JASPER

Wilma King

Fall 2022

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Still reveling in the success of Colby Quick's *Moon Swallower*, The Jasper Project announces the next cycle of the Play Right Series, a collaboration between South Carolina theatre artists and Community Producers, culminating in 2023 with the staged reading of another brand-new South Carolina play.

The winning play will be workshopped and developed by a collection of some of the SC Midlands' finest theatre artists, the playwright, members of the Jasper Project's PRS steering committee, and the 2023 class of Jasper Community Producers, culminating in a staged reading in August 2023. For more information, read our story on page 12.

The play submission window is open until December 31, 2022

- Playwrights must be natives or residents of South Carolina.
- Plays may be on any topic, using language appropriate to the subject matter, though please: no musicals or children's plays, and only one submission per playwright.
- Submissions must be one-act plays, 45-75 minutes in length, typed according to industry-standard format.
- Collections of shorter revue sketches on a common theme will be considered.
- Please include, as a cover sheet, a short (one-page) biography of the playwright and description of the play, and include cast size and any unusual technical demands, bearing in mind that smaller and fewer are usually preferable.

Please submit your play to playrightseries@jasperproject.org

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draw JASPER

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JASPER IS

JASPER project

Dear Friends,

We come to you later in the year than usual for a fall magazine release, but we are bringing you a bountiful book full of stories we hope will excite and inspire you and make you feel as proud as we do to be a part of the Midlands, South Carolina arts community.

After 11 years of covering music in the Midlands, this issue of Jasper takes a comprehensive look at the local jazz scene. We tried to bring all the various jazz camps together in our coverage of this art form that we are abundantly blessed with, with leaders like Robert Gardiner, Bert Ligon, Mark Rapp, Reggie Sullivan and the master of them all, Dick Goodwin, in our pages. Gordon "Dick" Goodwin came to SC in 1973 by way of Missouri and then Texas, and he conducted the USC orchestra for decades, teaching theory and composition until he ultimately assumed the post of Distinguished Professor Emeritus at the university. No one can deny the impact of his mentoring on the jazz scene we enjoy now.

We also had the pleasure of writing about three new independent films created this year with ties to the Midlands. In a fascinating project out of USC, assistant professor Dustin Whitehead brought a group of students together and, funded through Indie Grants and working with Local Cinema Studios, created a new film called *Hero*. Poet Monifa Lemons performed in a beautiful piece, *Crooked Trees Gon Give Me Wings*, produced by Lena Waithe, which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival, as did the film *We Dance* featuring Thaddeus and Tonya Wideman-Davis of the Wideman Davis Dance Company at USC.

In another example of a SC artist whose work is taking them places away from home, please read Kristine Hartvigsen's article on Arischa Connor who has been busy not only performing alongside Michael Keaton in the award-winning drama, *Dopesick*, but is also popping up on screens large and in recurring and one-off roles in films and programs like *Mike, Players, All American, The Last Days of Ptolemy Gray* and many more.

In visual art we cover Jamie Blackburn and his work on sustainable art and product life extension via art with The Twelve, an organization brought together by designer Ellen Taylor and Brooks Boland, founder of The Twelve and MSP Disposal. We're excited to follow this project and report back to you about the other innovative SC artists involved in this commendable project.

In two pieces written by Will South, we also feature the work of Elizabeth Catlett, groundbreaking artist whose work is currently on display at Columbia Museum of Art, as well as another groundbreaking artist from Conway, Jim Arendt, whose powerful work with denim evokes unending inspiration and meaning.

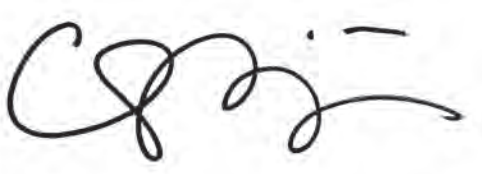
On our cover we feature an original piece created by Wilma King for the cover of Jasper Magazine as part of the Draw Jasper project. King was the editors' choice for the winning portrait, but we also honor other contributors like Ginny Merrett, Jean Lomasto, and Patrick Mahoney. Read more about the fascinating life and accomplishments of Wilma King herein.

Finally, if reading these pages is not inspiration enough, please note the calls for three upcoming Jasper projects—Fall Lines literary journal, the 2023 Play Right Series call for one act plays (closing soon!), and yes, 2nd Act Film Festival is finally back from our Covid hiatus, and we can't wait to see what you folks will produce.

In the meantime, please visit *JasperProject.org* for multiple daily articles and notifications, please follow our Jasper Gallery spaces at Sound Bites Eatery, Harbison Theatre, Motor Supply Bistro, our sidewalk gallery at the Meridian building, and online at our always-there, always-open Tiny Gallery (local artist ornaments are back in December!) Please consider becoming more involved in Jasper as a guild member or team member by visiting us online and clicking Support.

And remember, Jasper loves you. It's what we're here for.

Take care,



Jasper// as in Johns, the abstract expressionist, neo-Dadaist artist
as in Sergeant, the Revolutionary War hero
as in Mineral, the spotted or speckled stone
as in Magazine, the Word on Columbia Arts

FALL 2022 / VOLUME 009 / ISSUE 002

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do something to that,
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-Jasper Johns

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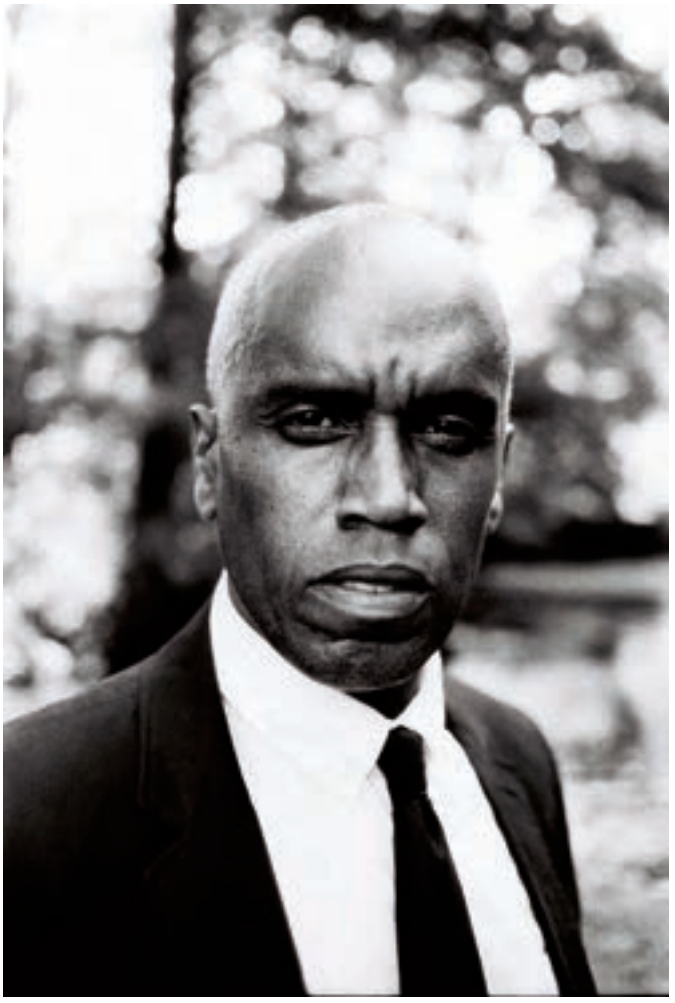
At the Jasper Project, we're working harder than ever to keep Jasper Magazine free and available to anyone who wants to read it. We realize a lot of you hold on to Jasper, too, and that's why it's important that we create a piece of literary art that is beautiful, informative, and an archival and interpretive narrative of the SC Midlands arts culture. The magazine you hold in your hand costs between $12 and $15 to produce, and that's without compensating editors or staff. This is almost double what it cost before the pandemic. If you believe in Jasper and our mission to nurture, promote, and celebrate SC arts in all its forms, please consider becoming part of the answer to how we continue to keep Jasper free by joining the guild at whatever level you can afford. Thank you!

Wideman-Davis Dance Explore Migration and Movement through Dance with '*We Dance*' at Tribeca Film Fest and more

By Christina Xan



In their newest project, Columbia couple Thaddeus Davis and Tanya Wideman-Davis, dancers and professors at the University of South Carolina, are challenging the boundaries of film to dive deep into what it means to inhabit and sustain the very bodies they exist in—and what it means for those bodies to move both freely and forcefully.

"We've been really thinking about patterns of migration and thinking about our families…how the shaping of the way we eat is different than the way we may have grown up," Wideman-Davis reflects, "How we can figure out new pathways to merge old and new ways of thinking about food and have those communal experiences still be nurturing."

Wideman-Davis' grandmother worked in a Chicago factory rife with migrant workers and a variety of different cultures and food. She developed a broad palette that she passed along to her children and grandchildren, notably when she would take a young Wideman-Davis to explore new restaurants after picking her up from dance.

Davis reflects on similarities in his own family, thinking about the time following the African American Great Migration when his maternal relatives moved to Minnesota. Though they brought their culture with them, they had to adjust their recipes due to lack of access or simply a different way of life—like the scarcity of grits in the Midwest.

Whether the expansion of palette due to an inclusion or a limiting of culture, it led to both Davis and Wideman-Davis being keenly interested in how the movement of food affected their Black identity and how that in turn affected their movement as dancers. So, when John T. Edge of the Southern Foodways Alliance reached out to work with the pair, they knew where to start.

The couple was commissioned to do a live performance, but it fell through when COVID-19 hit. Shortly after, they got asked to do a virtual presentation instead, and the pair, thinking of a film they had seen Ethan Payne and Brian Foster do the year before, requested to work with the filmmakers. Soon after hearing their ideas, Payne and Foster signed on as co-directors and as cinematographer and writer, respectively, and We Dance was born.

The process was detailed. Foster would send Davis and Wideman-Davis a series of questions, which they would answer, and to which he would then send a new slew of more questions, until finally a script emerged. In addition to filming, Payne scouted locations and eventually did the work of submitting the film to numerous national festivals. The film itself was shot over the course of several days from late-July to early-August of 2021 with the shooting being split between Chicago and Montgomery, where Wideman-Davis and Davis are from, respectively.

"A big part of this didn't start out as a love story, but in the end, it was exactly that. But it wasn't just about the love between the two of us. It was the care for each other in telling this story and the love for the pivotal women in our lives—Tanya's mother and grandmother and my mother and grandmother" Davis says. "People in our families who sustained us like food and allowed us to have these careers that we've had in dance and beyond."

In the end, We Dance came together as a 12-minute experimental film that combines documentary, dialogue, imagery, and dance to share the story of two people, where they came from, and where they have yet to go. This story is three-fold: in part 1, "Spin," Wideman-Davis reflects on her grandmother's home in Chicago; in part 2, "Rise," Davis reflects on his grandmother's home in Montgomery; and in part 3, "Hold," the two reflect on their lives together.

In the first two segments, each of the pair's grandmothers are seen baking a staple from their individual and collective histories—pound cake and sweet potato pie. While the women bake, Wideman-Davis and Davis narrate, speaking words related to the cooking process, themes of their life, and dialogue they recall from these inspirational women. Stitched within these scenes are images from the cities and surrounding areas the families call home along with segments of dance.

"There's something about being in that water, at that specific space that was a segregated space…"

"That movement [migration] is dance—the dance from south to north, that's choreographed. That's seeking something, that's a hopeful end result. It's not, 'Oh, I just think that Chicago will be a great city to live in.'" Davis says, "It's, 'No, I'm leaving Mississippi because there's no work here for me. I'm migrating. I'm having to choreograph this experience of the unknown.'"

"And for me, in the dancing, I see the merry-go-round of Black migratory patterns in our country. I grew up in the north, and now living in the south again, my family is like, 'You're crazy for living there. We moved away so you didn't have to go back.'" Wideman-Davis reflects. "But now I'm back in it and I have this platform of making work about these different experiences in our American Black landscape."

For if food represents a part of our identity in which we bring our culture within our bodies, then dance is how we use our bodies to reveal that culture. In the migration process, wherever and whatever the reason in moving, we are doing just that—moving. Sometimes the world moves around us while sometimes we move around the world, but this film asks us to acknowledge and embrace movement regardless of what form it takes.

This is best exemplified in a scene toward the end of the short film where Wideman-Davis and Davis do not dance or even move but instead stand, completely still, hands clasped around each other's, in white garb, as a Prattville, Alabama, river rushes fast and hard around them.

"There's something about being in that water, at that specific space that was a segregated space," Wideman-Davis says. "To come back to it and to have to anchor yourself in the water with this current, knowing that it has all that racialized history, knowing the deadly components it could have had for us 20 years ago, just being there."

"That water is also symbolic of the middle passage. It's symbolic of Black life, of movement while standing still. Having to be ready to move. Having to fight with the resistance of having to stand up in that water while it's moving past you and trying to push you down," Davis adds. "And it is quite poignant to just kind of be standing there and letting the water be the movement."

Whether the movement of food, of bodies, or of physical place and time, this project, one which Davis calls an "heirloom" or "archive," makes us reflect on how movement has defined us as well as how movement has uniquely affected those who had less agency over their movement and harnessed it to ensure their identity survived.

And the film has clearly made an impact, having been accepted to the Oxford Film Festival, the Fort Myers Beach International Film Festival, the Experimental Dance & Film Festival, the WorldFest Houston International Film Festival, the Ouray International Film Festival, and, most excitingly, the Tribeca Film Festival, where it premiered in June 2022.

The film itself, however, is only one component of this project. In its full performance, the film is played, and then, upon its conclusion, B-roll footage is projected onto three different screens while Davis and Wideman-Davis dance on stage, making it appear almost as if they are coming out of the film itself.

"I think that We Dance is trying to also speak beyond just our dancing to speak about the totality of movement," Davis says. "Us eating and dancing in our hometowns, us standing still in the world, the water dancing past us, the beauty of dance and movement—it's all dance. It's not, 'Oh, there are the dancers.' No—we're all dancers."

