

MATERIALIAL

GIRLS

**Contemporary
Black
Women Artists**

WALDESTRASSE

1910



CHAKAIA **BOOKER**

SONYA **CLARK**

TORKWASE **DYSON**

MAYA **FREELON ASANTE**

MAREN **HASSINGER**

MARTHA **JACKSON JARVIS**

JOYCE J. **SCOTT**

RENÉE **STOUT**

MATERIAL GIRLS

Contemporary Black Women Artists



Joyce J. Scott, *Galaxy (detail)*, 2006, Glass, ceramic, beadwork

MATERIAL GIRLS

Contemporary Black Women Artists

Curated by Michelle Joan Wilkinson, PhD

Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History & Culture
Baltimore, Maryland

2011



REGINALD F. LEWIS MUSEUM
of Maryland African American
History & Culture

Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History & Culture
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FOREWORD

African-American traditions of creative ingenuity are a constant source of inspiration in my work... I believe art should transform the way we think about ourselves and the world.

—Maya Freelon Asante¹

The transformation of everyday, mundane materials is so prevalent in the work of African creators globally, that it could almost be identified as an ethnically determined aesthetic. After all, it was the African artist Fodé Camara who once noted that the essence of African-ness in contemporary creative production is grounded in “amalgamation and recycling.”²

There are two aspects to that transformation in the work in this exhibition. On the one hand, there is what Maya Freelon Asante identifies as the acts of salvaging and transforming discarded materials to create objects—specifically African American quilts³—that emerge from traditional African practices of enlivening and sanctifying objects. This indicates a special sensibility for the power and expressive potential of materials, textures, and forms that is prevalent in global African communities. The work in this exhibition also demonstrates that these qualities can have gender nuances and thus easily be co-opted as “women’s work.” But the objects created by Freelon Asante, Chakaia Booker, Sonya Clark, Torkwase Dyson, Maren Hassinger, Martha Jackson Jarvis, Joyce J. Scott, and Renée Stout all have a power and force—no matter what their scale—that indicate these are no mere parlor manifestations by polite “little women.”

For one thing, there is a mythic and totemic quality to this work that reveals itself in Freelon Asante’s quirky and unexpected tissue paper constructions; in the heraldic wreath of hair by Clark; or Booker’s upwardly snaking form that threatens to strike out at us, as if it were Quetzalcoatl, the famed winged reptile of the ancient Americas; and in Scott’s more specifically referential galactic tableau that resembles a beaded freeform easel floating in the universe. Ceremonial forms are replete in Clark’s radiating pyramid, a curvilinear stacking of humble hair combs that aspires to the power of monumental ritual structures. Jackson Jarvis finds expression in totemic poles and pods rendered in her characteristic mosaic “assemblage” technique. In this category, Clark’s mimicry of textiles by binding the combs with threads to create patterns reminds us of César Paternosto’s correlations between the textiles and architectural structures of South America.⁴

Natural and organic manifestations are found by Hassinger who has consistently eked nature out of cable wires, newsprint, and plastic. A performative potential lurks behind these activated forms

Sonya Clark, *Hair Wreath (detail)*, 2002, Human hair, wire



recalling her roots as a dancer. Jackson Jarvis continues her explorations of tubular shapes in sculptures that evoke gourds and rather sinister pods whose scale can't help but make us think of science fiction. At the same time, Stout domesticates the ferociousness of the Yoruba male deity Ogun, lord of fire and iron, in a series of sensuous drips that speak as much to fertilization and birth as they do to the fiery transmogrification of form.

From here could the *fetiché* figure be far behind? In Scott's hands they are malleable glass figures that are combined with beaded elements to capture moments of a personal, racialized experience or reference. In Dyson's hands they emerge from the play with detritus, rubbish, and discarded materials that come together in powerful bundles that rival those of the legendary Philadelphia Wireman, who left such gifts anonymously in the streets of the city of Brotherly Love. How we assign value to these materials is forever transformed in the presence of her work. This experience is offered by Stout in her exquisite assembled mattress frame that is also dedicated to Ogun. It seems a fit object to be set within one of her mysteriously wrought interiors that mine the psychological, emotional, even occult possibilities of a given experienced space.

These artists amply demonstrate that while they most certainly live in the material world, they are no mere inhabitants. They are its constructors and transformers.

Lowery Stokes Sims, PhD
Curator, Museum of Arts and Design
New York, NY

¹ Stephen Riley, "Maya Freelon Asante: The Beauty of Now," *Afro-American Red Star* (August 1-7, 2009).

² Susan Vogel, "The Official Story," in *Africa Explores: Twentieth-Century African Art*, essays by Walter E. A. Van Beek, et al. (New York: Center for African Art in association with Prestel-Verlag, Munich, 1991), 184.

³ Riley.

⁴ César Paternosto, *The Stone and the Thread: Andean Roots of Abstract Art*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996).



Renée Stout, *The Thinking Room*, 2005, Mixed media installation

OF MATERIAL IMPORTANCE

By Michelle Joan Wilkinson

Contemporary black women artists are, and have been, fearless agents of artistic experimentation. The tools of their trade are highly textured materials that range from natural to man-made, from spirit-filled to soulless, from ritualistic to robotic. The materials they prod, ply, and piece together play on unique cultural meanings, personal memories, and social agendas. Given black women's traditions with craft and fiber arts—consider basket-weaving and quilting—the skilled fabrication of functional and aesthetic objects has long been within their domain. This dual tradition reveals that there have always been artists and makers who create *just because*—not because of necessity. There was a time when, for many African American women, creative production was limited to whatever materials were at hand or could be readily gathered. In their desire to create, to invent, to make something of beauty, they modeled art forms that passed from generation to generation, from family to community, from private homes into public museums. As mass production diminished the need for individuals to craft and sell utilitarian objects, the paradigm shifted. What happens when necessity does not drive invention? As handcraft practices are channeled into “fine art” production, what materials are being used and why?

Material Girls, an exhibition featuring work by Chakaia Booker, Sonya Clark, Torkwase Dyson, Maya Freelon Asante, Maren Hassinger, Martha Jackson Jarvis, Joyce J. Scott, and Renée Stout, examines the materials mined by contemporary black women artists to create unique and highly tactile forms. Some of these artists work in traditional media, such as wood, metal, and glass. Others rely on manufactured, recycled, discarded, and unexpected materials, including plastic bags, rubber tires, plastic combs, and human hair. Many create public art, whether commissioned for large, metropolitan centers or installed in locales off the beaten track. By introducing objects and materials from outside the traditional art-making canon, they build on the contributions of artists such as Faith Ringgold, Betye Saar, Barbara Chase-Riboud, and others who in the 1960s began to create within the expressive traditions of materiality.¹ Those artists' ground-breaking experiments in fiber, metal, wood, and various found objects connect in important ways with the monumental tire sculptures of Booker, the quilt-like tissue paper installations of Freelon Asante, and Stout's mixed-media tableaus.

