



Wednesdays are dedicated to Black Women in Art

Bisa Butler: Stitching Black History into Vibrant Quilted Portraits

The Visionary Textile Artist Transforming Portraiture

Bisa Butler isn't just an artist—she's a storyteller, weaving Black history, culture, and identity into stunning quilted masterpieces. Known for her **life-sized, technicolor portraits**, Butler reimagines historical and everyday Black figures with fabric, turning quilting into a powerful medium of fine art.

A Journey from Paint to Fabric

Raised in South Orange, NJ, Butler discovered her artistic talent early—winning a blue ribbon at just **four years old!** She honed her craft at **Howard University**, studying under legends like **Loïs Mailou Jones** and **Elizabeth Catlett** before earning a Master's in Art from Montclair State University. It was there that a **Fiber Arts class changed everything**—leading her to embrace fabric as her primary medium.

From the Classroom to the Global Art Scene

Before becoming a full-time artist, Butler spent **13 years as a high school art teacher**, inspiring the next generation. Now, her work is showcased in major museums, including:

 **The Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture**

 **The Art Institute of Chicago**

 **The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston**

 **The Los Angeles County Museum of Art**

Recent Highlights

- **2022 Gordon Parks Foundation Fellowship Winner**
- **Exhibited at Art Basel Switzerland with Jeffrey Deitch Gallery**
- **Honorary Doctorate from Bloomfield College**

Why Bisa Butler's Work Matters Now

In a time where Black stories deserve amplification, Butler's art does more than capture images—it **honors legacies, sparks conversations, and preserves history through**

textiles. Her quilted figures vibrate with energy, dignity, and resilience, ensuring that Black presence is seen and celebrated in museums worldwide.

💡 “I made a portrait quilt for my grandmother on her deathbed, and I have been making art quilts ever since.” – Bisa Butler

Howardena Pindell: A Visionary Breaking Boundaries in Art & Activism

Howardena Pindell’s journey in the art world is one of resilience, innovation, and unwavering commitment to both abstraction and activism. From breaking barriers as MoMA’s first Black curator to creating groundbreaking works that challenge racism, sexism, and exclusion, Pindell’s legacy is undeniable.

✨ A Pioneer in Abstraction

Pindell’s signature **Spray Dot paintings**—intricate layers of hand-punched dots—push the boundaries of color, texture, and space. Through these meticulously crafted works, she developed a distinct visual language rooted in both structure and spontaneity.

🎬 Art as Protest

In her powerful video piece *Free, White and 21* (1980), Pindell confronts the art world’s racism head-on, playing both herself and a dismissive white critic. Her raw testimony and satirical critique remain as relevant today as ever.

🏛️ A Trailblazer in the Art World

- **First Black curator** at The Museum of Modern Art
- Co-founder of **A.I.R. Gallery**, the first women’s cooperative gallery in the U.S.
- Distinguished professor at SUNY Stony Brook

🔥 A Legacy of Influence

Pindell’s work spans decades, addressing critical social issues—**homelessness, war, apartheid, and more**—while staying deeply personal. Her pieces are held in major institutions like MoMA, The Met, and The Whitney, ensuring her impact will be felt for generations.

“Even though early on, my work faced a lot of rejection, I just kept going. I just didn’t give up.” – Howardena Pindell

Lynette Yiadom-Boakye: The Visionary Painter Reshaping Black Portraiture

🖼️ Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, a distinguished British artist and writer, is renowned for her evocative portraits of imagined individuals. Her work has been showcased in numerous exhibitions worldwide. As of March 16, 2025, her current and upcoming exhibitions include:

Auras: Portraits of Women by British Artists

This group exhibition at Lévy Gorvy Dayan in London features Yiadom-Boakye's work alongside other prominent British artists. The exhibition runs from March 6 to June 8, 2025.

♥ Reimagining Representation

Yiadom-Boakye doesn't paint real people—she paints **possibilities**. Her imagined Black figures exist outside of history, outside of stereotypes, and entirely on their own terms. They are timeless, yet deeply present.

📖 The Intersection of Art & Literature

A writer as well as a painter, her work is steeped in storytelling. The titles of her pieces—*A Passion Like No Other*, *Elephant In The Room*—hint at narratives beyond the canvas, drawing us into a world where every brushstroke whispers a story.

🏛️ A Force in the Global Art Scene

- **Tate Britain's landmark exhibition (2023)**
- Works in major institutions like MoMA, The Met, and Guggenheim
- Turner Prize-nominated & hailed as redefining contemporary portraiture

🌍 Why This Matters Now

In a time when Black stories are still underrepresented in major art spaces, Yiadom-Boakye's work **centers Black presence with quiet power and radical imagination**. Her portraits are not about struggle—they are about **existence, joy, and depth**.

✨ **“I write about the things I can't paint, and paint the things I can't write about.”**
– Lynette Yiadom-Boakye

🔥 Trailblazer. Innovator. Legacy Maker. 🔥


At 69, when most consider slowing down, **Alma Thomas** was just getting started. She devoted herself fully to painting and made history as the **first Black woman to have a solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum** in 1972.

Her vibrant, rhythmic color field paintings—like *Mars Dust*—not only captured the beauty of nature but also reflected her fascination with space exploration, proving that inspiration knows no limits.

But Alma's story isn't just about art—it's about **resilience, reinvention, and representation**. Born in 1891, she grew up in a segregated America where Black artists

weren't welcome in museums. Decades later, her works now hang in the most prestigious institutions, from the Smithsonian to the White House.

Her words remind us why art matters:




 "Through color, I have sought to concentrate on beauty and happiness, rather than on man's inhumanity to man."

Carrie Mae Weems: The Artist Who Makes America Look in the Mirror


 **b. 1953, Portland, Oregon | Lives & works in Syracuse, NY**


For **40+ years**, **Carrie Mae Weems** has used her art to **expose power, rewrite history, and amplify Black voices**. Her work doesn't just tell stories—it *demand*s reflection.


 **Through photography, film, performance & text, she asks:**

-  *Who holds power?*
-  *Whose stories get told?*
-  *How does history shape our lives today?*

Her Most Iconic Works:




 *Kitchen Table Series* (1990) – A deeply personal yet universal exploration of Black womanhood.

 *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried* (1995-96) – Confronting racism through recontextualized archival photos.

 *And 22 Million Very Tired and Very Angry People* (1989-90) – A poetic fusion of imagery and protest.

Beyond Museums – Art as Activism

Weems doesn't just exhibit; she **mobilizes**. Her projects have sparked dialogue across film, theater, and public spaces.

-  *The Baptism* (2020) – A Lincoln Center tribute to John Lewis & C.T. Vivian.
-  *Grace Notes: Reflections for Now* (2016) – A multimedia performance on Black resilience.
-  *The Shape of Things* – A think-tank-meets-art-installation at Park Avenue Armory & LUMA Arles.

Awards & Legacy:

- ✓ MacArthur "Genius" Grant
- ✓ Hasselblad Award

- ✓ U.S. State Department's Medal of Arts
- ✓ Congressional Black Caucus Foundation's Lifetime Achievement Award

💡 *Her work isn't just seen—it's felt.*

🌿 **Clementine Hunter: Painting the Stories That History Overlooked** 🎨

She didn't start painting until her **50s**—using leftover paints on a window shade. She worked all day on a Louisiana plantation, then painted by night, using **snuff boxes, milk jugs, and even iron pots** as her canvas.

Self-taught and unstoppable, **Clementine Hunter** captured the everyday lives of Black communities in the South—cotton picking, baptisms, funerals, and celebrations. Her art rejected formal rules, instead embracing the raw, honest storytelling of folk tradition.

For years, her work was dismissed. But by the 1970s, it hung in the **Museum of American Folk Art and LACMA**. Still, Clementine never left Louisiana, proving that success doesn't always mean leaving home—it means honoring where you came from.

🔥 A true testament to **creating with what you have, wherever you are.**


🚀 **Marcellina Akpojotor Joins Civitella Ranieri's Prestigious Residency!** 🎨🏰

A force in contemporary African art, **Marcellina Akpojotor** has been selected for the **Civitella Ranieri Foundation's Visual Arts Residency (2025–2026)**—a global incubator for artistic and intellectual exchange housed in a **15th-century castle in Umbria, Italy**.

✨ Rooted in **collage and traditional painting**, Akpojotor's work reclaims Ankara fabric to explore **femininity, identity, and cultural heritage**. Her selection affirms the **global impact of her material and conceptual vision**.

From Lagos to the world, Akpojotor's career has been a journey of excellence—from her early apprenticeship under her father to **solo exhibitions at Rele Gallery** and showcases at **Art Basel Miami, Ross Sutton Gallery, and LA Louver**.

 **This residency is yet another milestone for an artist whose work continues to push the boundaries of contemporary African storytelling.**

Drop a  in the comments if you're excited to see what she creates next!

#MarcellinaAkpojotor #CivitellaRanieri #BlackWomenInArt #AfricanArt #AnkaraCollage
#GlobalArtists #WomenInArt #ReleGallery #ContemporaryArt

Shining a Spotlight on Ijania Cortez

This Women's History Month, I'm highlighting incredible Black women in art like Ijania Cortez, a self-taught fine artist and muralist from Detroit, Michigan. Born in 1990 and deeply inspired by her upbringing in 90s Detroit, Ijania creates work that reflects the resilience, beauty, and vulnerability of Black men in the inner city.

Her practice is rooted in painting but also extends to murals and mixed media. Ijania's portraits are unmistakable, showcasing her subjects in vibrant neon colors that highlight both their individuality and the "man-made conditions" of the city. By placing her subjects in surreal, unnatural environments, she explores the complexities of thriving amidst adversity.

Ijania's work interrogates masculinity with sensitivity, celebrating the strength, vulnerability, and humanity of Black men. Her art creates conversations between the painting and the viewer, compelling us to see her subjects in a new light.

In July 2017, she hosted her first solo exhibition, *A Summer Nativity*, which received acclaim for its profound narratives and unique approach to storytelling through color and form.

As someone deeply committed to her craft and community, Ijania Cortez is a trailblazer who inspires us all to create and connect.

As I reflect on her work, I'm reminded of the importance of elevating local artists who are making an impact in their communities.

Dr. Samella Lewis: The Legacy of a Trailblazing Artist and Historian

“Art is an essential part of our history, our culture, and our future. It must be preserved, celebrated, and understood.” – Dr. Samella Lewis

A Visionary in African American Art

Dr. Samella Lewis (1923–2022) was more than an artist; she was a scholar, educator, and advocate who reshaped the way Black art was documented and appreciated. Known as the "Godmother of African American Art," Lewis used her talents to ensure that Black artists received the recognition they deserved. Through her work as a painter, printmaker, historian, and curator, she built a foundation that continues to support and uplift generations of Black artists.

A Life Dedicated to Art and Education

Born in New Orleans, Louisiana, Lewis showed an early passion for art. She pursued higher education at Dillard University before earning her doctorate in art history at Ohio State University in 1951—becoming the first Black woman to do so. Her academic journey took her across the country, teaching at institutions such as Florida A&M University and California State University, Long Beach.

Beyond teaching, Lewis played a crucial role in documenting African American art history. Her seminal books, including *Art: African American and African American Art and Artists*, remain essential texts in the field.

