

Nelson 
Atkins
MUSEUM OF ART

TESTIMONY

AFRICAN AMERICAN
ARTISTS COLLECTIVE

Art can be a testimony. It is an opportunity for artists to speak their authentic truths and be heard. The deeply personal testimonies shared by the Kansas City-based African American Artists Collective and received by you embody this powerful reciprocal interaction. Through a range of media, styles, and themes amplified by the artists' own words in the labels, this exhibition offers perspectives on myriad Black and African American experiences.

The African American Artists Collective (AAAC) grew from a 2014 gathering of local, community-minded artists at Gates Bar-B-Q on Main Street. Since then, the AAAC has increased the visibility of African American and Black artists throughout Kansas City and beyond. Although 35 artists are represented here, AAAC boasts nearly 150 members, many of whom have national and international reputations. Together, they advance professional development, build networks, provide mentorship, and engage in social justice.

TRACY MILSAP



Video still



TRACY MILSAP
American, born 1950s

SPEAK! Speak Things Speak!, 2021

Video

Courtesy of the artist

"HOME: Our familiar, Our longing, Our belonging. I am creatively obsessed with Home (intellectually, physically, emotionally, and spiritually). I am awakened when exploring, returning to, and reclaiming home within the story landscape. We all share immeasurable tangibles like blood and soil, and we seek home. Our root story is informed by it. This makes our collective stories universally essential and produces the communal testimony of who and why WE ARE.

A single story can be luminous, lasting, and legendary. I hope each beholder reaches at least one of those crossroads and embraces it."

DEAN LAMONT MITCHELL



DEAN LAMONT MITCHELL
American, born 1957

Photo by Jacob Blickenstaff

Mr. Dan Bradford, 2021

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of the artist and Connie Mitchell

"I could feel the weight of the trauma of growing up Black and poor in America: the Jim Crow era, the propaganda of stereotyped images of our community, the lack of economic development crippling our opportunity. Even with all this, I found hope in the relentless dignity lifting us to be our best selves. I am Mr. Dan Bradford."

SHERRY LYN MIRADOR



SHERRY LYN MIRADOR
American, born 1976

Faith, 2021

Gold-plated quartz, metal, wire, and 14-carat gold findings
Courtesy of the artist

"I have been born into a world that makes me feel I am less than deserving of love. As a person of color this is our walk of life, the constant feeling of needing PROTECTION. This jewelry set represents an ARMOR of protection, as quartz is known as a 'master healer' and gold is associated with love. Red wire is a reminder of the ugly truth of hostility from our past that continues to permeate our nation."