The eight artists in *Material Girls* have both skill and passion for making things. Their process of making—using the mind, eyes, and hands in a very conscious way—honors



the foremothers who created without being recognized as the artists they were. In her seminal essay, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens," Alice Walker writes about the artistic contributions of black women that go unnoticed.² Walker traces the unsung creativity of women like her mother, whose passion for gardening was as much an "art" as Walker's prize-winning writing. The essay reaffirms the love and care black mothers invested in creating things of beauty, even when faced with enslavement, forced illiteracy, and little or no access to conventional art-making materials.

As did Walker's mother, generations of black women found ways to infuse their creative spirit into everyday practices. Black women crafted meals from the less desirable cuts of meat, turning out delicacies that we now consider "soul" food. They healed physical and emotional wounds with herbs and homeopathic remedies. Using the materials available to them, black women improvised, experimented, and, in the process, invented what they needed. They learned how to "make it work" and they passed on the lesson that even the commonplace items that surround us can be valuable material for us, if we place value in them.

In the recycling and reinventing of material objects for artistic purposes, the artists in *Material Girls* build upon time-honored creative traditions within African American culture. For centuries, African American quilt-makers have pieced together scraps of old clothes to make beautifully stitched, colorful bed coverings. Today, the handiwork of these quilters is recognized for its aesthetic and technical contributions to American art, craft, and design. Quilts made for decades by the women of Gee's Bend, a small rural community in Alabama, now adorn not only their homes, but also museum walls around the nation. More recently, the Women of Color Quilters Network has created traveling exhibits of art quilts that continue to transform the genre.

Some of the artists in *Material Girls* took early inspiration from seeing their mothers, grandmothers, and other family members sewing, quilting, and shaping simple pieces of fabric into something rich and impressive. Freelon Asante claims a heritage of grandmothers and



From the top: Barbara Chase-Riboud, *Confessions for Myself*, 1972, Bronze, paint, wool; Betye Saar, *Shield of Quality*, 1974, Mixed media assemblage; Faith Ringgold; *Mrs. Jones and Family*, 1973, Mixed media

great-grandmothers who were able to create beautiful, functional objects from scraps of cloth. Clark learned how to thread a needle, in what she has called “a magical way,” from her maternal grandmother, who was a tailor.³ Clark now creates sculptural works patterned to resemble West African *kente* cloth and other strip-woven fabrics, though she works with unusual materials: hundreds of plastic hair combs and thread.



Having witnessed family members working with their hands, artists in this exhibition seem pre-disposed to exploring the pleasures derived from the sense of touch. They embrace art forms that allow them to engage the tactile qualities of their media. Some recycle or intentionally “repurpose” what has been deemed waste, bestowing new value and meaning on discarded materials. When Booker began creating large sculptures, she saw that old tires were easily available. Her recycling of old tires is also connected to traditions of sewing.



Booker offers, “My grandmother, my aunt, and my sister were people who sewed. Growing up, I remember seeing my aunt and my sister design and create things for themselves, family members, and friends.”⁴ Booker’s exposure to sewing via the women in her family led her to tailor her own clothes growing up. She translates that early experience of deconstructing store-bought garments and creating inventive forms that better suited her body, into a contemporary artistic practice that allows her to experiment with wearable art pieces, repurposed materials, and performative self-fashioning. “In the morning when I get up, I sculpt myself first,” she says, “I myself am sculpture and that continues on a daily basis. At the studio, the process continues.”⁵ Not unlike Clark sculpting headwear and jewelry and Scott producing provocative beaded necklaces, Booker fashions art works that might serve as adornment, embellishment, and perhaps even forms of protection.

From the top: Chakaia Booker, *Rainbow*, 2001, Rubber tire, wood; Sonya Clark, *Plain Weave* (detail), 2008, Plastic combs, thread

Though most of the art selected for *Material Girls* is not wearable or functional in any strictly utilitarian sense, a number of works on view reference spiritual traditions in which objects have ritual functions. Rituals of healing are undercurrents in works by Scott, Stout, and Jackson Jarvis. Scott invokes the healing properties of plant roots



At left: Joyce J. Scott, *Inkisi: St. John the Conqueror (detail)*, 2009, Collected glass bottles, glass beads, wire, thread, coral; Martha Jackson Jarvis, *Crossroads/Trickster I, II, III*, 2006, Terracotta brick, stone, glass, steel, mortar

in *Inkisi: St. John the Conqueror*, an assemblage of miniature glass bottles filled with coral pieces that resemble the gnarled root “John the Conqueror.” In African American folk culture and elsewhere, John the Conqueror root is used as a protective device against harm. The “Inkisi” (or *nkisi*) referred to in Scott’s title is the vessel that holds the spiritual matter, or the root. In Kongo cultures on the west coast of Central Africa, *nkisi* is a charm filled with sacred contents—cemetery earth, clay, seeds, stones, and sticks—that can protect and heal.⁶ Referring to the “John the Conqueror” root as “St. John,” Scott plays on historic naming conventions in which Africans, especially those brought to Latin America and the Caribbean, paired the names of Catholic Saints with those of African deities. This dual naming logic allowed enslaved Africans to conceal their spirit worship practices within the guise of Catholicism, as they gradually developed syncretic, New World belief systems such as Santería, Candomblé, and Vodun.



While such titles and materials convey the diasporic reach of Kongo-inspired traditions, Africa’s Yoruba deities are also named and evoked in this exhibition. Ogun, the Yoruba god of war and iron, appears in the titles of a repurposed metal bed sculpture by Stout and in her *Ogun Power Object #2*. Stout shares that her father was a steelworker, mechanic, and “tinkerer.” Her attraction to the metal god and to metals themselves is rooted in the material’s familiarity and memories from her childhood in Pittsburgh, a steel mining town. Artist Jackson Jarvis nods to Eshu-Elegbara, the Yoruba guardian of the crossroads, in *Crossroads/Trickster I, II, III*. Her environmentally engaged sculptures incorporate elements of African spirituality and domestic rituals that she observed as a child. Jackson Jarvis’s grandmother would take broken fragments of pottery to the family gravesite, a practice common in Central Africa and brought to the United States by captives from that region. With seeds, stones, clay, and glass, Jackson Jarvis transforms gallery and outdoor spaces into ceremonial sites that feel at once ancient and contemporary. For Scott, Stout, and Jackson Jarvis, materials reveal a narrative about identity (who they are) and ancestry (who they come from).