Champion of Black Artists

Frustrated by the lack of institutional support for Black artists, Lewis took matters into her own hands. In 1976, she founded the *International Review of African American Art*, a publication dedicated to showcasing Black creativity. She also established the Museum of African American Art in Los Angeles, ensuring that Black artists had spaces where their work could be displayed and celebrated.

A Lasting Influence

Dr. Samella Lewis’s contributions to the art world remain immeasurable. Her efforts in education, curation, and publishing laid the groundwork for greater inclusion and appreciation of Black artists. Today, her legacy lives on in museums, books, and the careers of the countless artists she mentored and inspired.

Explore the Legacy:

Visit the Museum of African American Art in Los Angeles to see her influence firsthand. Read *African American Art and Artists* to delve into her critical contributions. Support Black artists and institutions that continue her mission.

Dr. Samella Lewis didn't just document history—she made history. Her work ensures that Black artists and their contributions will never be forgotten.

🔥 BLACK WOMEN IN ART: LORNA SIMPSON – REDEFINING REPRESENTATION 🔥

Lorna Simpson didn't just enter the art world—she transformed it. 📷✨
Emerging as a pioneer of conceptual photography in the 1980s, Simpson disrupted traditional narratives, using image and text to challenge perceptions of race, gender, identity, and memory.

With a BFA in Photography from the School of Visual Arts in New York and an MFA from UC San Diego, Simpson was already reshaping photographic practice when she graduated in 1985. Feeling a deep need to re-examine and redefine photography for contemporary relevance, she crafted works that were both visually striking and conceptually profound.

In the early 1990s, Simpson gained recognition for her large-scale photograph-and-text pieces that confronted narrow and conventional views of identity and history. Her use of unidentified figures invited viewers to engage deeply, reflecting on how race and gender shape human interactions and experiences in America.

🎨 As her practice evolved, she expanded into film and video installations, creating multi-layered narratives that explored identity and desire. Works like *Cloudscape* and *Momentum* use movement, memory, and abstraction to evoke themes of invisibility, representation, and cultural storytelling.

Her more recent works present isolated figures within nebulous spaces, blending photography and ink washes to blur the lines between reality and perception. Through every medium she explores, Simpson continues to push the boundaries of visual storytelling.

Her work is held in the collections of some of the most prestigious institutions, including:

🏛️ The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York

🏛️ The Whitney Museum of American Art

 The Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago

 The Walker Art Center, Minneapolis

 Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art

Simpson has also made her mark internationally, exhibiting at Documenta XI in Germany, the Venice Biennale, and earning the J. Paul Getty Medal in 2019. She is currently represented by Hauser & Wirth.

Lorna Simpson's legacy is undeniable—her work speaks to our collective past, present, and future. She continues to inspire a new generation of artists, thinkers, and visionaries.

✨ Historic Appointment at NOMA! ✨

Anne Collins Smith has been named the inaugural Chief Curator of the New Orleans Museum of Art (NOMA)—making history as the first Black individual to lead its curatorial department.

A proud New Orleans native, Smith brings over two decades of experience, having previously served as Director and Curator at Xavier University of Louisiana and spending nearly 20 years at Spelman College Museum of Fine Art, where she helped secure its first international loans.

Her curatorial vision spans *literary, visual, and performing arts*, with past exhibitions including *PRESENCE: Meditations, Maren Hassinger...Dreaming, Howardena Pindell, and Multiple Choice*. Up next? *Eye Ten, Real Good Hands, and Always a Pleasure*—stay tuned!

At NOMA, Smith is leading major exhibitions, acquisitions, and a partial reinstallation of the museum's permanent collection. She also serves as institutional curator for two groundbreaking retrospectives: Hayward L. Oubre Jr. and Willie Birch.

A 2021 Center for Curatorial Leadership Fellow, Smith serves on the boards of the Association of Art Museum Curators and the New Orleans African American Museum, while also playing a key role in the New Orleans Tourism and Cultural Fund.

Her appointment marks a transformative moment for NOMA and the broader art world, reinforcing a deep commitment to diversity, cultural preservation, and innovative storytelling through art.

🌟 Miriam Uhura: Painting the Future, Honoring the Past 🎨🌟

From Highland Park to the canvas, Miriam Uhura is crafting a new vision of Black identity—one where nostalgia meets futurism, and personal connection shapes collective power.

Her work isn't just art—it's a celebration. Through bold colors and expressive brushstrokes, she invites us into intimate moments that feel both deeply personal and universally resonant. Whether through fine art or body art, Miriam ensures that every subject is seen, valued, and honored.

🔥 Her debut solo exhibition, NOIR STAR, is a visual love letter to Black individuality—where portraiture captures personal style, boldness, and joy.

🔥 *Breaking News in the Arts World!* 🔥

Kristina Newman-Scott has just been named **Vice President for Arts at the Knight Foundation**, a powerhouse in cultural funding that has invested **\$466M+** into the arts since 2005! 🎨🌟

A dynamic leader with **over two decades** of championing arts, culture, and community impact, Newman-Scott brings a multidisciplinary approach—from artist to curator to executive—making her the perfect fit to **shape the future of arts funding nationwide**.

🚀 *Why this matters:*

Knight Foundation fuels groundbreaking programs like **Knight New Work** and **Knight Art + Tech Expansion**, ensuring artists and institutions thrive through innovation, new media, and transformative storytelling. With Newman-Scott at the helm, expect even **bigger investments in artists, new technologies, and cultural infrastructure** across **Detroit, Miami, Philadelphia, San Jose, and more!**

🗣️ From leading **BRIC in Brooklyn** to shaping **Connecticut's cultural policy**, Newman-Scott has made waves in both public and nonprofit arts leadership. She's a **national voice for artist empowerment**, serving on key boards like Americans for the Arts and Brooklyn Arts Council.

💡 *Her Vision:*

“I’ve worked across every corner of the art world, and I bring a multidisciplinary approach that meets artists and organizations where they are in their journey. I look forward to building on Knight Foundation’s incredible legacy.”

📖 *Artists, creatives, and arts leaders—this is your moment!* Expect major opportunities, deeper investments, and a new era of **innovation-driven arts funding**.

📖 **FIRST SOLO EXHIBIT: ART IS MY THERAPY!** 🎨🧠✨

Meet **Jennifer Maples**, a Detroit-born artist whose work turns mental health struggles into **powerful, visual storytelling**. Her first solo exhibition, **Art Is My Therapy**, opens **Friday, March 14, from 4 PM ~ 6 PM at First Merchants Bank, 22635 Woodward Ave, Ferndale, MI 48220** (through April 4)~an unmissable event for anyone who believes in the power of art to heal, connect, and inspire.

Jennifer, born in 1991, discovered her artistic calling after surviving a **traumatic car accident in 2019**. That life-altering experience became the catalyst for *Art Is My Therapy*~a brand and artistic journey dedicated to self-healing, **emotional expression, and mental health advocacy**.

🔥 **A Visual Journey Through Healing** 🔥

Jennifer’s work spans **painting, photography, and mixed media**, offering a deeply personal yet universally resonant perspective on mental health. From **dark, introspective pieces that capture despair to bold, abstract compositions bursting with hope**, her art challenges stigma and invites viewers to engage with their own **emotional landscapes**.

🌟 **Making an Impact in Detroit & Beyond** 🌟

Her work has been exhibited in **local galleries and art fairs**, earning recognition from **mental health advocates and art lovers alike**. Most recently, she was **selected by the City of Detroit** for a major **public art installation in celebration of the 2024 NFL Draft**~a testament to her growing influence in the art world.

💬 “**Art is my therapy~it’s how I process, heal, and connect with others who have faced similar struggles.**” – Jennifer Maples

Her latest work, featured in *Luminosity: A Detroit Arts Gathering at the Charles H. Wright Museum* (April 4, 2025 ~ March 31, 2026), continues to push boundaries, using creativity as a tool for advocacy and healing.

Black Women in Art: Honoring Commissioner Rhonda Welburn

This Black History Month, we shine a light on trailblazing Black women in art and culture. Meet **Rhonda D. Welburn**, a distinguished attorney, leader, and advocate for the arts whose contributions have significantly impacted Detroit's cultural landscape.

Championing the Arts at the Detroit Institute of Arts

Rhonda Welburn's influence extends beyond her legal career into the world of art and culture. As a **Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) Board Member**, she serves as the **Chair of the Governance & Nominating Committee** and remains a dedicated member of the **Collections Committee**. Her work at the DIA underscores her passion for preserving and uplifting art that reflects the diverse stories of our communities.

A Legacy of Leadership and Advocacy

Welburn serves on the boards of the **Fred A. and Barbara M. Erb Family Foundation** and the **DMC Foundation**, championing initiatives that support education, environmental sustainability, and public health—all areas deeply connected to community well-being and cultural enrichment.

Breaking Barriers in Law and Business

Before dedicating her expertise to advancing the arts, Welburn had a groundbreaking legal career at **Dickinson Wright PLLC**, focusing on public finance, municipal law, and banking. She consistently earned accolades, including recognition as one of the **Best Lawyers in America®**, a **Michigan Super Lawyer**, and a **Top Lawyer by DBusiness Magazine**.

Earlier, at **General Motors**, she broke new ground as a mathematician and manager, developing computer-aided design technology and later serving on the company's financial staff.

Black Women in Art: Creating a Cultural Legacy

Through her contributions to the DIA, her leadership in governance and collections, and her service on philanthropic boards, Rhonda Welburn has helped ensure the preservation and celebration of art that reflects the richness of African American and global cultures.

Join the Celebration!

This Black History Month, we honor Rhonda Welburn and other Black women making waves in art and culture. Let's celebrate their stories and contributions to our communities.

Sources:

Michigan Government Official Profile

Detroit Institute of Arts

Dickinson Wright PLLC

Black Women in Art: Celebrating Adenrele Sonariwo

10 Years of Rele Lagos: A Milestone in African Art

Today, February 1st, 2025, in addition to kicking off Black History Month, we celebrate the 10th anniversary of Rele Lagos, the flagship of Rele Art Gallery, founded by Adenrele Sonariwo. With locations in Lagos, London, and Los Angeles, Rele has become a global hub for African contemporary art.

Breaking Boundaries: The First Nigerian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale

In 2017, Sonariwo made history as the lead curator of the first-ever Nigerian Pavilion at the prestigious Venice Biennale. The exhibit featured groundbreaking works by Victor Ehikhamenor, Peju Alatise, and Qudus Onikeku, solidifying Nigeria's place in the global art scene.

Empowering the Next Generation of Artists

Through the Rele Arts Foundation, Sonariwo has launched initiatives like the Young Contemporaries program, providing grants, mentorships, and exhibition opportunities to emerging artists. Her commitment to nurturing talent continues to shape the future of African art.

Global Recognition and Influence

Sonariwo's contributions have earned her numerous accolades, including:

- *The Future Awards Africa* for Arts and Culture (2016)
- *Vogue's* "Five Coolest Women in Lagos" list (2018)
- *New African* magazine's 100 Most Influential Africans (2022)

She's also served as a TEDx speaker, juror for the Dak'art Biennale, and cultural consultant to the Ogun State governor.

Rooted in Tradition, Building a Global Legacy

As the daughter of Oba Michael Sonariwo, the late 18th Akarigbo of Remoland, Adenrele grew up steeped in Yoruba traditions. Her name, meaning “the crown is going back home,” embodies her deep connection to culture and heritage, which inspires her to elevate African art on the world stage.

