

SALON TIME

Sonya Clark + Althea Murphy-Price + Nontsikelelo Mutiti





CLOCKWISE from Top Left:

Sonya Clark, *The Hair Craft Project: Hairstylists with Sonya, Collaborating Hair Artist: Anita Hill-Moses, Braids and Dreds*, 2013. Inkjet photograph.

Sonya Clark, *The Hair Craft Project: Hairstylists with Sonya, Collaborating Hair Artist: Ingrid Riley, Beauty Bar*, 2013. Inkjet photograph.

Sonya Clark, *The Hair Craft Project: Hairstylists with Sonya, Collaborating Hair Artist: Ife Robinson, Indigo Salon*, 2013. Inkjet photograph.

Sonya Clark, *The Hair Craft Project: Hairstylists with Sonya, Collaborating Hair Artist: Jamilah Williams, Jah Braids*, 2013. Inkjet photograph.

CURATORIAL STATEMENT

Salon Time: Sonya Clark, Althea Murphy-Price, and Nontsikelelo Mutiti

“Hairdressers are my heroes,” proclaims Sonya Clark, pointing to the poetry, politics, and legacy of Black hair care specialists. The Union for Contemporary Art is pleased to present *Salon Time*, an exhibition featuring three artists who examine and celebrate ritual time and material culture surrounding Black women’s hair care.

Sonya Clark’s appreciation for craft and the handmade was cultivated through her family’s working traditions and stories, particularly those of her maternal grandmother who was a professional tailor. Working in photography, fibers, and performance—among other materials and processes—Clark emphasizes and connects the repetitive and ritualized labor of material processes with that of designing and caring for intricate hairstyles. Clark’s 2014 *Hair Craft Project* invited eleven stylists in Richmond, VA to create works of fiber art, beginning with a design woven directly on the artist’s head using her own hair as material. A translation of this style was then woven with silk thread on canvas. For *Salon Time*, the artist focuses on the first part of that collaboration. Through her working relationship with stylists, the artist collapses boundaries between the gallery space and the salon, erasing distinctions between personal care and art by emphasizing the inherent artistic talent and cultural contributions of hair care specialists. Clark’s project and performance touch on the weight of the time that passes during a styling session. A seat in the salon chair taps into a lineage of creative and technical mastery—thousands of hours of practice, knowledge, and technique. The chair also embodies an expansive network of accumulated experiences, connecting each woman who sits in a stylist’s chair to all those who’ve come before her.

COVER: Sonya Clark, *Throne*, 2016. Found chair, glass beads, and fabric.

BACK (Detail): Althea Murphy-Price, *Container*, 2016. lithograph on gampi surface paper.

Althea Murphy-Price uses synthetic hair extensions as a drawing material, arranging, cutting, and manipulating strands into compositions for print and collage. Thinking of herself as a “‘wanna-be’ hair stylist,” the artist understands a complex vision of beauty maintenance. As someone who loves working with her hands, Murphy-Price finds the time and repetitive effort involved in maintaining her hair pleasurable and linked to the process of making prints, installation, and sculpture. However, she is sensitive to the pressures beauty places on women—particularly women of color—surrounding identity, marginalization, and assimilation. Intricate, candy-colored, and graphic, her prints in the exhibition formally convey contradictions of pleasure, personal expression, and the sinister superficiality of society’s expectations for women and girls. Murphy-Price, along with Clark, include references to girlhood and the formation of self in their artworks, demonstrating how Black female identity is linked personally and politically to the rituals and perceptions of hair care.

Nontsikelelo Mutiti’s work offers braiding as a communication tool that crosses historical and geographical borders. Stemming from her training in graphic design, Mutiti sees the potential of braids as both tactile and virtual, with endless generative potential. African braided styles are traced over thousands of years—cornrows can be found on statuary from the Nigerian Nok civilization as early as 500 B.C.E.—and are a cultural marker of African diaspora. But these braided styles also reflect a form of code designed through algorithmic thinking that links it to our present and future digital languages, reflected in her tessellated box braids. Braiding is also a unifier; just as individual strands are woven to form a plait, the slow process of braiding brings people together for prolonged conversations and bonding. As a designer, Mutiti is a visual communicator, but is also very interested in social space in relation to her artistic practice. Her works often create spaces for intimate community interaction and activities of self and collective care outside of digital realms—much like a beauty salon.