Hassingier and Dyson comment on our relationship to the natural and built landscapes, using materials as a critical language to explore

At right: Maya Freelon Asante, *Keep Ya Head Up* (detail), 2010, Tissue ink/monoprint collage; Maren Hassinger, *Winter Garden* (*Stone Garden*), 1990, Concrete, wire rope

concerns about the environment. Whether installed outdoors or inside galleries, Hassinger's sculptures use commercial grade materials, like wire rope, in poetic ways that mimic textures and tones found in nature. Hassinger is especially interested in sculpture as a way to make physical what has been lost or is in danger. Dyson is concerned with hazards related to material economies—that is, with how all the “disposable” stuff we buy, sell, use, and discard affects the environment. Her multi-media sculptures combine science, architecture, engineering, and technology, often to explore issues of environmental injustice and vulnerability. Whether using austere or commonplace materials, her works profess a kinetic beauty. “It has to be beautiful, with an undercurrent of politics,” Dyson has said.⁷ The reverse also seems equally true—that the work has to be political, with an undercurrent of beauty.

By working at the intersection of art and material culture, these artists transform the expressive traditions of their foremothers, “mothers of invention” who sewed, quilted, gardened, and cooked. Their contemporary art works manifest and acknowledge formative traditions of “women’s work,” while referencing architecture, design, and environmental science. Similarly, as a curatorial endeavor, *Material Girls* builds upon the foundational work of Lowery Stokes Sims and Leslie King-Hammond, scholar-curators whose collaborations and contributions encompass *Art as a Verb* (1988) and *The Global Africa Project* (2010). In fact, *Material Girls* features some artists from these two exhibitions, more than twenty years apart, while also bringing into the fold a new generation of art-makers like Dyson and Freelon Asante.

Exhibitions such as *She’s So Articulate* (2008), focusing exclusively on contemporary art by black women, and *Second Lives: Remixing the Ordinary* (2008), investigating materiality and contemporary craft, have also advanced the critical conversation by highlighting artists whose work is material-driven. Yet, a key element that makes *Material Girls* unique in this realm is its attention to the ingenuity and the intergenerational creativity of women who grew up around other creative women and men, and, particularly, how, as self-defined artists, they now make things—objects and installations—that expand



the range of art-making practices and materials. These artists care about what texture suggests, recalls, evokes. Compulsive gatherers and crafty recyclers, they mine the material inheritance of our contemporary lives, as well as the handcraft traditions of their own pasts.

What also sets *Material Girls* apart is context. It is significant to show these eight artists together in the Reginald F. Lewis Museum, an institution whose lens is on African American history and culture, broadly defined, as opposed to a venue dedicated to showing fine art, craft, or design. These black women exist in a contemporary art world increasingly focused on works that blur the lines between art and life. At the museum, a key goal is documenting and annotating African American life and its material effects. What better context, then, in which to consider the materiality of contemporary African American experience than an institution where visitors can explore how *Material Girls* connects to and departs from the material culture displayed throughout the museum's permanent exhibition galleries. The conversation among the contemporary artists and their foremothers and forefathers is there for all to see and seek out. Which household objects from Stout's *The Thinking Room* can be glimpsed elsewhere behind glass display cases? What skills did enslaved African ironworkers bequeath to Hassinger, Dyson, Stout, and Booker—all of whom are comfortable prying industrial materials apart to communicate their own potent visions? What lessons and traditions do Freelon Asante, Scott, and Jackson Jarvis allude to that are not also encoded in handsome quilts on view in the permanent exhibits? What rituals of beauty and adornment are evident in Clark's comb sculptures and Booker's feathered tires that we don't also recognize in the museum's installations featuring hot combs and Sunday hats?

Presenting a view of artistic processes, practices, and production within a larger conversation about African American history and African diaspora cultures, *Material Girls* sheds light on how black women artists transformed the adaptive strategy of "making it work" into making art work. They build monumental sculptures, shape richly textured surfaces, and apply intricate handiwork to both delicate and resilient materials. Drawing upon the experiences of their foremothers who embodied the phrase "mothers of invention"; reaching across the spectrum to create art engaged with history, architecture, dance, science, technology, and spirituality; translating tactile experiences into visual form; and investing in the future by recycling materials from the present, these eight women energize the field of contemporary art by highlighting the expressive potential of undervalued objects. They show us that by choosing to value the materials around us, we can shape our lives and livelihoods through our own making. They reveal how we can derive both beauty and meaning from materials that may seem inconsequential to the world around us.

¹ Among the contemporary black women artists working in this vein of material-driven art are Senga Nengudi, Sana Musasama, Alison Saar, Valerie Maynard, Saya Woolfalk, Tanea Richardson, Shinique Smith, and countless others.

² Alice Walker, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens," in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. New York, NY: Harcourt Books, 1983.