A Visionary Shifting Narratives

Adenrele Sonariwo’s work is redefining the narrative of African art, showing its depth, diversity, and transformative power. Her galleries across three continents are a testament to what’s achievable with vision, passion, and purpose.

Sources:

Wikipedia

The Guardian

Rele Gallery official website

Join the Celebration!

Let’s continue to support and amplify the voices of Black women in art. Explore Adenrele Sonariwo’s work at ReleGallery and follow her journey as she inspires the world through African art and culture

Edmonia Lewis

Edmonia Lewis stood out to me as the “1st African American and Native American sculptor to earn international recognition with a (USPS) stamp”. Additionally, two of her sculptures are on display at the DIA.

The early days

Edmonia Lewis was the first sculptor of African American and Native American (Mississauga) descent to achieve international recognition. Her father was Black, and her mother was Chippewa (Ojibwa) Indian.

Orphaned at an early age, Lewis grew up in her mother's tribe where her life revolved around fishing, swimming, and making and selling crafts. In 1859 she attended Oberlin College in Ohio, one of the first schools to accept female and Black students. She developed an interest in the fine arts, but an accusation of poisoning, probably racially motivated, forced Lewis to leave the school before graduating. She traveled to Boston and established herself as a professional artist, studying with a local sculptor and creating portraits of famous antislavery heroes. Moving to Rome in 1865, she became involved with a group of American women sculptors and began to work in marble. Sculptors usually hired local workmen to carve

their final pieces, but Lewis did all her own stonework out of fear that if she didn't, her work would not be accepted as original. In addition to creating portrait heads, Lewis sculpted biblical scenes and figural works dealing with her Native American heritage and the oppression of Black people

Lies they told

Kidnapped, beaten and left to die, Edmonia Lewis, a talented artist with both African and Native-American ancestry, refused to abandon her dreams. In the winter of 1862, a white mob had attacked her because of reports that she had poisoned two fellow Oberlin College students, drugging their wine with “Spanish Fly.” Battered and struggling to recover from serious injuries, she went to court and won an acquittal.

Unboxed and unbothered

Though these details are apparently true, after becoming an internationally known sculptor, Lewis used threads of both truth and imagination to embroider her life story, artfully adding to her reputation as a unique person and a sculptor who refused to be limited by the narrow expectations of her contemporaries.

Shattering expectations

Lewis shattered expectations about what female and minority artists could accomplish. “It was very much a man’s world,” says the museum’s curator Karen Lemmey. Lewis, she says, “really broke through every obstacle, and there’s still remarkably little known about her. . . . It’s only recently that the place and year of her death have come to light—1907 London.”

Controlling her narrative

The artist proved to be particularly savvy about winning over supporters in the press and in the art world by altering her life story to suit her audience. “Everything that we know about her really must be taken with a grain of salt, a pretty hefty grain of salt, because in her own time, she was a master of her own biography,” says Lemmey. Lewis shifted her autobiographical tale to win support, but she did not welcome reactions of pity or condescension.

“Some praise me because I am a colored girl, and I don’t want that kind of praise,” she said. “I had rather you would point out my defects, for that will teach me something.”

Her parents

Lewis's life was profoundly uncommon. Named Wildfire at birth, she apparently had a partially Chippewa mother and a Haitian father. Lewis claimed her mother was full-blooded Chippewa, but there is disagreement on this point. That parentage set her apart and added to her "exotic" image. Her father labored as a gentleman's servant, while her mother made Native-American souvenirs for sale to tourists.

After both parents died when she was young, Lewis was reared by maternal aunts in upstate New York. She had a half-brother who traveled west during the Gold Rush and earned enough money to finance her education, a rare opportunity for a woman or a minority in the 19th century. She was welcomed at the progressive Oberlin College in 1859, but her time there was not easy. Even after being cleared of poisoning charges, Lewis was unable to finish her last term at Oberlin following allegations that she had stolen paint, brushes and a picture frame. Despite dismissal of the theft charges, the college asked her to leave with no chance to complete her education and receive her degree.

The generosity of others

She moved to Boston, again with financial assistance from her half-brother. There, she met several abolitionists, such as William Lloyd Garrison, who supported her work.

Unlike white male sculptors, she could not ground her work in the study of anatomy. Such classes traditionally were limited to white men: however, a few white women paid to get a background in the subject. Lewis could not afford classes, so she engaged her craft without the training her peers possessed. Sculptor Edward Brackett acted as her mentor and helped her to set up her own studio.

Success as an artist

Her first success as an artist came from sale of medallions she made of clay and plaster. These sculpted portraits featured images of renowned abolitionists, including Garrison, John Brown and Wendell Phillips, an advocate for Native-Americans. But her first real financial success came in 1864, when she created a bust of Civil War Colonel Robert Shaw, a white officer who had commanded the 54th Massachusetts infantry composed of African-American soldiers. Shaw had been killed at the second battle of Fort Wagner, and contemptuous Confederate troops dumped the bodies of

Shaw and his troops into a mass grave. Copies of the bust sold well enough to finance Lewis's move to Europe.

Choosing Rome

From Boston, she traveled to London, Paris and Florence before deciding to live and work in Rome in 1866. Fellow American sculptor Harriet Hosmer took Lewis under her wing and tried to help her succeed. Sculptors of that time traditionally paid Roman stone crafters to produce their works in marble, and this led to some questions about whether the true artists were the original sculptors or the stone crafters. Lewis, who often lacked the money to hire help, chiseled most of her own figures.

The Death of Cleopatra

While she was in Rome, she created *The Death of Cleopatra*, her largest and most powerful work. She poured more than four years of her life into this sculpture. At times, she ran low on money to complete the monolithic work, so she returned to the United States, where she sold smaller pieces to earn the necessary cash. In 1876, she shipped the almost 3,000-pound sculpture to Philadelphia so that the piece could be considered by the committee selecting works for the Centennial Exhibition, and she went there, too. She feared that the judges would reject her work, but to her great relief, the panel ordered its placement in Gallery K of Memorial Hall, apparently set aside for American artists. Guidebook citations of the work noted that it was for sale.

"Some people were blown away by it. They thought it was a masterful marble sculpture," says Lemmey.

Lewis showed the legendary queen of ancient Egypt on her throne. The lifeless body with head tilting back and arms splaying open portrays a vivid realism uncharacteristic of the late 19th century. Lewis showed the empowered Cleopatra "claiming her biography by committing suicide on her throne," says Lemmey. She believes Lewis portrayed Cleopatra "sealing her fate and having the last word on how she'll be recorded in history," an idea that may have appealed to Lewis.

After the Philadelphia exhibition ended, this *Cleopatra* began a life of her own and an odyssey that removed the sculpture from the art world for more than a century. She appeared in the Chicago Interstate Industrial Expo, and with no buyer in sight within the art world, she journeyed into the realm of

the mundane. Like legendary wanderers before her, she faced many trials and an extended episode of mistaken identity as she was cast in multiple roles. Her first mission was to serve as the centerpiece of a Chicago saloon. Then, a racehorse owner and gambler named “Blind John” Condon bought her to place on the racetrack grave of a well-loved horse named after the ancient leader. Like a notorious prisoner held up to ridicule, the sculpture sat right in front of the crowd at the Harlem Race Track in Forest Park, a Chicago suburb. There, Cleopatra held court while the work’s surroundings morphed.

In the early 1990s, the historical society donated the sculpture to the Smithsonian, and a Chicago conservator was hired to return it to its original form based on a single surviving photograph. Although the museum has no plans for further restoration, Lemmey hopes that digital photo projects at institutions around the world someday may unearth more images of the sculpture’s original state.

Respect demonstrated

During her first year in Rome, she produced *Old Arrow Maker*, which represents a portion of the story of Longfellow’s “The Song of Hiawatha”—a poem that inspired several of her works. White artists typically characterized Native Americans as violent and uncivilized, but Lewis showed more respect for their civilization. This sculpture also resides at the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

Forever Free

Her first major work, *Forever Free (Morning of Liberty)*, was completed a year after her arrival in Rome. It shows a black man standing and a black woman kneeling at the moment of emancipation. Another work, *Hagar*, embodies the Old Testament Egyptian slave Hagar after being ejected from Abraham and Sarah’s home. Because Sarah had been unable to have children, she had insisted that Abraham impregnate her slave, so that Hagar’s child could become Sarah’s. However, after Hagar gave birth to Ishmael, Sarah delivered her own son Isaac, and she cast out Hagar and Ishmael. This portrayal of Hagar draws parallels to Africans held as slaves for centuries in the United States. *Hagar* is a part of the Smithsonian American Art Museum’s collection.

What survived

While many of her works did not survive, some of Lewis's pieces now can be found at the Howard University Gallery of Art, Detroit Institute of Arts, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Baltimore Museum of Art. Lewis recently became the subject of a Google Doodle that pictures her working on *The Death of Cleopatra*. Also, the New York Times featured her on July 25, 2018 in its "Overlooked No More" series of obituaries written about women and minorities whose lives had been ignored by newspapers because of the cultural prejudice that revered white men.

Credit: Smithsonian

Edmonia Lewis once famously said, "I sculpt because it is the language my soul speaks."

Marsha Battle Philpot

I recently watched a video about Detroit's Black Bottom created by Jamon Jordan, Official Historian for the City of Detroit, which included Marsha Battle Philpot. This piqued my interest to learn more about this cultural influencer.

Two things stood out, in addition to a fondness for Black art, both our dads owned record shops and recording studios and we have an affiliation with the DIA, I as a volunteer and Marsha has a board director.

The Detroitist

Marsha Music was born in Detroit and grew up in Highland Park, Michigan. She is the daughter of legendary pre-Motown record producer Joe Von Battle and West Side Detroit beauty and music lover Shirley Battle. Marsha is a former activist and labor leader and a noted speaker. She has contributed to significant Detroit narratives, including *Untold Tales, Unsung Heroes: An Oral History of Detroit's African American Community*, University of Michigan's Living Music oral history project, and *Thanks for the View, Mr. Mies: Lafayette Park, Detroit*, as well as an HBO documentary on the Detroit Tigers. In 2015, she was commissioned to create a poem about Detroit for Tod Machover's acclaimed *Symphony in D*, which she read in performances with Detroit Symphony Orchestra. A Detroit cultural luminary, Marsha was the opening speaker for the July 2016 launch of the Detroit '67 project at the Detroit Historical Museum and was commissioned to create a poem for the Belle Isle Conservancy. Music

received a 2015 Knight Arts Challenge award and was a 2015 New Museum IdeasCity Detroit fellow. In 2018, she lost her husband, the artist David Philpot, and she feels his supportive spirit in this project. Marsha also joined the Board of Directors of the Detroit Institute of Arts in 2020.

Credit: ArtXDetroit

MARSHA MUSIC, JOE'S RECORD SHOP, AND BLACK BOTTOM
Marsha Battle Philpot, also known as Marsha Music, is one of the curators of the Black Bottom and Paradise Valley portions of *In the Neighborhood: Everyday Life on Hastings Street*, JHSM's exhibit in the museum's community gallery.

A self-described "primordial Detroiter" and a "Detroitist," Music is an activist and an acclaimed writer. In 2012 she was awarded a Kresge Literary Arts Fellowship. In 2015 she received a Knight Arts Challenge Award. In 2016 she was the opening speaker for the Detroit Historical Museum's Detroit 67 Project. Music is the daughter of legendary pre-Motown record producer, the late Joe Von Battle. Von Battle's landmark record shop and recording studio are featured in *In the Neighborhood*.

