls of Anger* (1970).<sup>50</sup> There were also teachers such as Karenga,<sup>51</sup> who encouraged students to be proud of their heritage and make a global impact.

While the liberal cultural elite supported the Mafundi Institute, the conservative political establishment was resistant to their efforts. One of the endeavors of the Institute was a training program in cable television systems. The plan was to eventually launch the Watts Communications Bureau, consisting of a short-range FM radio station and community cable television system for Watts-originated programs and commercials.<sup>52</sup> This program in particular was designed to fulfill the terms of the grant from HUD that required job training. A similar training program in film and television jobs failed to receive federal funding from the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO).<sup>53</sup> Governor Ronald Reagan vetoed the grant citing unemployment in the entertainment industry would make job placement impossible. The real motive, however, was later revealed to be more personal. Reagan objected to the grant because Karenga was on the board of directors at the Institute and was on trial for assaulting two women. As a result of Reagan's objection, Karenga was asked to resign from the board.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, the grant was not awarded.

Like many organizations established in the wake of the 1965 Uprising, the Mafundi Institute struggled to make ends meet. By 1973, the Institute experienced a schism among board members and a decline in funding.<sup>55</sup> The majority of the board members resigned, and donations began to dwindle. After the Institute closed its doors in 1975, participants scattered to other Watts

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<sup>48</sup> Shelia Highsmith, "Kitt's Commitment is 30 Years Strong," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, November 4, 1999.

<sup>49</sup> Bourland, "A Capsule of Mafundi."

<sup>50</sup> Gene Handsaker, "Marge Champion Now Watts Dancing Teacher," *Post Crescent*, September 14, 1970.

<sup>51</sup> "Mafundi Institute," circa 1969 brochure, available at California Index, Los Angeles Public Library.

<sup>52</sup> Jones, "Creativity Begins to Bloom."

<sup>53</sup> "Assemblyman: 'Reagan Insures Unemployment'," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 17, 1971.

<sup>54</sup> Robert Fairbanks, "Reagan's Veto of Watts Grant Called Racist," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 8, 1971.

<sup>55</sup> Leanna Y. Ford, "Mafundi Institute Mired in Turmoil," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, August 9, 1973.

Watts Happening Cultural Center

Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA

County and State

community centers, such as the Watts Towers Art Center and the Watts Labor Community Action Committee. In 1982, the building was renamed the Robert Pitts Westminster Neighborhood Center to honor Robert Pitts, the first African American regional administrator of HUD. The Cultural Center then became home to a variety of community organizations offering social services, including the Watts Credit Union, Friends Outside, and Westminster Neighborhood Association.

Watts Health Systems (WHS) master leased the building in 1996 and attempted to revive the Mafundi Institute.<sup>56</sup> Once again the plans were foiled by financial problems. Although WHS relinquished management back to the City of Los Angeles, chef Desiree Edwards opened the Coffee House in 1997 and remains as a tenant in the building to this day. Beginning in 2000, the Los Angeles Conservation Corps operated the building as a charter high school and a vocational training center before moving to other locations in 2020. The building is currently vacant other than the Coffee House.

### ***Kennard and Silvers, Architects***

Although the Cultural Center is not nominated under Criterion C, it is worth noting that it was designed by Black architects Robert Kennard and Arthur Silvers during their partnership. The design of the building has been attributed to Silvers, although Kennard may have been responsible for obtaining the commission through his relationship with Dr. Cannon. Both graduated from the University of Southern California (USC) School of Architecture, Kennard in 1949 and Silvers in 1959. Robert Alexander Kennard was born in Los Angeles on September 18, 1920 but raised in Monrovia. He founded what would become known as the Kennard Design Group (KDG) in 1957, the oldest continually operated Black-owned architecture firm in the western United States.<sup>57</sup> He died on March 24, 1995.<sup>58</sup> KDG continues to operate in Los Angeles under the leadership of his daughter, Gail Kennard.<sup>59</sup> Arthur Harry Silvers was born on July 12, 1930 and raised in South Los Angeles just outside of Watts. Silvers worked for Kennard from 1963 to 1964. He joined Kennard as a partner in 1966 and the name of the firm was changed to Kennard and Silvers, Architects and Planners.<sup>60</sup> In 1972, Silvers left the firm for personal

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<sup>56</sup> Jack Leonard, "Watts' Mafundi Institute Stars in Its Own Revival," *Los Angeles Times*, October 24, 1997.