"That movement [migration] is dance—the dance from south to north, that's choreographed. That's seeking something… a hopeful end result. I'm migrating. I'm having to choreograph this experience of the unknown."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a film by
BRIAN FOSTER AND ETHAN PAYNE
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WIDEMAN DAVIS DANCE

Moon Swallower

Playwright Jon Tuttle Tells the Tale of the 2022 Play Right Series

'Twas in January--gather round children--the month when the Wolf Moon rises (you can look it up) that the Jasper Project announced Colby Quick's lycanthropic romp Moon Swallower as the play selected for the second cycle of its Play Right Series.

'Twas in August, the month when wolfsbane blooms (you cannot make this stuff up) that it was presented, under Chad Henderson's excellent direction, as a blocked-and-teched staged reading before a rabid and frothing audience at the Columbia Music Festival Association.

In the months intervening, the play was read, discussed, dissected, pared, parsed, and rehearsed in the presence of the playwright, a cast and crew of professional theatre practitioners, and ten Community Producers—persons supportive of Columbia's rich dramatic tradition and willing to venture beyond the veil of the production process. Along the way there were sandwiches and some very fine beverages, including a home-made fruity concoction called "Moon Swallower."

By September, when arose the Harvest Moon—so named because it casts a brighter light for the reaping of summer crops--Jasper decided that the series had gone so well that a third cycle was in order.

But let's come back to that. First, let's talk about Moon Swallower. Spoiler alert: I'm spoiling everything.
The play discovers its protagonist, Boris Clavell, in the grip of extemporaneous prosody as he addresses, on his cellphone camera, his legion of YouTube viewers who are, like him, werewolves. "To my headboard post I remain tethered," he says, restraining himself from the urge to commit carnage, "with chains and shackles, by day's end fettered. / I will now demonstrate for the better—
Whereupon his mother enters and asks, "What are you doing in here, filming porn?"

And off we go. What appears at first to be a darkly-romantic Twilight-inspired gothic fantasy becomes in that moment a comic rollick about a mother and son trying to unbreak their lives. Boris is in self-exile, a social dropout from the

daylight world of "normal" people, who (unconsciously?) sabotages his mother's hopes for a healthy adult relationship. Dead for twelve years is Boris' father, whose primary bequest was a healthy appetite for horror movies.

Boris' mother, Marie, has spent her widowhood trying to rehabilitate her son without exiling him from her house, but he doesn't make it easy, especially when he assaults her suitor, a Methodist minister who may or may not be a vampire. During the climactic dinner scene—probably the best this side of August: Osage County—there's howling and hissing and the tearing of clothes, a garlic clove, a wooden stake, and the brandishing of stainless steel mistaken for silverware.

Finally, just when you think the play has thrown at you everything it's got, comes an unexpected denouement: mother and son bonding for perhaps the thousandth time in their dysfunctional screwed-up fantastic, beautiful relationship, which leads to Boris' decision to go back to school for a degree in creative writing. "You know," Marie tells him, "you really are great at writing poetry."

(He really is. In Boris, Quick has created a character who shifts frequently, elegantly, and hilariously from prose to couplets to quatrains and back.)
The play closes with Boris' farewell--one last video to his lycanthropic brethren, who are us:

"Tis I, your favorite humble wolf howling,/'I will miss you,'/ The surface gives way to the turning screw,/ Then there is nothing left to do/But to bid you all 'adieu.'" And with that, he turns off his camera, the lights go dark…and we have just lost a really fascinating friend.

It's not often that a playwright receives a standing ovation on his first try, but Colby got one, and it lasted a good long while. It was followed by a Q and A, during which the play's many themes were exhumed: mental health, drug addiction, parenting, and more than anything the need to find one's place in the world. There was also a reception with a bar, an open bar, in fact! and hors d'oeuvres, and of course the book, published by Muddy Ford Press, with gorgeous cover art by Julie Schuler. It was available to those who were there and, yes, it is to you as well. You can find it at Muddy Ford's website, Amazon, Barnes & Noble and other outlets.

Colby, the playwright, is from Chesterfield. He is well-practiced poet and raconteur, having recently received a degree in English from Francis Marion University, as well as an actor, musician, lead singer for a stoner doom band called Juggergnome, a teacher and the father of two. His Moon Swallower is the second play midwifed by the Play Right Series, the first being David Randall Cook's Sharks and Other Lovers, which was developed and presented in the before-times (2017) and has since gone on to receive the Centre Stage's New Play Festival's "Best Play" award and subsequent production there.

'Tis now October, the month of the Hunter's Moon, and how convenient, because Jasper is now hunting for the play to be developed during the third cycle of its Play Right Series. A link to the guidelines may be found in this very magazine, as well as on the Jasper Project website, but briefly, the series is open to residents or natives of South Carolina; plays must be one-act (45-75 minutes), formatted according to industry standards, and may be on any topic, though please: no musical or children's plays. The submission deadline is December 31.

Open too is Jasper's invitation to prospective Community Producers, who will participate in the development process, from initial reading, through discussions about acting and technology, to the grand unveiling next August. There's more information about this opportunity on the Jasper Project website as well.

We've tinkered with the process and tightened the timeline and are now looking forward to developing our next play, and celebrating our next playwright, and protracting this moon motif, which is actually pretty difficult, because it's hard to know what to do with the Worm Moon and the Strawberry Moon and the Beaver Moon and the Sturgeon Moon, none of which I knew about until I wrote this.

Jon Tuttle is Professor of English, Director of University Honors, and Writer-in-Residence at Francis Marion University. He is the author of The Trustus Collection (Muddy Ford Press, 2019) and a member of the board of directors of the Jasper Project.

Wilma King

By Cindi Boiter
Photos by Brad Martin

"I remember an incident in fourth grade that helped me focus in on my love of art and design," Columbia-based visual artist and winner of the 2022 Draw Jasper competition, Wilma King begins. "My teacher, Ms. Hendrix, knew how to inspire and cultivate creativity. She read to us, held in-class competitions, and infused applied learning into our coursework way back then. Our school was on a military base in Fort Greely, Alaska. My mind was full of dreams of being a nurse like Clara Barton until Ms. Hendrix announced a fashion design competition. My classmates convinced me that I would surely win—but I didn't. So, I launched this compulsion to design paper dolls for my sisters, friends, and anyone who would let me do so. It was an experience that allowed me to delve deeply into individual, and cultural preferences for design, color, shape, size, and form."

That lesson, to persevere despite all odds, has served King well as a guiding force driving her to accomplish a life full of achievements and broken barriers that serves as an inspiration to artists and women and people of color today.

Born in Lexington, SC, King, who has a BA in studio art from the University of SC and a MA in journalism from Texas Southern University in Houston, says she grew up both in Lower Richland County and Alaska. "I have lived in 11 different states and done domestic and international sabbaticals that took me to a cumulative 9 months of

slow travels and teaching abroad in Italy and in Canada. After more than 30 years of doing some of the things I found interesting and exciting, and to become my mother's primary caregiver, I moved back home to SC."

But that was not before teaching art at the Art Institute in Houston, O'More College in Franklin, TN, SUNY, and serving as an associate professor in PR at both Western Kentucky University and well as the Rochester Institute of Technology in upstate New York. "I always felt there should be a collaboration between words and images. I taught graphic design, computerized design, or some form of public relations design most of my career, beginning with launching, teaching, and designing the first courses and curriculum in commercial art here in Columbia at Benedict College."

King was the first Black faculty member in the Department of Journalism and Broadcasting, and she stayed there for 16 years where "they allowed me to do things I never dreamed I could do." One of those dreams-come-true was launching an international conference on diversity and inviting groundbreaking photojournalist Gordon Parks to the school for three days of lectures and hands-on learning. "It was then that I started to specialize in art and storytelling," King says, reflecting on her time with Parks, whose documentary style photography was instrumental in the fight for civil rights but who went on to be the first Black person to produce and direct major motion pictures, including 1971's revolutionary film, Shaft.

"I came to love a very well-written painting," King says, adding that "art should tell a story," an endeavor she strives for in her own work. "I enjoy telling my stories as well as those of people I have met along the way. An avid nonfiction reader, I try to incorporate a level of authenticity, through descriptive and narrative detail in my paintings. I focus on the story to give it broader meaning – that is, the painting's relationship-building potential. People often comment on my style. I paint from memory, not photos (unless commissioned to do so), and I rarely use references. Various elements in each painting are carefully outlined to show that the story is a composite of different places and spans of time."

King's medium of choice is acrylic. "My very wonderful art professors at USC, particularly Jim Edwards, taught me that acrylics are extremely adaptable and can convincingly disguise as other paint mediums." And as for her technique, "I would say that I have either a 'gentle' realism or perhaps a somewhat 'rigid' surrealism style," she says. "I am not

painting from photographs unless I'm commissioned to or as reference. The white outlined objects in my work come together in my memories from myriad places and times."

Among her greatest influences are Dony Mac Manus, sculptor/founder of the School for Sacred Art in Florence, Italy, and Giancarlo Polenghi, the school's director of the master's program who is an Italian art historian and teaches theology of the body. "They both helped me to understand that the purpose and power of art is to elevate the status of individuals in communities and in society."

"Now, each day, before I begin to paint, I study some of the great Christian art. I enjoy Biblical stories through the eyes of Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni, Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, Peter Paul Rubens, Cristofo de Predis, Rogier van der Weyden, Rembrandt, Vincent Van Gogh, and even Salvador Dali."

But she adds that, "Jonathan Green has given me some very good advice and critique on my work, as well," counting Greene as one among her three favorite SC artists. "I love his use of color and form, and the stories of the African American experiences in the South. He depicts an enjoyment, pride, and love for life that is seldom seen these

days. His viewpoint and perspective are necessary against a backdrop of sadness, anger, and bitterness in the world." Her other two favorite home-state artists are Gerard Erley and Phillip Mullen. Of Erley she says his technique is "akin to that of the 'great masters,' not only in his artistic ability, but also in the way he commands his storytelling." From Mullen, her former drawing professor whose work she says she "has always loved," King says, "I learned to be meticulous in the details and still develop a style distinguishable from everyone else."

With a CV replete with honors, awards, grants, and fellowships, listings of lectures given, international conferences organized and attended, publications in books and esteemed journals as well as listings of books and publications she designed, and truly, more accomplishments than can be recorded here, King's humility is overwhelming. It is beyond anticlimactic to mention her recognition as the winner of a competition as prosaic as the Draw Jasper contest, but it must be done.

It is on the cover of this issue of Jasper Magazine that Wilma King's painting, Jasper is published, the winning entry in the 2022 Draw Jasper Competition. "My art is of hindsight, unable to catch up with the present—because the present becomes the past too quickly. Nonetheless, each of us are where we need to be when it comes to our art," King says. "The Jasper painting expresses the joy of being where I am now, and the struggle of recognizing significant moments and collaborative memories from multiple sources. Through the colors and imagery, I try to describe my vision of a world that is seeded and then grows from my South Carolina and Louisiana Creole cultural roots. It also speaks of my age that notices and shares the pivotal history of two generations before me."

"These days, I read less than I used to (a book each week), and paint more," King continues. "I am painting each day, whether it is on canvas or glassware. Art is a way of praying. It helps me find positivity in whatever I am confronted with throughout the day – good or bad. I am seeking ways to put the events of the day in proper perspective and finding a way to reconcile my day in gratitude. I began what I hope will become a series of painting based on contemplative and spiritual exercises. I believe art should elevate the status of persons and communities. Finally, I have had a happy life, despite a few calamitous events I certainly hope the happiness is what my art passes on to others."

Wisdom from Wilma King

I think there's a need to not only expose the world to Columbia arts, but to also expose Columbia arts to the world! There are ideas and opportunities for collaborations that are not being explored. Let's create some opportunities for collaborations and universality through perhaps Sister Cities for starters.

On my wish list? It's time for a women's museum, a children's museum, and an independent art school. The spirit and excitement of art is apparent in Columbia's eclectic art community. Still, the more we venture out, explore, and study the universal art world, the less repetitive we become.

An Honest & Gentle Voice

A Bit About Baba Seitu Amenwahsu

By Al Black

Some nights in downtown Columbia's concrete canyons echoing flute floats between buildings I follow the sound to a small dashiki dressed man with a turban wrapped head. He looks up, smiles, and says, "Hi Brother," and asks if I want to go somewhere to eat and I say, "How does Tios sound?"

Seitu Amenwahsu is the son of Mattie Stephenson, a retired HUD administrator and gospel singer, and Dr. John Stephenson, former superintendent of Richland I School Corporation. After graduating from Keenan High School, he attended Spartanburg Methodist College and finished his BA at the University of South Carolina School of Art, received his MFA in visual art from Howard University and, after starving as a working artist, he returned to Benedict Collect to pick up teaching credentials.

Amenwahsu credits Tarleton Blackwell with helping him navigate and graduate despite the crippling prejudice of USC toward Black American artists, especially back then. When asked what led him to change his name and begin his spiritual path, the artist credits his African ancestors, dreams, visions, and research.

Seitu Amenwahsu describes himself as a seeker and spiritual counselor serving God and the liberation of African peoples. Columbia knows him as retired public school art teacher, writer, poet, jazz singer and musician, Kemetic priest, djembe drummer, Reiki master, accomplished visual artist, genealogist of the South Carolina African diaspora, a Pan-Africanist, and a Columbia native.

Amenwahsu is a much sought out contributor to the jazz and drumming scene and has had several exhibitions of his visual art. Galleries struggle with the size and complexity of his work; often pieces can be fourteen feet high and four feet wide and not readily appreciated by the casual wine and cheese aficionado crowd. He has published Ba

Akhu: Mystical Spiritual Path's Visual Art Aesthetic in 2020 and The Way of the Mystic: The Ba Akhu Spiritual Path in 2022.