About Joe's Record Shop

Joe Von Battle arrived from Georgia in 1937. After being laid off from the auto plants, in 1945 he met an elder Jewish woman, who was closing her store at 3530 Hastings Street. He acquired it. Joe's Record Shop sold all genres, but was known for the Blues. It was an immediate hit. He also recorded artists, including John Lee Hooker, Della Reese, and Kenny Burrell. He was the sole producer of Rev. C. L. Franklin (whose New Bethel Baptist Church was on Hastings Street). He was first to record Franklin's daughter Aretha, producing her earliest (Gospel) records. In 1960, as the demolition encroached, Joe's Record Shop moved to 12th Street. Battle descended into chronic alcoholism. With the 1967 civil unrest, the business ended. He died in 1973. Joe's Record Shop was a bedrock of the Detroit Sound, part of Hastings Street's cultural legacy.

Credit: Detroit Historical Society

Additional accolades

Music served as a 2019 Kresge Eminent Artist panelist, and was a 2014-2015 Kresge Arts in Detroit Advisory Council member.

Credit: Kresge Arts in Detroit

State of Michigan Special Tribute to Marsha Music, and Spirit of Detroit Award. Both awarded on September 16, 2023.

Credit: Marsha Music

The Detroitist: An Anthology About Detroit

The Detroitist is an anthology of poems and stories about Detroit written by a daughter of Detroit. Natives of Detroit will recognize the places, faces, and history of their city. Newcomers to Detroit will learn about a Detroit that was and is a real locale, not a media-driven invention. Those returning to the Detroit their parents and grandparents fled will realize that they are not here to save Detroit, but to be saved by their new hometown. Words of hope. Words of grief. Words of joy. Words of sadness. Stories about a long-ago time. Stories about today and tomorrow. The Detroitist is a fascinating combination of poetry and prose that will entertain you, engage you, and educate you. The Detroitist is a book about Detroiters, for Detroiters, written by a Detroiter. If you are not already a Detroiter, The Detroitist will probably make you want to be a Detroiter. The Detroitist is about "Detroit Pride," past, present, and future. Marsha Battle Philpot, known in Detroit as "Marsha Music," was born in Detroit and grew up in Highland Park, Michigan. In 2012, she was awarded a prestigious Kresge Literary Arts Fellowship, and in 2015 she received a Knight Arts Award. She is also recognized as an exemplar of Detroit style.

Order here: <https://www.amazon.com/Detroitist-Anthology-About-Detroit/dp/1733317309>

Alison Saar

Born in 1956

Saar credits her mother, acclaimed collagist and assemblage artist Betye Saar, who was highlighted last week, with exposing her to metaphysical and spiritual traditions. Assisting her father, Richard Saar, a painter and art conservator, in his restoration shop inspired her learning and curiosity about other cultures.

Educating Saar

Saar studied studio art and art history at Scripps College in Claremont, California, receiving a BA in art history in 1978. In 1981 she earned her MFA from the Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles. In 1983, Saar became an artist-in-residence at the Studio Museum in Harlem, incorporating found objects from the city environment. Saar completed another residency in Roswell, New Mexico, in 1985, which augmented her urban style with Southwest Native American and Mexican influences.

Alison's artistic work

Saar's style encompasses a multitude of personal, artistic, and cultural references that reflect the plurality of her own experiences. Her sculptures, installations, and prints incorporate found objects including rough-hewn wood, old tin ceiling panels, nails, shards of pottery, glass, and urban detritus. The resulting figures and objects become powerful totems exploring issues of gender, race, heritage, and history. Saar's art is included in museums and private collections across the U.S.

Credit: NMWA

Who is Alison Saar

Alison Saar is a contemporary American artist who addresses ideas of race, gender, culture, spirituality, and humanity through her figurative sculptures and paintings. "The pieces always feel like children to me, in that they have their own personalities and their own needs and desires, and their own abilities," Saar has said about her life-sized artworks. Often commissioned for public installations, one of his best-known works is the fantastical Spring (2011), a bronze sculpture of a young women with tree roots growing out of her hair and butterflies adorning their branches. Born on February 5, 1956 in Los Angeles, CA, Saar earned a BA from Scripps College in 1978 and an MFA three years later from the Otis Art Institute

(now Otis College of Art and Design). Though primarily a sculptor employing a variety of materials—wood, glass, metal, and found objects—the artist also creates prints and illustrations that explore themes similar to those expressed by her three-dimensional bodies. A recipient of the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation and Joan Mitchell Foundation Fellowships, Saar currently lives and works in Los Angeles, CA. Her work can be found in the collections of the Walker Institute in Minneapolis, the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, and the High Museum in Atlanta, among others.

Credit: Art Net

Alison Saar's Biography

“When I’m working with specific ideas, information from cultures outside of my own, I seek to understand them through my own personal experience in relation to everything I feel: my pain, my understanding of love or anger, what I hope for and dream about.”

— Alison Saar, 1995

Alison Saar’s sculptures and installations are rooted in her interests in materiality and histories of art, religion, and spirituality from a global range of communities, including the African diaspora and Indigenous peoples, among others.

Saar was raised by the accomplished artists Betye and Richard Saar, whose distinct careers shaped her artistic development. Saar’s father, a classically trained art conservator at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), encouraged her to read books on Michelangelo, which influenced the solid and muscular physicality of her sculpted figures. Her mother’s artwork—assemblages of found objects that explore spirituality, folklore, and Black experience—fostered Saar’s interests in self-taught, African, Mexican, Native American, East Indian, and Asian art. In 1963, Saar moved with her parents to Laurel Canyon, a semirural enclave in Los Angeles, where she began the intensive engagement with found materials that proved crucial to her artistic practice, foraging for objects that she viewed as having “memory and spirit and a sense of that history.”

From 1974 to 1978, Saar attended Scripps College in Claremont, studying art of the African diaspora with Dr. Samella Lewis while making

abstractions that attempted to, in her words, “evoke spirit through color and a very ethereal form.” In 1981, she received her MFA from the Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles, carving her first wooden figurative sculptures for her thesis. A year later, Saar moved to New York City and began the Studio Museum in Harlem’s Artist in Residence program in 1983. There, Saar constructed larger-than-life sculptures of women and men from salvaged tin ceiling tiles and wood. In 1991, Saar began bronze-casting public artworks, creating figurative statues that responded to their sites through layered cultural and historical references.

In the 1990s, Saar became a mother and began integrating this new experience into her work. She collaborated with her mother on works and shifted her subject matter to be “very female.” This mode culminated in *Rouse* (2012, SAAM), made when her daughter left for college. During this period, Saar also addressed current events such as the AIDS epidemic, Hurricane Katrina, and racial violence, creating an array of works that “attempt to distill bigotry to its essence in order to dispel it.” In the years following President Barack Obama’s election, she continued to probe racism through works that recast historical Black literary characters from racial stereotypes to autonomous subjects, such as in *Reapers* (2021, SAAM).

Imbuing urban and rural detritus with personal and cultural references, Saar’s career-long engagement with figuration takes “the ordinary” and goes “with it into the surreal.” As she once stated, “I’ve always treated the body as a courier for ideas, and within this shell we can understand and feel an experience better than a cerebral understanding.”

Authored by Gabriella Shypula, American Women’s History Initiative Writer and Editor, 2024.

Credit: SAAM

Blood/Sweat/Tears at the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA)

Alison Saar creates life-size figures that emotionally embody what it means to be human. She explores desire, anxiety, aging, and loss in expressive sculptures based on her own body and informed by her own experiences. Her figures begin as a lumber beam, which she carves with a chain saw; sometimes, as in *Blood/Sweat/Tears*, 2005, she covers them in a copper skin. The grief expressed by this figure is palpable. She succumbs to her

sorrow, hunching her shoulders and cradling her head in her hands. The rusted nails that secure the surface copper to the wooden core trace scar-like patterns all over her body. Droplets made of cast bronze—blood, sweat and tears—cover her skin. Such expressions of grief and suffering are universally clear, but knowledge of the recent death of Saar’s father Richard, a ceramicist and art conservator, adds a personal dimension to the title’s reference to arduous physical sacrifice.

Credit: Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts 89 (2015)

Paris Olympics 2024

L.A. Louver is proud to announce Alison Saar has been chosen to produce a work of public art for the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris, France.

Alison Saar was selected by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the City of Paris to produce a sculpture to be placed in the French capital honouring the legacy of the Olympic and Paralympic Games Paris 2024. Entitled Salon, the work serves as an invitation to the public to meet others and engage in dialogue in a spirit of shared humanity, illustrating the Olympic ideals of a peaceful and inclusive society.

The inauguration was held in the presence of IOC President Thomas Bach; Carine Rolland, Deputy Mayor of Culture at the City of Paris; Tony Estanguet, President of the Organising Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Games Paris 2024; and Jeanne d’Hauteserre, Mayor of the 8th Arrondissement.

The sculpture is an initiative of Olympic Art Visions, through which the International Olympic Committee invites a renowned visual artist to create an original artwork inspired by sport and the Olympic values to be presented in a publicly accessible space in the city hosting the Games.

“I am deeply honoured to have been selected to create the Olympic sculpture. It is my hope that this work of art, a gift to the people and the city of Paris, will become a gathering space for the public to experience the spirit of friendship and interconnection across cultures and borders.” - Alison Saar

Credit: LA LOUVRE

Betye Saar

“To me the trick is to seduce the viewer. If you can get the viewer to look at a work of art, then you might be able to give them some sort of message.”

Betye Saar

American assemblage artist

The American assemblage artist Betye Saar spent her childhood salvaging lost, discarded and forgotten things, like small glass beads, broken necklaces and scraps of colored paper left in trash bins or littering the ground where she walked. Born in 1926, she was raised during the Great Depression and so, Saar wrote to me recently, she was taught to “use it up, wear it out, make it do or do without.” That manifesto has guided both her lifelong habit of collecting curios and relics — picked up during her travels to Nigeria, Senegal, Mexico, Haiti and Brazil, and at swap meets in her hometown of Los Angeles — as well as her more than 60-year artistic practice, which similarly brings together and recontextualizes symbols and totems of the Black diaspora. “My daughter Tracye calls me a hoarder who found her calling,” Saar says. Some of the objects that Saar collects have sat unused in her converted-garage studio for years before finding their way into one of her artworks. Saar, who is 97, decides what to reach for based on something she has referred to over the years as “mother wit”: she feels when a wooden statue, antique doll or rusted dagger is calling to be used. Saar considers this selection process to be a sacred one. “I’ve always felt that old objects hold a power,” she says. “They’ve survived, and they have a sense of the previous owner. They have a spirit.”

In her studio

In her studio, which is attached to her shingle-adorned, garden-guarded home in Los Angeles’s Laurel Canyon neighborhood, she keeps a curved metal bookshelf that resembles the bow of a ship, passed along by her

granddaughter, who had bought it at an auction. It brings to mind one of her newest works: the large-scale installation “Drifting Toward Twilight,” a 17-foot-long vintage canoe that sits atop a bed of brambles harvested from the grounds of Los Angeles County’s Huntington Library, Art Museum and Botanical Gardens. On view at the museum through November of next year, the readymade sculpture has been imaginatively altered by Saar. She added wood burrows to either end of the boat in order to disrupt the manufactured vessel with the delightful deformity of nature and, inside the boat, in place of passengers, she installed antlers, some of which are attached to the salvaged parts of an old merry-go-round. The canoe, itself a symbol of early America and the country’s long history of trade and forced migration, displays other antlers inside of antique cages. These last objects recur through Saar’s work as a shorthand for captivity. For decades, Saar’s own career was confined by the prejudices of the art establishment; although she has consistently shown and sold her work widely, it wasn’t until she was in her 90s that major museums and institutions took significant notice.

