BIGGS
MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

America's 250 Years:

Poetic Responses

In commemoration of 250 years of American history, acclaimed poets and spoken word artists engaged with the Bigg's Museum collection, creating original poetic responses. This program was curated in collaboration by poets Joyce Enzor Maust and Dennis Spence.



THE SPRINTER - DENNIS SPENCE

Assume set position.
And remain.
Remain under the scrutiny of constant supervision
until you are liberated by the blast of a gun.
Liberated to run.
To run for your life.
Or maybe even liberated from this life.
Hold set position.
Better yet Freeze...
Like ICE.
Because if you flinch,
you will be disqualified from this Race.
This race you have the right to be in.
And even still, you will be informed that you do not belong.
Hold set position.
And then fly.
Fly like the wind.
Just be careful if you win.
Beat the Master at his own game
in front of the public eye and watch him cry "DEI".
He may even imply that you should add a "-TY"
Take first place too many times
And watch a steady lengthening of the finish line.
25 decades of raising the bar.
And still you rise to all occasions.
Hold set position.
Find your lane.
And continue to take what is yours.
Go!

Inspired by Biggs Collection Work: "The Sprinter" by R. Tait McKenzie

THE PIRATE - TORREY MALEK

On a museum wall this backwater sits
at the throat of a cove off Delaware Bay,
marsh-mottled, mud-brown, swallowing sound,
this inlet's stillness where our pirate lies,
red sash slung low, his boat on amber glass.

There he lurks, hunched in his little skiff,
a worn wool cap pulled tight over his ears,
his face still flushed from sunburn and from rum,
as if his veins were rigging, bones turned spars.

He could have gone aloft on a brig at Henlopen,
worked up from the Carolinas with a Caribbean crew,
then, when a share was worth the stealing, slipped to this reedy creek,
into a cave, and left the law and his shipmates counting him drowned.

It is not hunger that hung him here,
but how this cove slowed and thinned his once simmering blood,
how the brackish surface handed back his measuring stare,
a tribunal he thought he'd slipped past, even in these shallows.

So he waits. Rifle ready on the gunwale. He listens
for rope-creak in the weedy wind, for a hull
edging in from the furrowed sea, for one small chance
to test the old temper: schooner, skipjack, sloop.

And we stand under gallery light, in the galley of his heart,
already his crew, already braced to board
the next deck he dares.

Inspired by Biggs Collection Work: "The Pirate" by Frank E. Schoonover.

BRANDYWINE CREEK PREAMBLES - JOANN BALINGIT

1. Be it known I was born in deciduous Forest though I appear to come from Sea.

2. In the year of my birth, billion-year-old Rock. Appalachia dapple grey.

3. I looked up at those loaves like a three-year-old met with giant mother's naked ass. I watered her Toes. I ran and ran.

4. It's good not to be dead I knew, in my own lap with the mourning dove.

5. Water drinkers hovered around me. Piedmont to fall line, grandparents to parents, coastal plain to marsh, my world of voices and sharp claws.

6. A high song spills from me and quiets never, not for Flood–

7. On summer weekends the city children the city children the city children ride their vinyl creatures down my Shoals.

8. I remember a chorus fell, old growth fell, white village growth, villagers' low chorus with musket-fire, thunder-fire cloud crack, downpour, the People pouring blood. The Eagle's white face and tail.

9. I am history of Moss and Temperature.

BRANDYWINE CREEK PREAMBLES - JOANN BALINGIT (CONT.)

10. blocked bombed dammed deeded bridged diked drunk fished prayed-in swum dived-into dredged dreaded diverted disregarded painted sung splashed waded drowned-in longed-for named named named

11. And more than once they set fire to my sleeves and petticoats. Jack in the Pulpit, Trout Lily. Mother's crowns towered down, pinning each other across my slender back. I turned blue, like the Sky.

12. How is it I've become my own Mother? Sing in her treble voice? Take her mouth to bed?

13. At night the shooting Stars tack tulip trees to heaven.
14. Father, my Father, wherever you are there is always a body upstream.

15. History of fishing spider, shad, wolf, eel. Bog turtle, heron, peeper, bear. Our Salamander of the Wet Perpetua.

16. Always I am leaving home. Always I am coming home.

17. I looked up and the ash were back, both white and green, sycamores, beech, swamp maple. Oak, centuries of them. Last night's rain dripped from their leaves onto my silver face.