"For we live by FAITH, not by sight." — Bible, 2 Corinthians 5:7

ARIE DEE MONROE



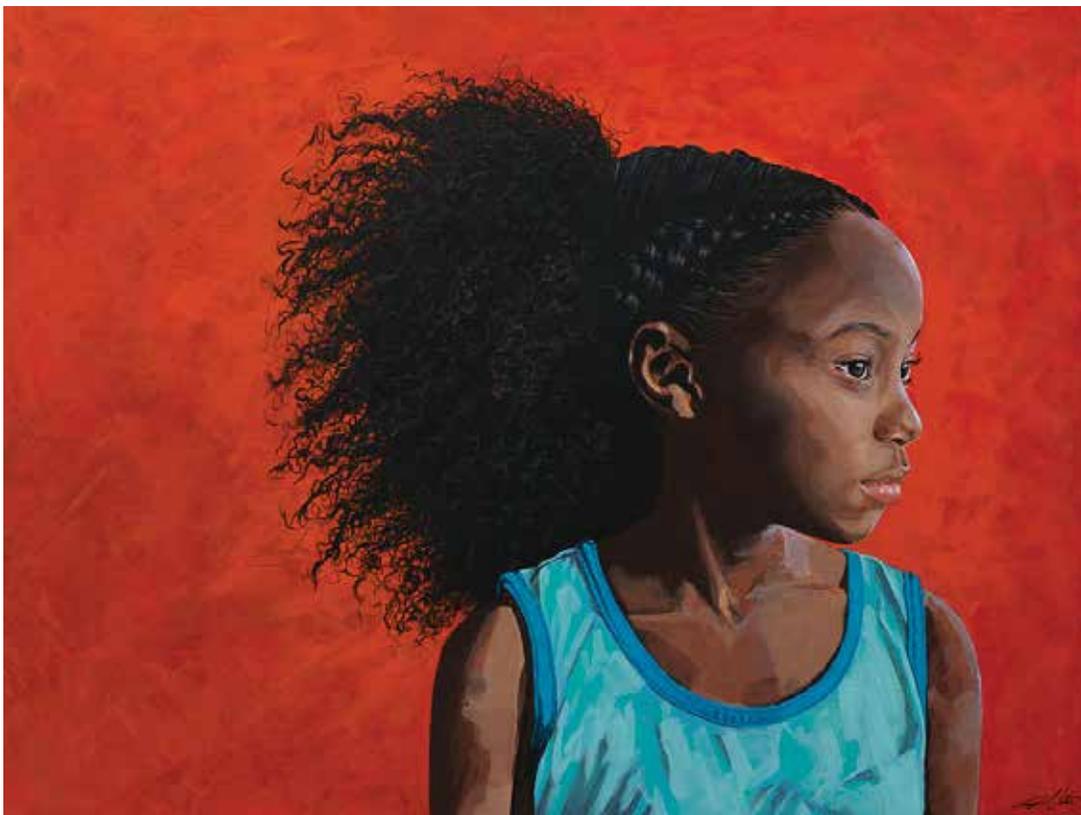
ARIE DEE MONROE
American, born 1979

Block and Delete, 2021

Digital media (Clip Studio Paint, mixed media) on canvas
Courtesy of the artist

“My comic, *Tornado Alley*, became my sounding box for the frustration and sadness I have felt all these years as a Black woman. I never imagined it would be relatable to so many others, while telling a story that no one can understand more than Black women. We pull ourselves out of abusive relationships and family dynamics. We fight to be seen as respectable and lovable, often without support. Every woman has experienced the odd text conversation that starts normal and turns into unsolicited advances. This piece is about protecting oneself and not accepting disrespect in a world that makes being disrespected seem normal.”

JOSEPH A. NEWTON



JOSEPH A. NEWTON
American, born 1972

The Hues of Her Father's Dreams, 2021
Acrylic on wood panel
Courtesy of the artist

“Though my art is diverse, I am drawn to portray
The beauty in hues where our stories lay
In a culture painted as one that is fierce
The realities few have been able to pierce
To profile the legacies deep inside
That one too many have tried to hide
Awaken the truths suppressed by men
Bring light to where our value begins
To showcase the depth of all God did make
In which He did not make a mistake”

JOSEPH TYLER NEWTON, SR.



JOSEPH TYLER NEWTON, SR.
American, born 1950

Be forever wonderful... Ahmose-Nefertari, 2021
Oil on canvas
Courtesy of the artist

"I wanted to honor my mother, my sisters, and all women by painting the female form of ancient Kemet/Egypt. The monumental Black characters of the art of ancient Kemet/Egypt affected me at an early age, and I grew to love and respect that culture. This painting depicts queen Nefertari as a beautiful woman with very dark skin, as it is believed Nefertari descended from the Nubians. She is surrounded by the papyrus plant, a symbol of the female principal in Kemetic/Egyptian mythology. Behind her, in silhouette, is a group of papyrus, and at the bottom are yellow water lilies."