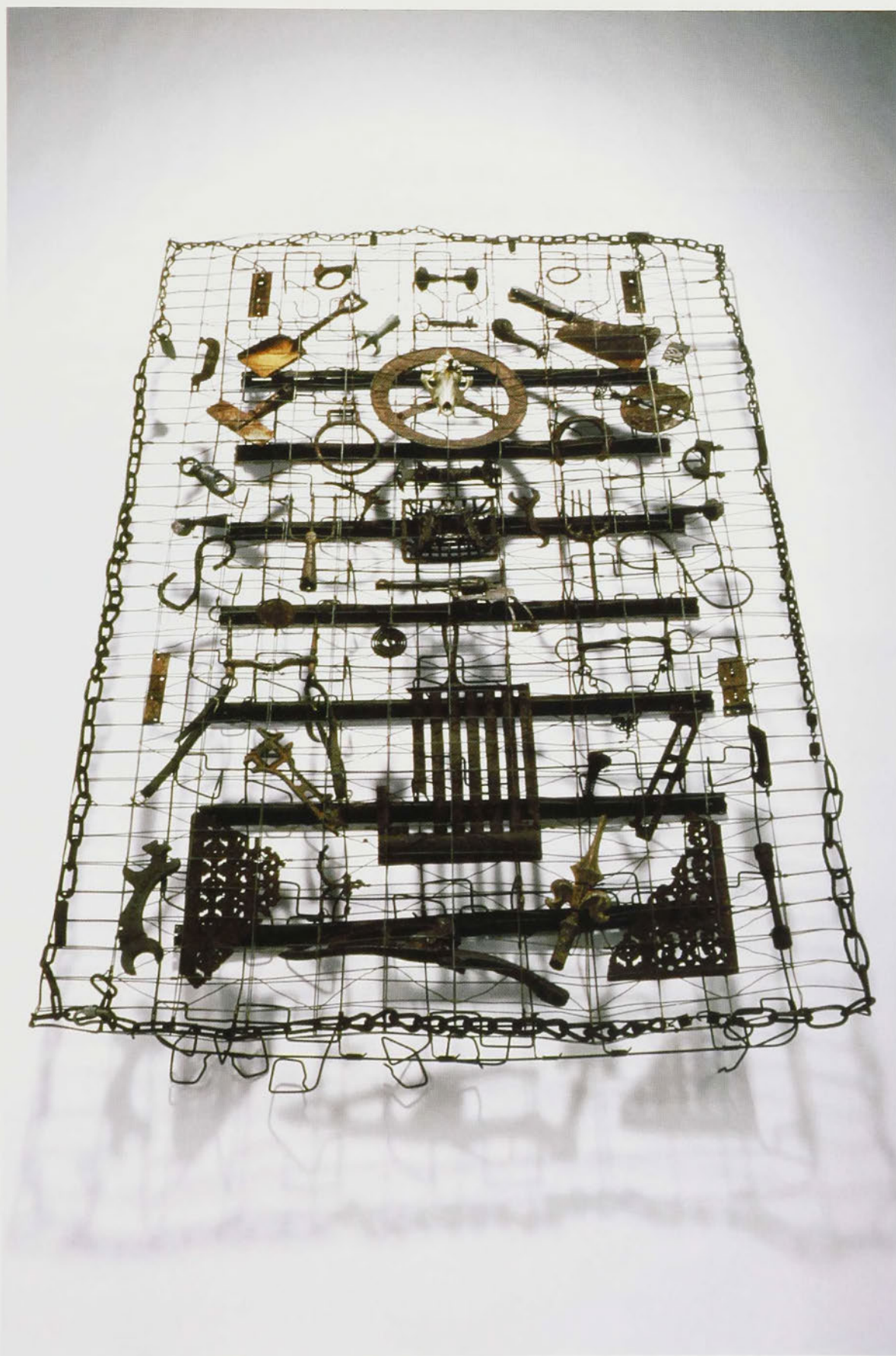
³ Sonya Clark, The Marc Steiner Show, Center for Emerging Media, 2008.

⁴ Jan Garden Castro, "The Language of Life: A Conversation with Chakaia Booker," *Sculpture*, Jan/Feb 2003.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African & Afro-American Art & Philosophy*. New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1984.

⁷ Jessica Dawson, "A Piercing Look at the World (Interview with Torkwase Dyson)," *Washington Post*, July 27, 2008.



Renée Stout, *Ogun's Bed*, 1998, Wire, found objects

CHAKAIA BOOKER



Born in Newark, New Jersey, in 1953, Chakaia Booker has shown her work nationally and internationally and is the recipient of numerous awards. She was a featured artist in the Whitney Museum of American Art's biennial exhibition in 2000.

Booker holds an MFA from The City College of New York and a BA in Sociology from Rutgers University. She began producing art in the 1970s. Since the late 1980s, she has been transforming discarded rubber tires into monumental abstract sculpture that give visual form to issues of class, race, gender, and environmentalism. Booker states, "My intention is to translate materials into imagery that will stimulate people to consider themselves as part of their environment—one piece of a whole."

The rubber tires in her work are recycled materials with their own narratives about manufacturing, industry, and transportation. The artist shapes the tires' threaded textures and thick black skin into objects of unexpected beauty, reborn with provocative names and new identities. Booker also creates wearable art pieces, a process that is informed by her training in sculpture and basket-weaving, and by observing women in her family design their own clothes. Understanding these mediums as existing in tandem, she works outside conventional boundaries to materialize her innovative and evocative ideas.



Mixed Message, 2005, Rubber tire, wood



The Fatality of Hope, 2007, Rubber tire, wood

SONYA CLARK



"We leave evidence of our humanity through the things we make," Sonya Clark says. Born in Washington, DC, in 1967, Clark is a maker whose extensive training includes a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, an MFA from Cranbrook Academy of Art, and early lessons from the many craftpersons in her Afro-Caribbean family. Clark's maternal grandmother was a tailor and her maternal grandfather made furniture. For Clark, art-making is a tactile practice in communion with these and other ancestors throughout the African Diaspora.

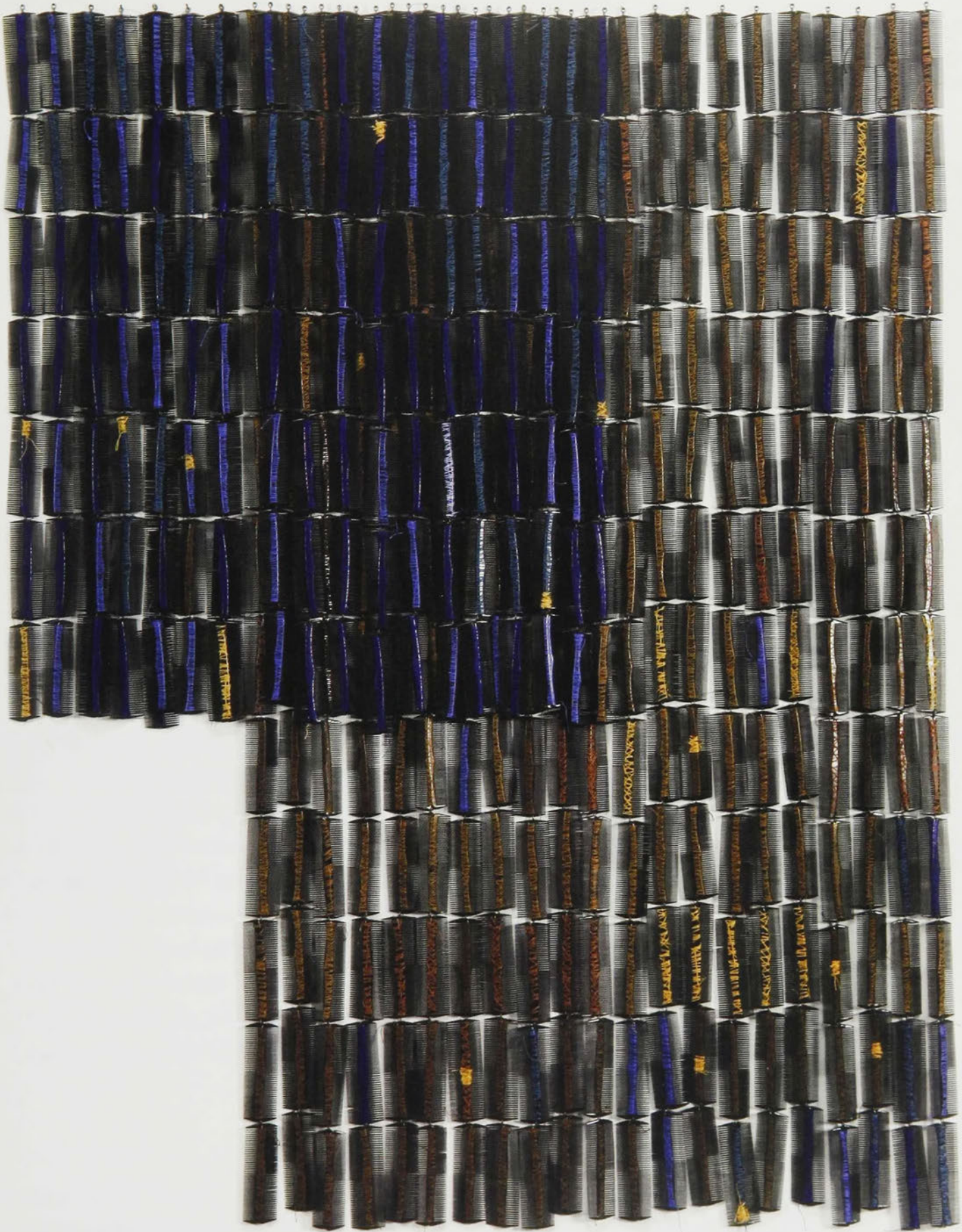
Highly informed by the cultures of West Africa, in particular the Yoruba, Clark uses seemingly mundane objects, such as plastic combs and thread, to assemble wall hangings that resemble textiles. As a fiber artist, she also uses hair—the primordial fiber—to sculpt jewelry and other objects. In her art process, the object becomes the subject. As she affirms in her artist statement, "The everyday 'thing' becomes a lens through which we may better see one another."