Inspired by Biggs Collection Work: "Landscape-Brandywine" by Henry Lea Tatnall

MAE MAFCO SPEAKS TO HER CREATOR - SHELLEY BLUE GRABEL

Are you here to see me again?
I do not avert my eyes.
Does my directness
discomfort you?
You're the one who brush-stroked
the sharp lines that define
my forehead, nose and cheekbones.

I am assuming you had a
Cezanne in mind here
when you made the table off kilter
to highlight the bourbon in my hand.
You have caught me off guard this evening.

The harsh light of that bare bulb
spotlights my face, my chicken neck.
My dress so full of Savannah foliage
How I long for that
sweet savage warmth
of the long Georgia nights.

Yes, I smoke fat hand rolled
cigarettes, drink harsh Bourbon, and
will always call you out on your shit.
I may be a muckspout,
but at least I'm no dead hoofer.
I have danced the shine off
many a wooden floor.
You never knew that did you?
Maybe you should have
added a good jazz piano
to this dreary scene.
Matisse would have used
so many more colors.

MAE MAFCO SPEAKS TO HER CREATOR - SHELLEY BLUE GRABEL (CONT.)

I ain't got time for bullshit,
let's make this short.
You came to see me – do you know why?
You look confused.
Sit right here.

I sound tired you say,
my voice like grinding stones.
Where have you been?
Around and back to where you stand.
Wanted to see what you made, huh?
Looking back is dangerous.

Remember, you the one put me down
on this old canvas exactly as I am,
all hard angled and mean.
Don't blame me when it
all goes to hell in a handbasket.
Get one good look at me.
Quick before someone else
tries to round out my edges,
or paint me out of the picture.

Inspired by Biggs Collection Work: "Portrait of Mae Mafco" by Edward Loper Sr.

AMERICAN ART AT THE BIGGS - TINA RILEY

Each week I come to this place in the center of town
I wander up, down, and all around
Then I sit sulking with my face frowned

Because after pondering what I see
There are no reflections here of me
Not even painted images of strange fruit on a tree

Perhaps I am behind the mask-where many say I belong
A closer look reveals my Indian cousin dancing to a song
So, it's not me---I was mistaken---I was wrong!

I've known rivers more ancient than this
Yet I am not in these scenes, something is amiss
It is as if hues of brown didn't even exist

I too, sing the American dream
"I am right here!" from behind the walls I can hear my ancestors scream
Yet, I remain absent from these scenes- or *so it seems*

Perhaps there is no face here that resembles mine,
But I have been here all the time

For no artist can deny what I am
I am the tree
I am the mask
I am the river
I am the American Dream
I AM art.

Inspired by Biggs Collection Works: "Autumn Landscape" by John Francis Murphy; "Indian Dancer" by Frank E. Schoonover, and "Delaware River in Winter" by Walter Elmer Schofield

BLUE MOON - FRANETTA MCMILLIAN

I bore you while still a child myself.
Fourteen and ignorant,
fourteen and scared,
but I loved you
from your first cry,
born under a bright blue moon.

I didn't have much
but I gave you all I had:
milk from my newly swollen breasts,
clothes my friends had thrifted,
lullabies the village mothers taught me.

Often I wonder if I did a bad thing.
This world is hardly rosy
and the stars never quite align.
Who am I to plant a flower
in such cruel soil?

So no, I can't promise you an easy life,
but I will pledge my heart.
Hear it as it beats
as I carry you close
traveling under this bright blue moon.

Inspired by Biggs Collection Work: "Blue Child" by Rebecca Raubacher

LIFE SPEAKS - BARRY DSP MERRILL

Should I talk about the
day before

conversing on topics
not to be ignored

Thoughts of the man I
should have been

wishing for a second
chance to try and win

Times moving on at
a steady pace

courses are Uncharted
trying to reach my place

Hoping when I get there
I truly belong

pathway seems so clear
pray I'm not wrong

If it is flawed I'll
continue to carry on

searching and searching
every day is a new dawn

The situation continues
to be repeated

recycled until the journey
is completed

Only then may I rest
from

the thoughts of the day
before

Sojourn accomplished
no

need for discussions
anymore

Inspired by Biggs Collection Work: historic staircase

WET PAINT - DOMINIQUE FOREHAND (THE POETIC CREATRESS)

As a man I stand here
A man of three
Man from me and the ones that came before

See, where I was born I was raised to lead without a chance to sort out me
I was sorting land and trades and how to withstand the change from 300 years ago to now
And how it will affect tomorrow made me
I mean
US, no never mind because it was OUR plan
The one made for me before I was born

A product of an environment that any shade darker than me calls
"Evil"

I was once a little boy in a big world who was told it was all mine if I
"Walk like this!"
And
"Talk like that!"