At 97

“‘Drifting Toward Twilight’, is at the Huntington through November 30, 2025, is truly a legacy work; it’s full circle,” Saar says. “I used to come to the Huntington with my mother when I was a child. She loved to garden, especially African violets, and she passed that love of plants and nature on to me.” Saar grew up in Watts, one of Los Angeles’s historically working-class neighborhoods, before her family moved outside of the city proper to the more affluent Pasadena, not far from the museum’s grounds. Beginning her career as a printmaker, she encountered the work of Joseph Cornell at the Pasadena Museum of Art in 1967, after which Saar began experimenting with what would become her signature mixed-media style. “They were beautiful and funny and fascinating,” Saar says of Cornell’s shadow box assemblages, many of which were made of repurposed junk. “I saw his work and realized that it was OK to make art out of anything.” One of her most famous pieces combines the influence of Cornell with an activist spirit: “The Liberation of Aunt Jemima” (1972), an assemblage that centers on a derogatory mammy figurine standing atop a bed of cotton. Created in the aftermath of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s 1968 assassination, Saar’s doll turned the caricature of Black women as domestic servants on its head; arming her with a rifle and a hand grenade,

Saar makes Aunt Jemima into a heroine, a protector, a self-emancipating revolutionary.

Assemblages & Black Power

Nearly six decades later, the artist's assemblages continue to bring together seemingly disparate references and symbols, transforming them into tributes to Black power. At Saar's solo show at Roberts Projects in Los Angeles, which closes tomorrow, eight small, decorative boxes hold antique masks, vintage textiles and hand-carved ephemera. These objects are juxtaposed alongside digital detritus — circuit boards, resistors — that line the wooden boxes like wallpaper. Saar has been collecting computer parts since a monthlong residency at M.I.T. in 1987, but the scraps on view at Roberts Projects came from her grandson, who was getting rid of an old device.

Through the years

Through the years, Saar has remained singularly committed to her art. “I make art because I enjoy the process of creating, of finding interesting objects and putting them together to create a feeling or tell a story. If you like my artwork, fine. If you don't, that's fine, too,” she says. She describes her house as “an altar that is made up of mini-altars.” “I have big windows to see out to the hills of my canyon, to see nature. I have my studios full of things to make art.

What embarrasses Betye

Not a lot, because I'm 97 and I've been there, done that and moved on!

Betye's favorite artwork by someone else

Betye's favorite artwork by someone else is the Simon Rodia's Watts Towers. When I was a child, I'd visit my grandmother who lived in Watts and we'd walk by the towers as Simon was making them. We didn't know what the heck he was doing, but it was beautiful. I didn't know it was art because I was just used to seeing paintings but, unbeknown to me at the time, it was very formative to my becoming an artist, and especially an assemblage artist.

Credit: NY Times

'Drifting Toward Twilight' is at The Huntington, San Marino, CA through November 30, 2025.

Saar's Beyond Midnight 2002 and her daughter Alison Saar's Blood/Sweat/Tears 2005 are on display at the Detroit Institute of Arts in the African American Galleries.

Dr. Denene De Quintal

During The Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) Volunteer Overview, it was mentioned that several "Deneens (sp?) worked at the DIA so of course I'm highlighting one of them.

Meet Dr. Denene De Quintal, Assistant Curator for Native American Art at the DIA.

Additionally, when I was in Diversity & Inclusion (D&I), I led corporate strategy for several diverse segments, Native American being one of them and, similar to Dr. Denene, who started an Advisory Council, I started an Inclusion Council.

September 25, 2019

The Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) has named Dr. Denene De Quintal as the Assistant Curator of Native American Art in the Department of the Arts of Africa, Oceania and Indigenous Americas. She succeeds David Penney, the museum's last curator of Native American Art who left the DIA in 2011.

"Native American history is a key component of Michigan's elementary school curriculum, and the DIA's galleries are the most visited by school groups," said Salvador Salort-Pons, DIA Director. "Having a dedicated curator of Dr. De Quintal's expertise to research and recommend acquisitions for this collection will allow us to create more relevant connections with our indigenous communities, student groups, and our general visitors."

Prior to The DIA

Most recently, De Quintal spent two years as the inaugural Andrew W. Mellon Post-Doctoral Curatorial Fellow in Native Arts at the Denver Art Museum. During her fellowship, she co-curated *Eyes On: Julie Buffalohead* (2018). She was also on the team that produced the large-scale cross-departmental exhibition *Stampede: Animals in Art* (2017). Her fellowship research focused on the Southern New England Native American material objects in the Denver Art Museum's collection, especially the baskets.

“The DIA has a dynamic collection of artworks from the Indigenous Americas,” said De Quintal. “I look forward to introducing different aspects of the collection to the public and working with local and international Indigenous communities to share the museum's diverse and vibrant Indigenous artwork collection.”

As an Educator

De Quintal taught as an adjunct professor at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. She also interned at the Tomaquag Indian Memorial Museum in Rhode Island and served as a fellow at the Smithsonian Institute for Museum Anthropology where she worked on a project about the scarcity of Southern New England artifacts in the Smithsonian's Department of Anthropology's artifact collection.

Paulla Dove Jennings, Curator Emerita of the Tomaquag Indian Memorial Museum, noted that De Quintal “was not only a dedicated student of native cultures but also, ended up becoming a good teacher. The DIA has made a great selection for the position. She will help the museum to grow and make its art collection more accessible to the general public.”

Dr. Denene's Educational Background

De Quintal earned her bachelor's degree in Cultural Anthropology with concentrations in Native American Studies and Latin American Studies at Cornell University. She attained her M.A. and Ph.D. at the University of Chicago in Cultural Anthropology. Her dissertation, "'Race,' 'Face,' and American Indian Nations: Native American Identity in Southern New England" focused on race and Native American identity in Southern New England. She was assisted and mentored by members of the Narragansett, Mohegan, Mashpee Wampanoag, Western Pequot, Eastern Pequot, Nipmuc, and Schaghticoke tribes.

Credit: DIA

Dr. Denene at The DIA

De Quintal is reengaging the Indigenous and Detroit communities with the Native American Art collection, strategically acquiring contemporary and historical art, addressing NAGPRA compliance, and enacting best practices for the display of Native American Art. In her position she created a Native American Advisory Council that assists the museum with addressing the concerns of the Native American community and is augmenting the contemporary Native American Art collection by purchasing works by Marie Watt, Cannupa Hanska Luger, Nicholas Galanin, and Kelly Church, among others. Dr. De Quintal also formed an interdepartmental Cultural Stewardship Taskforce that is developing policies and procedures for the care, housing, handling, research, and display of the Native American Art collection. She led the development of a traveling exhibition, *Vitality and Continuity: Art in the Experiences of Anishinaabe, Inuit, and Pueblo Women*, which celebrates some of the critical roles Anishinaabe, Inuit, and Pueblo women fulfill in their families, their communities, the art world, and beyond. She received a Terra Foundation grant for planning the reinstallation of the Detroit Institute of Arts' Native American Galleries, and Luce Foundation Museum Partners for Social Justice grant.

Credit: Curatorial Leadership

Josephine Love

Thank you BB for this recommendation and introduction to Your Heritage House. Interesting to learn Josephine's maternal grandfather, who happened to be white, was a founder of Morehouse. (Morehouse is part of The Atlanta University Center (AUC), a consortium of four Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU)—Clark Atlanta University, Morehouse College, Morehouse School of Medicine, and Spelman College.)

Josephine's heritage

She was born Josephine Harreld on Dec. 11, 1914, in Atlanta and was the product of a very distinguished and accomplished family. Her father, Kemper Harreld, was a highly regarded concert violinist and the first director of the Morehouse College Glee Club. Her mother, Claudia Turner, of white and Native American ancestry, was a poet. William Jefferson White, her maternal grandfather, was one of the founders of Morehouse College.

“I was one of those children who did not resist the plans of a parent for his or her career,” she told Marlene Chavis in an interview published in “Untold Story” edited by Alan Govenar. “I grew up in a home surrounded by musical people and permeated by music.” By the time she was three her father tucked a violin under her chin but she gravitated to the piano and at a very early age began to pick out tunes. “I have always had what is known as a good ear and could play easily what I had heard.”

A gifted musician

At the age of 12, she was a professional pianist and often gave recitals when she wasn't accompanying her father to his violin concerts. Josephine's natural ability was accentuated at Spelman College where she majored in English with her ongoing study of piano and violin. Inevitably, she was a member of the Spelman College Glee Club and the Spelman-Morehouse Chorus and the University Players. In 1932 she was the recipient of the William Travers Jerome award for arrangement of the Negro Spiritual "You May Bury Me in the East." A year later she won recognition for her musical setting for the Greek tragedy "Antigone." At the Juilliard School of Music in 1934, she completed postgraduate study and two years later received a master's degree in musicology from Radcliffe College and subsequently attended the Mozart Academy in Austria. She made her concert debut as a pianist in 1939 in San Diego. Later she was the accompanist for Anne Brown who had been chosen by George Gershwin to play Bess in the original production of "Porgy and Bess."

Meeting William Thomas Love

In 1941, a year after meeting William Thomas Love (1901-1966), a physician, they were married. They had met after her recital at Second Baptist Church in Detroit. A year later they were back in Detroit where she established a music studio. Soon, after beginning with only a few students, her lessons attracted more and more young people who were not only interested in learning to play the piano but in the other arts activities. From this growing interest she co-founded Your Heritage House, providing children with a variety of artistic outlooks, from puppetry to painting and sculpture, all of which had been Josephine's endeavors.

Programs at Your Heritage House

During her interview with Chavis, Josephine explained the process of programs at Your Heritage House. "The youngest children are two-year olds who can attend a Family Arts Workshop with their parents," she began. "At four years, Creative

Movement is offered, and at five, Explorations in Art and Music, the beginning of learning about producing and putting together musical sounds. This is coupled with the introduction to visual art. Sketching, painting, sand casting and other types of ceramics, paper sculpture, collage, note reading, pitch recognition, and techniques of learning to perform on simple easily mastered musical instruments comprise the Explorations in Music.”

The impact of Your Heritage House


Over the ensuing years, Josephine and Your Heritage House nurtured thousands of children in their artistic ambitions, several of whom like the painter Alvin Loving have achieved global recognition. The impact of her advocacy came home to her during a visit to Washington, D.C. in 1979 to attend a dinner sponsored by the National Black Child Development Association. “There was someone present from every period of my life up to now—adults who had been children in my programs, older adults who had known me as a child, childhood playmates, and one of my own children. In the audience were three young women who were in the Merry MADS! They are educating their children in the arts as they were educated, they said.”

Your Heritage House - Fine Arts Museum For Youth. 110 E Ferry St Detroit is now the home of “BasBlue, a non-profit organization dedicated to advancing economic mobility and leadership skills ... to underrepresented and under-resourced women and non-binary individuals”.

