



ALBANY MUSEUM OF ART

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AMA LECTURE SERIES EXPLORES WORKS OF ARTIST WILLIAM H. JOHNSON

Art History Experts and Artists Headline Albany Museum of Art Fall Lecture Series

[For Release Oct 20, 2022 – Albany, GA] — A series of lectures designed to illuminate the works of William H. Johnson, one of America’s leading African-American artists of the 20th century, will get underway in November at the Albany Museum of Art.

“We will have experts on art history who will provide context for William H. Johnson’s paintings, as well as current artists who will share their perspectives about his work,” Annie Vanoteghem, director of education and public programming, said. “Two of these lectures will be in-person events conducted at the AMA, and the third will be accessible via Facebook Live.” Each lecture will start at **6 pm**, and all are free and open to the public.

The William H. Johnson Lecture Series complements the exhibition *Fighters for Freedom: William H. Johnson Picturing Justice*, which is on view through Dec 10, 2022, in the AMA’s Haley Gallery. Organized by the Smithsonian American Art Museum, generous support for the exhibition has been provided by Art Bridges.

“Johnson painted his *Fighters for Freedom* series in the mid-1940s as a tribute to African-American activists, scientists, teachers, and performers, as well as international heads of state who worked to bring peace to the world,” Vanoteghem said. “He celebrated their accomplishments while acknowledging the realities of racism, violence, and oppression they faced and overcame.

“In every painting in his *Fighters for Freedom* series, William H. Johnson tells a story with his use of color and symbolism. We are fortunate to have these talented educators and artists who can share tremendous insights about Johnson’s groundbreaking work and give us a clearer perspective on how his vision 80 years ago translates to today’s society.”

The first lecture on **Thursday, Nov 17** will be in-person at the AMA, and will feature Rebecca Bush, curator of history and exhibitions manager at the Columbus Museum in Columbus, Ga. She will be

joined by exhibiting artist Tracy Murrell and Murrell's cousin Wayna, a Grammy-nominated singer who was the inspiration for Murrell's exhibition *Wayna: Her Dreams of Ethiopia*, which is on view in the East Gallery of the AMA through Jan 4, 2023.

Bush will discuss who the *Fighters for Freedom* were. "She will provide insights into the historical figures, point out small surprises on the canvases, and explain how Johnson's work provides a new perspective on the United States in the 1940s," Vanoteghem said.

She said Murrell and Wayna "will share their experiences as Black female artists in today's society." Murrell is an Atlanta-based visual artist who uses silhouettes as entry points to complex conversations about gender, race, and how beauty is perceived. Wayna, an R&B/soul artist who was born in Ethiopia and grew up in Washington, D.C., worked as a writer for the Clinton White House before releasing three solo albums and earning a Grammy nomination.

Bush is vice president of the Georgia Association of Museums, and serves on the editorial board of the journal *The Public Historian*. Before coming to Columbus in 2011, she worked with house museums at Historic Columbia in South Carolina. Bush has a BA in History from Kansas State University and an MA in Public History from the University of South Carolina.

On **Tuesday, Nov 29**, Elizabeth Hamilton, Ph.D., assistant professor at Fort Valley State University, will discuss *Harriet Tubman's (Afro)Future* during a Zoom session that will be broadcast as a Facebook Live event on the Albany Museum of Art's Facebook page. Viewers of the lecture will be able to participate in a question-and-answer in the Facebook Live Chat Box.

Hamilton will examine the Afrofuturistic visual legacy of Harriet Tubman, whom Johnson included in his *Fighters for Freedom* series. Hamilton is an art historian whose research focuses on the visual culture of the African diaspora, feminism, and Afrofuturism. Her first book, *Charting the Afrofuturist Imaginary in African American Art* (Routledge), is the winner of the Wyeth Foundation for American Art Publication Grant. She has published research in *Nka: The Journal of Contemporary African Art*, *African Arts*, the *International Review of African American Art*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and *Smithsonian Voices*.

On **Thursday, Dec 1**, Susan Bragg, Ph.D., associate professor of history at Georgia Southwestern State University in Americus, will be joined at the in-person lecture at the museum by Atlanta-based artist Eric Mack, whose work was on view at the AMA last year.

Bragg will discuss contextualizing Johnson's civil rights struggle during the World War II era and how his work represents an effort to visualize a new kind of civil rights legacy in a postwar world. Bragg, who teaches courses in African-American history, women's history, and cultural studies at GSW, earned her Ph.D. in history at the University of Washington and has published in the field of 19th- and early 20th-century civil rights politics, focusing on family politics and gender in the NAACP. Her current research explores the visual and textual politics of race and gender in 20th-century children's literature.

Mack will lend his perspective as a Black male artist, and speak on the South Carolina connection he and Johnson share. Like Johnson, Mack has spent time studying in Europe, and he will compare his experiences with those of Johnson, and discuss the global contributions of Black people in the arts that he witnessed abroad.

"This lecture series will be an incredible opportunity for the AMA community to hear more in-depth about William H. Johnson, whose contributions to the art world at large are severely unknown and underrated," Katie Dillard, AMA director of curatorial affairs, said. "Johnson created powerful artworks, and he didn't accept anything less than what he believed he deserved. With each artist's lecture, we

will have the unique opportunity to hear their modern stories, but will also have the chance to make connections to the trailblazers who have come before them.

"I always appreciate the opportunity to hear a story and learn from someone else's perspective. We also want to give our guests the chance to put themselves in someone else's shoes and walk for a bit. This will be such an opportunity for growth and connection, and I am looking forward to it."

All lectures are free and open to the public.

AMA EXHIBITIONS

- *Fighters for Freedom: William H. Johnson Picturing Justice* is in The Haley Gallery, Sept 1-Dec 10, 2022. Organized by the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Generous support is provided by Art Bridges.
- *Wayna: Her Dreams of Ethiopia, Works by Tracy Murrell* is in the East Gallery, Sept 1, 2022- Jan 7, 2023.
- *Georgia Artists Guild of Albany, 29th Juried Exhibition* is in the McCormack Gallery, Sept 1, 2022-Jan 7, 2023.
- *Forsaking All Comfort and Prosperity, Works by Maryam Safajoo* is in the Hodges Gallery, Oct 6, 2022-Jan 28, 2023.
- *Escape Plan, Installation by Elinor Saragoussi* is in the West Gallery.

AMA EVENTS

- *AMA ChalkFest*, Nov 19, 2022, 10 am-5 pm, Front Street and Veterans Park Amphitheater. Admission is free. www.amachalkfest.com.

ABOUT THE ALBANY MUSEUM OF ART

The Albany Museum of Art is located at 311 Meadowlark Drive in Albany, Ga., adjacent to Albany State University West Campus just off Gillionville Road. The museum is accredited by the American Alliance of Museums. The Albany Museum of Art is open to the public 10 am-5 pm Tuesdays through Saturdays. Admission is free.

For more information about the AMA please visit our website, www.albanymuseum.com, or call 229.439.8400. Be sure to follow the @AlbanyArtMuseum on Twitter, AlbanyMuseum on Instagram, and AlbanyMuseumOfArt on Facebook.

CAPTION INFORMATION

Art educators from Georgia and Alabama tour the *Fighters for Freedom: William H. Johnson Picturing Justice* exhibition during the Art Ed. Connect professional development day on Oct 13 at the Albany Museum of Art. Johnson's art will be discussed at three AMA fall lectures led by art historians and artists. (Photo: Albany Museum of Art)

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