<sup>57</sup> Leon Whiteson, "Designs on the Future: Through the Legacy Left by Her Father, Gail Kennard Madyun Hopes to Build a Better L.A. for the Next Generation," *Los Angeles Times*, January 21, 1996.

<sup>58</sup> Robinson, "Odyssey in B-flat," 72.

<sup>59</sup> Like many architecture firms, KDG evolved as partnerships changed. The firm was originally owned by Robert Kennard (1957-1966). The name changed to Kennard and Silvers when Robert Kennard and Arthur Silvers were partners (1966-1973). After Silvers resigned, Ronald Delahousie and Jeffery Gault became partners and the name changed again to Kennard Delahousie and Gault (KDG, 1974-1985). When Delahousie and Gault resigned in 1985, KDG became an abbreviation for the Kennard Design Group.

<sup>60</sup> UCLA Library, Digital Collection, (Silvers)Tape IX, Side One (January 1, 1991), 37:00, <http://digital2.library.ucla.edu/viewItem.do?ark=21198/zz0008zpkn>; Jerome A. Robinson, "An Odyssey in B-flat: Rediscovering the Life and Times of Master

Watts Happening Cultural Center

Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA

County and State

reasons and in 1986 he retired and moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico. He returned to Los Angeles in 2007, where he died the following year on January 18<sup>th</sup>.<sup>61</sup>

Kennard and Silvers were from a generation of post-World War II architects whose work demonstrated a break from traditional European influence, in line with the Black Arts movement. Their work was inspired by the modernism of Richard Neutra, Victor Gruen, and Paul R. Williams.<sup>62</sup> After the 1965 Watts Uprising, Kennard and Silvers focused on civic-minded projects. They partnered with Pollak, Barsocchini and Associates, and the Community Redevelopment Agency of Los Angeles (CRA/LA), to create the Watts Redevelopment Plan No. 1, the goal of which was to rebuild the infrastructure of Watts without sacrificing the older and historic core of the community. The design included connecting bridges and garden courts and introduced what they called Afro-Western architecture. It was a contemporary European-influenced architecture that combined shapes that represented the African culture (square, circle, rectangle, and triangle). The plan also included a pedestrian-friendly design and a monorail that prioritized transporting elderly residents through the area. The design was community-centered and preferred restoration and adaptive reuse over demolition. The plan was never realized; instead, CRA/LA slowly rebuilt the community one building at a time.<sup>63</sup>

Between 1957 and 1994, Kennard and Silvers separately or jointly worked on projects including Zeiger Residence in the Laurel Canyon area of Los Angeles, 1958; Temple Akiba in Culver City, 1962; Hyde Park Elementary School (renamed the YES Academy) in the Hyde Park area of Los Angeles, 1966; 102<sup>nd</sup> Street Elementary School (renamed the Florence Griffith Joyner Elementary School) in the Watts area of Los Angeles, 1968; Bank of America branch in the Watts area of Los Angeles, 1969; University of California, San Diego Master Plan for Thurgood Marshall College, 1972; and Carson City Hall, 1973.

In addition to their large body of work, Kennard and Silvers were active leaders in the Civil Rights movement within the architecture profession as well as the larger community. They made it their mission to encourage and mentor people of color pursuing careers in architecture and urban planning. Both were members of Scarab, an architecture fraternity. Kennard was a founding member of and helped to raise funds for the ICCA in the 1960s. He was honored in 1986 as a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects (AIA). In 1991, Kennard received the AIA's Whitney M. Young Jr. citation for his bold response to national social issues. He received the USC School of Architecture's Distinguished Alumni Award the same year.<sup>64</sup> The Los Angeles Chapter of the AIA in April 2019 announced the Robert Kennard, FAIA Award for

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Architect Robert A. Kennard," (Thesis, University Southern California, 2018), 53, 56; Ancestry.com. U.S., Index to Public Records, 1994-2019.

<sup>61</sup> Ancestry.com. U.S., Index to Public Records, 1994-2019; "Arthur Silvers [Obituary]," *Santa Fe, New Mexican*, February 3, 2008.

<sup>62</sup> Whiteson, "Los Angeles Times," January 21, 1996.

<sup>63</sup> Robinson, "An Odyssey in B-flat, 122.

<sup>64</sup> Evelyn De Wolfe, "AIA Honors Five Southland Architects," *Los Angeles Times*, April 13, 1986; Ruth Ryon, "Architect Honored for Mentor Role," *Los Angeles Times*, March 17, 1991.