Josephine Love died in 2003 and is buried in Detroit’s historic Elmwood Cemetery.

Credit: Amsterdam News

Margaret Taylor-Burroughs

Although Margaret Burroughs was not a Detroiter, I amplify Detroit BWIA, her impact was made upon Detroit artists.  Thanks HB for this enlightening recommendation.

Creating a voice for US

Margaret Burroughs created a voice for African-Americans that was not present until she established the DuSable Museum in her home. This home welcomed luminaries like artist Charles White, Gordon Parks, Augusta Savage and many more who related to her commitment to developing the voice of African American artists.

NCA was born

A few years before founding the Ebony Museum, in 1959, Burroughs became the executive director at the Negro History Hall of Fame, and in the same year she founded National Conference of Artists. (The Michigan chapter was founded in 1974.)

Margaret's artistry

Margaret Burroughs was an artist herself who captured the life of children in the African American community in a very positive way. Her fame never affected her promoting the young artist of every artistic discipline. She worked in many mediums, including sculpture and painting, but she is most renowned as a printmaker. Working primarily with linoleum block prints, Burroughs crafted a lasting body of art that includes striking images of African American leaders, history, and ordinary life

Cultural identity in books

She authored books for children like *What Shall I Tell My Children Who Are Black*. Dr. Burroughs' creativity can be seen in her artwork that shares our appreciation for use in the settings by which individuals interpret their cultural identity.

A venue for the community

Fascinating is the fact that Burroughs established two museums, the DuSable Museum and the South Side Community Arts Center in Chicago. Creating venues that allow African-American creative artists to fashion their culture to be previewed inside their community was critical to Burroughs' thinking.

The historical impact of 3806

The Burroughs' mansion located at 3806 South Michigan Avenue was the first home of the DuSable Museum but its history is also attached to the Pullman porters who regarded the mansion as the Quincy Club. It is from this type of socially empowering event, which took place in its history that creating a museum was seen as necessary in order for African-Americans not to have to ask permission to have their cultural voice allowed and free.

A treasure

Margaret Burroughs is a true African-American and American treasure. Her spirit forged the voice of the African-American artist and broadcast their spirit of creativity from Chicago to the world.

Credit: <http://www.margaretburroughs.com/>

Charlene Uresy

Self-taught Artist

Charlene Uresy is an African-Cuban-American, self-taught artist, born in Chicago Illinois, and living in Detroit Michigan. She paints African symbols on repurposed furniture. These symbols have been used on the African continent for over a thousand years and are known as communication expressions; they tell you something about the people who use them. Not only is Charlene creating something beautiful, she is also teaching a culture

Credit: Eventeny

Charlene's self-description

Charlene describes herself as a photographer and functional art painter, painting in the traditional art style. She's inspired by the culture of Africa, particularly the Ndebele and Zulu people of South Africa.

Credit: Facebook

Charlene contributes

In addition to being on the board of the Mint Artists Guild, Charlene is an artist known for her colorful clothing and jewelry, her vibrant smile, and her ample use of ancient African symbols on repurposed furniture. She sells her beautiful work, furniture and photographs, in fine art fairs and a few galleries. Charlene often takes photos at art and cultural events around Detroit and shares them on Facebook.

Credit: Mint Artists Guild

Charlene is

"I am an artist that has been inspired by colors, shapes, music and food. These basic elements are fundamental to my approach in painting African symbols on repurposed furniture. These symbols are known as communication expressions and have

been used on the African continent for over a thousand years. My work employs traditional elements of culture to bring new meaning and enjoyment to today's world.”

Credit: Market Spread

Beverly A Thomas

Beverly A Thomas, a woman I've become very fond of, is this week's BWIA. I so love how we discuss things at Art Chat and they manifest in different ways. During our weekly meeting, someone showed one of Beverly's paintings which led to me adding more to today's feature.

Beverly, The Creative

Beverly Thomas is a world-renowned artist, musician, and educator who has dedicated her life to creating works that are both spiritual and beautiful. She has spent years honing her craft and developing her unique style, which combines elements of impressionism and realism with a deep appreciation for the spiritual and the divine.

Beverly's educational journey

Born in Detroit, Michigan, Beverly Thomas shared her artistic talents as a musician for many years. She received her Bachelor of Science Degree in Music Education, Wayne State University and a Master of Arts Degree in Organ Performance, University of Michigan, with additional work there toward her Ph.D. in Educational Administration.

Beverly is renowned for

Thomas is known for her ability to create works that are both deeply personal and universally resonant. Her music and art are infused with a sense of wonder and awe at the beauty and people of the world around us, as well as a deep reverence for life experiences.

Beverly's impact as an educator

As a Detroit educator, Thomas taught vocal music. She has inspired countless students to pursue their own passions and explore their own creative potential. Her administrative positions include having served with distinction in Detroit public schools as Department Head of Fine Arts and

Foreign Language at Mumford High School, and Principal of the award winning Renaissance High School.

Throughout her career, Thomas has received numerous awards and accolades for her contributions to the arts.

Beverly performs

An accomplished pipe organist, Thomas has performed in organ concerts throughout the United States and parts of South Africa. Coursework at Union Theological Seminary in New York in Sacred Music and Organ Performance added to her musical skills.

Beverly's travels

Beverly spent time traveling with her husband, the late Bishop Robert Thomas, Jr., during his appointment as the 107th elected and consecrated Bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, she worked with him in South Africa as a missionary, the 8th (Mississippi and Louisiana) and they completed their tenure of Episcopal service in the 4th Episcopal District (Michigan) which is "home" for them.

Beverly's legacy

Beverly enjoys popularity as a professional artist, exhibiting her paintings throughout the United States, South Africa, Namibia and Canada. She is a Golden Life Member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. and a Life Member of the NAACP. Thomas is extremely proud of the Beverly Thomas Scholarship Trust in South Africa and other scholarship efforts established under her leadership in the 8th and 4th Episcopal Districts. Each scholarship program was established through her efforts and sale of prints from her original art work.

Beverly's legacy continues

"MOBEV GALLERY is a space that celebrates the beauty and complexity of human life. We believe that art has the power to inspire, heal, and transform, and we are committed to showcasing works that capture the essence of what it means to be human. Our collection is a testament to the power of family, friendship, and community, and we strive to create an environment that fosters connection and understanding. Through our exhibitions and events, we hope to inspire people to explore their own

experiences and connect with others in meaningful ways. Our vision is to create a world where art is a source of joy, inspiration, and healing for all.”

✨”Mother” Beverly Thomas is an artist, musician, and educator whose work is a testament to the power of creativity and the human spirit. Her contributions to the arts have inspired countless people around the world, and her legacy will continue to inspire future generations for years to come. ✨

Credit: mobevgallery + The AMEC Supervisors Council

Anita Sewell

Abstract Artist Anita Sewell is a Collect Black Art Artist whose passion for her art is evident in the video below.

Anita grew up in The D

Anita enjoyed her childhood, growing up in Detroit, Michigan. Her childhood taught her that she could be whoever she wanted to be.

What formed Anita’s art

Starting out, some 15 years ago, Anita mostly used acrylic paint. However, she has begun experimenting with oil-based paint, which * takes her back to her childhood. Her motto when developing her pieces is, "Be a kid first, then be an adult." This motto shapes her technique when creating art.

While critics may say, "I could have done tilat Anita knows that even she cannot produce the same piece twice, and she would like to see the critic try. Another medium that transports her back to childhood is charcoal.

When charcoal colors her hands, she lets her hands lead her, and a beautiful piece of art immerges.

What Anita is most proud of


Anita's greatest achievement to date was a commissioned piece for her cousin. The piece shows Anita's mom and aunt walking down a path holding hands. This piece stretched her in amazing ways and is now hanging proudly in her cousin's home.

Societal impact on Anita’s art

The pandemic and racial climate has also affected Anita's work. She felt the pain of the world and that pain shaped some of her recent works. One such work is entitled "Blood on My Hands" , which is on display today. She wants people to know that it is not their fault. She also wants people to know that they will be ok.

Channel Anita as you admire her work

As you browse Anita's work allow your inner child to feel how she felt. There are also pieces that will speak to you as an adult. The art you are seeing are works of peace. She wants to share her peace with you. Each piece is an original piece, she hopes her art inspires you to smile and be happy. If you would like to know the story behind each piece, Anita welcomes the opportunity to share the story with you.

Want to see Anita's  up close & personal, check out her exhibit at Bigby Coffee in Madison Heights this Sunday through June 13th.

IG: @4everamarie

Carol Morisseau

As the granddaughter of a craftsman and the daughter of a visual artist, the native Detroiter is a lifelong artist by practice and in legacy.

Morisseau's work manifests in paintings, illustration and mixed media; and her career trajectory has traversed many forms, from visual art to dance and teaching.

Credit: Detour Detroiter

"My investigation has always considered the movement of the observer's eye in the development of composition. My charge is to organize space on a two dimensional surface in a meaningful manner that forms a visual rhythm. This challenge remains constant whether working figuratively or abstractly with few points of departure."

Credit: Morisseau Art

"Healing Wall"

I was inspired to create these pieces by my exposure to the custom of tying ribbons onto the fence of a famous Cathedral or onto wrists in Maranhao, Brazil. I found the custom to be similar to the funeral customs

of Ghana. I was intrigued by their similarity despite they're being an ocean apart. "Healing Wall" is a 3 dimensional interactive art installation that asks participants to write down the name of a black, brown, or indigenous person that has been killed or brutalized by the police or a corrupt system. The participant will write this name on a ribbon and the artist attaches the ribbons to a grid. In Brazil, a black person is killed by police every 23 minutes. In the piece each ribbon represents a human life taken. There are over 4000 ribbons in the piece. Interspersed throughout the work are painted oil portraits of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and other Black and Brown people from around the globe who have suffered or met their demise through this brutality. If we can collectively grieve, then maybe we can collectively heal. "Healing doesn't mean the damage never existed. It means the damage no longer controls our lives." Native American proverb. Credit: Fulbright

Faith Ringgold

Life of Faith Ringgold, 1930-2024

Although Faith Ringgold was not a Detroiter, our art collector's group discussed her significance to and in the art world. I was 1st introduced to her by Dexter via calendars of her work and Marilyn through her children's books such as Tar Beach. Today, we revisited Tar Beach and, had a moment of silence in Faith Ringgold's honor.

Anyone can fly. All you need is somewhere to go that you cant get to any other way. The next thing you know, you're flying among the stars.

– Faith Ringgold, "Tar Beach" (1991)

The Early Years

Born Faith Willi Jones on October 8, 1930, in Harlem, Faith Ringgold was a pioneering painter, mixed media sculptor, performance artist, author, teacher and activist whose powerful works address issues of race, gender, and social justice. Ringgold's innovative use of quilting and storytelling techniques revolutionized the art world by bridging the gap between fine art and craft traditions.

The First Quilt

Ringgold made her first quilt, *Echoes of Harlem*, in 1980, in collaboration with her mother, Madame Willi Posey who was a prominent Harlem fashion designer. Ringgold's quilts were an extension of her tankas from the 1970's. Ringgold's first story quilt, *Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima?*, was written in 1983 as a way of publishing her unedited words.

Another First

Ringgold's first children's book, the award-winning *Tar Beach*, was published in 1991 by Crown. An animated version with Natalie Cole providing the voice-over was produced by HBO in 1999. The book is based on the story quilt of the same title from the 1988 *Woman on a Bridge* series.