Clark is currently Chair of the Department of Craft/Material Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts. Her work has been exhibited in numerous cities across the United States, and in Australia, Austria, Brazil, Canada, Korea, and the United Kingdom, among other countries.



Wavy Strand, 2005, Plastic combs, wire

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Thread Wrapped, 2008, Plastic combs, thread

TORKWASE DYSON

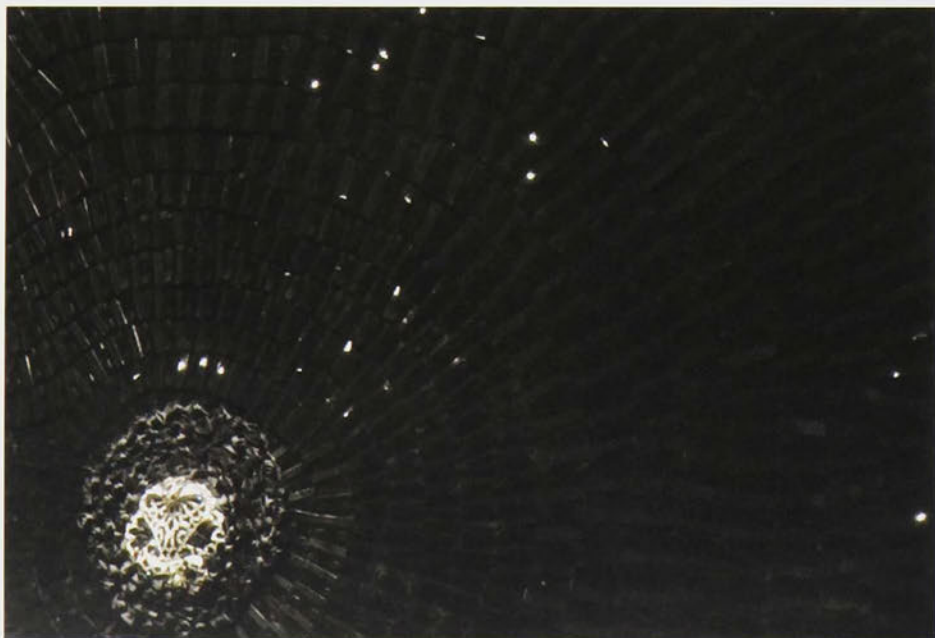


Based in Brooklyn, NY, artist Torkwase Dyson creates sculptures and installations that comment on urban design and eco-politics. In her hands, everyday objects from mass culture, such as earring cards, sweatshirt decals, and toy cars, are transformed into magical realist sculptures. Her studio practice melds technology, architecture, materialism, and imagination. Moreover, by incorporating a diverse cadre of mediums—including photography, video, sound, painting, and sculpture—Dyson creates multi-sensory experiences, not simply art objects.

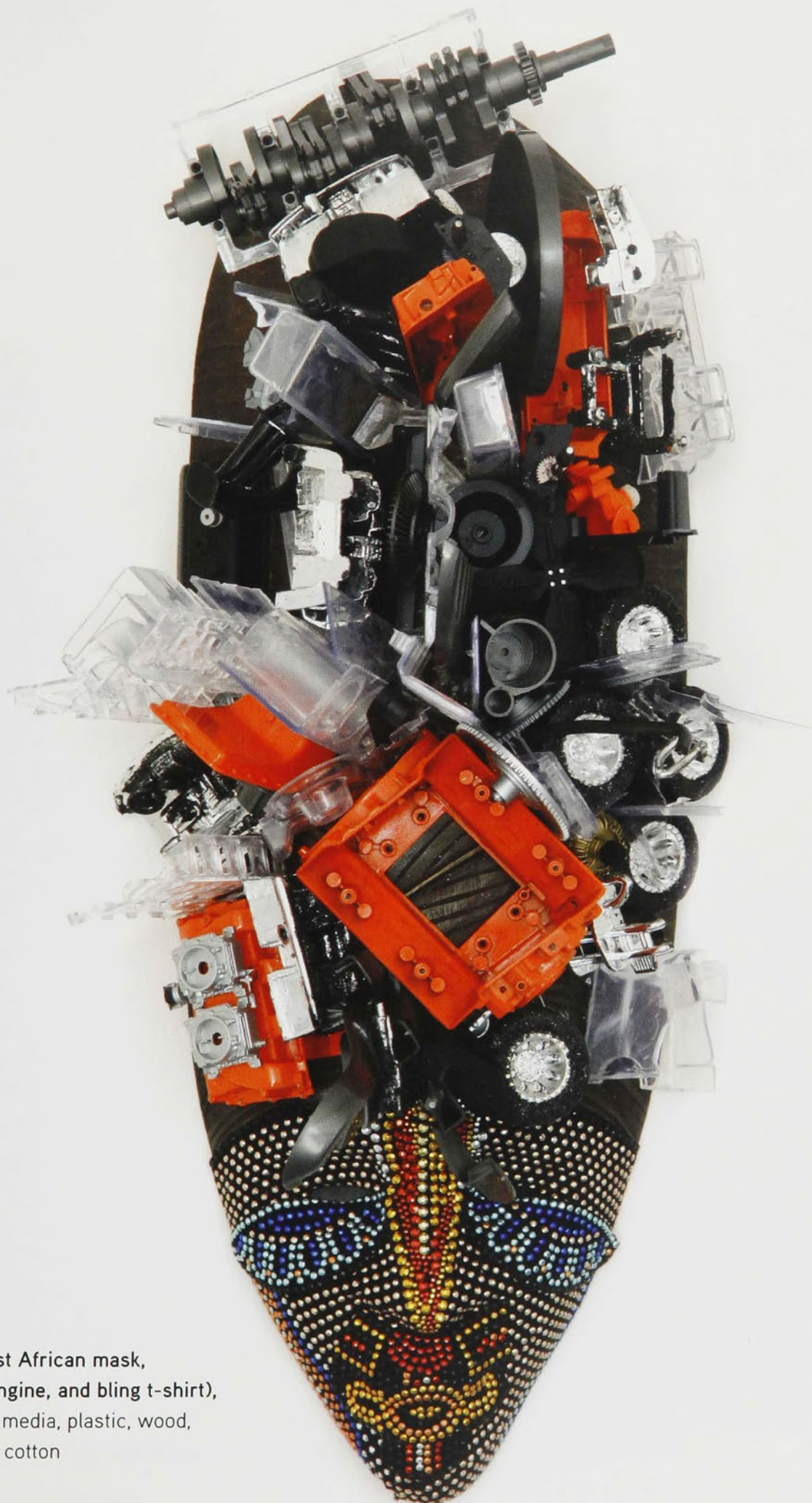
The aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico have particularly affected her creative process. She states that her work is a way of thinking through “complicated facts with complicated materials” that make up her built environment. Industrial roofing supplies, solar tubes and panels, and aluminum are among the materials upon which she now draws.