Watts Happening Cultural Center

Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA

County and State

Equity, Diversity & Inclusivity in honor of the social justice work he had done. This award was established to recognize “exemplary practices that promote ethnic and cultural diversity, gender equity, and the inclusion of marginalized groups of citizens through design and/or practice.”<sup>65</sup> Silvers was president of the Los Angeles Chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in the 1960s. CORE helped the community of Watts expose racial discrimination in housing and public accommodations such as restaurants. He was the historian and parliamentarian for the National Organization of Minority Architects (NOMA) in the 1970s.<sup>66</sup> Silvers was also chairman of the Urban Planning Advisory Committee to Los Angeles City Councilman Thomas Bradley.<sup>67</sup>

### ***Elliott Pinkney, Muralist***

Born on January 9, 1934, Elliott Lawrence Pinkney Jr. moved to Southern California from his native Georgia after serving in the U.S. Air Force. He earned his Bachelor of Arts from Woodbury College and went on to lead a notable career as an artist. Although Pinkney is best known as a muralist, he was also a studio painter, printmaker, sculptor, and poet. In the early 1970s, he was active at an innovative community arts school called the Compton Communicative Arts Academy where he met John Outterbridge, who would become the first director of the Watts Towers Art Center under the administration of the City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department in 1975.<sup>68</sup> In 1972, Pinkney and Outterbridge were commissioned to work on the sculpture “O Speak, Speak”. With a special grant from the California Arts Council, he completed eight murals including “Slaying of the Dragon” and “Summer of Fun” from 1977 to 1978. Their underlying themes were African American pride and the importance of understanding between different cultures. All but three are gone.<sup>69</sup> Pinkney painted "All That You Can Be" in 1990 and "Vision and Motion" in 1993 with support from the SPARC Neighborhood Pride Program, in addition to many more powerful public artworks. Pinkney received many awards including the Don Belding Award; Latham Foundation International Poster Award; City of Compton, California, Hometown Hero Award; California Legislature Assembly Resolution; and more. He died on December 22, 2019.

### ***Conclusion***

The Watts Happening Cultural Center was one of the most prominent cultural centers in Los Angeles from 1970 to 1975. It was the only cultural center of its kind in any Black community anywhere in the U.S. at the time; a gathering space for local artists, writers, musicians, filmmakers, poets, and community organizations; a project led by artists for artists; and a dream

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<sup>65</sup> Robinson, “Odyssey in B-flat,” 63; Ruth Ryon, “Architect Honored for Mentor Role,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 17, 1991.

<sup>66</sup> Arthur Silvers, “Urban Renewal and Black Power,” *American Behavior Scientist*, (March-April, 1969), 43-46.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> David Einstein, “Paintings on Compton Walls Illuminate the Black Experience,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 4, 1984.

<sup>69</sup> “Elliott Pinkney,” Mural Conservancy of Los Angeles, accessed on January 22, 2023, <https://www.themcla.org/artist/elliott-pinkney>.

Watts Happening Cultural Center

Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA

County and State

facility for the community.<sup>70</sup> It is one of the few tangible remnants of cultural expression that evolved in the aftermath of the 1965 Watts Uprising. The other buildings that were occupied by the Mafundi Institute earlier in its history (1802 E. 103<sup>rd</sup> Street and 1772 E. 103<sup>rd</sup> Street) were demolished to make way for urban renewal projects. Thus, the Cultural Center at 1827 E. 103<sup>rd</sup> Street is the only surviving building associated with the Mafundi Institute. It is significant because it was purposely built as a cultural center for the Mafundi Institute, which made an important contribution to the history of Los Angeles.