All three participating artists see Black hair care as a vital connecting thread between generations of women—historical, present, and future. To complement the exhibition, novelist **Novuyo Rosa Tshuma** shares a short personal essay reflecting on identity, diaspora, and the bonds of hair care.

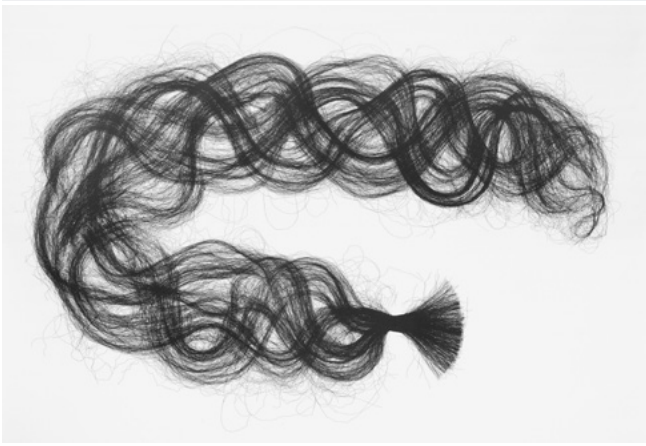
Salon Time is curated by Amanda Smith, Exhibitions + Fellowship Manager at The Union for Contemporary Art

This exhibition is generously supported by Paul and Annette Smith and with the support of the Nebraska Arts Council and the Nebraska Cultural Endowment.





Althea Murphy-Price,
Barrette no.2, 2015.
Collaged screenprint ink.



Althea Murphy-Price,
Super Silky study 9 (Braid), 2015.
Lithograph on gampi surface
paper.



Nontsikelelo Mutiti,
*African Hair Braiding Salon
Reader*, 2014. Laser printed,
spiral bound booklet.



African Hair: Bonding

Novuyo Rosa Tshuma

I got my hair braided for the first time since coming to the USA, after four years of keeping it short and natural. For four years, I had let it run wild and free, cultivating it with an afro comb and coconut oil. It was glorious how my kink thrived. It rose from my head in a fine thicket, dense and soft to the touch, like wool.

Oye, my Nigerian hairdresser, took me back to my childhood. My hair hadn't been touched like that by someone else in a long time. I had been performing self-love on it for the past four years, and now it felt like someone else was loving it, too; loving me. The feel of Oye's nimble fingers twisting and weaving my hair brought my mother to me. Suddenly, I was ten years old in mama's house in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, my head angled into the bathroom sink, mama's long, dainty fingers working shampoo into my kinky hair in slow, circular rhythms.

Mama usually plaited my hair on the last weekend of each month, on Sundays, in preparation for the school week. We would sit outside facing the street, in the cool shade of the veranda, away from the sun, she on a chair and I on the floor, ensconced between her legs. Next to us was an assortment of combs, wool, a hand mirror, coconut oil and Vaseline Petroleum Jelly.

She would begin by dousing my hair in coconut oil, dampening the kink so it would yield to her hands. Next, she would work my hair with an afro comb, its pick-shape and thick teeth perfect for disentangling the thick strands. Sometimes, this disentangling was painful, the afro comb vicious as it tore through the kink, and I would bury my face in mama's lap and try not to cry.

Finally, mama would use a fine-toothed comb to part my hair, partitioning it into even portions by drawing straight lines down the length of my head with the tail of the comb. And then, she would begin braiding it, working methodically from one end of my head to the other.

ng with our Mothers

It was at this time, as she was plaiting my hair, that she would tell me stories about her own childhood. She would tell me about growing up in Lupane Village, in the 60s back when Zimbabwe was still Rhodesia, while weaving my hair into cornrows, her soft hands moving in quick, fluid motions, her wrists jerking in rhythmic movements, her nimble fingers dipping in and out of my thicket like she was playing an instrument.

African hair was frowned upon back when she was a child, she would tell me, especially by the missionaries. Because of this, my khulu, my grandfather, never let them grow it. He would ask his mother, mama's grandmother, my khokho, to tend to it. My khokho would line up all her grandchildren, and they would take turns to sit beneath the msasa tree, outside her hut, where she would shave off their hair, shave it all off until their heads were as smooth as babies' bottoms.