Dyson received a BA in Sociology from Tougaloo College and a BFA in Painting/Printmaking from Virginia Commonwealth University. In 2003, she earned an MFA from Yale University. Dyson is the

recipient of numerous awards. In 2010, she participated in the Whitney Museum of American Art’s biennial. Currently a Visiting Artist at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Dyson is also at work on a sustainable public sculpture project in Philadelphia, titled “We Glow In The Dark.”



Spill (detail), 2009, Earring cards, cobra, rosettes
Photo/Courtesy of the artist and Creative Alliance
(Not in exhibition)



Untitled (West African mask, V-8 Model engine, and bling t-shirt), 2008, Mixed media, plastic, wood, bullet heads, cotton

MAYA FREELON ASANTE



Maya Freelon Asante was born in 1982, in Durham, NC, into a family of artists. Painter Allan Freelon is her great-grandfather. Her mother, Nnenna Freelon, is a Grammy-nominated jazz vocalist and her father is award-winning architect Philip Freelon. However, Freelon Asante notes, "My drive to be an artist comes from more than just my immediate family. African-American traditions of creative ingenuity are a constant source of inspiration in my work."

In 2005, while attending art school and living with her grandmother, Freelon Asante discovered a stack of water-soaked colored paper in the basement. This inspired her exploration of a new medium, tissue paper. She delved deeper into the process of using tissue paper as a medium during her 2006 residency at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. Harnessing the ink from the tissue paper, she creates colorful prints, collages, and sculptures, sometimes independently and sometimes in an amalgam. In her sculptures, the artist explores how pieces of fragile-looking tissue paper gain power and force through unity.

Freelon Asante holds an MFA from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and a BA in Art from Lafayette College. She has also studied at the American University in Paris. The artist has exhibited in Ghana, Madagascar, and throughout the United States. In 2010, she was awarded a residency at the C. Sylvia and Eddie C. Brown Studio at the Bromo Seltzer Art Tower in Baltimore.



Time Lapse, 2010, Tissue paper, tape



Gestation (detail), 2010, Tissue paper installation

MAREN HASSINGER



"Sculpture has become a way of orienting myself to the world," Maren Hassinger states. Working out of the tradition of minimalist abstraction, Hassinger creates fluid sculptures using commercial and natural materials, such as plastic bags, wire rope, concrete, and tree branches and leaves. Her work explores the continuum between art, nature, emotion, and environment.

The loss of nature in an industrialized world is a preeminent concept in Hassinger's nearly forty year body of work. During the 1970s, she stumbled upon wire rope in a junkyard and began incorporating this material into sculptures that mimic bushes, branches, and other natural objects. Hassinger's art also includes performance, film, and installation. As a trained dancer and the daughter of an architect, she draws inspiration from architecture and dance—two fields where space is consistently negotiated and transformed.

Born and raised in Los Angeles, CA, the artist received an MFA in 1973 from the University of California, Los Angeles and a BA in 1969 from Bennington College. She has exhibited widely and her work is held in public and corporate collections. Hassinger is currently Director of

the Rinehart School of Sculpture at the Maryland Institute College of Art, where she has served since 1997.



Left: *Anklet*, 2006, *New York Times* newspapers

Right: *Love*, 2008, Pink plastic shopping bags with love notes inside, inflated by human breath



MARTHA JACKSON JARVIS



Rooted in nature and highly informed by spiritual ideas, the work of Martha Jackson Jarvis captures a universal energy, which she calls the “unknown thing.” Jackson Jarvis works with natural materials, including clay, glass, wood, and stone, to create sculpture in the round, using traditional African dung firing and Japanese raku techniques. By incorporating the clay shards that scatter in the firing process into her mosaics, the artist draws on African and African American burial traditions that similarly adorn gravesites with broken plates and crockery.

Jackson Jarvis’s oeuvre encompasses sculpture, site specific installations, and public art. She received an MFA in Sculpture/ Ceramics from Antioch University and a BFA from Tyler School of Art. She also studied mosaic techniques in Italy and worked as a teacher and artist-in-residence at numerous institutions.

The progressive body of work that Jackson Jarvis has created over the last four decades has led to exhibitions in museums nationwide and a number of public art and landscape commissions. In 1989, she worked as the artist/designer for the film *Daughters of the Dust*. In 1996, a twenty-year survey of her work was installed at the Corcoran

Gallery of Art. She has been a featured artist in solo and group exhibitions at Maryland Art Place, the South Carolina Botanical Garden, and the African American Museum in Dallas.