"Let me Drink Blue Spirit Mumblins to become its essence and Aire, the healing power and strength of the drinking gourd, to pour out the Water of Divine Knowledge to quench the world.

Spitting them out to drive away evil and negative forces, as a great wave, which surrounds me with a mighty wall of an indomitable spirit. May my tongue flow with the primal force, radiant, strong, and everlasting, declaring the Divine majestic presence." From the poem, 'Blue Spirit Mumblins'

Jackdaw —
A Steven Chapp/Jerred Metz Phantasmagoria

By Christina Xan

"A sequence of real or imaginary images like those seen in a dream" is how Oxford Languages defines phantasmagoria, the word local poet Jerred Metz uses to define his new poetry collection Jackdaw.

Metz is a longtime writer who is no stranger to the strange. A publisher of seven books of prose and now seven books of poetry, he is known for having "riddles," "lyric," and "mythmaking" pervade his work, as his author bio states.

Jackdaw: A Phantasmagoria, published in July of this year, contains 38 poems divided into six sections that all follow its titular character—a personified trickster bird—from conception to departure. This blend of mythmaking and natural imagery earned a blurb of praise from Columbia Poet Laureate Ed Madden.

"Jerred Metz's jackdaw is myth, trickster, and id. He is in history and beyond history, a riddler and a riddle, redeemer, and unrepentant thief," he pens, "There is much that darkens and delights my memory after reading this fantastic book."

This sequence of stories, rife with the adventures of the arrogant bird, is brought to life on the cover by fellow South Carolina creator Steven Chapp, a printmaker whose work inspired 10 of the poems in the collection and who has been homing his art for nearly four decades.

In fact, both Chapp and Metz studied their crafts as well as teaching them to others. Metz has three degrees in literature with a dissertation on William Butler Yeats and taught for a handful of years at Webster College. Chapp also eventually left teaching, retiring from Sevier Middle School in 2010, but continues to lead printmaking workshops, supported by his MFA in Printmaking and Drawing from Clemson University.

Birds, specifically those of the crow family, permeate Chapp's work. Fine lines, blurred edges, and collaged images are trademarks of his darkly effervescent prints. This energy seemed fated to marry Metz's writing style—so deceptively simple in language yet striking in imagery—to give flight to the larger-than-life jackdaw.

This is not to say Metz's language isn't visual—it very much is. His inspirations of Yeats and Allen Ginsberg are evident in this collection, with the jackdaw's actions and the natural world around him's descriptions invigorated by sharp punctuation and enlivened by sound—the hesitation of an s, the gasp of a p.

Together, these artists create an exchange of storytelling that intertwine to tell the life cycle of a single jackdaw, through who we may just learn something haunting and delightful about ourselves.

Take the first step of this jackdaw's journey with a selected poem: "Like Samson."

Like Samson
He would be his own Abram:
eat the eggs in any bird's nest,
a mouse, a praying mantis
in the midst of prayer.
Climb a ladder? He would leave Jacob far behind.
Like Samson, mighty Jackdaw swings an ass's jawbone.
Like the psalmist, Jackdaw sings his lusty prayer.
Like Solomon, Jackdaw is judicious, filled with craft.
Joshua? His "Chak! Chak!
"Chak! Chak!"
alone would have torn down Jericho's walls.
No need for marching around.
And don't ask him about the prophets.
Scruffy maniacs. He perched on their shoulders
and told them what to say.

The Mystic

(A meditation on The Mystic)

Jackdaw reads prophesy
and truths revealed
in the tea leaves' swirling.

The castor and vertical pencil
graph the Truth of All Being
on his Ouija board.
"Chak! Chak!" he whispers to himself,
seeing Destiny before him.
"Chak! Chak! Indeed!"

Another Sunset

(A response to Another Sunset)

Yet another sunset comes and goes.
Night follows day.
Season leads to season.
All the while, from his heavenly perch
Jackdaw surveys the universe,
calls it good,
calls it bad,
his opinion
changeable
as a sunset.

Arischa Conner's Big Risk Pays Off

A Jasper Interview

By Kristine Hartvigsen
Photos courtesy of Arischa Connor

It took nearly a decade for Columbia's Arischa Conner to arrive from a small theater epiphany to a dream come true in a profession few experience beyond the local stage. The former public-school teacher, who in midlife turned to acting, found opportunity and success landing coveted national television roles in a number of series streaming on the likes of Hulu, Paramount+, Apple TV+, and The CW.

In 2011, well into her career as an instructional specialist with Richland School District One, Conner innocently enough joined the District's Faculty Choir. Impressed with Arischa's singing chops, Choral Director Walter Graham encouraged her to audition for a show being developed at Trustus Theater. Shrugging her shoulders, she thought, why not. Soon she was cast in the musical Smokey Joe's Café, directed and choreographed by Terrance Henderson.

"We sold out every night," Arischa says. "On the last night, I was in tears. I loved the show, and I loved the cast. That is when I realized that I wanted to act."

A fellow actor, Katrina Blanding, later told her about a play, Yesterday is Still Gone. Arischa auditioned and was named an understudy. One night, when Arischa happened to be performing, a crew filmed the show and put it out on DVD. It then was picked up by Maverick Entertainment, which distributed it in 2014. (Arischa's daughter, Dyneisse, also had a role.) The film brought professional exposure and is still available for rent or purchase from Walmart, Amazon, and Redbox.

While everything was going great, Arischa wisely didn't quit her day job. Not yet.

"While working, I was actively doing as many shows as I could," she says. "I wanted to learn everything about acting. I started researching it on my own. I took head shots and shopped agencies. I went to a weekend showcase where I met an Atlanta talent agent named Joy Pervis. I was the only person at the showcase she wanted to sign, but at that point, I wasn't ready. … A year later, I signed with a small boutique agency, Coastal Talent in Isle of Palms."

In her few years with Coastal Talent, Arischa booked several small roles, including a Bojangles commercial, but she hungered to reach a broader audience. She realized it was important to take acting classes, and she worked hard to elevate her skills.

"I started taking classes in Charlotte and was really learning the craft of acting," Arischa recalls. "But it was tough. At the end of the first day of class, I went to my car and cried. The people in class were amazing, and I wasn't as good as I thought I was. Developing as an actor is a journey connecting with your authentic self."

All the while, Arischa never forgot about the agent in Atlanta, Joy Pervis, and looked her up. "She actually remembered me and said, 'Come in and read for me," Arischa says. "She said 'I love you, and I am signing you.' I got more auditions in a month than I was getting in a year at Coastal."

As she gained confidence, Arischa pondered a really huge life change. "I wanted to take a year off before I turned 50. I didn't want to look back and think 'coulda, woulda, shoulda.' My husband (Craig Frierson) works in the school system, too. He has been so supportive," she says. With Craig's blessing, she resigned from teaching. "And the next thing that happens? COVID. Everything shut down."

Instead of harming her progress, COVID had a strange way helping as far as acting classes were concerned. Before everything went virtual, Arischa had wanted to travel and take acting classes available in the Los Angeles area. Before COVID, it seemed an impractical idea.

"After the shutdown happened, I could take the classes I needed out in L.A. because they were online," she says. "I was dishing out money, too. I took my pension and rolled it into an IRA and took out a portion to help pay for these dreams. I was taking classes and working on myself."

Several months into the shutdown, in October 2020, Arischa got an audition for Swagger, a sports drama loosely inspired by the experiences of NBA player Kevin Durant. The series premiered on Oct. 29, 2021, on Apple TV+. She was cast in a recurring role for the first season as Apocalypse Ann.

"I am not in the second season, but it's OK," she says. Indeed. she has several other irons in the fire.

An opportunity to act in a documentary-type theater performance titled Misery is Optional brought unexpected accolades. Working with Dewey Scott-Wiley and Christine Helman, the project grew from interviews with real people affected by addiction. The actors told their stories.

"I played eight different characters," she says. "I really learned what addiction does."

The role garnered Arischa a best actress nomination from BroadwayWorld Regional Awards and a stint at the Spoleto Festival USA in Charleston. Those successes led her to seek a role in Dopesick, a Hulu miniseries that, while fiction, has the feel of a documentary because it addresses a real-world legal case against Purdue Pharma, the developer of the drug

OxyContin. The series focuses on the nationwide problem of opioid addiction.

"When Dopesick came out, I really wanted to do it. I auditioned several times for several different roles," she says, eventually winning the recurring role of nurse Leah Turner, opposite Michael Keaton's character, Dr. Samuel Finnix. "I have been in six episodes — seven if you count a flashback clip. Now the show is nominated for 14 Emmy Awards! … (The legendary) Barry Levinson directed the first episode I was in!"

There really wasn't time to be starstruck on the busy Dopesick set. Arischa found herself working with a noteworthy cast that included Keaton, Mare Winningham, Peter Sarsgaard, and Rosario Dawson. Keaton has been her favorite Batman, and she adored some of his older movies, including Beetlejuice and Mr. Mom.

"Michael Keaton was so nice. He was an executive producer as well," she says. Off set, he was conversationally friendly. "When we would go on set, we would just continue our conversation. He taught me that authenticity is really what acting is all about. … They (cast members) all were just real people I would have conversations with. It was such a great experience for me."

Next Arischa had an opportunity to audition for the Last Days of Ptolemy Grey, a Paramount+ drama series starring Samuel L. Jackson as the title character, an elderly man suffering from dementia until a miracle drug enables him to recall events in startling clarity. Arischa soon found herself, again working as an actor, on the set with her cinematic idol.

"My favorite actor is Samuel L. Jackson. To me, he is just so real, and he is so grounded in himself," she says. Arischa asked Jackson if he ever watched himself on film, and, while she declined to share his exact language, she said he responded in the affirmative. "He said 'If I don't watch myself, how can I expect anyone else to watch me?' Being there on set with him was surreal to me."

As her star continues to rise, Arischa admits she has been recognized in public once or twice, and it was equally surreal. While in Los Angeles filming Players, a sports mockumentary on Paramount+, she was on a flight back to South Carolina when she was "spotted."

"Dopesick was actually playing on the plane," she says. "Someone behind me was talking about it. She said, 'I think that is the lady from Dopesick (pointing to Arischa). When I said, yes, it was me, she says to her companion 'I TOLD you that was her!' That was so interesting to me. … I knew Dopesick was a great story, and then I knew it was going to blow up and be amazing."

Arischa says she has at least three more shows coming up, Mike, based on boxer Mike Tyson. In it, she plays Maya Angelou. There's also All American, a sports drama series on The CW, and the aforementioned Players on Paramount+.

Fifty is looking pretty good on Arischa Conner. In fact, she spent her milestone birthday shooting an episode of Players.

"When I turned 50, I was in L.A. on the set, and we were doing a scene with the cameras rolling. The guy who plays my son started singing Happy Birthday, and everyone else joined in! … It is a great memory!"

All Things Jazz

Columbia, SC Just Very Well May Be a Jazz City

By Kevin Oliver

The scene is repeated almost nightly around Columbia–a soloist steps forward, taking a turn on saxophone, or guitar, or piano as a tight combo of players hold the groove, they've been building the past several minutes. It's a small, darkened room with patrons enjoying dinner and conversation, probably not realizing the talent and effort being showcased right in front of them as music theory collides with improvisation and inspiration to create what we call jazz music.

This is jazz music's reality in many towns, relegated to background music in clubs and restaurants. Columbia's jazz scene has ebbed and flowed over the years, with originators such as Skipp Pearson, Bert Ligon, and Dick Goodwin giving way to younger players including Reggie Sullivan, Amos Hoffman, Mark Rapp, and Robert Gardiner, many of whom are known far beyond the city.

We've produced some artists such as Chris Potter who leave and only come back rarely, but it is becoming easier for our talent to stay and not only use Columbia as a home base for regular worldwide touring but also to find enough work locally to survive, and even thrive, as a jazz musician. With projects such as the SC Jazz Masterworks Ensemble and the Cola Jazz Foundation supporting jazz in many different venues and areas of our local community, has Columbia finally birthed a real, consistently vibrant jazz scene?

Robert Gardiner certainly thinks so. His weekly gigs over a decade and a half at the former Speakeasy in Five Points were a launching pad for many area players and a meeting space for even more; currently Gardiner is holding down Friday nights at The Aristocrat with a rotating ensemble that includes versatile guitarist Zach Bingham, among others.

"For the size of Columbia, the jazz scene is really strong," Gardiner says. "There are great opportunities for musicians to play, and this is the best the jazz scene has been since I've been playing here."

Gardiner is a jazz instructor at Lander University in Greenwood, which he readily admits "pays the bills," but the majority of his time off the stage and out of the classroom these days is spent organizing and presenting the South Carolina Jazz Masterworks Ensemble, an 18-piece group of all-star players mostly from Columbia and surrounding areas. It is supported through the SC Jazz Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to celebrating and preserving the history of jazz as well as supporting new composers and artists in the state.

The concerts that the ensemble presents are designed to bring in bigger names but also to highlight our local talent, Gardiner says.

"The guest artists we have had are considered the best jazz musicians on the planet, from Kenny Barron to Joe Lovano, these are recognizable names to jazz fans," He notes.

Allowing those visiting artists to mix with our local scene is a large part of the mission of the ensemble shows, and also to expose Columbia audiences to a high level of internationally known jazz.

When one talks about a jazz scene, one of the hurdles that gets in the way is the never-ending question of what exactly jazz is, how it is defined and who's playing it and who is

not. Gardiner's take is an open-ended one, he says. "Traditional jazz, which depends on what you mean by 'traditional'," He says. "I'm not that strict, I'm happy to use the term in a lot of different ways–look at Zach Bingham, who plays with me. His own group is more of a straight blues band, but we play some of that as well, along with tunes from the fusion era of the 1970s."