Because it honors my skin and separates me from them just for a little black girl to tell my story 250 years later all from the seeing the glistening pain painted in my eyes To tell the HIStory that was made for me

WET PAINT - DOMINIQUE FOREHAND (THE POETIC CREATRESS) CONT.

Eyes heavy with duty Heart worn from war Arms folded holding on to the little boy who wanted to be a peace maker not the president The one who wanted to raise free-range horses not slave cattle A boy who was once overjoyed by his daddy stepping over the threshold after a long day Vanished after stepping into his shoes over that same threshold The one whose walls I am painted in

All that I knew was the world was mine if I
"Walk like this!"
And
"Talk like that!"

Because it honors my skin and separates me from them just for a little black girl to tell my story 250 years later just by seeing the glistening pain painted in my eyes as i stand next to a man that was made for me And me for him

Waist cinched holding on to the rest of the little girl I was never allowed to be because carrying legacy was just as important as having a say so in who i give my body to Betted on and sold like the ones that dress me before dinner

WET PAINT - DOMINIQUE FOREHAND (THE POETIC CREATRESS) CONT.

Agirl who was a woman by 13
Prepped to carry something much bigger than her even though she was taught that lifting a finger would diminish her value
And
Raising her voice was disrespectful to

"Everything WE have built!"

Who knew that wet paint could take so long to dry
I wonder if the cries of who I wanted to be at 5 keeps my portrait damp
Every decade a new stroke adding color to white
No justification on how we built legacy on the
"Land of the free"

Just the product of our environment that any shade darker than me calls "Evil"

Wanting to make our forefathers proud and honoring mothers self-sacrifice in order to carry something much greater than us

Inspired by Biggs Collection Work: Mastiff Ewing and Jane Hunter Ewing by Charles Wilson Peale.

CURTAINS FOR THUNDER BEINGS - REBECCA "LITTLE TURTLE WHO SEES" JACKSON-SQUARE

Far north of these lands
Close to where
the land and sky meet
Is a portal to Hinu
The thunder spirit;
Who rests and exists
To remind us of
Gallons upon gallons
of water falling-
No,
fighting to fall
When you land there-
you find yourself still,
To experience
The Droplets
stinging the skin
The pound
of rushing water
And the physical shaking
of your chest
as you near it,
All to prove the
undeniable;
that the water
Is greater than us.

At The time of these falls
In this scene-
The paint tells a tale
Of fantasy that
Makes for a majestic
Yet
imagined naked land-
In the stillness
Of the paint, The land still full of its caretakers the originals- OGs The Plants, animals, people and droplets Fit harmoniously in the "peace" of the painting But the truth In this landscape, In this masterpiece Keeps its visitors curious- The keepers of the great gateway Have been removed by then And by now, Land taken Blood shed And quickly "Repainted" The Stories of these falls And people Displaced not disoriented; As They continue to watch the gateway- The tribal people The **Haudenosaunee**
land lovers,
Peace holders
earth keepers
Gate keepers
The **SENECA** as they are-
Continue to know
their contract
with the earth,
sky and spirit
The curtain
to the thunder beings
Mystifies by mysteries
To all who visit
And the Hinu-
waits
Still resting
Listens
for a call
from their people

#poem

Inspired by Biggs Collection Work: "Horseshoe Falls" by James Hamilton

AS SOON AS SHE LOOKS AT YOU - VAUGHN R. JOHNSON HILTON

As soon as she looks at you
you feel her, even hear her.
You're captivated
by her demonstrative face.

She overwhelms you,
emotionally drains you,
dominates all the air
in your space.

You follow each brushstroke.

Her features
a subtle blend.
Look again.

Her wider nose.
Her puffy hair.
Every strand in place.
This woman,
perfectly captured on canvas.

The sassy expression
so clear to see.
Her demeanor,
painted eighty-six years ago.
I hereby proclaim
she's related to me.

Leonard Loper, Sr. painted her in 1940.
Most Delaware cultural venues
were segregated.
Aunt Jemima caricatures,
obscene and bawdy,
were the illustrations
featured
and celebrated.

This year begins America's celebration.
Two Hundred Fifty years of independence.

She will glorify stories
of becoming a nation,
mention slavery
as an *unfortunate happenstance*.

Whenever *I* mention slavery,
I'm told to move on.