### **Criteria Consideration G**

The Watts Happening Cultural Center meets National Register Criteria Consideration G (properties that have achieved significance in the past 50 years) because of its exceptional importance in the history of the Black Arts movement, which generally spans from 1965 to 1975. The building was planned and completed more than 50 years ago and was used by the Mafundi Institute until 1975. There is scholarly research on the subject of the Black Arts movement, including California.<sup>71</sup> In *Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles*, historian Daniel Widener called the Mafundi Institute “one of the largest and best-funded community arts centers in South Los Angeles.”<sup>72</sup> During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Black Los Angeles produced dozens of cultural organizations that sought to foster a new relationship between creativity and community. Most of these organizations focused on a particular form of art like theater, dance, music, visual art, or writing. The Cultural Center stood out as a place where a variety of artists could hone their craft and connect with other artists for a cross fertilization of ideas. The Mafundi Institute demonstrated that the arts could be a means of social change and hope in the lives of individuals by contributing to improvements in self-image and community identity. Completed in 1970, the Cultural Center was the very first building constructed on 103<sup>rd</sup> Street after the 1965 Uprising. A number of buildings along 103<sup>rd</sup> Street were destroyed by fire during the Uprising. Others were subsequently demolished under the guise of urban renewal, leaving the main street of the community a blank canvas. The fact that the first new building to rise from the ashes was developed by and for the community was an extraordinary achievement of self-determination. Furthermore, the building is of exceptional significance as one of the only tangible reminders of this important period in Black cultural activism in Watts.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Margaret Harford, “Blacks’ Gives Vitality Jolt to Negro Actors,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 18, 1970.

<sup>71</sup> This scholarship is represented in the works of Daniel Widener and Darnell Hunt.

<sup>72</sup> Widener, 188,

<sup>73</sup> The only other extant property that reflects this context and period is the Watts Towers Art Center at 1727 E. 107<sup>th</sup> Street, which was constructed by the City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department in 1970.

Watts Happening Cultural Center

Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA

County and State

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Watts Happening Cultural Center

Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA

County and State

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Watts Happening Cultural Center  
Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA  
County and State

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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
  - Other State agency
  - Federal agency
  - Local government
  - University
  - Other
- Name of repository: City of Los Angeles, Office of Historic Resources

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):**

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**Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** Less than one acre

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_  
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

Latitude: 33.94358      Longitude: -118.23985

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Assessor Parcel Number 6048-028-935, which corresponds to the attached sketch map.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary includes the land area historically associated with the building.



Watts Happening Cultural Center  
Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA  
County and State

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### 10. Form Prepared By

name/title: Teresa Grimes and Rita Cofield  
organization: Los Angeles Conservancy  
street & number: 523 W. 6<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 826  
city or town: Los Angeles state: California zip code: 90014  
e-mail: Teresa.Grimes@icloud.com  
telephone: (323) 868-2391  
date: June 1, 2023

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### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

### Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

### Photo Log

Name of Property: Watts Happening Cultural Center  
City or Vicinity: Los Angeles  
County: Los Angeles  
State: California  
Name of Photographer: Stephen Schafer  
Date of Photographs: November 4, 2020

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1. East and south facades and surroundings, camera facing northwest.
2. East facade, camera facing west.

Watts Happening Cultural Center

Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA

County and State

3. East and north facades, camera facing southwest.
4. East façade, main entrance, camera facing northwest.
5. South and west facades, camera facing northeast.
6. South and west facades, camera facing northeast.
7. West façade, window detail, camera facing southeast.
8. Lobby, camera facing west.
9. Atrium, camera facing southwest.
10. Multipurpose space, camera facing southwest.
11. Coffee House, camera facing north.
12. Second floor corridor, camera facing north.
13. Second floor, typical workshop, camera facing north.
14. South wing stairway, camera facing south.