Chaye Alexander is a promoter and owner of the now well-established local music venue Chayz Lounge, which heavily features jazz music on its event calendar. She's a board member of the South Carolina Jazz Foundation, too. For her it's more about the experience than the definition of jazz. "From the moment you walk in the door, it's the music, the ambiance, the food, even the service," She says about making Chayz a quality jazz venue. "We have a niche in the Columbia scene where we tend towards a more mature, older crowd because we can be a real listening venue. These are people who not only love jazz but know the history and have a real appreciation for the music and the musicians."

Like Gardiner, she is in favor of a wider interpretation of what jazz is or can be. "We've never been a straight jazz venue, we have R&B bands and more, but then we have nights with the Dick Goodwin Big Band as well, or a Miles Davis night. There is such a wide variety of jazz music out there, why not appeal to a wide variety of people?"

Top to bottom – Robert Gardiner, Bert Ligon with Reggie Sullivan, Dick Goodwin. Photos courtesy of the subjects

Trumpeter Mark Rapp takes that question and answers it with the success of the Cola Jazz Foundation, which he helped found several years ago as a way to spread the jazz message throughout the community in new and different ways. It has grown to a 10-member board with a membership program numbering in the hundreds, putting on educational programs in schools, summer camp programs for all ages, and sponsoring an annual Cola Jazz Fest every fall; the 2022 event was held at the State Museum and the Hampton Preston Mansion over two days.

"We're trying to support local jazz artists and grow the scene," Rapp says of the mission of Cola Jazz. "We want to bring in more national and international acts but make sure they are playing with our local artists. We're also creating opportunities for musicians to present their art in unique ways."

One of those is a monthly "Loft Session" presented in the Pastor's Study space downtown, above Lula Drake. Its success has proven to Rapp that Columbia is ready.

"It is a true listening room situation, we get an average of 70 people on a Monday night to come, sit, and actively listen to jazz," He says. "We're already talking about doing it more frequently. I think this has grown to that level of demand due to people wanting a deeper, richer jazz experience. It's a testament to the growth of the scene–you would not have been able to do this two, three years ago."

Add the "Live in the Lobby" shows at Koger and a new presentation called "Behind the Curtain" where audiences are seated on the Koger stage with the performers, partnerships with the SC Philharmonic, the SC Philharmonic Youth Jazz Orchestra, and a December holiday concert at the Columbia Museum of Art, and Cola Jazz is doing its best to ensure Columbia has no shortage of great jazz programming to choose from.

The impact of the pandemic on the jazz scene, and the energy coming out of it now, is similar to other parts of the cultural landscape, as audiences return and even expand. They realize they missed these in-person experiences and the connection with others, and with musicians playing at a high level.

"I used to play the Aristocrat once a month, maybe twice, pre-pandemic," Gardiner says. "Under the current ownership I've been regularly playing Fridays since last spring now."

In addition to events at the Koger, Harbison Theater, The Aristocrat and Chayz Lounge, other venues that regularly feature jazz music include The Joint at 1710 Main and Hall's Chophouse in the Vista. It is a healthy, vibrant scene with a lot going on, and with audiences showing up again, the growth potential is real.

Alexander says that she can see the difference lately in the makeup of the audiences that fill Chayz Lounge on Friday and Saturday nights.

"I find every week when I'm introducing the artists, and I ask if we have any first timers in the audience who've never been with us before, it can be as much as half of the room sometimes," She says. "It amazes me, the support that's out there in Columbia for live music–we have become a real music hub."

So, if the venues are doing well, audiences are coming out, the musicians are not only working but doing so regularly and in front of appreciative crowds, the state of the local

Kevin Oliver has been a trusted music writer in the SC Midlands for decades and is now the Music Editor for Jasper Magazine. His column, The Beat, appears weekly on the Jasper Project website.

jazz scene seems to be on an extended upswing that's only getting better as it gains more momentum.

Gardiner offers up an observation that sums things up in a snapshot of one particular night in town, a late August Friday as the students are returning and the nightlife sizzles as much as the summer evening temperatures. "So, tonight I'm playing here at the Aristocrat, and Mark Rapp is over at Hall's Chophouse, Amos Hoffman has a group playing The Joint, and Reggie Sullivan is at Chayz Lounge," He says. "All in the same night. How great is that if you love jazz and live in Columbia?"

USC Jazz Notes from Matt White

"We had three new faculty hires in the area last year, including me, and we are currently doing a multi-million-dollar renovation on the Greene Street Methodist Church to create what we're calling a Jazz Church that will serve as the new home of jazz studies," he says. It will be the only facility of its kind in the United States.

"We also brought in 15 guest artists last year, including multiple Grammy Award Winners, and conducted over 20 outreach visits," he says. "Our faculty are busy creatively, too. Colleen Clark just performed at the Detroit Jazz Festival and recorded with Trombonist Michael Dease, and I recorded two albums this summer, including one (attached to my Guggenheim Fellowship) with Columbia native Chris Potter."

White says he feels lucky to have such a supportive administration and also be in a city with a great scene that provides amazing professional opportunities for USC students.

Matt White, who is the new chair of Jazz Studies at USC is eager to boast about the department's recent investment in the art.

Reflections from Bert Ligon

To me, jazz is defined when the players play. Three or four musicians who might verbally define jazz differently, who might have completely different play lists on their phones, agree on a standard tune and set about defining jazz for thems elves in real time. Is this right down the middle or close to the edge? That's the excitement of the jazz moment, and why musicians and audiences return to play and hear the same tunes again.

This story mentions one night where Mark Rapp, Robert Gardiner, Amos Hoffman, and Reggie Sullivan are all playing different venues. In every band that night, I'll bet there was a student from the USC Jazz program. Bassist Reggie Sullivan, guitarist Zach Bingham, bassist Sam Edwards, drummers Xavier Breaker, Brendan Bull, guitarist Evans McGill were all probably playing somewhere.

I think the Jazz program at USC has certainly had an impact on bringing and keeping in many of the musicians that are and have been playing around town in Columbia. We gave them opportunities to perform in traditional ensembles like the big band or jazz vocal group, but we also offered unique performing ensembles like a Jazz Strings group, and a Jazz Guitar ensemble. The Jazz area at USC often books some of the first paying jobs for students through our gig office. I don't want to take credit for teaching them jazz—but we did offer them opportunity and outlets for their own growth.

In the thirty years I was at USC, the Jazz area brought in dozens of world-class jazz artists to perform for the community and work with the students. We brought in solo artists, but we also brought in performing groups so that students could see the artists interact with their peers, and then the students could interact with those artists.

I recently retired from USC, but the Jazz area has added three new faculty members: trumpeter and composer Matt White, drummer and musicologist Colleen Clark, and saxophonist and vocalist Lauren Meccia. Bassist Craig Butterfield and trombonist Michael Wilkinson are also active in the jazz area.

The school will continue to bring students to USC. These students will be the future players performing in the venues around town. They will continue to bring in the best jazz musicians to perform and work with these students.

Former director of jazz studies at the University of South Carolina, Bert Ligon received his Bachelor of Music and his Master of Music in jazz piano performance and arranging from the University of North Texas. Ligon has published three books, Jazz Theory Resources Vol. 1 & 2, Connecting Chords with Linear Harmony, and Comprehensive Technique for the Jazz Musician as well as several original compositions and arrangements for big band, jazz orchestra and steel drum ensembles.

Remembering Thales Thomas "Skipp" Pearson 1937 - 2017

South Carolina's Second Ambassador of Jazz

Educator. Band director. Member of the US Air Force and the SC National Guard Band. He toured Western Europe and the US playing with such greats as Dizzy Gillespie, Sam Cooke, Otis Redding, Wynton Marsalis, Patti Austin, Wycliffe Gordon, Art Pepper, and more. Names SC Ambassador of Jazz after our first ambassador, John Birks "Dizzy" Gillespie. Recipient in 2003 of SC's highest artistic honor, the distinguished Elizabeth O'Neill Verner Award for individual artistic excellence and in 2017, five months before he left us, Skipp received SC's highest civilian honor, the distinguished Order of the Palmetto.

Jim Arendt: Fabric & the Future

By Will South
Photos courtesy of the artist

Speaking with South Carolina artist Jim Arendt is a pleasurable experience. He is passionate about art making, teaching, and living, not necessarily in that order. He is also quick with a joke, though within the context of sharing serious insights. Perhaps one of the most insightful came toward the end of two hours of zooming:

"Art doesn't change the world, not all at once. It is more of a suggestion—it helps people to realize that they're not alone and that realization is the creation of community."

Nicely stated and perhaps even novel in contemporary discourse. But how exactly does it communicate this hugely helpful feeling of community? We wrestled through that.

It has long been a commonplace in art criticism to talk about art as a language. Many take this analogy to extremes, insisting images have a grammar and syntax. However, if pressed, you could ask any artist alive to create an image (no words) that purports to say, "Go across the street and buy me a pack of Marlboro Lights."

That artist could create a mural a mile long and no one on earth is ever going to understand the exact meaning of that simple sentence, however you feel about smoking. Theorists very much detest such obvious observations.

That said, we do, as viewers, react to art. That we converse with it is highly doubtful except within the minds of the most willfully romantic. But we do see things and seeing is a fundamental cognitive activity that sets in motion a cascade of thoughts. We see a growling pit bull emerge on the street in front of us and we think, "Wow, this is it." Or, we have begun running before even consciously aware of running. Images are impossible not to think about, mostly in ways we could not fully understand if we read every volume on brain books for sale on Amazon

Jim Arendt's preferred medium for a long time now has been denim, and when people see that they are going to have a reaction. Why? Because denim is ubiquitous, he says,

"that people don't even think about it." Nonetheless, we have all experienced it and feelings about that experience are going to bubble up. Denim is the material Wrangler's are made of, along with a host of other wearables. Jeans remain a popular staple of dress not just in America, but around the world. Farmers have worn them for over a century, but James Dean wore them and, well, that was/is the epitome of cool.

To see denim instantly conjures associations. You may think of your grandfather or great-grandfather working the fields in overhauls. You may picture Bruce Springsteen's behind on the album, *Born to Run*.

You may think of patches on clothes worn thin that needed to last one more season.

This material has more than a market function, that is, it is more than material used to make a product. It has cultural meaning that runs deep.

Seeing denim is not a neutral experience, but a charged one. Of prohibition, of coolness, sexiness, work, farms, rock stars, and yes, dirt. And, sweat.

Now, couple denim with a figure. We all know figures. The longer you linger in front of an image of a figure, the more associations your mind will bring up. In Yvette and Ansley, we instantly recognize a mother and child, a well-travelled subject in art history. The mother, Yvette, does not look at her baby. Her eyes are staring, lips down-turned, somewhere off in the distance. And, she is dressed in overhauls, and sits in what appears to be an old rocker. Many of us will see "farmer."

And why the seemingly unhappy face? We conjure: Farming is hard. The economy is bad. This equals struggle, and how are you going to pay the rent? Feed that little one? It doesn't take long for the brain to construct a general unspoken narrative, one coupled with feelings of struggle, maybe even desperation. This is life. Jim Arendt suggests to you exactly what he had hoped to—that you are not alone. "I'm advocating," he says, "for an empathetic response from people."

A good deal of his methodology boils down to one word: Sincerity. In fact, he calls himself a "sincerity junkie." He states it simply: "I try to be real and stick to what I know best."

What Jim Arendt knows best is an American life that began in the Midwest growing up on a farm outside of Flint, Michigan and feeling first-hand the drama of bad years for crops. The pressure, the fear, the risk. This gave him an early appreciation of the fragility of the stable home, the proverbial American Dream. From an earlier interview for the World of Threads Festival, Arendt had this to say of his early years:

I didn't grow up with easy access to museums and galleries, but a farm can provide a wealth of aesthetic experience. I would say that there was a certain skill-set and aesthetic appreciation to the way in which I grew up. There was art in doing a job well. There was art to the patterns of the seasons. There was art to the way the wind blew through corn. The world of fine arts was very far away, but the people I grew up with appreciated skill and craft. There were aspects of customization and automotive culture, pride in the appearance of buildings and objects, admiration for skills of the hand. We didn't call these things art, but they are the same types of skills that I trade on today in my work. The farm was a kingdom of isolation where you developed a sense of how things fit together. Patterns of growth and weather were necessary to know and observe

and were both beautiful and terrible. I remember sitting in the top of the barn as a child and looking out over green fields of wheat and watching the shadows of clouds pass over that sea of heavy grain. That was beautiful, and if it wasn't art, it was nearly so.

Early on in life, drawing captured his imagination and to the day remains his premier passion. His ideas begin as drawings, taking shape on paper. It was drawing that took him to Kendall College of Art & Design, from where he studied abroad in England, engaging in classic all-night bull sessions with like-minded people.

It was from there to Cincinnati, and then to the University of South Carolina for a master's degree. It was at USC, where he took a deep dive into what paint meant to him as a medium and found it to be, ultimately, "aristocratic." It would be denim that felt like a populist medium, the material of the everyman/woman.

A big problem was, how to work with this unruly stuff? Answer: He works it. He sews. His work not only often references labor and our relation to it, but it is also in itself a laborious process. Sometimes, he admits, he takes a shortcut from sewing when possible and used tacky glue. That's fine. "I'm not an artist who likes rules," he will tell you.

He will also say that he follows John Baldessari's mantra, "I will not make any boring art." Arendt wants to make art "that is impossible to ignore."

He did that with Yvette and Ansley. The denim is enough to stop a viewer and hold their attention. Add to that the emotionally compelling Yvette and the unstoppable thoughts of work and farms and dirt and some kind of unnamed sadness, and the viewer has had an art experience. No doubt wordless, but one charged with emotion and empathy.

Arendt would go on to create numerous works. Among these is the enigmatic Totemic Figures of 2014. These are free-standing sculptures and again denim is the material. His totemic figures are tall enough to tower over the average viewer. A single head sits atop a rising mass of denim from a circular mass at the bottom up to a neck-like pinnacle. From the chins of these figures fall strips of denim that


SINGER

resemble the long beards of the sage who sits for life in quiet contemplation. What will the sage tell us?