KIM ALEXIS NEWTON



KIM ALEXIS NEWTON
American, born 1972

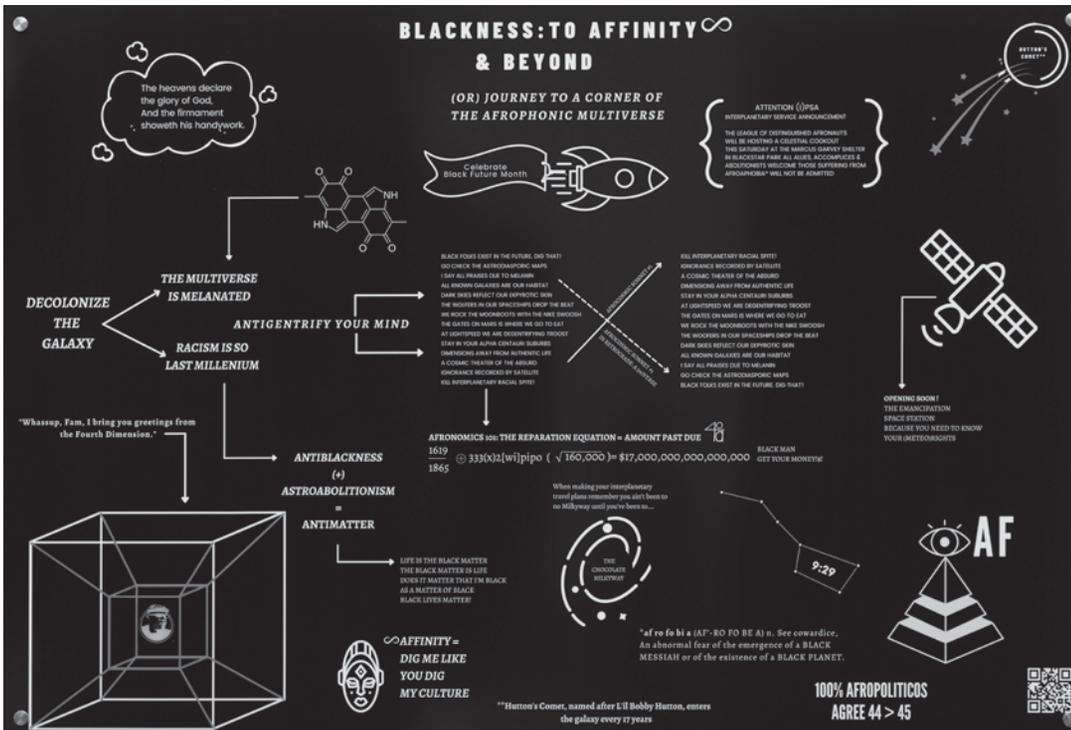
Embraced Promises, 2020

Cotton, Indonesian Batik cotton, fabric fusing, and quilting
Courtesy of Anne Devereux-Mills and David Mills

"My work fuses emotional journeys with a time-honored tradition. Emotion is the thread that ties us together. I work to create pieces that tell stories that elicit universally human reactions.

I believe the anger that many only choose to see is fueled by love and fear. Love of family. Love of self. In this work of art, it is a mom's fear of losing her son. The boy's face shows his disbelief of the need to fight for his own existence. Why is the sign down? Because they were taking a rest in their 'pursuit of happiness.'"

GLENN A. NORTH, JR.



GLENN A. NORTH, JR.
American, born 1966

Photo by Robert Hale

Blackness To Affinity: (or) Journey To A Corner Of The Afrophonic Multiverse, 2021

Visual poetry on Dibond
Courtesy of the artist

"Two of my favorite things are Black folks & poetry. With poems I celebrate the Black experience & advocate for social justice. In recent years, I have become interested in Afrofuturism as it pertains to the visual arrangement of a poem, how a poem moves through time, & asking the question, 'How would an Afrofuturistic poem perform on the page?' And, in the process, letting the world know that we are made in the image of our Creator so... **Black People Will Exist In The Future, Black People Are The Future** — as a matta fack — **The Future's Black.**"

MICHAEL TJON PATTON

PREPOSSESSING

Curious crowds gather at a lynching
willful compliant faces
anxious, expectant, cryptic smiles
indifferent to horror
a festive night for bloodletting
engaging complicity
from overalls to shirts and ties
no class distinctions tonight
scuffed-up to spit-shined hatred
out to see the show

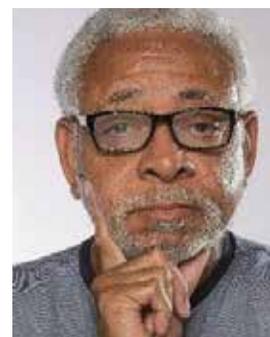
Some stand alone
some cling together
all soon become shadows
dancing in the firelight
swaying to whatever breeze
ignites dormant embers
still feeding on charred bones
overwhelmed by passion
a peculiar angry foreplay
promising raging release

The scent of burning flesh
beckons them closer
they watch the boiling blood
oozing from naked limbs
sizzle in the flames
swooning to the rhythmic popping
of blistering skin
a blissful dance with death
craving evil's writhing embrace
as the children watch and wait

"Rock-a-bye nigger in the tree-top"
a lullaby sung from birth
stiffens the blackened bough's
refusal to break
a child's nervous laughter
pierces the suffocating ecstasy
a cooling morbid comfort
settles wanton fury
seducing unrestricted marvel
insuring inevitable harvests

Sights and smells and sounds of dying
diminish in the morning mist
hanging bones rattle
like mournful wind chimes
declaring freedom's familiar victory
this generational madness
sowing fields of childlike wonder
with seeds soaked
in tears of lost innocence
wiped from tender smiling eyes

M. Patton



MICHAEL TJON PATTON

American, born 1951

Prepossessing, 2021

Poem

Courtesy of the artist

"This poem speaks to the horror depicted in the photos of naked, burning bodies hanging in hatred's forest and the smiling faces of young white children standing in the crowd. Their innocent, smiling faces staring at the murdered, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. Generational hatred is real and persistent. The sins of parents burden their children with the weight of a calloused inhumanity that wipes the smiles from their souls."