Nest Stones (detail), 2008, Stone, glass, concrete, wood vine



Umbilicus, 2006, Volcanic stone, glass, wood

JOYCE J. SCOTT



Sculptor, jeweler, printmaker, performance artist, and educator Joyce J. Scott was born in Baltimore, MD, in 1948. In 1970, Scott received a BFA from the Maryland Institute College of Art and in 1971 she earned an MFA in Crafts from the Instituto Allende in Mexico. She furthered her art education at Rochester Institute of Technology in New York and Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in Maine. Her work carries on what the artist describes as “life affirming” traditions passed down from three generations of storytellers, quilters, basket makers, and wood, metal, and clay workers, among them her mother, acclaimed fiber artist Elizabeth Talford Scott.

Scott’s work focuses intently on beadwork, glass, quilting, and ceramics. Deeply influenced by African, African American, and Native American traditions, she also explores ideas from American popular culture and European decorative arts. Scott shapes her materials into intimate sculptures that serve up jilting commentary on issues of race, gender, and violence. Her signature glass vessels radiate spiritual and social healing.

Scott’s national and international exhibitions are innumerable. She has shown her work across the United States, and in Canada, Finland, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, Poland, and Scotland. In 2000, the Baltimore Museum of Art celebrated Scott’s work with a thirty-year retrospective entitled *Joyce J. Scott: Kickin’ It With the Old Masters*.



Left: *Galaxy (detail)*, 2006, Glass, ceramic, beadwork

Right: *Inkisi: St. John the Conqueror*, 2009, Collected glass bottles, glass beads, wire, thread, coral



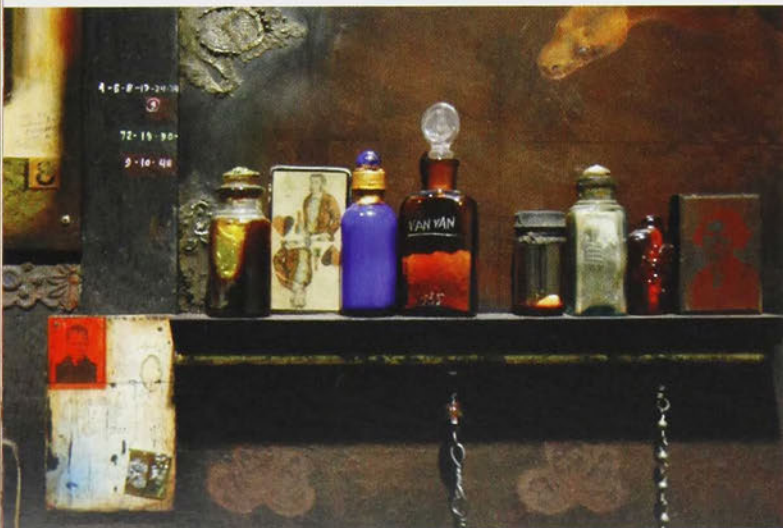
RENÉE STOUT



Renée Stout was born in Junction City, Kansas, in 1958. However, it was her Pittsburgh upbringing rich in art and lore that helped shape her worldview. Stout comes from a family that worked creatively with a variety of materials. Her mother did needlework and her father, a steelworker and mechanic, tinkered with tools. Her uncle was a self-taught painter.

Stout began her career as a photorealist painter, but later expanded her work to include mixed media sculpture and installations using found and collected objects. Wood and metal, glass jars, and material culture artifacts are combined in Stout's assemblages. Her process channels the spiritual traditions of the African Diaspora into contemporary works of art. Some of her most widely exhibited sculpture is informed by sacred Central African Kongo objects (*nkisi*), Yoruba culture of West Africa, and African American ritual practices of New Orleans. At times, the artist incorporates fictional characters to bring forth her creative vision. Her latest alter ego is herbalist and fortuneteller Fatima Mayfield, a conduit for the artist's own process of self-discovery.

Stout earned a BFA from Carnegie Mellon University in 1980 and in 1985, moved to Washington, DC, where she lives and works. She has been a featured artist in many solo and group exhibitions. Most recently, Stout was awarded the 2010 David C. Driskell Prize from the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, GA.



The Black Room with Bitches Brew (detail), 2010, Mixed media, found and constructed objects, wood



Self-Portrait as Inkisi (Self-Portrait #2),
2008, Bottles, cloth bags

CHECKLIST & PHOTO CREDITS

CHAKAIA BOOKER

Photograph of artist by
Nelson Tejada
All reproduced images are
© Chakaia Booker, Courtesy
Marlborough Gallery.com

Black Hole, 2001
Rubber tire, wood
46" x 50" x 7"
Courtesy of the artist and
Marlborough Gallery

The Fatality of Hope, 2007
Rubber tire, wood
85" x 201" x 32"
Courtesy of the artist and
Marlborough Gallery

Mixed Message, 2005
Rubber tire, wood
47" x 43" x 56"
Courtesy of the artist and
Marlborough Gallery

Phobic Digression, 2006
Rubber tire, stainless steel
114" x 60" x 54"
Courtesy of the artist and
Marlborough Gallery

Rainbow, 2001
Rubber tire, wood
11" x 12" x 10"
Courtesy of the artist and
Marlborough Gallery

SONYA CLARK

Photograph of artist by
Abigail Volkmann

7 Layer Tangle, 2005
Plastic combs, glue
7" x 30" x 30"
Courtesy of the artist

Hair Wreath, 2002
Human hair, wire
15" x 15" x 3"
Courtesy of the artist
Photo/Tom McInville

Plain Weave, 2008
Plastic combs, thread
45" x 50"
Courtesy of the artist
Photo/Amy Weiks

Thread Wrapped, 2008
Plastic combs, thread
65" x 45" x 1"
Courtesy of the artist
Photo/Taylor Dabney

Wavy Strand, 2005
Plastic combs, wire
5" x 10" x 20"
Courtesy of the artist
Photo/Tom McInville

TORKWASE DYSON

Photograph of artist courtesy of
Torkwase Dyson

Postcolonial Fauna, 2008
Plastic, wood, bullet heads, cotton
26" x 8" x 10" and 32" x 7" x 7"
Courtesy of the artist and
Flanders Art Gallery
Photo/Courtesy of Flanders Art
Gallery

*The Strategy of an Exuberant
Future, or Reflection On a Lost
Birth Certificate*, 2011
Mixed Media
8' x 4' x 8'
Courtesy of the artist

Untitled (Green Series #1, Electric Car), 2011
Mixed media
Dimensions vary
Courtesy of the artist

Untitled (West African mask, V-8 Model engine, and bling t-shirt), 2008
Mixed media, plastic, wood, bullet heads, cotton
24" x 8" x 13"
Courtesy of the artist and Flanders Art Gallery
Photo/Courtesy of Flanders Art Gallery

MAYA FREELON ASANTE

Photograph of artist by Ryan Joseph

Gestation, 2010
Tissue paper installation
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist
Photo/RFLM