You will wait for words in vain, but your associations are there: This head is held high; this figure is important. The long swaths of denim beard suggest wisdom.

Again, we have an art experience carefully built on the artist's empathetic use of materials and composition that evoke common associations, as well as esoteric associations. "Persuade" is a word he has used. He nudges us toward an experience, but readily acknowledges people experience wildly varying responses: "I'm caught off guard," he says, "by what my art does for other people when I talk to them."

Union Made from 2021 is work that could elicit imaginative takes, and for good reason. Here, two figures sit across from each other, holding hands. But are not both of these figures the same person? It appears to be a mirror image, albeit with no mirror. Odder is that each woman has four hands.

Between the two figures is but one heart over which we read the words, "Union Made Noinu." Ok, there is a mirror and so the idea of seeing yourself arises. Although this woman so clearly is looking out at us, not herself. Is the one heart, then, a shared heart? Hers and ours? Quite possibly, as we are both "Union Made," that is, the workers of this world give us food and shelter and health care and just about every material thing as well as a host of essential services. This heart is blood red—it is alive.

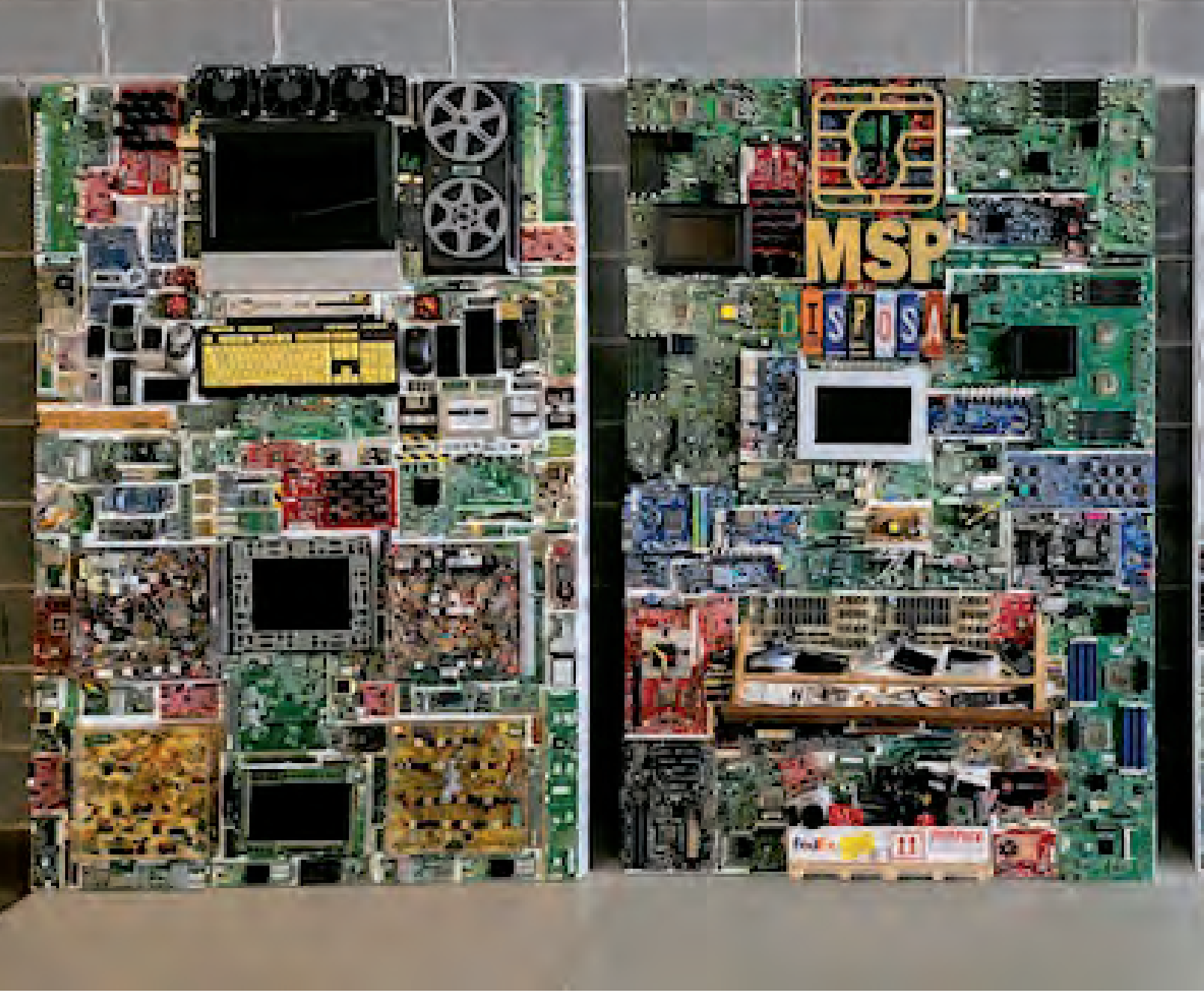
Somehow, though, this figure suggests, again, a negative charge. She sits. Is she out of breath? On a break? Out of work? Has the Union been knocked on its rear, and now must take stock of itself?

No words are going to tell you anything, but you've already conjured a gallery of possibilities. Many hands tell you she has needs. She is holding on—to what? Herself. From what we see, that's all she has to hold onto. Maybe we look and see her need, if that's what it is, and respond. Now, that's a very positive charge, an empathetic one. Jim Arendt gets some viewers, he hopes, to touch his perspective.

On the trajectory of his career, Jim Arendt likewise shares an empathetic view, crediting a world of connections for whatever success he has had so far, which has been considerable. Here is a recent assessment, from Jim Arendt, of his life and work: "Recently, I've been toying with the concept that a lot of my success has to do with being on a virtuous cycle," he writes in an online meet-the-artist. Type virtual interview (shoutoutsocial.com) There is an audience of people rooting me on, and whether I am deserving or not, they are invested in my success. This causes me to make more work, (which is sometimes good.) and to exhibit more often, which often leads to people writing about my work and spreading the word that it's worth exhibiting. This in turn grows the audience for my work, and they're invested in my success, which causes me to make more work, which leads to more exhibitions, and so on.

The idea of a "virtuous cycle" makes sense once you have talked to Jim Arendt for a while. He sees a future for himself, his family, his community, and this world. The questions of course, are many. Can we do the work necessary to make this future livable?

The art of Jim Arendt suggests that we do understand labor, are willing to engage it, take the risks, suffer the bad years, and come out the other side. His art is here to help.

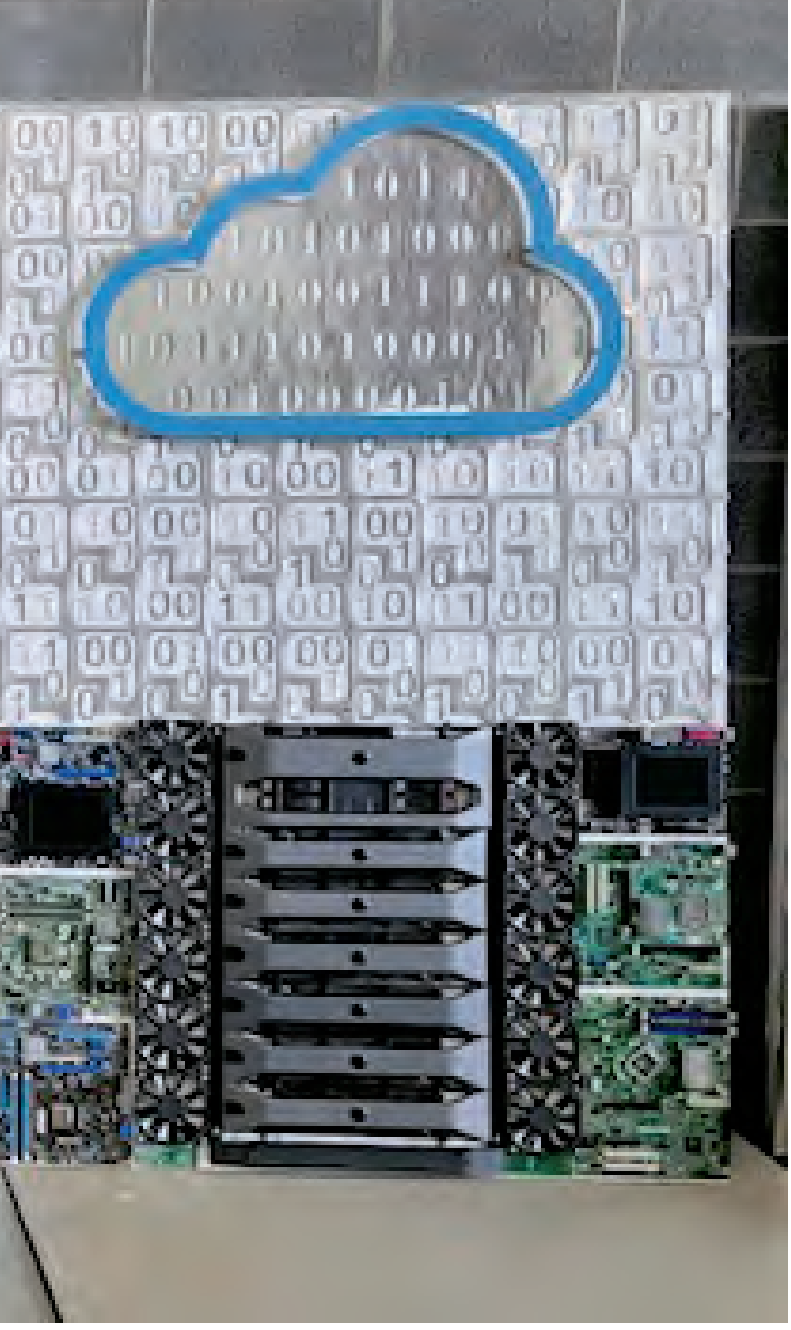


Visual Artist Jamie Blackburn Takes On Computer Waste

By Ginny Merett

In a fresh attempt to tell a story of both societal waste and the progression of the computer era, Columbia artist Jamie Blackburn has built a triptych consisting of three 4' x 6' panels using thousands of obsolete electronics typically disposed of haphazardly, including computers, circuit boards, CPUs, keyboards, and phone systems.

Worldwide, about 50 million tons of electronic waste is generated per year. This waste creates toxic trash, which is sent to landfills, burned, and released in the air. Much of our waste is disposed of and contracted to Africa and Asia which poisons their waters and landfills and leeches into the world's water supply.



This sad commentary on the lack of human responsibility for the world we live in is Blackburn's inspiration: "There's been a big shift in disposal and the amount of e-waste that's been discarded. It's a huge problem," he says.

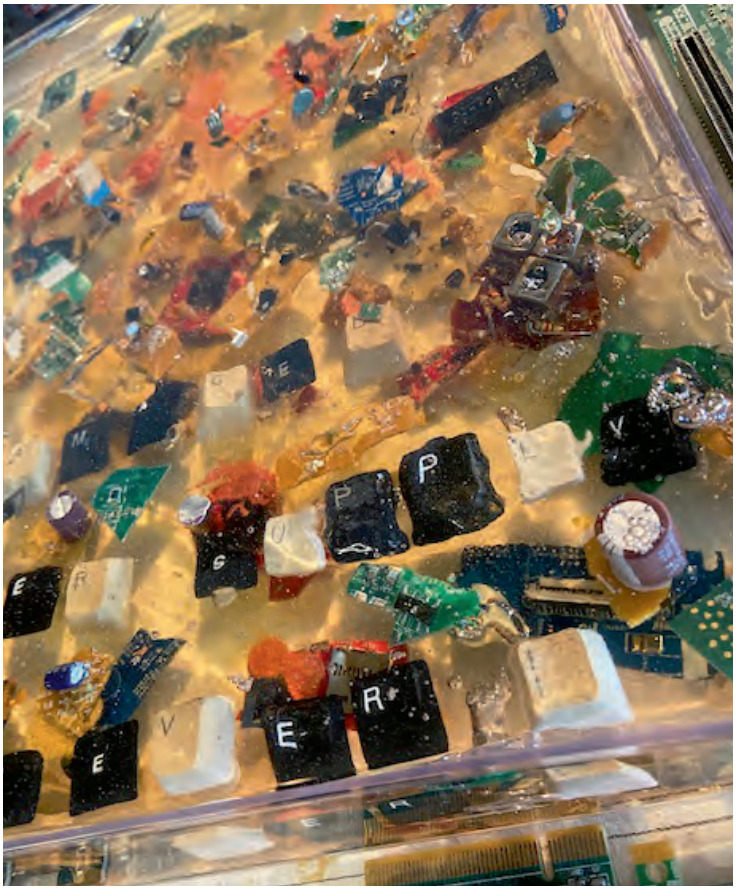
Referred by Ellen Taylor from Ellen Taylor Interiors, Blackburn was commissioned by Brooks Boland, CEO of e-waste company MSP Disposal Company who collects obsolete computer pieces and rebuilds them as new products, to create this installation and tell the story of how we dispose of e-waste over time.