Accolades

Ringgold was the recipient of over 100 awards and honors; author of 20 children's books; and subject of the recent critically acclaimed touring exhibition "*Faith Ringgold: American People*" (2022–2024).

Credit: faithringgold.com

Carole Harris

Another recommended artist, Detroit, Carole Harris. Cool to learn Carole and I are both Wayne State alumni.

CAROLE HARRIS is

CAROLE HARRIS is a fiber artist who has redefined and subverted the basic concepts of quilting to suit her own purposes. She extends the boundaries of traditional quilting by exploring other forms of stitchery, irregular shapes, textures, materials and objects.

A Mother's Influence

Carole's mother introduced her to needle arts at an early age, teaching her embroidery and crocheting. Sewing classes in elementary school increased her skills. It wasn't until she received a BFA in art from Wayne State University in Detroit in 1966 that she began to explore fibers as an art form.

"Many of my early quilts have architectural and geometric themes, which I am sure is influenced by my years as an interior designer, working with

architectural forms," she says. Carole enjoyed a career as an interior designer for over 45 years, 33 years as president of Harris Design Group, LLC (HDG), the interior and graphic design firm that she founded in 1976 and dissolved in 2009 to devote full time to her studio art practice.

Exploration through Travel

Travels to Europe, China, Japan and the Caribbean have led her to explore how time impacts and alters our natural and constructed environments.

"I now draw inspiration from walls, aging structures and objects that reveal years of use. My intention is to celebrate the beauty in the frayed, the decaying and the repaired. I want to capture the patina of color softened by time, as well as feature the nicks, scratches, scars and other marks left by nature or humans on constructed and natural surfaces. I want to interpret these changes and tell these stories of time, place and people in cloth, using creative stitching, layering and the mixing of colorful and textured fabrics."

The Technique

As to her technique: "I primarily use commercially printed cottons, silks, hand dyed and vintage fabrics, which I often alter by overdyeing or painting. Recent investigations have led me to employ found objects, paper, rust dyeing, collage, and even burning as techniques. These materials are cut up, overlaid, and repositioned until I know I have arrived at my destination of a densely layered collage. This top layer is then sewn to an inner layer and back by machine using traditional and non-traditional quilting techniques and hand embroidery."

Recognizing Carole

Carole's work has received numerous awards, including a 2015 Kresge Visual Arts Fellowship. Her work has been exhibited in museums and galleries nationally and internationally, including the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution, in Washington, D.C; the Museum of Art & Design and the Folk Art Museum (both in New York City), and galleries in Europe, Japan and South America. She continues to be honored with multiple solo exhibitions. Her work has been published extensively, and she is much in demand as a lecturer and juror.

Website: [charris-design](http://charris-design.com)

Tiff Massey

I “claim” 6 and Livernois so there was no doubt I’d feature Tiff Massey who is not only from 7 and Livernois, it is the name of her history making exhibition. Plus, she was recommended by a previous Woman in Black Art honoree.

Who is Tiff Massey

Tiff Massey is an interdisciplinary artist from Detroit, Michigan. She holds an MFA in metalsmithing from Cranbrook Academy of Art. Her work, inspired by African standards of economic vitality, includes both large-scale and wearable sculptures, music and performance. Massey counts the iconic material culture of 1980’s hip-hop as a major influence in her jewelry. She uses contemporary observances of class and race through the lens of an African diaspora, combined with inspiration drawn from her experience in Detroit.

Tiff’s Accolades

Tiff Massey is a 2015 Kresge Arts in Detroit Fellowship awardee, as well as a two-time John S. and James L. Knight Foundation’s Knight Arts Challenge winner, and the 2019 recipient of Art Jewelry Forum’s Susan Beech Mid-Career Artist Grant. Massey has participated in numerous international residencies including Red Bull in Detroit, Ideas City (in Detroit, Athens, Greece and Arles, France) hosted by The New Museum of New York and with the Volterra-Detroit Foundation in Volterra, Italy. Tiff Massey’s work has been widely exhibited in both national and international museums and galleries.

Credit: tiffmassey

7 Mile + Livernois

In May 2024 (May 5th), the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) will open a new solo exhibition from Tiff Massey (MFA Metalsmithing 2011), Detroit-based artist and Cranbrook Academy of Art alumna. The exhibition’s title, 7 Mile + Livernois, refers to the neighborhood at the heart of Detroit’s Black business and fashion district. It is also where Massey grew up, and the site of a new art and community space Massey is building that blends her craft with her drive for community kinship.

7 Mile + Livernois will be on view from May 5, 2024, to May 5, 2025.

Massey Exhibitions

The Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) describes the show as Massey's most ambitious museum presentation. She has previously exhibited at the DIA, Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History (Detroit), The Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, Detroit Historical Museum, Cranbrook Art Museum, Muskegon Museum of Art, and Center for Contemporary Craft (Houston), among many other galleries and institutions.

Massey is a champion for Detroit and its artists.

More Accolades

Massey is a 2021 United States Artists Fellow. She received the Art Jewelry Forum Susan Beech Mid-Career Artist Grant in 2019 and a Kresge Arts in Detroit Fellowship in 2015. She is a two-time winner of The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation's Knight Arts Challenge.

Credit: Cranbrook Academy of Art

Sabrina Nelson

Detroit Artist Sabrina Nelson warmly greeted a SisterFriend and I when we attended the Cranbrook Art Museum's Skilled Labor: Black Realism in Detroit Exhibition Artist Talk hosted by Sabrina's son, and co-curator of the exhibition, Mario Moore. Sabrina (and Mario), was one of the 20 contemporary artists featured. Additionally, one of Sabrina's former students and, BWIA (Black Women un Art) alum, Sydney James, was in the show as well.

Sabrina is

Sabrina Nelson was born in the wake of the '67 Rebellion in Detroit, Michigan. She is a painter by degree from Detroit's College for Creative Studies. Influenced by Yoruba Religion, as well as Eastern and African philosophies, Sabrina's work is a combination of spirit, motion, and intimacy. Not limited by two dimensions, the scope of her work also includes sculpture, objects, performance and installations.

Educator of the Arts

Sabrina has been a professional artist for over 35 years and an educator for nearly as long. As a studio art teacher at the Detroit Institute of Arts, she

lectures and performs artist demonstrations. She is also on staff at the College for Creative Studies, where she works hard at motivating and preparing students to pursue art degrees in Detroit.

Influencing Artistic Spaces

Sabrina has lectured on the preservation of Black Feminism in Art at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History in Detroit. She is a guest curator at both The Carr Center and the Music Hall Performing Arts Center. For over 30 years she has judged art competitions, curated numerous art talks and exhibits, and conducted interviews of guest artists for the City of Detroit's Culture video channel MyDetroitCable.

Sabrina's Work

Her work has been exhibited at the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, and the African American Art in Culture complex in San Francisco. Sabrina's work has also been exhibited in Florida, New York, Louisiana, Illinois and Ohio. Her work is in the permanent collection of the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History and private collections in Florida, New York, Ohio, Georgia, California, and Michigan. She has also shown work at Jakmel Gallery as part of Art Basel Miami, as well as at the American University in Paris.

Website: [sabinanelsonart](http://sabinanelsonart.com)

Gilda Snow

Introducing Gilda Snow

Detroiter Gilda Snowden (1954–2014) was a graduate of Cass Technical High School and Wayne State University, where she received a BFA, MA, and MFA in Painting. She was Interim Chair and Professor of Fine Arts at the College for Creative Studies, and also Gallery Director of the Detroit Repertory Theatre. Snowden's works have been exhibited throughout the United States, as well as in Mexico, Canada, and West Africa. Her works are featured in a number of publications, as well as private and corporate collections, including Post/Newsweek, the Neiman-Marcus Corporation, Ameritech, Blue Cross/Blue Shield, and The Detroit Institute of Arts.

Credit: [kresgeartsindetroit](http://kresgeartsindetroit.com)

What Delineates Snowden's Work

What delineates Snowden's work are the imperatives of introspection, meditation and production. These facets, which are both contemplative and robust, facilitate objects and images born out of necessity, bursting with assurance, expressive resonance and personal history. There is also the overt physical presence of an amalgamation of the biographical and historical with the physically extant - the interior and implicit juxtaposed against the exterior and explicit.


Snowden's Sense of Identity

These portrayals are inscribed with Snowden's sense of identity. On the subject of being a black artist, she has said that some people expect African American artists to make work about one thing and one thing only: being black. She counters: "To be an African American artist, especially a female artist, is a political statement. This opened me up to abstraction." In other words, she is a political artist, but maintains the right to select her vehicle of expression.

Credit: M Contemporary Art

IG: gildasnowdenestate

Linda Whitaker

In October of 2023, a group of us visited the home of David and Linda Whitaker to view their art collection and, was BLOWN away. Paintings, drawings, sculptures and antique furniture covered every inch of their home. They even have stained glass windows and humongous doors from churches throughout their home. Not only did Linda remind me of the Breakfast Club (keep reading) that artist Judy Bowman introduced to me, I'm now a more intentional collector as a result of meeting Linda. She armed us with a list of artists to invest in and I've  off acquisitions while adding more to my list.

The Detroit Fine Arts Breakfast Club

The Whitakers are long-standing members of the Detroit Fine Arts Breakfast Club, which meets each Monday morning at Marygrove College and connects local artists with peers and collectors, which, in turn, enables collectors to continue investing in Detroit's art community.

Inspiring art collectors

"I would like to say that people should not be afraid to collect artwork," Linda Whitaker said. "We all collect something. And the artists are very friendly, and they will work with you because they're excited to have you want their work — most artists have something you can afford, if you just ask them. And they'll work with you to make sure that you can get the work. That's my advice to new collectors."

Credit: Free Press

The Alain Locke Recognition Award

(David and) Linda Whitaker are among Detroit's most widely known and respected names in the local art-collecting community. The couple of 38 years has quietly spent decades amassing a marvelous collection of mostly African American art, from mostly Detroit artists, and were honored with the Friends of African and African American Art's Alain Locke Recognition Award on February 11th at the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA).

Dale Pryor

Dale Pryor is another Detroit must I was told I HAD to include in my weekly dedications.

Cultural Impact

Dell Pryor's cultural impact on Detroit can be traced in a wide arch across the city, from Eastern Market through points downtown, spanning the latter half of the twentieth century, to the Midtown gallery today.

After College

After college Dell had spent a good chunk of the '60s and '70s as a freelance commercial and residential interior designer. In school she had been eager to get out into the world and design. "I didn't understand why I had to study art history, art appreciation, learn about painting and sculpting before I could start designing," she says. But In the end, it was the breadth and depth of that education that really "ignited" her passion for arts more broadly. In her design work she began commissioning local artists. "I became very excited about not just introducing my clients to art, but about finding places in people's homes and offices for artists' work to be shown." When these passions grew beyond the bounds of her work, she began a modest show space in Eastern Market.

Detroit's Scarab Club

Dell Pryor, called the "grand dame" of Detroit's arts scene, is the first Black and female gallerist invited to sign a beam at the Scarab Club. It's a tradition that has been happening since shortly after the club's building was completed in 1928.

A Constant

Dell has been a constant ever since she opened up decades ago in Eastern Market," said Wilkinson. "She's really championed a lot of artists who wouldn't have much visibility otherwise." Not many gallerists have had Pryor's staying power, said Mariuca Rofick, board president at the Scarab Club. "As a curator her gallery spaces have had a significant cultural impact in the city for decades as she tirelessly showcased both new and established artists," said Rofick in a press release.