The One Hundred Eighty-Eight years
of discrimination,
including the twenty-two years
after I was born.
Contradicts America's
"exceptionalism" conversation.

Sixty-two years ago,
the Civil Rights Bill was signed.
Mae's portrait
being sixty-four years old by then.
It was the year
white America lost its mind.

Organizing racist, powerful,
extremely rich,
white men.

The next few years,
those who looked like Mae and me
excelled
in ways the majority never expected.

AS SOON AS SHE LOOKS AT YOU - VAUGHN R. JOHNSON HILTON (CONT.)

Electing a Black U.S. president
and a Black woman VP
resulted in systemic racism
immediately resurrected.

Mae's portrait conveys self-confidence.
I know she had stories to tell.
Racism would be part of her
experience.
one she would have navigated well.

And now, today,
we are here.
You.
Mae.
And me.

At the onset of America's
250th Anniversary.
"The land of the brave,
the home of the free."
This phrase America claims to be
has not yet become a reality.

Not only for those
like Mae and me.
We must eliminate
white supremacy.
We must fight
to solidify
our democracy.
The time has passed
for complacency.

If you're white and poor,
come join me.
Trust me:
your rights are in jeopardy.

So happy birthday, America
from Mae and Me.

This is the year
we must guarantee
America as the land
of the brave
and the home
of the free.

Inspired by Biggs Collection Work: "Portrait of Mae Mafco" by Edward Loper Sr.

RISE AND FLY - YALONDA JD GREEN, PhD.

Keisha opens the door: azure top pecan skin coily black hair her face angles & shadows brow so straight she balances worlds above her nose pulls you into a tight rocking hug & you know you're home she's pointing to a space to set down your pitcher of hibiscus tea & faygo red pop by the fat homegrown watermelon showing off its glossy black seeds

She might not smile much in pictures or on her indigo days but that girl can burn so the house smells good & her tone is warm as she puts you to work with a baby, gon head & move that red velvet next to the tea cakes that auntie fixed then grab you a plate serving whiffs of grandmama's red beans & rice & your daddy's ribs & you know it's Juneteenth

frankie beverly blasts in the backyard & anita baker croons good love in the kitchen the baked beans are almost ready so you glide through the house guided by the clatter of double sixes dropped from a crown royal bag into the boneyard & you know it's a party because Tisha's got the aunties doing the newest hustle ballrooming with red cups & boots on the ground

But your heart is heavy heavy because your old man ain't walking right & times are too tight so Keisha escorts you past the cousins playing spades hollering about running a boston & they bet not overbid or renege or talk across the table & then you know you're safe from being anybody's partner since they still ain't forgave you for cutting your brother's ace in '08

In her quiet sitting room where the herbs & jars rest Keisha clips you a little mint for your tea & high john for your mojo then pulls out a haint blue cloth fragrant with cinnamon & mugwort protecting cards charged by whispers & prayers you know these cards shuffled & smoothed in your madea's madea's rough hands holding dreams & answers for you

This deck is as old as the small card table small yet sturdy & your fingers follow the gilded top tracing the patterns ebony & mahogany & you know you're loved by the familiar shadows that curl around you ever faithful the table waits under your palms as Keisha pulls some cards suits & spreads to help you stand up straighter in case your man doesn't find his way back home

RISE AND FLY - YALONDA JD GREEN, PhD. (CONT.)

Now Keisha's taking somebody's spot ready to run the table like her grandaddy whose daddy was a pullman porter taught her bid whist mixed with stories of freedmen on 20 hour shifts
serving sleepers from detroit to miami & you know they were tired with nowhere to sleep so brothers played cards with rolled sleeves smacking jokers & bidding high to claim the kitty

Keisha makes y'all plates of rum cake fish & spaghetti & deviled eggs or potato salad if there's even any left so the only weight you carry from her door is collard greens & peppers from her
garden & bellies full of hospitality tended in the same black soil & you know that you know you're free anywhere there's a Keisha who loves playing cards & throws a damn good party

After Elizabeth Catlett's lithograph,"Keisha M." (2008)
the mahogany, ebony, and white pine card table at
the Biggs Museum in Delaware