This, I believe, is why mama loved my hair so much, why she enjoyed playing with it and plaiting it, nourishing it regularly so it could grow long. I had never thought of this, how much she loved it, perhaps more than I. Whenever I tired of the time and care my hair needed, I would visit my khulu and beg him to cut it. The first time I came home from khulu's with my head shaved, smooth as my bottom, mama refused to speak to me.

I didn't realise I was crying until Oye asked me what was wrong, didn't I like the Senegalese Twist she was braiding, did I want another style? Anything she could do, she told me, handing me a catalogue to see. What did I want? I smiled, embarrassed, and told her that I loved the shiny braids, they reminded me of my mother, who I hadn't seen in two years. I missed her terribly, I said. She chuckled, evidently pleased, and resumed braiding my hair. She began to tell me about her life, how she learned to braid hair from her grandmother.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS



Sonya Clark is a Distinguished Research Fellow in the School of the Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University. Born parents from Trinidad and Jamaica, Clark gained an appreciation for craft and the value of the handmade objects and stories from her family. She earned an MFA from Cranbrook Academy of Art, a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and a BA from Amherst College. Her work has been exhibited in over 350 museum and galleries in the Americas, Africa, Asia, Europe, and Australia. She is the recipient of a United States Artist Fellowship, a Pollock Krasner award, an 1858 Prize, Art Prize Grand Jurors Award, and an Anonymous Was a Woman Award. She participated in a Red Gate Residency in China, a BAU Carmago Residency in France, a Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Residency in Italy, a Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship, a Knight Foundation Residency at the McColl Center for Arts + Innovation, a Civitella Ranieri Residency in Italy, a Yaddo Residency, and a VCUarts Affiliate Fellowship at the American Academy in Rome.



Nontsikelelo Mutiti is an interdisciplinary artist and educator whose work encompasses fine art, design, and social practice. Born in Zimbabwe, Mutiti holds a diploma in multimedia art from the Zimbabwe Institute of Digital Arts, and an MFA from the Yale School of Art with a concentration in graphic design. Recently, she was a resident artist at the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, as well as at Recess and the Centre for Book Arts, both in New York City. In 2015, Mutiti was awarded the Joan Mitchell Foundation Emerging Artist Grant in its inaugural year. Mutiti continues to develop her work around African hair braiding and themes related to African immigration. She was an Assistant Professor in the New Media Department at State University of New York, Purchase College before joining the faculty at Virginia Commonwealth University, where she is currently and Assistant Professor of Graphic Design. She lives and works between New York City, Richmond, and Harare.



Althea Murphy-Price is an artist and professor living in Knoxville, TN. As an artist, her work has been recognized for its non-conventional approach to the traditions of printmaking. Murphy-Price began her studies in Fine Art at Spelman College before receiving her Master of Arts in Printmaking and Painting from Purdue University. She went on to study at Temple University's Tyler School of Art, where she earned her MFA. Murphy-Price has exhibited in venues throughout the country including: the Weston Gallery, Cincinnati, OH; Howard Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD; Wellesley College, Boston, MA; Wade Wilson Art Gallery, Houston, TX; Indiana University Art Museum; The Print Center, Philadelphia, PA; The Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art, Charleston, SC; and the Knoxville Museum of Art, Knoxville, TN. Her international exhibits include the International Printmaking Exhibition, Jingdezhen, China; the American Youth Printmaking Exhibition, Lui Haisu Art Museum, Shanghai, China; and Print Resonance, Musashino Art University, Tokyo, Japan. Her writing and work have been featured in publications including *Art Papers Magazine*, *CAA Reviews*, *Contemporary Impressions Journal*, *Art in Print*, *Printmaking: A Complete Guide to Materials and Process*, and *Printmakers Today*. She is an Associate Professor of Art at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville.

ABOUT THE WRITER



Novuyo Rosa Tshuma is the author of the forthcoming novel *House of Stone* (Atlantic Books, UK, June 2018, W. W. Norton, USA, January 2019). A graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop (2015), she is a native of Zimbabwe, and has lived in South Africa and the USA. *Shadows*, her short story collection, was published to critical acclaim by Kwela in South Africa (2013) and awarded the 2014 Herman Charles Bosman Prize. Novuyo has received writing residencies from the Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Programme and the Kimmel Harding Nelson Center for the Arts. She has work in *McSweeney's* (Issue 52, March 2018) and *The Displaced* (Abrams Press, April 2018), an anthology edited by the Pulitzer Prize winning writer Viet Thanh Nguyen. Novuyo serves on the Editorial Advisory Board and is a Fiction Editor at *The Bare Life Review*, a journal of refugee and immigrant literature based New York.