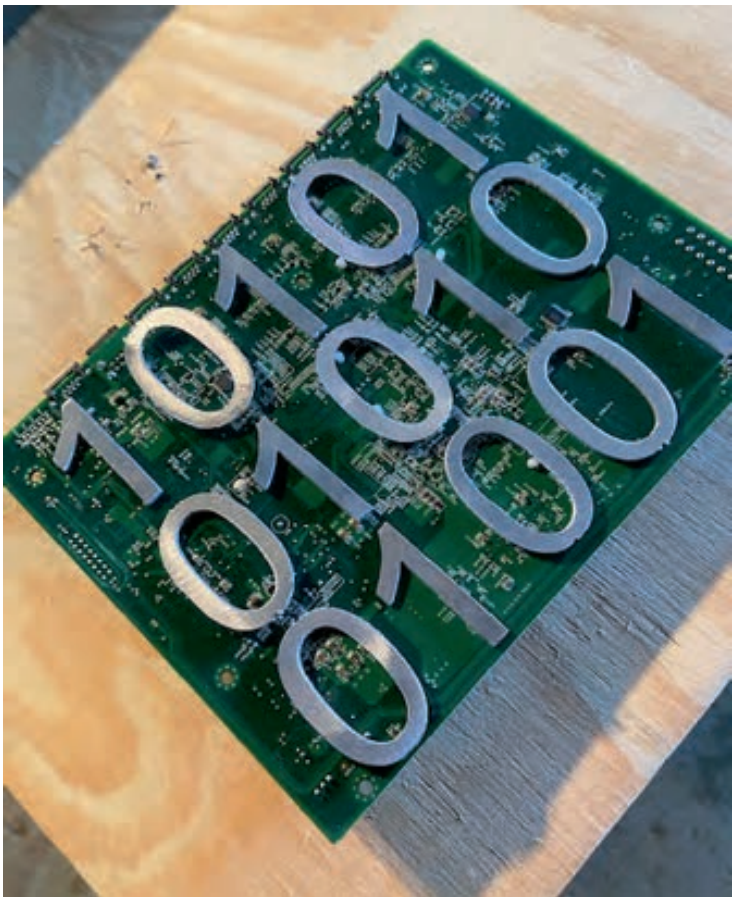
Though Blackburn has been an artist all of his life, he says that everything up until this point has prepared him for this ambitious project. Experimenting with multimedia in his paintings prepared him for using the vast amount of technological waste available. In fact, he enjoyed the challenge, even though it's been the biggest of his career, saying, "It's given me more confidence."

Each panel of the triptych, weighing 125 to 150 pounds, shows the progression from the beginning of the computer age to the modern era and emphasizes the waste of its materials. Beyond the assorted electronics, Blackburn's multimedia panels make use of resin, metal, household items and other components to denote waste and use encrypted messages from keyboard pieces to emphasize the narrative. Creating an ebb and flow of textural and colorful pattern, shape, and form reads like a book from one panel to the next.

The first panel depicts the beginning of the computer era to the modern era. By creating a fictional computer, he uses digital frames and pieces of computers to symbolize everything from huge room-size computers to the modern cell phone—all of which are in our landfills now.

The second panel shows a better solution for disposal of these elements. It both represents thousands of tons





of waste being disassembled, separated, and recycled and shows how MSP resells, repurposes, and redistributes waste.

The third panel characterizes the present and future of computer components by showing the universal symbols of 'the cloud' and binary code. The cloud attempts to eliminate personal and industrial storage devices as well as the purchasing and repairing/replacing of old infrastructure.

Blackburn emphasizes that this data storage mechanism, typically kept deep in the earth or floor of the ocean, represents "the future consolidation of all other widgets the world has used for data storage and industrial infrastructure."

Blackburn's project is to be unveiled at the Expansion Building reveal party where several artists will show works of art. The panels will remain in permanent exhibit at MSP.

For more information about sustainability and how Midlands artists like Blackburn, Susan Lenz, Lucas Sams, Flavia Lovatelli, Van Martin, Carol Washburn, Bridget LeGrand, Tammy Loftis, Tammy Cline, Angel Allen, and Christopher Lane are using technology to help extend the life of products, please visit TheTwelve.world. And watch this space and JasperProject.com to follow this fascinating project as it progresses.

Monifa Lemons Performs with Her Ancestors in Lena Waithe Produced Short Film *Crooked Trees Gon Give Me Wings*

By Christina Xan

Not every Columbia performer can say they starred in a Tribeca short film produced by Lena Waithe, but local poet, teacher, entrepreneur, and actor Monifa Lemons can say exactly that.

Though Lemons is known for being "naturally inclined to verse," as she puts it, acting was her first love. At 10 years old, her mom placed her in the Black Spectrum Theatre Company in New York, and she then attended the LaGuardia High School of Performing Arts.

In her junior year, however, she would move to South Carolina—a familiar place where her grandmother dwelled—and fall into poetry, with acting becoming a memory. She did not know that years later one of her own students would encourage her to get back into acting, even helping her film her audition tapes.

The first audition tape she sent in? The role of "Mama" in Cara Lawson's short film *Crooked Trees Gon Give Me Wings*. At the time, Lemons had no idea that this film being made by a crew of SCAD students and was being produced by Lena Waithe and Hillman Grad Production. All she knew was that she knew this character—a Black woman, mother, and midwife.

"I looked at it and I said, 'Oh, that's my grandmother. I know that person.' The role is a midwife, which my grandmother was not, but she was a mother to everything," Lemons recalls, "So when I read the role, saw a grandmother that was a midwife and worked in herbal medicine teaching her granddaughter how to live like that, I said 'Grandma. I can do that.'"

The film, which centers around Mama and her granddaughter, Bertie Bee, presents a Black matriarch, to not only a family but a community, whose people rally around her and seek out her guidance in times of turmoil. Mama's power comes from both knowledge of

the natural world and a sense of magic, which emanates from the film both in tone and in the appearance of unknown masked figures and stories of people's spirits flying above the trees.

And magic has always been a part of Lemons' everyday life. She has always sought out the energies of the world around her, believing "everything comes from the Creator." In fact, when her twin daughters were born, she and her late husband were living mostly off-grid, and many of the products the family used were made holistically by Lemons herself.

"I made my own tinctures for allergies. Everything in our house was about herbs and medicines and making things. I did my yoga and meditation all the time," Lemons reflects. "And so, when I get into this woman [Mama], I see an herbalist who is teaching her granddaughter how to listen to her spirit, speak to the heavens, and speak to the spirit. And that's how I teach my daughters."

With a character so close to her heart, it may seem as if Lemons would barely have to perform but perform, she does—stunningly. Her character maintains a sense of awe-inspiring stoicism throughout the film, even when a young pregnant woman comes in, close to death. Lemons expertly maintains this presence in her body while reflecting moments of fear and hope in her eyes. In a short 14 minutes, Lemons is both fiercely unwavering and brightly nuanced.

This balance is crucial, as the focus of the film is on young Bertie Bee inheriting the gifts of her grandmother, and though she is her helper, she is not yet prepared to hold this identity. While Mama can return back the gaze of masked figures that stare her down at night, the young girl hides from them, representing a fear of the mystic that Lemons embraces.

"There are tools out there that have been put in front of us, from the ground and up in the sky, put there to help us move through that magic in us," Lemons says. "This is what helps us navigate our way through the magic that's within us and then we are the most free."

This is where the discomfort from the viewer and the desire to clearly delineate between what is real and what is not must be confronted. This film does not allow easy binaries or boundaries. It calls audiences out and does not allow them to separate themselves from the stories being told by merely calling them "magic."

"The world that Mama had created, I envy her space; there was so much beauty in her power. And, you know, as a Black woman and in that time period, everybody didn't make it. And you know that when she walks in a room, whatever is going to happen is going to happen in its most beautiful space," Lemons says. "But the fear is also there, of knowing that beyond that realm, beyond the realm of the community that they had built there exists a space of total fear and death."

Beyond that realm, outside this world of midwives and magic, is the pain of knowing the world does not see one's body as equal or worthy of care. When this happens, when reality will not hold everyone, those on its edges must create their own, and this is magic. It is not glamorous or glittery—it is gritty and raw and real.

"The film speaks to how our bodies have been abused over the years in experiments, and how we're treated in hospitals and in childbirth. And it still happens to this day. Black women are notorious in the medical community for being labeled to hold more pain," Lemons says. "We're not believed when we complain about what's going on in our bodies, we're not treated as human in a lot of regard, because of the strength that we had to exude throughout our history."

Within this lies the intergenerational trauma of having to fight to be alive, even if that fight is not identical in its conceptualization. Being a mother, to others and to oneself, becomes harder—and becomes that much more valuable.

"As a Black woman, you really have to gird yourself up a little bit more," Lemons asserts, "I know that as a Black woman, I have to prepare myself and my children for our spaces. A little more guarded and girded. I have to be girded up to face the day."

This is what Mama symbolizes. She stands in a middle ground as observer and doer. She takes in the stories of her people and uses their fear to bring hope into the world. She knows the body, the Black woman's body, and knows the herbs and prayers that kept them safe in the darkest times, ones that still vibrate at the edges of this film.
So, when Bertie Bee comes to Mama asking her if she can "fly away" like the woman who lost her children once did, Mama knows the answer is not so simple. The trauma is heavy, and staying is painful, but severing roots can be just as harmful. Community is not about staying or leaving but about holding and growing.

"We can speak to the ancestors, transcend into a spirit guide, which makes you weightless. But you got to realize that with that power comes so much responsibility. We know more and we feel more, and so we have to make sure that we know where we are, and why we are here," Lemons says. "I have to listen with the weightlessness of being able to help and get up and walk into my own wholeness. You have to balance being present and being above what could weigh you down, and there is the magical realism. I am here, and I am with you, and I am present."

It is only after learning this lesson that Bertie Bee can heal the dying woman in her home, bringing within her the same mysticism and care that Mama holds. She must accept the pain in order to experience the beauty, must recognize the real as magic and the magic as real.

Truly

By Monifa Lemons

Truly (a song for our wombs)

Truly. There is a faint
belief underneath my skin
that calls me worthy.

Truly. Bodies can't
whisper stories in houses
built bereft of souls.

Truly. What remains
of my kin bears the bricks laid
beneath the tombstones.

Truly. Foremothers
will one day lift this earth. Shake
loose our will for war.

Truly. Our wombs will
release the shards of witness
and tear the sky up.

Truly. Our bellies
full and forced will push past time
and heal anew view.

Monifa Lemons, also recognized as SelahthePoet, began her poetic journey in Columbia, SC in the late 90s, both as a spoken word artist and as a host at various venues. She currently facilitates community workshops on writing and intentional creation. Monifa is currently following her entrepreneurial dreams as Coffee Roaster and Co-Owner at Haiku Coffee 575, a company she opened in Fall 2020 along with her four daughters. She has recently returned to her original art of acting, playing the principal role of Mama in the short film Crooked Trees Gon' Give Me Wings (2022), directed by Cara Lawson and produced by Hillman Grad Productions.

Midnight in the Fairgrounds

By Jonathan Butler

An unlit ferris wheel
in the dark
on the edge of town.

The whole carnival
half-assembled,
one booth's flickering bulbs.

The ruins of a civilization
that was built in a day.

The funhouse dark,
a shadow stretching into the midway,
the only sound
the flapping of the flags.

Also, the dead eyes of
the prizes in the booths,
the skeletal roller coaster
threatening the stars,

And the carousel,
its horses frozen mid-stride,
like a metaphor for time,
the way it stands still,
the way it runs.

Jonathan Brent Butler's poems have appeared or are forthcoming in Foothill, The Raintown Review, Fall Lines. His poems also appeared in The World Begins, a collaborative gallery show and chapbook with painter Laura Spong, hosted by Columbia's If Art gallery. Until recently the Writing Center director at Presbyterian College, he has just accepted a position at Matoaca High School near Richmond, Virginia.

Review: Carla Damron's The Orchid Tattoo

By Eric Morris

Carla Damron's new Crime Fiction novel, The Orchid Tattoo, is a quest, a relentless adventure, and a telescopic sight into the dark and persistent world of human trafficking. This book begins with a running leap into a cloudy and frightening mystery and never slows throughout its full length.

Damron's lead character, Georgia Thayer, is an overtired social worker who endures a mild psychosis that creates a chorus of internal voices which guide, counsel, and sometimes in her most stressful moments, challenge and bewilder. At the outset she becomes entangled in solving her sister Peyton's sudden disappearance. This amateur but determined investigation leads into a bleak and dangerous realm that exists outside boundaries of comfortable society. While taciturn law enforcement warn caution, colorful best friends help and encourage, and at times even put themselves at risk against a powerful and ruthless netherworld. Georgia's mission to find Peyton soon uncovers an obscene economy of human trafficking, a hidden alliance, whose master referred to only as Jefe, tattoos his subjects to exhibit ownership of their bodies, a demonstrable possession of their very existence.

Damron sets the novel in the South Carolina midlands, referencing well known places of the area, notably Columbia, the Palmetto State's capitol city, as well as rural surrounds such as the peach fields of Pelion and pine forests of Saluda. But this story could be located anywhere in our nation, and sadly, the entire wide world. Damron's style is straight forward and communicative, complementary of the genre. Easy prose and succinct dialogue welcome us into the winding narrative while refusing to let go, even in the quieter moments. Chapter by chapter we're carried along with drama and salient information that makes this book a compelling page turner and impossible to set aside once entered.

The narrative is built in three parts: First, is Georgia's tireless quest in search of Peyton. Second, is the stolen life of an underage sex worker, whose given name of Tessa is replaced by the nickname Kitten, so called by the industry that has enslaved her. And the third is that of a beautiful, complicated madam, Lillian, who oversees the immense Sandhills estate into which women are imported for servitude and sold as toys to rotations of the world's most privileged and wealthy men. This triad of storytelling maintains a clarity and crispness and seamlessly merges the plot into an inevitable and seething climax that fuses kidnapping, gunfire, Russian oligarchs, helicopters, and finally the FBI.

Damron cleverly uses point of view to make the story an expressive saga. Georgia Thayer speaks to us in the first person while the remainder of the story is revealed by intimate third person point of view. This combination works well, offering the reader a familiar landing place in the chapters of focus for Georgia, allowing entree into her complex chambers of psyche as well as definition for urban and countryside sleuthing. Then invariably expanding for the grainy, sour breath of a trailer park, a dingy roadside blockhouse, or the dank glitter of a millionaire's mansion estate, and successfully articulating for all the unfortunate souls confined within.