YALONDA JD GREEN'S POET NOTES

I wrestled to write this poem. Despite having a clear, even visceral, reaction to my chosen artifacts, writing continually stalled. From the beginning, I knew the three art pieces I wanted to talk about:the card table circa 1815-1820 (1992.116), Still Life with Broken Watermelon circa1825 (2004.439) by James Peale, and Keisha M (2008) (2023.4) by Elizabeth Catlett. My mind immediately tied itself to a house party. Like the ones my parents threw when was small and supposed to be upstairs sleeping. With the watermelon, I flipped to Juneteenth. Red everything rules Juneteenth: watermelon, hibiscus tea or red pop, red velvet cake, and barbecue ribs. Because of the card table, I dove into researching Black folks' card games: Tunk/Tonk, Spades, and Bid Whist. Even Uno because house rules like stacking Draw 4s override anything Mattel can say in their funky little rule book. Card parties are cultural gatherings that grew from clandestine meetings on plantations, evolving from playing cards made from scraps of paper to cutting the highest spade on the table with the little joker in a poker deck (and deuces wild).

I delved so deeply into Keisha's house and the party and the Blackness of it all, that I forgot that this was supposed to be a response to America250, recognizing 250 years since the signing of the Declaration of Independence. And eventually, the disconnect clicked: Black folk in this country, regardless of the century, have always found refuge in each other, have refined slop into delicacies, found the truth despite outlawed literacy, made music with the body and whatever may be at hand, and created collective moments of Black joy under threat of the lash, or the noose, castration or jim crow, segregated militaries, segregated jazz clubs, redlined swathes of cities surrounded by concrete, separation from the land and its promise that if you lovingly tend, it will lovingly grow and feed. The destruction of Black settlements and banks and schools and utopias burned down or flooded to make a lake by the jealous and the mean, forced sterilization, purposely untreated syphilis, and withheld anesthesia because Black women don't feel pain.

YALONDA JD GREEN'S POET NOTES (CONT.)

Through heroin, crack, and cointelpro, mass incarceration, stop and frisk, the snatching of lives and dignity and human rights, stolen babies and murders of the unarmed in the streets or in their own homes, there has always been a table somewhere—makeshift or sturdy mahogany, foldable or glass-topped. A table where somebody is shuffling or cutting or dealing cards, sliding double 6 dominoes from the boneyard, sipping a little something something and laughing loud, but perhaps not too loud.

Within every moment since 1776, Black folks have done what Black folks do: sourced and sustained sanctuary in an inhospitable nation, nevertheless built by their sweat and brilliance. This is the origin and animus of my poem, "Rise and Fly."

POET BIOGRAPHIES

Torrey Francis Malekis an American poet from Greenville, Delaware of Persian descent. In 2023, he was shortlisted for the Letter Review Prize for Poetry and served as Poet Laureate of Valley Forge Military Academy. His work has appeared in the *Broadkill Review* and regularly in the *Plants & Poetry Journal*.

Barry D. Merrill, known to many as **DSP**-DoingSomething Positive, is a dynamic spoken word artist, retired Fire Captain, and lifelong community advocate. With a voice full of purpose and poetry, Barry brings lived experience, hard-earned wisdom, and undeniable heart to every stage he graces. Originally from Camden, New Jersey, Barry served his community for over two decades as a firefighter and fire captain. Now, through his company S.W.A.Y. LLC, and as co-founder of the M&B Make It Better Foundation, he continues to inspire and uplift through storytelling and mentorship. "I believe words can heal. They can break chains, open hearts, and spark change," Barry shares. His work is grounded in his faith, service, and a belief in the power of positivity. His performances are more than entertainment-they're soul-stirring moments meant to connect, challenge, and encourage. A recipient of the Martin Luther King Medal of Freedom Award, Barry uses every opportunity to speak life and hope into those around him. "I'm not here just to perform," he says. "I'm here to remind people of their power-and to leave something positive behind."

Franetta McMillian has been writing ever since her mother taught her how to hold a pencil. Her poems, artwork, essays, and fiction have appeared in Dreamstreets, Gargoyle, and Quartet, among others. She has published several zines throughout her lifetime, the most recent of which is the persona, Fat Black Girl In A Wheelchair which is available at the blurb.com storefront. She also served as a guest editor for Quartet, a journal dedicated to poetry from women over 50 from September 2024 to May 2025. She has published a novel, Love in the Time of Unraveling, which has been expanded into a streaming audio tale series from Spoken Press, The Crescent Chronicles.

Dennis Spence has been writing and performing on stages ever since falling in love with the craft in high school twenty years ago. From competing on Slam stages such as the International World Poetry Slam competition in Charlotte, NC to promoting local community events and open mics in Delaware for artists to reveal their truest forms of expression, Dennis is always yearning to work with other creatives to encourage others to experience this journey with him, advocating for all arts, especially spoken word poetry.