JASON D. PIGGIE



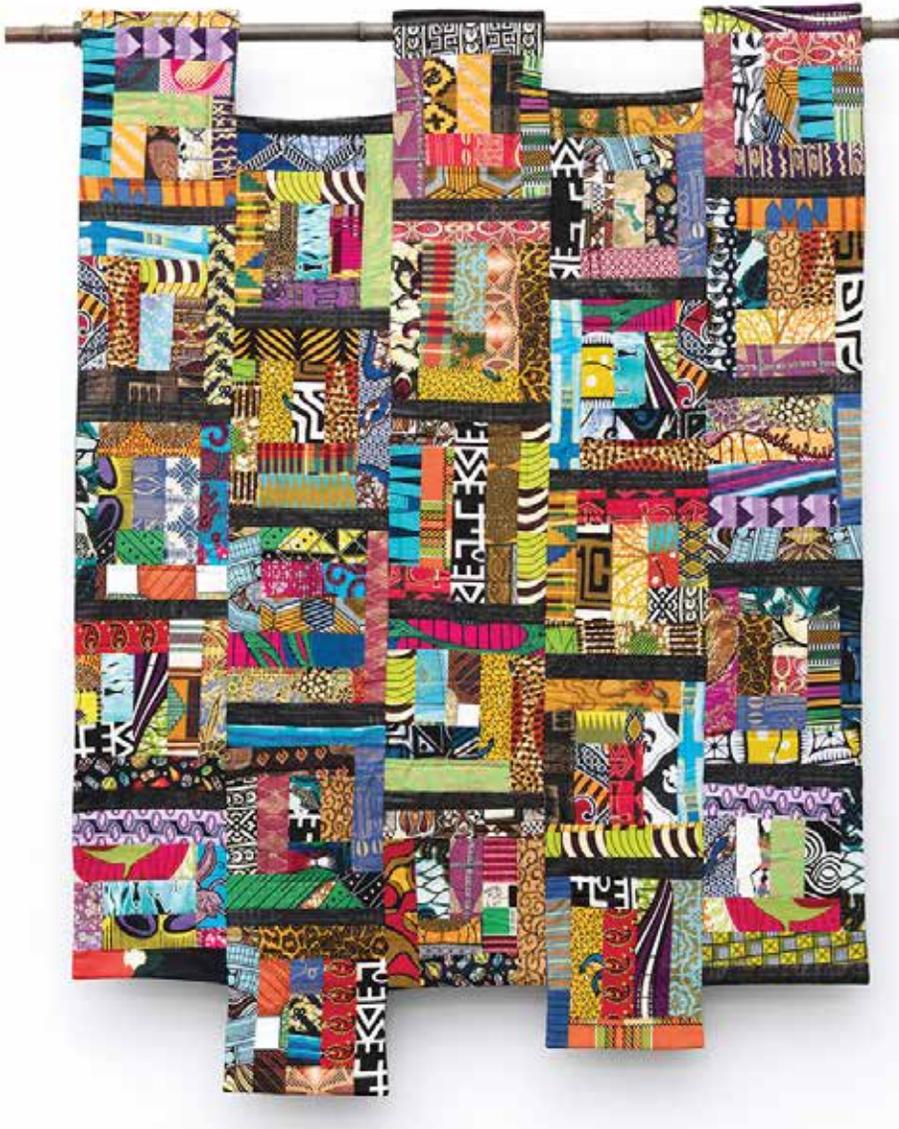
JASON D. PIGGIE
American, born 1971

Father Passes Son, 2018–2021

Photograph and video
Courtesy of the artist

“My initial motive with this work was to express motion in a still image. But the secondary theme that arose was of a man and his son journeying through life experiences. The father carrying his joys, disappointments, and expectations to a foreseeable future, but the son being stuck and frozen in the moment. My ultimate desire with this work is to imitate a thought of life’s cycles.”