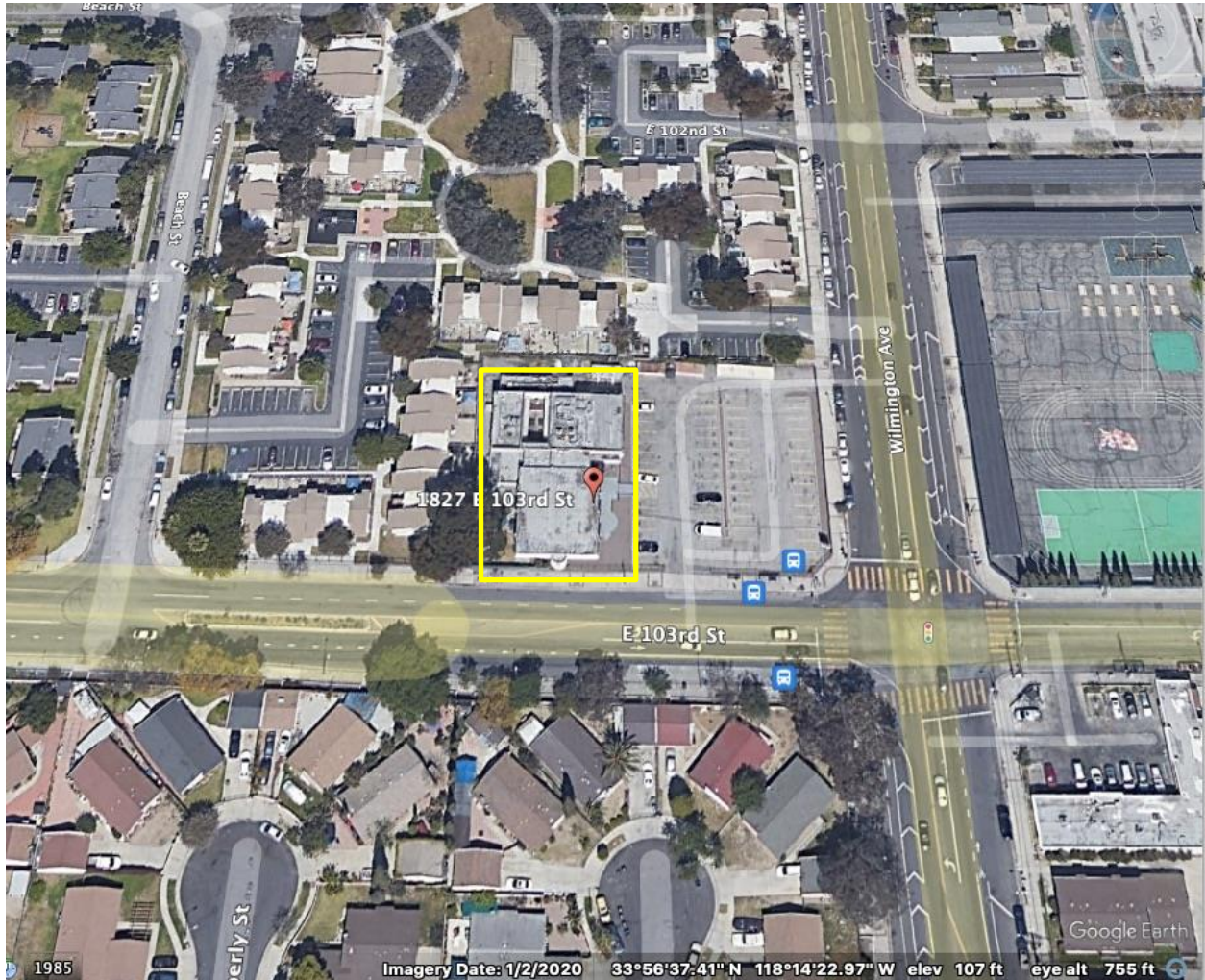
**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Watts Happening Cultural Center  
Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA  
County and State

**Location Map**



Base map courtesy of Google, property boundary outlined in yellow.

Watts Happening Cultural Center  
Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA  
County and State

Sketch Map/Photo Key



Base map courtesy of Los Angeles County Assessor, property boundary outlined in yellow.

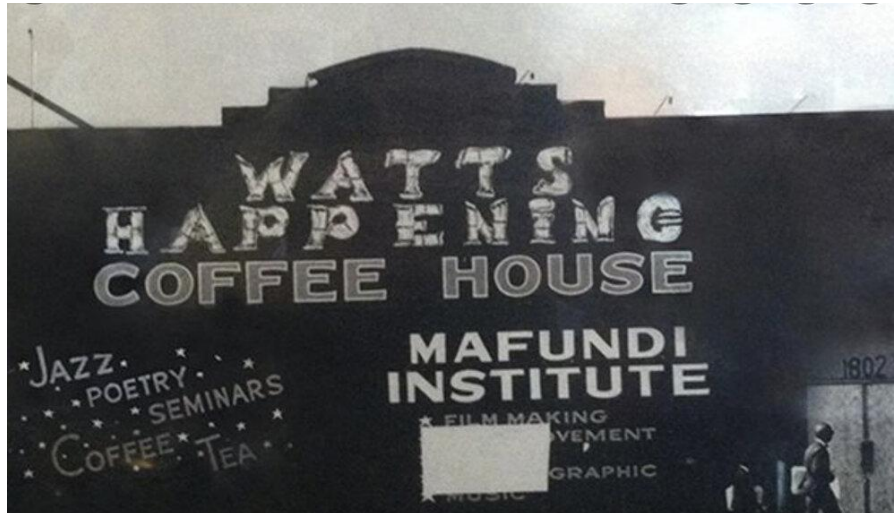
Watts Happening Cultural Center

Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA

County and State

### Additional Documentation



**Figure 1:** Watts Happening Coffee House/Mafundi Institute, 1802 E. 103<sup>rd</sup> Street, circa 1967, photo courtesy UCLA Newsroom.