The subject matter is difficult, somber, and even heartbreaking at times. But Damron pays close attention to treating each of the dozen or so principal characters with complexity and dignity and finding humor wherever possible. The trafficked women are each their very own person with a vital backstory, all carrying hopes and dreams and in their own way enduring a vile and wanton fate, seeking to live one more day in hope of finding a better way. Strong women rising for truer days, for themselves and their pilfered lives, for their estranged families, parents, brothers, and sisters gone from them. Each surviving to see a promised morning outside of the night and hell into which they have been incarcerated.

Damron saves a sublime, howling twist for the latter part of the story, a plot turn that's so creative and fearsome, so well hidden amidst the intrigue of this collection, that we can barely wrap our heads and hearts around it. I knew something was coming, but I did not see the headlights of this maneuver until it ran straight over me.

This book can be read anywhere at any time and still deliver the punch as intended. Pack it and take it with you or keep it handy on your nightstand. One note of caution: when you open the first page it'll be impossible to set it aside for any length of time.

In The Orchid Tattoo, Carla Damron explores through fiction the real-world tragedy of human trafficking. A plague that exists in all levels of societies and economic settings and reaches well into the highest tiers of our local, state, and national offices, and regrettably thrives in most every country on earth. However, the book's not a tutorial or a soap box; it's a story of people and their hopes and dreams gone wrong, while struggling to find their light in a sometimes-opaque world. The Orchid Tattoo is a telling of individual inviolable strength and an inexhaustible hope for justice.

The Polaris Project and South Carolina Human Trafficking Task Force offer more information addressing the crime of human trafficking.

Eric Morris is the author of Jacob Jump (University of South Carolina Press, 2015.)

jasper's nightstand

Please plan to join the Jasper Project's on-again/off-again book group, Jasper's Nightstand on Sunday, February 23, 2023, as we discuss The Orchid Tattoo with author Carla Damron in attendance to answer your questions and talk to us more about human trafficking in South Carolina. Check out JasperProject.org for more details.

Behind the Scenes with Casting Agent *Amy Brower*

By Cindi Boiter

JASPER: Amy Brower, thanks for chatting with Jasper. Can you start us off by telling us exactly what your business is called and what you do?

BROWER: Brower Casting is a casting agency that provides affordable, local background and principal talent for film, commercial and industrial projects in the Southeast. Simply, it's the official business name for what I get to do as a casting director, talent coordinator and sometimes acting coach.

JASPER: We know you as a filmmaker and actor, but how did you come to be involved in this line of work?

BROWER: Fair question! Casting is something I've been involved with informally for years. When you're a working actor, you meet other actors. You make connections. As an actor, I always felt like I was more interested in what was going on behind the camera, so I put what on-set experience I had to get work as a freelancer. I started out as a production assistant and eventually moved into producing roles. And as it came full circle, the casting duties landed with me. As the casting requests started rolling in, I realized how big the need is for accessible casting options that can be fully tailored to the scope and budget of the project at hand. That's when I decided to start Brower Casting.

JASPER: Can you give us a few examples of people/roles you've cast lately?

BROWER: These haven't had their online release yet, but I was the Casting Director for SCETV's 4th and 5th installment of the Reconstruction 360 project. This project was produced by Betsy Newman and featured actors with a wide range of experience. The Black Codes features some recognizable actors (and strong examples of SC talent) including Nagi Njuguna, Meritt Van, G Scott Wild, Fleming Moore and Kalema Shaw.

More recently I've cast commercials for South Carolina State Museum, Blue Cross Blue Shield and Lexington Medical Center and a recent Tik Tok campaign for DAODAS. You may have spotted Columbia based actor Arischa Conner in a featured role in a Floor and Decor Commercial. (For more on Arischa and her blossoming career, see page 20.)

It's not Hollywood (laughs) but I really love the fact that I get to work with a wide range of clients and all kinds of people. In most cases, real people with day jobs and families and the desire to work in their region. For many, it's these professional jobs that give them the resume and momentum to land bigger opportunities in larger markets.

JASPER: I know there are probably no truly typical days for you, but can you give us some examples of what some of your workdays look like?

BROWER: Like a lot of folks, my day usually starts with responding to emails. I'll have a scheduled concept meeting with a client, where we discuss scope, breakdowns, and budget. Then with these roles in mind, I'm scouring my talent database, posting open calls, and beginning to put together my casting file for the director. Then I'm sending out availability requests, putting proposals together, and negotiating rates with talent agencies. I'll have a coaching call with a new actor, discuss resume format and what looks to include in an actor's next headshot session. I'll review self-tapes and send notes. A really good day is one where I get to see a local theater production or local film screening. I've met a lot of amazing actors that way.

JASPER: Can you share with us any details about a project you're working on right now?

BROWER: Yes! And it's a project I know Jasper is aware of… I was brought on to help cast and produce Robbie

Robertson's new short film, Common as Red Hair. Due to the subject matter and the timeline in which the story takes place, it's an intensely delicate process. But I'm honored to be a part of it.

JASPER: If someone is interested in looking for on camera work in commercials, film, or TV, what recommendations do you have for them?

BROWER: Being a background artist or a production assistant is a great way to learn about the inner workings of the industry. And it usually requires little or no experience to get started. Local/regional commercial work and independent film are a great way to get experience and build a resume. A decent snapshot of yourself is sometimes all you need to get in the door.

JASPER: And how can they contact you?

BROWER: The best way to connect with me is by email at browercasting@gmail.com

Jasper Welcomes New Theatre Editor – Libby Campbell

One of the most onerous tasks to me as an actor is having to write my own bio for use in the program. I do believe this is even more difficult…

I'm Libby Campbell-Turner. Some of you may recognize me from shows in which I've appeared here in Columbia and across the state. I've been asked to serve as Theatre Editor here at Jasper. I'm both terrified and excited at the prospect. I hope I can live up to the expectations laid before me.

The arts have come through a weird couple of years, thanks to The Plague, but we seem to have made it to the other side relatively unscathed and for that I'm grateful. It's lovely to see actors and artists back on various stages here in the Midlands and I'm excited to help support their efforts.

One of my responsibilities will be to review theatrical productions. The consensus has been that there may be no one in Columbia truly qualified to write reviews. I can't disagree with that, having spoken those words any number of times. It would be a marvelous thing to have a dramaturge to review the many shows produced here, but we don't. I will do my dead level best to provide the community with honest, authoritative reviews. Columbia's theatres are on a never-ending mission to entertain and increase their audiences; I think it's important to provide theatregoers, and potential theatre goers, with an analysis of what's onstage. Obviously, I cannot personally review every show that opens, but Columbia has an amazing population of writers, and I hope to take advantage of their talents when it comes to writing reviews. For my acting family (many of whom are saying "whaaaaatttt???"), I promise you that I will be fair. I will not review a show where there may be a conflict of interest. Most importantly, I will not tolerate unkindness from anyone who writes a review for this publication. Period. It is entirely possible to dislike a show or some aspect thereof without being unkind. It isn't always possible to provide "constructive criticism,"

but "destructive criticism" will not happen on my watch. The task of a Theatre Editor should not be to only write reviews. I want Jasper to be a source of information for all aspects of theatre - the comings and goings, the upcoming, the possibilities. I need everyone's help in doing this. If you have a bit of news or an idea for an article or interview, please share it with me. If you're interested in authoring an article or review, please let me know.

Jasper magazine editor Cindi Boiter, the Jasper staff, and the Jasper Board do an outstanding job of raising awareness of the Arts in all of their beautiful incarnations. Columbia is so very fortunate to have such a wide variety of theatre companies, and I daresay there isn't another city of this size which brims with talent such as we have here on the banks of the Congaree River. I look forward to sharing and supporting the art form.

University of South Carolina Film Students and Faculty Work Together to Create the Indie Film Hero

By Cindi Boiter

Not everyone spent their summer vacation sleeping late, traveling, or hitting the beach. For a group of 14 USC students and assorted faculty, they spent their summer creating the independent film, *Hero*, and many of their lives will never be the same.

According to director Dustin Whitehead, "Hero is a coming-of-age drama about a misfit artist, Tre, played by Anthony Currie, who finds out his pre-med ex-girlfriend, Jess, played by Carly Siegel, is pregnant. As she debates whether or not to keep their baby, he must prove himself a worthy father by building a more permanent footing in the world."

Whitehead, assistant professor of film and media performance at USC, grew up skateboarding and surfing in Melbourne Beach, Florida, where his mother was a costume designer, and most of his time was spent around theatre, developing quite a curiosity about the craft. However, he didn't start acting until he was a junior in college and transferred from a larger state school (UNF) with no theatre department to a small private school (Jacksonville University) with a small department with an exciting and supportive culture. After that, he went on to DePaul University in Chicago to get an MFA in Acting. "I lived in Chicago for eight years only moving away once for about a year to study filmmaking at NYU Tisch Asia in Singapore. For three years before leaving Chicago, I worked as a multimedia producer at the graduate business school at the University of Chicago."

He and his wife, Sadie, who is a birth doula and women's health advocate, and their two young children left Chicago in 2015 for Whitehead to take a teaching position at Western Carolina University, School of Stage & Screen where he helped design and launch a BFA in Acting for the Camera. "I also directed theatre productions, taught movement courses, and coached student filmmakers on casting and working with actors," he says.

In 2019, Whitehead was offered a position at USC, and has been teaching there ever since.

"In my first three years, much of my work has been dedicated to two things: providing on camera acting opportunities for students and getting students on professional film sets" he says. "The University of South Carolina has rarely had acting for the camera courses in the Theatre and Dance curriculum or in the Department of Media Arts. In collaboration with other faculty and staff, I have built a brand new on-camera acting curriculum, and we've converted an old classroom in the Booker T. Washington building into a production studio as well as purchased cameras and other production gear for the space." According to Whitehead, students are now able to shoot auditions and make films with the equipment.

In addition to the on-camera course work, Whitehead says he has been dedicated to building an organization called Local Cinema Studios, a non-profit film production company "with the mission of bridging the gap for students from academia to the industry. Local Cinema Studios designs curriculum, hosts script and project development retreats, and offers internship and apprenticeship opportunities on professional film sets for current students and recent graduates from multiple universities."

One of Local Cinema's projects was making the film, *Hero.*

"Initially I reached out to the [South Carolina] film commission to propose a partnership with USC to produce a feature film," Whitehead says. "I knew that they had a similar initiative called Indie Grants where they provide funding for short films in partnership with the film program at Trident Technical College. Matt Storm at the film commission and Brad Jayne who runs Indie Grants both loved the idea of doing something similar in Columbia and because of our experience producing features, they trusted us to do a trial run."

Once the project was approved and all the contracts signed and sealed, Whitehead reached out to Myles Isreal hoping he would want to write the script. "Myles and I work together at Local Cinema Studios/Iris Indie, and he's also been crew on some films I have helped produce. During that time, he shared some of his scripts with me. I knew Myles was the guy."

Josh Russell, Whitehead's producing partner at Iris, also played a large role in making the film happen. As an executive producer, he helped to secure gear and a truck to move the gear at no cost, which, Whitehead says, helped with the budget immensely. "I also have to say this couldn't have happened without the support of Jim Hunter, Joel Samuels, and lots of the faculty and staff at USC."

Whitehead says that he couldn't have asked for a better cast, both on and off the screen. "Everyone gave it their all and we captured so much magic together."

Anthony Currie, who graduated from USC in Spring of 2022, plays the lead role of Tre in the film. "He is a phenomenal actor well on the way to making a name for himself in the film and theatre industry," according to Whitehead. Columbia-based actor and founder of NiA theatre, Darion McCloud plays Tre's father. Carly Siegel, a current student in the department of Theatre and Dance who played Juliet in last year's production of Romeo and Juliet had just wrapped her role, so she stayed on as a PA working long hours in the production office. Atlanta-based Myles Isreal, who wrote the film, also plays Tre's best friend. Zoe McBride is a student at Western Carolina University and came on as they were starting production.

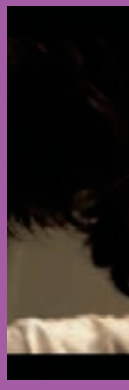
"In terms of the faculty, Marybeth Gorman Craig was the intimacy coordinator, leading a workshop during the orientation week that set the whole crew up for understanding consent on set - on screen and off screen, Whitehead explains. Dance faculty and company member

of Columbia Repertory Dance Company, Olivia Waldrop, worked with Anthony on choreography for a pivotal moment in the story. Patrick Rutledge was our camera operator and also helped recruit students from Benedict College where he teaches, and senior instructor David Britt, as well as Marybeth Gorman, acted in the film as well."

Whitehead has also spent a lot of time in front of the camera as well as behind it. “One of my favorite roles as an actor,” he says, “was playing the lead in Bruiser, a feature film shot in Western North Carolina. I was involved both as a producer and an actor. I enjoyed it because I was able to see the film go from conception to completion and distribution.”

During this interview Whitehead was in Montana visiting the set for a western called Outlaws featuring Mario Van Peebles, Whoopi Goldberg, and Danny Glover. His company, Iris, is producing the film and “Local Cinema Studios is partnering with the production to provide internships for students and recent graduates. Six crew members from the earlier film *Hero* came out to Montana to work on the film. One of the interns, Crystal Tysinger, a graduate of Benedict College in Columbia, is a PA on the project and was asked to be a stand-in for Whoopi Goldberg.

Whitehead, whose influences include Noah Baumbach, Ava DuVernay, and Cameron Crowe, says he “has spent most of my career fascinated by and focused on the actor director conversation. To me that is my way into all of it, acting, teaching, and directing. All that to say, I work with actors the way that I think makes sense based on my experiences and preferences as an actor. For example, I appreciate clear, simple direction. I empathize a lot with the journey of an actor because I have been there. But I also expect a lot from actors for the same reason. It is a privilege to be on set, we should all appreciate that and work hard with the opportunities we are given, no matter what role we are occupying on a project.