I am You, 2010
Tissue paper
8' x 2.5'
Courtesy of the artist

Keep Ya Head Up, 2010
Tissue ink/monoprint collage
3' x 4'
Courtesy of the artist
Photo/RFLM

Time Lapse, 2010
Tissue paper, tape
2" x 20" x 20"
Courtesy of the artist
Photo/RFLM

MAREN HASSINGER

Photograph of artist by Ric Kallaher
All reproduced images are courtesy of the artist

Anklet, 2006
New York Times newspapers
Arrangement variable, 12" h
Courtesy of the artist

Love, 2008
Pink plastic shopping bags with love notes inside, inflated by human breath
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist

On Dangerous Ground, 1981
Wire rope
4' x 3' x 3'
Courtesy of the artist

Winter Garden (Stone Garden), 1990
Concrete, wire rope
16" x 56" x 56"
Courtesy of the artist

MARTHA JACKSON JARVIS

Photograph of artist by Jarvis Grant

Crossroads/Trickster I, II, III, 2006
Terracotta brick, stone, glass, steel, mortar
13' x 3.5' x 3.5'
Courtesy of the artist
Photo/Jarvis Grant

Nest Stones, 2008
Stone, glass, concrete, wood vine
2' x 20' x 18'
Courtesy of the artist
Photo/John Woo

Umbilicus, 2006
Volcanic stone, glass, wood
23' x 76' x 20'
Courtesy of the artist
Photo/John Woo

Vortex (with pods), 2009
Stone, glass, smalti glass, concrete, steel
4' x 4'6" x 4'6" and 1' x 6' x 1'
Courtesy of the artist



JOYCE J. SCOTT

Photograph of artist by
John Dean

*Buddha Transcends Field of Dead
Fire*, 2004

Beads, wire, thread, wood, glass
inclusion, sand-cast glass
58" x 10" x 10"

Collection of Sara M. & Michelle
Vance Waddell

Galaxy, 2006

Glass, ceramic, beadwork
48.5" x 38" x 2"

Courtesy of the artist

Photo/James Singewald

Galaxy II, 2010

Glass, ceramic, beadwork
47" x 27" x 2"

Courtesy of the artist

Photo/James Singewald

Inkisi: St. John the Conqueror,
2009

Collected glass bottles, glass
beads, wire, thread, coral
17" x 24.5" x 17"

Courtesy of the artist and Goya
Contemporary

Photo/Michael Kyorta

Oogah Boogah, 2005

Glass, beads, stone
25.5" x 7" x 20.5"

Courtesy of the artist

Photo/RFLM

Virgin Water, 2000

Sand-cast glass, beads,
metal, glass

31" x 8" x 3"

Courtesy of the artist

RENÉE STOUT

Photograph of artist by Mary
Noble Ours

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courtesy of the artist and
Hemphill Fine Arts, unless
otherwise noted

*The Black Room with Bitches
Brew*, 2010

Mixed media, found and
constructed objects, wood

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist and
Hemphill Fine Arts

Ogun's Bed, 1998

Wire, found objects
10" x 72" x 48"

Courtesy of the John & Maxine
Belger Family Foundation
Photo/Dan Wayne

Ogun Power Object #2, 2008

Iron, glass, mixed media
24" x 10" x 10"

Courtesy of the artist and
Hemphill Fine Arts



From the top: Renée Stout,
Ogun Power Object #2, 2008,
Iron, glass, mixed media; Joyce
J. Scott, *Oogah Boogah (detail)*,
2005, Glass, beads, stone

ADDITIONAL CREDITS

Self-Portrait as Inkisi (Self-Portrait #2), 2008

Bottles, cloth bags

32" x 7" x 7"

Courtesy of the artist and
Hemphill Fine Arts

The Thinking Room, 2005

Mixed media installation

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist and
Hemphill Fine Arts

Visualization Device, 2007

Wood, mixed media

54" x 13" x 5"

Courtesy of the artist and
Hemphill Fine Arts

Barbara Chase-Riboud

Confessions for Myself, 1972

Bronze, paint, wool

120" x 40" x 12"

University of California, Berkeley
Art Museum and Pacific Film
Archive

Purchased with funds from
the H.W. Anderson Charitable
Foundation

Betye Saar

Shield of Quality, 1974

Mixed media assemblage

4 1/8" x 14 3/4" x 18 1/8"

Purchase 1998 The Members'
Fund 98.37

Collection of the Newark Museum

Faith Ringgold

Mrs. Jones and Family, 1973

Mixed media

74" x 69"

Faith Ringgold © 1973

Artist's Collection



Chakaia Booker, *Phobic Digression*, 2006, Rubber tire, stainless steel

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Joyce J. Scott, *Galaxy II* (detail), 2010, Glass, ceramic, beadwork

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PAST...

Taffeta. Crinoline. Chambray. Words like these spooled off my mother's tongue. In New York City's garment district where she worked, names of textiles and fabrics were part of everyday conversation. On lucky days, she would bring home bundles of cloth or rejected sample garments in a wide array of materials whose names spun in my head. Taking scraps of fabric, I would sew rough dresses for my dolls. I had seen my aunt—a dressmaker by night—handling cloth, and in what seemed like simple measuring, cutting, and stitching, turn out pretty work clothes and bridesmaid dresses. Her clients came to our home for fittings, bringing their own fabric or choosing something from the stashes my mother saved. What a wonderful combination: one sister's day job providing the materials for the other's night job. I dedicate *Material Girls* to these two women—my mother, Pearlene V. Wilkinson, and my aunt, Doreen U. Wilkinson—and to all the women and men who are passing down their material inheritance to yet another generation.

PRESENT...

Material Girls was built around a broad vision and lovingly honed by the dedicated staff of the Reginald F. Lewis Museum. The tireless efforts of Asantewa Boakyewa, Curatorial Assistant, brought a brilliant energy to the exhibition's development. Deborah Nobles-McDaniel, Christina Batipps, and Dawn Bennett were wonderful team players. Dave Ferraro joined us just in time to supervise an exquisite installation. Vivid design by Amanda Micek, robust editing by Cathy Byrd, and contributions by Asantewa Boakyewa shaped the exhibition's catalogue. The Executive Director, David T. Terry, and each department—Education, Development, Marketing and Public Relations, and Finance and Administration—shared their knowledge, expertise, and encouragement.

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Michelle Joan Wilkinson, PhD

Curator of *Material Girls: Contemporary Black Women Artists*

Director of Collections and Exhibitions

Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History & Culture

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Renée Stout, *Visualization Device*, 2007, Wood, mixed media

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Torkwase Dyson, *Postcolonial Fauna*, 2008, Plastic, wood, bullet heads, cotton





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