**Figure 2:** Watts Writers Theatre, 1690 E. 103<sup>rd</sup> Street, circa 1970, photo courtesy Cornerstone Theater Company Blog, <https://cornerstonetheater.org/change-series/jordan-downs-transformation-by-the-decade-1970s/>

Watts Happening Cultural Center  
Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA  
County and State



**Figure 3:** Architect's rendering, 1969, photo courtesy of UCLA/Gail Kennard.



**Figure 4:** Dance class in multi-purpose space, February 2, 1971, Los Angeles Times Photographic Collection, UCLA Digital Library.

Watts Happening Cultural Center  
Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA  
County and State

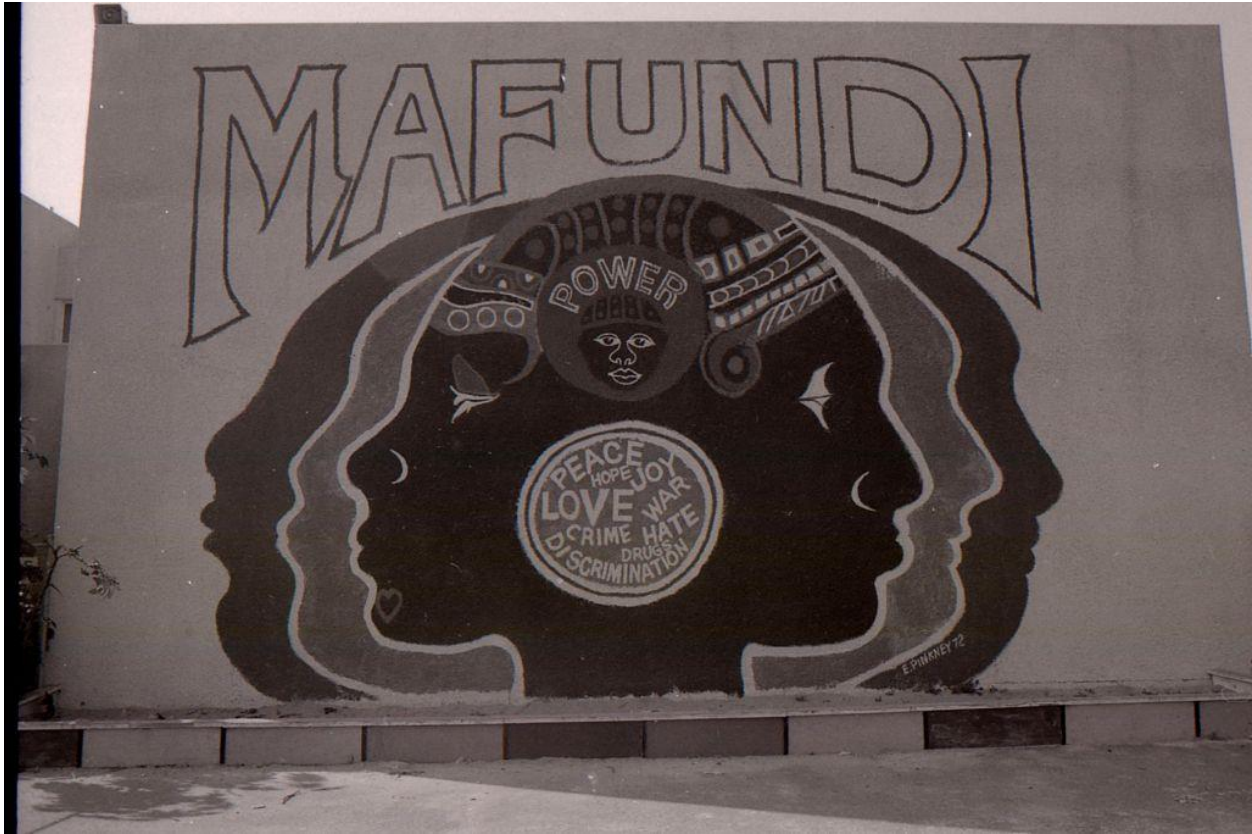


Figure 5: Mafundi mural, 1972, Mural Conservancy of Los Angeles.

Watts Happening Cultural Center  
Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA  
County and State



**Figure 6:** Watts Neighborhood Center, circa 1981, Herald Examiner Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.