LISA SHEPARD



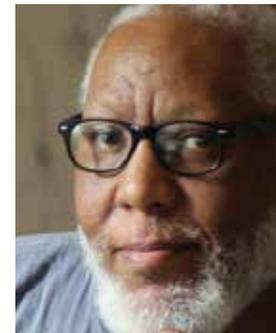
LISA SHEPARD
American, born 1964

Makola on My Mind, 2019

Ankara African printed cotton, hand-stamped cotton, adinkra cloth, and cotton batting
Courtesy of the artist

“My annual fabric sourcing trips to Ghana, West Africa, usually begin with a stop at Makola (pronounced MAH-ko-la) Market in Accra. It’s a haven for both locals and tourists, the place to purchase just about anything, including FABRIC! This piece celebrates the energy of Makola, particularly the crowded, narrow, maze-like lanes of fabric vendors with their goods. This is my testimony to the richness of Ghanaian culture, mimicking the market’s everyday mix of colors and patterns that can only be described as Organized Chaos!”

HAROLD DAVID SMITH



HAROLD DAVID SMITH
American, born 1962

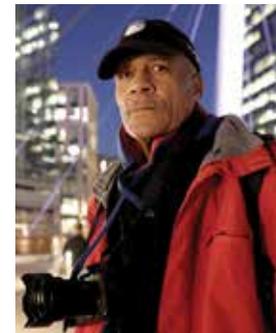
Friday Night Blues, 2021

Acrylic, spray paint, and fabric on canvas
Courtesy of the artist

“Friday Night has traditionally been a time to get together with ‘the brothers,’ have a few drinks, maybe get in a few games of pool or even chess. We share the joys and frustrations of our week and the ups and downs of the Black experience.

Over time, our Friday Nights have taken on more of a bluesy, melancholy feel. Talk of sports, work, and relationships has evolved into discussions about retirement pensions and the fact that not much has changed since we were idealistic twenty-year-olds.”

DAVID STEVENS



DAVID STEVENS
American, born 1946

Fife Master, 1996
Photograph
Courtesy of the artist

"I am motivated to photograph people whom I love and respect. It is my hope that my photographs not only capture the moment but also capture my relationship with the subject, which is one of deep knowing and admiration. It is my wish that through the viewing of my photographs you get a sense of the whole-hearted investment and bond I share with the people in my pictures. The subjects of my photographs have shared the essence of their souls, lives, and hearts with me; there is no judgement, just a celebration of their strength and beauty."

SARA SONIÉ JOI THOMPSON-RUFFIN



SARA SONIÉ JOI
THOMPSON-RUFFIN
American, born 1951

*Journey Legacy Series / Black Cherokee:
Slyamore, Arkansas, Trail of Tears, Tennessee
to Arkansas, 1830–1850, 2014*

Machine-sewn American commercial print fabric
and African fancy print fabric

Courtesy of the artist

“Invisible existence, voices unheard of steadfast
Silhouettes, from the Middle Passage to the Trail of Tears

The journey I am on is the legacy gifted to me by an
extraordinary people, their book has been written, I am
still writing my chapter

My Blackness is a gift, I am humbled to use my art to
share the experience and grateful for the journey”

MICHAEL VANCE TOOMBS



MICHAEL VANCE TOOMBS
American, born 1955

Dispensation, 2020
Acrylic on canvas
Courtesy of the artist

"*Dispensation* was sparked by personal experience during the 2017 eclipse. As the eclipse evolved into complete darkness, birds stopped singing, crickets sang their song. Trump was in the White House. The earth and our society were on the brink of a terrible change. The truth was broken repeatedly. The people were set against each other.

The word **TRUTH** is embedded in the painting. It is obscured by a stream of humanity drawn toward an incinerator creating smoke that spells 'lies.'"

ALTON "AT" WEBB



ALTON "AT" WEBB
American, born 1949

DeadDeadNDead, 2020

Acrylic on canvas

Courtesy of the artist

"At my first glimpse of life, I saw pure light. There was no Black, White, Brown, Red, or Yellow known to me. Why did it not stay this way? I have seen many acts of violence against people, mostly of color, with no consequences for those actions. *DeadDeadNDead* is an example of my prophetic works. It depicts people that have been persecuted before and after the completion piece. 'Destiny is truth revealed.' Love."

JASON WILCOX



JASON WILCOX
American, born 1982

Survivor, 2021

Acrylic, spray paint, acrylic paint marker, oil pastel, ink, tape, and fabric on canvas
Courtesy of the artist

"IF YOU'RE READING THIS
YOU'VE MADE IT THIS FAR
YOU'RE A SURVIVOR..."

I could tell you what *Survivor* means to me and what was going on in my head when I created it. But, if you're reading this, I want you to have your own personal connection with this painting. I want you to have your own opinion, with your own free will of thinking, without any narrative that could possibly alter how you truly feel. You've made it this far. How does it feel?"