Credit: Detroit News

Over Time

Over a fifteen year span in Harmonie Park, Dell showcased and brought in local and national artists, as well as a performing arts component that focused largely on live jazz.

Credit: Model Media

Show Space

A show space in the Market became a cultural destination in the late Trapper's Alley throughout the '80s, but when the cranes of development came swinging through Greektown, the casino subsumed her space, and Dell moved to Harmonie Park.

Website: dellpryorgalleries

Sydney G. James

Meet Sydney G. James, proudly a girl raised in, and by, Detroit

Sydney and I met last summer at her talk at MOCAD and continue to run into each other.

The D & Sydney

Sydney G. James, proudly a girl raised in, and by, Detroit. Her name is synonymous with colors and brushwork as strikingly defiant, and ever changing, as the city itself.

The Artist in Flow

Since returning to her hometown in 2011, Sydney has personified artist in flow, quickly building upon her creative roots as a BFA graduate of Detroit's College for Creative Studies. Her murals have transformed Detroit's skyline and its arts narrative, and helped her earn a coveted 2017 Kresge Arts in Detroit Fellowship.

The Painter on a Mission

She is a painter on a pointed mission to let each brush stroke spark conversations long silenced. In paintings and murals, Black women are first. Never last and never forgotten. Her works boldly rewrite the narrative in hues evoking the complexities of Black reality, joy and pain, and phoenix-like resilience.

The Exhibitions

Her artwork has been exhibited at Detroit's Museum of Contemporary Art and Design (MOCAD), the Charles H. Wright Museum, Inner State Gallery, PlayGround Detroit Gallery, Collective Detroit Gallery, Detroit Artist Market, Red Bull House of Art; and Janice Charach galleries as well as the Arts, Beats and Lyrics traveling exhibit. Sydney's murals have lit up walls in New Orleans, Brooklyn, NY; Atlanta, GA.; Los Angeles, CA.; Pow Wow Hawaii, Pow Wow Long Beach, Pow Wow Worcester, and across six continents.

The Mural Takeover

She is a co-founder of the biannual BLKOUT Walls street mural festival which debuted in Detroit in 2021. Sydney's artwork is featured by major marketing brands looking for authentic cultural connection. Brands include: Vans shoes, PepsiCo, Ford Motor Company, Detroit Pistons, Detroit Lions, as well as being one of the faces of the Lip Bar brand of cosmetics.

Dr. Cledie Taylor

When I shared at the Art Chat, group of collectors, this series, in unison, everyone said "you have to include Dr. Cledie Taylor! Although Dr. Taylor is a force in the art world, Detroit and Black/African American art in particular, little is written about her. Sharing what I found.

Please note, this Detroit trailblazer turns 98 on March 8th.

Arts Extended

Founded in Detroit in 1952, and currently located in a quiet neighborhood tucked between I-96 and Tireman and Livernois Avenues, Arts Extended is a 70-year-old project that is a contender for the nation's longest continuously operating Black arts organization.

Why Arts Extended

Arts Extended began as a group for Black arts educators and professionals, inspired by art's potential to enrich lives but excluded from much of the city's art establishment. Initially, they met monthly to discuss topics relating to art and collecting. In their early years, they hosted two annual pop-up shows to display their art. The first was a group show of members' work, and the second was a more commercial exhibition in the run-up to Christmas. They invited their friends and started to develop an educated collector base.

Enters Dr. Cledie Taylor

Dr. Cledie Taylor was a founding member of Arts Extended in the early 1950s and has been a quietly forceful presence in the Detroit art world since. Widely traveled, she is best known artistically as a metalsmith and sculptor. Dr. Taylor studied with the esteemed metal arts Professor Philip Fike at Wayne State University, with a particular focus on working Niello, a traditional black silver alloy, and she received her Ph.D. in Art History from Antioch College. Now in her mid-90s, she talks precisely and energetically about upcoming exhibitions and new projects such as a "beautifully illustrated" neighborhood newsletter and a library for the Arts Extended archives.

Credit: Metro Times

Judy Bowman

Meet Detroit mixed-media collage artist Judy Bowman.

I had the pleasure of learning about and meeting Judy last winter during her artist talk at MOCAD. Judy shared her early days at what is now the Detroit Fine Arts Breakfast Club (DFABC) of which I am now a member.

DFABC is dedicated to nurturing artists' talents and teaching them the business aspect of art.

Artist Biography

The Medium

Judy Bowman is a mixed-media collage artist who was born and raised in Detroit, Michigan. Considering herself a visual griot, she sees her job to tell stories that are reflective of her coming-of-age in Detroit's Eastside and Black Bottom neighborhoods. Scenes in her vibrant collages depict love, community and a type of fellowship that resides in jazzy nights, the sway of young Black women and the swag of young Black men, church on Sundays followed by family dinner, family outings and cultural dignity and richness.

The Collections

Bowman's work appears in private and public collections—nationally and internationally—including Institutional Collections of the Sarasota African American Cultural Coalition, Sarasota, Florida; The Free Press building, Detroit, Michigan; R.W. Norton Art Gallery/ Museum, Shreveport, Louisiana; Georgetown University Library, Booth Family For Special Collections, Washington DC, US Department of State, Art Bank Program, Washington, DC; and the Flint Institute of Arts, Flint, Michigan.

“Through my artistry, I aspire to leave a legacy for my children and grandchildren that paints our rich and complex history. I want my art to serve as a gift of joy from me to the universe and continue to make an impact long after I am gone.”

Judy Bowman

Credit: Judybowmanartist.com

Artis Lane

Meet “Detroit” Canadian painter and sculptor Artis Lane.

I chose Artis next as I've recently acquired one of her paintings. As with many of her pieces, it's a nude. After the acquisition, I realized I'd “attracted and manifested” it as I'm going through my “falling in love with myself and body” phase. Curious to know why nudes are a significant part of her work, I read “A Woman's Journey: The Life and Work of Artis Lane”

and learned Artis sees the woman's body as a temple. This gave me a new perspective and appreciation for this blue chip painting.

All my life I have worked on three levels of consciousness:

Portraits, Social Injustice & Metaphysics

In my work I strive to heal, uplift and inspire viewers and collectors to find perfection in their own being.

Artis Lane

The Early Years

Artis Lane was born near an all Black village in North Buxton, Ontario, Canada. After three years of art college in Toronto, Canada, Artis Shreve Lane moved to Detroit to study at Cranbrooke Art Academy. While in the Motor City she painted and sculpted the portraits of many of the business and political leaders of the day; Governor George Romney, Ford family members and! Coleman Young, the Mayor of Detroit. From Detroit she moved to New York City, spent time in Texas, Ruidoso, New Mexico and traveled to Mexico City, Mexico to paint many of the prominent families in the region. She eventually returned to Los Angeles where she has called the city home for over 35 years.

The Dignitaries

Since her early prominence in Detroit her portrait work has depicted dignitaries like Jaqueline Kennedy, Nelson Mandela, Gordon Getty, President Reagan, Oprah Winfrey and today both the First Lady and President Obama.

The Social Injustice Artist

"Social issues became the next focus of her work. She was honored by the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery in Washington DC during the installation of her bronze portrait of civil rights leader and long time friend, Rosa Parks. In 1999 she was selected to design the Congressional Medal of Honor awarded to Ms.Parks." Marlina Donahue LA Times Art Critic

"My Civil Rights images led me naturally to ideas about what and who we are outside of race. I went from there to the most important body of work, the metaphysical images of generic man and generic woman emerging out

of the ignorance of material concepts and evolving into spiritual awareness."

Artis Lane

The Messages in Her Art

"In the jaded 1990s, conceptual art rendered spiritual messages an artistic taboo. Always ahead of her time, Lane has never veered from her subject matter, regardless of the vagaries of what happened to be "in" or "out." As the new century opened, Museum shows and reviews indicate that more and more artwork had begun to deal with questions plaguing us: who are we, why are we here, what does our spiritual life entail? As this content inevitably comes to the fore, Lane's work becomes more and more germane. As we catch up to her profound vision, Lane will point the way to the future with work that addresses our highest selves.

Marlina Donahue LA Times Art Critic

These questions lead her to her Metaphysical work. She leaves the workings of the foundry: the gaiting material, ceramic shell mold, etc., (the "birthing" materials of the foundry), on the bronze to symbolize generic man emerging out of material thinking into spiritual consciousness.

She then shows the work in pairs... the traditional black patina bronze, with the ceramic shell pieces as a metaphor for the moralistic/materialistic conversations that mankind has wrestled with throughout eternity.

The New Millennium

The new millennium brought new challenges and celebrations of her work. At the age of 80, Lane was commissioned to create a 12 ft bronze of her "Emerging First Man." The sculpture was created for an 1100 acre private estate community in Atlanta, GA. In 2007 she was honored by The California African American Museum with a retrospective of her life's work which included almost 100 works of art. One of her latest creations was unveiled by First Lady Michelle Obama, her bust of Abolitionist and Suffragette, Sojourner Truth. The bust has been installed in Emancipation Hall and is part of the collection of the United States Capitol.

Shirley Woodson

Meet acclaimed Detroit artist Shirley Woodson

In reading « The Walter O. Evans Collection of African American Art », he shares how significant Shirley was in his art journey. Being a Detroit, I thought of no one better to kickoff this weekly series.

“Paintings are my diaries; drawings are my prose; collage is my poetry; assemblages are my dialogue,” notes artist, educator, arts advocate, and now 2021 Kresge Eminent Artist, Shirley Woodson.

The Early Years

Woodson connected with her creative energy at a young age leading to a BFA and MA from Wayne State University and additional graduate studies in painting and art history at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

The Exposure

Known for bold and expressive use of color and brush strokes in large-scale, figurative paintings, Woodson’s paintings have garnered attention from far and wide. In 1966, she received a prestigious MacDowell Fellowship. She used this opportunity to explore new ideas and techniques, including collage, a medium that continues to provide a counterpoint and complement to her paintings. Woodson has been featured in over 30 solo exhibitions, and her paintings are included in more than 20 permanent collections across the United States including, locally, the Detroit Institute of Arts and Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History. She is also featured in “The Art of Black American Women: Works of Twenty-Four Artists of the Twentieth Century” (McFarland Publishing, 1993) and “Gumbo Ya Ya: Anthology of Contemporary African-American Women Artists” (Midmarch Arts Press, 1995), among other books and publications.

The NCA Michigan Chapter

In 1974, she co-founded the Michigan chapter of the National Conference of Artists (NCA), the longest-running national arts organization dedicated to nurturing, developing, and promoting opportunities for Black visual artists. Woodson is an executive board member with the national organization and is the president of the Michigan chapter.

The Kresge Eminent Artist Award

The Kresge Eminent Artist Award is a \$50,000 no strings attached prize. Woodson’s life and work clearly and thoroughly reflect the award criteria,

including a distinguished record of high quality work, professional achievement, and significant impact in the arts, paired with generously sharing one's talent, expertise, and contributions to the growth and vibrancy of Detroit's cultural environment.

The Detroit Art Scene

Upon receiving the award, Woodson noted that Detroit is fortunate to “have an arts community that's never stopped.” In large part, that is due to the unwavering commitment and decades of education and advocacy for which she is renowned.