POET BIOGRAPHIES

JoAnnBalingit is a writing teacher and former librarian who served as Delaware poet laureate 2008 to 2015. Her poems and essays appear in *The Common, The Nation, POETRY, The Rumpusand Words for House Story* (2013). New visual poems from her hybrid form memoir-in-progress are forthcoming at Asian American Writers Workshop *The Margins*. Her work explores immigration stories and family secrets, sibling loss and love, and coming of age in 70's central Florida. She's been supported by the Fulbright Scholar program, Hedgebrook, Bread Loaf Writers, Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation and Macondo Writers. Her favorite Philippine street food is TAHO!

Tina L Riley is a multi-passionate teacher and storyteller whose artistic interests include a diverse array of mediums including mixed media, drama, and writing. The various artforms she practices are informed by her lived experience and serve as a catalyst for personal healing, self-expression and transformation. Armed with the innate therapeutic power of art Tina uses her role as a Professional Teaching Artist to bring creativity to as many people as possible. Tina is active in both the healing arts and youth education spaces. She has been curating and offering art programming for neighborhood children since she herself was a youth. Tina is the founder of Tina Riley IMAGINariums which is the vehicle she uses to offer creativity to her community.

Rebecca "Little Turtle Who Sees" Jackson-Square has been creating art since age seven, using mixed media for storytelling and self-discovery. A proud Two-Spirit Indigenous artist and published poet, her work reflects reconnection, resilience, and reclamation. Adopted out of her tribe in the late 1970s, she reunited with her birth family two years ago and re-grounded with the Nanticoke Tribe of Millsboro, Delaware. For over a decade, Rebecca has taught community and youth arts. Her work, inspired by East Coast Powwows and relationships with nature and spirits, embodies Indigenous rights and adoption themes. An experienced educator with over 25 years in community work, she uses art as a bridge between tradition and transformation, honoring ancestors through creative expression.

Vaughn R. Hilton is a poet and frequent open-mic reader. Originally from Stamford, Connecticut, she retired after a career as an Executive Assistant in corporate legal, television, and advertising. Her poetry draws from lived experience, observation, and a lifelong attention to the power of words.

POET BIOGRAPHIES

Dominique Forehand,knownas TheePoeticCreatress, is a Delaware-based spoken word artist and published author whose work centers on honesty, healing and self-love. Blending personal narrative with powerful performance, she has performed across communities and on stages including NAMI Delaware. Featured in Hold the Line – Volume 4 and with more works forthcoming, Dominique continues to evolve her craft. She is currently expanding her artistic reach through new creative projects and performances that continue to inspire and connect.

Shelley Blue Grabel's first book, *The Fourteenth Witch*, was published in 1975 by Persephone Press. Her second book, *Dowry Burnings,* a chapbook published by Broadkill River Press March 2022, won 1st place in the 2023 Delaware Press Association Contest. Her poems appear in *OneWordat a Time Anthology* – Rehoboth Beach *WritersGuild Poets. Devil'sParty PressAnthology Solstice, Gargoyle Magazine, Quartet,Delaware Bards, The Broadkill Review, Schuylkill Valley Journal, Delaware Poetry Review and The Cape Henlopen Poets.*

Yalonda JD Green, PhD (she/her) is a vocalist, poet, educator, and librarian whose transdisciplinary experiments encircle the lives and afterlives of Black women and their girlhoods. She explores the nexus between song, story, communal memory, and improvisational performance. Yalonda's creative work thrives on page and stage, engaging and transforming spaces of all kinds. She is a 2026 Delaware Department of the Arts Individual Artist Fellowship recipient and Cave Canem fellow, awarded residencies at the Storyknife Writer's Retreat, Fine Arts Work Center, Delaware Writers Retreat, and Bethany Arts Community. Most recently, her poetry has appeared in Inkwell, with work forthcoming in *Swamp Ape Review, Diode Poetry Journal,* and a co-edited collection, *Signed, Sealed, Delivered: the Motown Poetry Revue* with Madville Publishing. She is also a vocal artist with the ensemble, Elevation, and a new member of Wilmington, Delaware's rich creative community. In her workshops, creative keynotes, and live performances, Dr. Ya always urges folks to embrace our voices and raise them collectively. Together, we have the power to sing ourselves—and one another—free and whole.



"Reflections: 25 Objects for 250 Years of Delaware Historywillbeonview at the BiggsMuseumofAmerican Art for all of 2026.