Nontsikelelo Mutiti. *Black Thang*, 2017. Wallpaper, black resin, concrete, and wax on found objects.

Learn and Converse with us around the themes explored in *Salon Time*:

Gallery Talk: Artists Althea Murphy-Price, Nontsikelelo Mutiti, and novelist Novuyo Rosa Tshuma

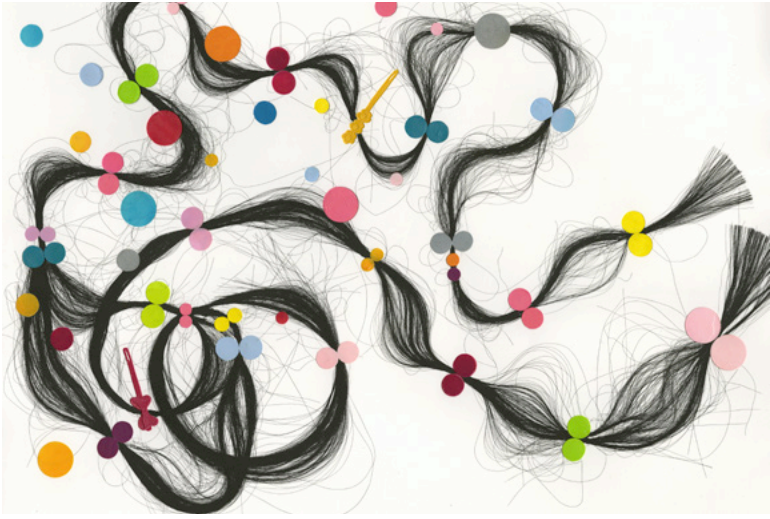
Saturday, May 5, 2 pm

Join us for a conversation between artists as they discuss the themes, influences, and history of their practices.

Performance: Sonya Clark's *Translations*

Saturday, June 23, 1-4 pm

As part of the exhibition, Sonya Clark will conduct a live performance in the gallery. *Translations* consists of the artist reading poems by Gwendolyn Brooks, Rita Dove, Audre Lorde, and Nikki Giovanni on the subject of hair, written in *Twist*—a font that looks like hair clippings. As Clark struggles to decipher the poems and read them, hair artist Jamilah Williams will give the artist a sculptural hairstyle based on a one she wore as a child when she was learning to read. The piece is performed in a beaded barber's chair, and represents the sharing of cultural knowledge through hairdressing traditions, and the complex and fraught relations between Black women's personal and political identities. The performance is free and open to the public.



Althea Murphy-Price, *Play*, 2015. Lithograph with screen printed collage.

Salon Talk: Licensure with Kessa Moore

Thursday, May 31, 6:30 pm

Join us for a nuanced conversation about licensure for braiding professionals in Nebraska and nationally with local stylist Kessa Moore. What are the regulations surrounding hair braiding services? What protections and barriers do they create? How does traditional cosmetology training include or exclude Black hair care techniques?

Salon Talk: Self Care with JoAnna LeFlore

Thursday, June 14, 6:30 pm

How do you prioritize self-care? JoAnna LeFlore will share tools and tips on how to make a larger space in your life for your physical and emotional wellbeing.

Care Fair

June 30th

Treat yourself, family and friends to a day of self-care and community. Activities include hair braiding, yoga, aromatherapy, and more! Visit u-ca.org for more information.

The Nebraska Arts Council, a state agency, has supported this arts event through its matching funds program funded by the Nebraska Legislature and the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Nebraska Cultural Endowment. Visit www.nebraskaartscouncil.org for information on how the Nebraska Arts Council can assist your organization.

UNION

**Supporting
The Arts,
Strengthening
Our Community.**

The Wanda D. Ewing Gallery

Open Tuesday–Saturday, 11 am to 6 pm

The Wanda D. Ewing Gallery is dedicated to the Omaha artist, educator, and supporter of The Union for Contemporary Art who passed away in 2013. Ewing encouraged dialogue around questions of who is allowed to make, see, and be seen in visual culture, and whether the arts look like the communities we live in, challenging her audiences to believe in the transformative power of art.



To view our exhibition schedule
and for more info on the program,
visit u-ca.org/exhibition.

The Union for Contemporary Art
2423 North 24th Street
Omaha, NE 68110

