



ALBANY MUSEUM OF ART

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MASUD OLUFANI, JIMMIE GARDNER TO DISCUSS *THE COLOR OF JUSTICE* TUESDAY AT AMA

U.S. District Judge Leslie Abrams Gardner Will Moderate Panel Discussion

[For Release April 29, 2019 – Albany, GA] — In his artwork, Masud Olufani addresses the inequities and injustices that have befallen African Americans. Jimmie Gardner has lived that injustice, forced to serve more than two and a half decades imprisoned for a crime he did not commit.

Olufani and Gardner will join together at **6 pm on Tuesday, April 30, 2019** at the Albany Museum of Art for *The Color of Justice*, a panel discussion about justice in America and its impact on African Americans. The event, which will be moderated by the Honorable Leslie Abrams Gardner, U.S. District Court Judge, is free and open to the public.

“Discussions about race can be difficult, but providing a safe space for these types of issues to be explored is one of the important ways the Albany Museum of Art serves our community,” AMA Executive Director Paula Williams said. “We have done that with our *Courageous Conversations* sessions, and our hope is to broaden perspectives and build stronger community with honest, open communication through thought-inspiring art, like that of Masud Olufani, and events like *The Color of Justice*.”

Olufani, whose exhibition *Memory and Meaning* is currently showing in the Haley Gallery at the AMA, said he is looking forward to the event. “There will be questions about mass incarceration,” Olufani said. “There will be some questions about my work dealing with social consciousness issues. That’s an area I want to focus on primarily.

“I’m going to talk about some of the spiritual dimensions of work that transcend social circumstances, but also inform those social circumstances and the way communities respond to those circumstances spiritually and are able to transcend those in difficult situations.”

Gardner said he also is looking forward to the opportunity to talk about the American justice system. He served 27 years in a West Virginia prison for crimes he did not commit before he proved his innocence and was freed in 2016. Since his release, he has been an advocate for other wrongfully

imprisoned men and women and a motivational speaker who has appeared at schools, colleges, universities, churches, prison and community events.

"My main position is to inform individuals on how you deal with whatever you're going through in your life, whatever perceived rough situations, and how you can deal with it and how you can come out a better person and being in a better state of mind," Gardner said.

"I definitely want to touch on wrongful convictions and the injustice from within (the legal system) dealing with certain aspects of life involving people who can't afford proper representation, those who can afford it, those who may or may not have legitimacy as far going through the habeas corpus process," he continued. "I want to speak overall about the judicial process, the judicial review, and how I'm applying my life today as an advocate for the wrongfully convicted and as a member of various innocence projects, including the Innocence Project here in Georgia."

Olufani said he will discuss historical links to mass incarceration. "Some of it will be about the prison industrial complex, my response to the historical links and ties between the 13th Amendment and the convict leasing system, and the current affairs with mass incarceration," he said.

Passed in 1865, the 13th Amendment outlawed slavery and involuntary servitude, but made an exception for it to exist as a punishment for individuals convicted of crime. That enabled the convict leasing system to develop. While it was practiced to some degree in a number of states, in the South it was used to generate money for state governments and private businesses by leasing African-American prisoners to work at farms, railroads, coal mines and other private companies.

Also, Southern states gave control of the leased prisoners to the contractors, abdicating government oversight of the prisoners and effectively making the contract locations their prisons. Laws like the Black Code, which restricted movement by African Americans, were passed, making it easy to entrap and incarcerate African Americans on petty and trumped-up charges like vagrancy, funneling them into a free labor pipeline that benefited white-owned businesses and state governments.

The convict leasing system began facing stronger opposition in the early 20th century. In 1928, Alabama, which in 1898 generated nearly three-quarters of its state government revenue from the system, became the last state to end official convict leasing. Prison labor, however, has continued in other forms, including the infamous chain gangs.

Olufani said he hopes that those who attend the event will emerge with new understanding and expanded viewpoints.

"I hope people come out thinking expansively about creative ways to respond to challenging circumstances and situations, be they personal or societal," Olufani said. "I really would like to encourage people to begin to consider some of the marginalized groups in our society, what they may be going through, how that informs the larger community, how the well-being of my brother and sister, regardless of where they come from, impacts my own life. It's that interconnectedness. History doesn't belong to just one group, but to all of us. It links us all."

Gardner said he also wants those attending to know that seemingly hopeless situations can be overcome.

"I just want to share testimony of how I made it through my ordeal, with God on my side and continuing to have faith, proving my innocence, and returning home," he said. "I'm a firm believer that God will not place a burden on us that's greater than we can handle. If you're in the position to be going through it, you can handle it. That's how I look at life and every opportunity to experience life."

It's all in our thought process—how we can grow from this experience or grow negativity from the experience. I go forward, think positive and keep myself optimistic.”

CURRENT AMA EXHIBITIONS

- *Memory and Meaning*, works by Masud Olufani, continues in the Haley Gallery through June 15;
- *Undercurrents*, works by Jerushia Graham, continues in the East Gallery through June 15;
- *Ghost Yonder Moonscape*, works by Zipporah Camille Thompson, continues in the West Gallery through June 15;
- *A Life Well Lived*, works by Alex Mixon, continues in the Hodges Regional Gallery through April 30.

ABOUT THE ALBANY MUSEUM OF ART

The Albany Museum of Art, located in Albany, Georgia, adjacent to Albany State University West Campus just off Gillionville Road is accredited by the American Alliance of Museums. The Albany Museum of Art is open 10 am through 5 pm Tuesdays through Fridays and noon until 5 pm on Saturdays. Admission is free.

For more information about the AMA please visit our website, www.albanymuseum.com or call 229.439.8400.

CAPTION INFORMATION

(L-R) Motivational speaker Jimmie Gardner, who advocates for the wrongfully imprisoned, and sculptor and multimedia artist Masud Olufani will participate in *The Color of Justice*, a panel discussion on the U.S. justice system and its impact on the African-American community in particular. The event, which will be moderated by the Hon. Leslie Abrams Gardner, U.S. District Judge, is at 6 pm Tuesday, April 30, at the Albany Museum of Art. Admission is free and the event is open to the public. (Photo: Jim Hendricks/Albany Museum of Art)

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