



Orciari, Veronica. "Review: 'Black Is Beautiful: The Kwame Brathwaite Story,'" *Cineuropa*, October 20, 2025.



Kwame Brathwaite  
*Mer*, 1968  
Archival pigment print, mounted and framed

World-premiered at the BFI London Film Festival as part of the official competition, Yemi Bamiro's *Black Is Beautiful: The Kwame Brathwaite Story* tells of the life and art of Kwame Brathwaite, an activist and photographer who started the "black is beautiful" movement in 1960s Harlem, which eventually spread around the world. Born Gilbert Ronald, Brathwaite changed his name to honour Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of independent Ghana.

Brathwaite spent his life capturing black American history, photographing and befriending its leading figures. He also created grassroots fashion shows (dubbed "Naturally") aimed at celebrating black beauty and Afrocentrism during a time of controversy. Forgotten for decades, his legacy was revived in the 2010s after his son rediscovered his vast photo archive, with family, friends and admirers working to honour his impact before his passing in 2023. Featured in the documentary, together with Kwame's son and wife Sikolo, are actors Gabrielle Union and Jesse Williams, and singer Alicia Keys, among others.

*Black Is Beautiful: The Kwame Brathwaite Story* is an extraordinary testament to how documentaries can be adapted for a more general audience without losing authenticity in their storytelling techniques. Undoubtedly, the topic is strong enough to have been captivating regardless of its technical aspects, but thankfully, Yemi Bamiro's hand also keeps all of the threads perfectly in sync. There's a natural balance that's struck between the usage of talking heads and archival footage – a feat rarely achieved. The film also boasts perfect pacing thanks to its seamless editing, thoughtful use of music and vibrant animated captions.

The number of photographs taken by Kwame (the film itself suggests that all of them are either by him or of him) is remarkable, and during the documentary, it's possible to glimpse some of the most influential figures from the past century, like Muhammad Ali, Nina Simone and the Jackson Five. This is indeed what allows the film to be such an easy watch for any viewer, while still maintaining its identity and authenticity. The doc is striking for its poignant approach to the topic, and can easily be imagined as part of an art-gallery exhibition or as a relaxed Sunday-afternoon watch at the cinema or on TV. It is appropriate for all sorts of mediums, and for that reason, one can only hope it attains the reach, appreciation and lasting visibility it truly deserves.

Bamiro has chosen a very interesting protagonist, who has definitely been forgotten by mainstream history, and has allowed his documentary to be a choral experience, telling of the struggles and successes of a whole community, as opposed to focusing solely on his main character. There is little – if anything – negative to note about this wonderfully crafted work. It is emotional when needed, without ever feeling forced or manipulative; informative and insightful, without seeming pretentious or didactic; and perfectly paced, maintaining its momentum without feeling rushed. A true gem.

*Black Is Beautiful: The Kwame Brathwaite Story* was produced by London-based Misfits Entertainment (which is also handling world sales) and the USA's Wayfarer Studios.