“This was by far the most rewarding collaborative experience of my life. I think a lot of the cast and crew would say the same thing.”

For now, *Hero* has been submitted to multiple film festivals already, and Whitehead says that will continue. “Many of these festivals want to be the world premiere, so we will have to wait until we see where it goes to have a public Columbia premiere. After the festival run, we will be getting it onto streaming platforms like Amazon Prime and Hulu. We are all very excited to share this film with the world. It is a beautiful slice of life film that celebrates our community and the people and art that live here. In a lot of ways, it is a love letter to Columbia.”

The Singular Elizabeth Catlett

By Will South

Photos courtesy of the Columbia Museum of Art

For most of its history the so-called "art world" has been an exclusive place. In America, women and minority artists alike found barriers to inclusion at every turn. Some of these barriers were invisible, the proverbial "glass ceiling"—you couldn't see it, but it was there.

Black artists, on the other hand, encountered visible exclusion. Museums were not segregated—they simply disallowed entrance to African Americans, period. Usually via a very visible sign. How was a young Black artist to see the achievements of world culture? Well, that was the art world. It is somewhat better now.

Elizabeth Catlett was both a woman and Black artist. A modest collection of her work featured at the Columbia Museum of Art offers the opportunity to revisit both the struggles and the satisfactions of her long and productive career.

She was born Alice Elizabeth Catlett in Washington, DC in 1915. Her father, who had been a professor of mathematics, died shortly before she was born. Her mother was a truant office for the Washington public school system, a job that supported her three girls. Elizabeth, the name she would always use, attended Howard University, and from there she went to—of all places—the University of Iowa. Part of what attracted her there was the presence of Grant Wood in the art department. Wood, one of America's great regionalist artists (along with Thomas Hart Benton and John Steuart Curry), taught a very methodical, process-

oriented approach to art making, and Catlett absorbed it all. Never would she be spontaneous in her art.

But perhaps the biggest influence Wood had on the young Catlett (who, by the way, was not allowed to live on campus and now there is a building named after her there) was his admonition to "paint what you know." Though Catlett decided to focus on sculpture instead of painting, that advice resonated. What she knew most about was being a woman and a Black woman at that. Her early work focused almost exclusively on images of the African American mother and child.

Not long after graduate school, she studied with Ossip Zadkine in New York (he had advertised for students, she was the only one to show up). The two engaged in philosophical disputes about art: Zadkine asked her why her terracotta figures of mothers and children had to look Black, and she responded that Black women would not relate to it otherwise. Zadkine argued for universalism, but Catlett said his "international figures" were all white. A key take-away for us now is how Catlett thought, and continued to think, about making art: It served a community, one that could identify specifically with her work. A sense of particularity, of the singular, lay at the center of her aesthetic. This focus would serve her well.

Another important piece of the Catlett biography is that early in life, while teaching at the George Washington Carver School in the mid-1940s, she learned to put what she described as her own privilege in check. The kids at this Harlem school came primarily from poor working families, and Catlett described how she once had felt superior to such people, but her experience with the children shook her out it. Here is a piece of incredibly self-searching text that she wrote about her time at the Carver School:

I learned that I wasn't superior to them, that they knew how to live, and I didn't, that they had certain necessities and a certain wisdom that I hadn't realized. So, I went in to teach them, and as I said, as we sewed, or as we modeled, we talked. And they talked about their lives, and what was important to them. . . I found out why they dressed so drably—because it was easier to have navy blue, or brown, or black that didn't show dirt so much. I found out why some people smelled bad—because they didn't have bathrooms, or they shared them with somebody. I was ignorant about all these things, and I was ashamed of myself for looking down on these people, when it was my ignorance that was looking down on them. . . .

I realized that I had a debt that I hadn't paid. I didn't realize it as such at the time, but I felt it, that I'd had privileges that they hadn't had, and that it didn't make me superior, it made me luckier.

And pay it back, Elizabeth Catlett would do—her commitment to community would suffuse the rest of her life and art.

In 1940, Catlett joined the faculty at Dillard University, a historically Black college in New Orleans. During a field trip to the Delgado Museum (today the New Orleans Museum of Art) Catlett and her students were denied admission because the museum was located within a segregated park designated for white visitors only. Catlett was eventually able to reschedule the visit, but only after agreeing to escort her students to the museum on a day it was closed to the public. The show she wanted them to see was a Picasso exhibition and the students loved it.

Twenty years later, during her keynote speech at the Third Annual Meeting of the National Conference of Negro Artists, Catlett's past experiences in New Orleans were revisited, and she urged artists of color to spurn the inherently racist and exclusionary network of American museums and galleries and to organize their own all-Black exhibitions. By this time, the Civil Rights movement's integrationist leaders, in the face of intense and senseless violence, had given way to more radical Black nationalists. The Black Power movement, epitomized by Malcom X, found a visual outlet among in the Black Arts Movement (roughly 1965–1975), and Catlett's speech marked a shift in many artists' allegiance toward the Movement.

As a foremother of the Black Arts movement (whose notable members included Niki Giovanni, Amiri Baraka, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Maya Angelou, among others), Catlett's sculptures and print media works were acts of defiance or potential aggression against those unsympathetic to the cause of Civil Rights. A perfect example is Malcom X Speaks for Us, from 1969. The title removes any doubt as to what the image is intended to evoke. We have our own leaders; Catlett informs the viewer. Malcom X had only recently been assassinated when she made this print, but she proudly placed Malcom before the public as an example of the power that can be achieved by using your voice.

Malcom X Speaks for Us is a linocut, one of the most basic forms of print making. It is easy to cut, and relatively easy to print. Catlett learned the technique at El Taller de Gráfica Popular (the People's Graphic Workshop) in Mexico. She

had first visited the workshop while she was in Mexico City on a fellowship in 1946. She was deeply influenced by the Mexican tradition of making socially charged art as represented by Diego Rivero and Orozco, among others. A linocut could be printed over and over and sold cheaply, a perfect medium to be the people's art.

It was in Mexico where she designed and pulled the first prints of her best-known graphic image, The Sharecropper, in 1952. (A later edition of the print is included in the CMA show.) In this extraordinary image, Catlett captures the serious yet serene face of an older, white-haired worker with a safety pin holding her blouse together. The worker's hat stretches from side to side, touching the edges, as if the woman would overtake the space she is in. Her calm demeanor belies a life of blistering labor, a world known to Catlett whose own grandparents had been enslaved. Her grandmother told the stories of hardship and loss that were burned into Catlett's psyche.

The technique used in The Sharecropper is well worth studying as it informs all her future prints. Her design is hard-edged and bold, her cuts clear and dynamic. The result is a shimmering intensity between black and white, an energy that enlivens the whole of the image. The quickening lines are essentially at odds with the monumental tone of the face, and this simple conceptual opposition creates a satisfying tension.

Like her first husband, the renowned artist Charles White, Catlett worked to create images of strength and dignity that expressed the African American experience. Over the course of her seventy-year career, she did just that. She emphasized the role played by the Black woman in society as caregiver, nurturer, and worker. This emphasis is clear in the work at the CMA, a list that includes her well-known sculpture, Mother and Child, as well as the prints Madonna, There is a Woman in Every Color, and Liberdad Para Angela Davis, the Black writer and revolutionary who ran for Vice-President of the United States as a communist in 1980 and 1984.

If there is disappointment to be found in this exhibition, it's that it is on the small side. There are but thirty Catletts total, including just two prints from the 1940s and none at all from the 1950s (not counting the reprinted Sharecropper). Nor do we enjoy the full measure of the artist's achievements in sculpture, her primary medium, with only five examples. Among these, however, her Pensive captures the eyes of one disappointed far too long and far too many times along

with the body language of self-protection. To meditate on this work is to see how the artist so skillfully used simplification of form to express the complexities of solitude, strength and the endurance required to remain standing.

Included alongside of the Catletts are three works by her second husband, Francisco Mora, and five works by her lifelong friend, Samella Lewis (from whom this collection derives). These additions do not fill out our understanding of Catlett.

Still, even with these limitations, the show suggests an atmosphere of militancy and celebration of Black revolutionaries appropriate to Catlett's own beliefs, and likewise illustrates her commitment to motherhood and community. She herself best explained those beliefs:

Art can't be the exclusive domain of the elect. It has to belong to everyone. Otherwise, it will continue to dive the privileged from the underprivileged. . . Artist should work to the end that love, peace, justice, and equal opportunity prevail all over the world; to the end that all people take joy in full participation in the rich material, intellectual, and spiritual resources of this world's lands, peoples, and goods.

These words would fit perfectly into the fractured world of the 21st century.

Due to the time Catlett spent in Mexico and because of her sympathies towards the Mexican revolutionaries, Catlett was labeled an "undesirable alien" by the U.S. Department of Defense and was barred from visiting for a decade. In 1962, she revoked her U.S. citizenship and became a Mexican citizen. Still, her artistic themes remained the same and her focus on the Black woman continued. By the time of her death in 2012, Catlett had influenced several generations of younger artists, preparing them well for expressing the deepened conflicts of our time.

The Art of Elizabeth Catlett

From the Collection of Samella Lewis

October 14, 2022 - January 18, 2023
Columbia Museum of Art

Foundering
Jump, Little Children
Self-released

It's not often that an ending can sound like a new beginning, but with their latest album Charleston's Jump, Little Children have pushed new boundaries within their longtime partnership. The group announced earlier this year that this would be their final album, after the departure from the band of founding members Evan and Matt Bivins. It would have been the third act of the Jump saga, which began on college town street corners in the 1990s, progressed into the major label world for a brief moment, and was resurrected in 2015 after a reunion tour turned into more.

This album features singer, songwriter and guitarist Jay Clifford, cellist and guitarist Ward Williams, and double bassist Jonathan Gray as the remaining band. Guests include Travis McNabb (Better Than Ezra, Sugarland) on drums, Owen Biddle (The Roots) on synthesizer, and cameos from Cary Ann Hearst (Shovels and Rope), Christina Cone (Francis Cone), and the Czech String Orchestra from Prague.

Without the Bivins brothers, who well represented the quirkier side in the Jump catalog as well as their eclectic live shows, the proceedings here lean toward the more atmospheric sections of previous albums such as Sparrow or even 2001's Vertigo. There's a real Radiohead feeling to "Suburban Trees," with its big synth drums and glacial tempo, but Clifford is a more sentimental-sounding, less detached vocalist than Thom Yorke. It ebbs and flows on the staccato of Williams' cello as Clifford references Pink Floyd's "The Wall" in the lyrics, which go on to mention credits on the wall scrolling, something that evokes the swan song nature of this final recording session.

There are many nods to finality throughout the album, from reaching the shore in "Waterline" to the protagonist of "On The Way Down" realizing he's spiraling out of control. "Young Again" is both resigned and optimistic, a duet with Cary Ann Hearst that acknowledges "things will never be the same again," but the music we've experienced sustains and nourishes us, much like our favorite bands keep us sane over the years.

Here's to the sanity offered by Jump, Little Children to a couple of generations worth of Carolinas music fans, and how they've given us all "One last chance to sing the old songs, one last chance to be young again."

- Kevin Oliver

Home

Todd Mathis, Clayton Mathis

Self-released

Todd Mathis is by now a well-known quantity on the Columbia music scene, having helmed the roots rocking American Gun as well as releasing his own solo Americana and instrumental music. His production talents have helped out several artists, too: most recently on Lang Owen's excellent 2022 release She's My Memory. For this new recording, Mathis has reached into uncharted territory, namely his brother Clayton Mathis.

The sibling situation positions this as a labor of love, or family duty, but the results are more than just a family debt paid off in songs. Clayton sings lead and plays guitar and mandolin, and his easygoing country vibe pulls Todd even further into the twangy side of his well-documented Americana tendencies.

The supporting players are among the best in town: Moses Andrews on organ, Mike Scarboro on drums (The Runout), and Jim Graddick on fiddle are all over these tracks, helping craft an almost live band sound to the proceedings, especially on the more upbeat numbers.

Together, they evoke the more sentimental moments of Tom T. Hall or John Prine on songs such as "Thicketty Creek," an acoustic strummer written by Clayton that paints a picture of a country scene as honest as it is apocryphal, with mosquitoes, country ham, cows, and more.

The title cut finds the brothers harmonizing on a yearning tale of what the concept of "home" means to them, with Clayton taking the lead and Todd singing the counterpoint harmonies. It's a one-song version of the entire album, with the line "Home's the beginning, home is the end," a fitting refrain.

"Old Truck" injects a bit of Todd's instrumental work into the album, with a bed of slowly pulsing music underneath his recitation of a story, or maybe a poem, describing a 1992 Ford F150 farm truck and the sometimes-brutal life, and death, of the cows who knew it by the sound of the engine. The somber realism gives way quickly, however, to Clayton's Merle Haggard style "Mama Didn't," which details in sometimes humorous, sometimes nostalgic sentimental detail, how their parents didn't like this or that part of the farm life but did it because that's how they put food on the table and raised him and Todd.

If current country music weren't such a bro-country wasteland, I'd call this a great new country album. Not wanting to insult either Mathis brother, I'll just note that on this set of songs, they've captured at least half of what David Allen Coe used to say made good country music, and that's more than enough for me.

- Kevin Oliver

2022 Draw Jasper Results

The Jasper Project is delighted to announce that the winner of the 2022 Draw Jasper contest is Wilma King. See Wilma's interpretation of Jasper on the cover of this issue and rad more about the artist on page 14.

Other notable images from the Draw Jasper competition were created by Jean Lomasto, Patrick Mahoney, and Ginny Merett, whose work previously graced the cover of Jasper Magazine.

Look for articles about Lomasto and Mahoney coming soon and check out their conceptions of Jasper below.

Ginny Merett

Patrick Mahoney

Jean Lomasto

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