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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

African American Artists Collective Featured in Nelson-Atkins Exhibition

Testimony First in KC Art Now Series

Kansas City, MO May 11, 2021—A powerful new exhibition highlighting work by the African American Artists Collective in Kansas City opens June 5, 2021 through March 27, 2022 at The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, the first exhibition in a series designed to spotlight local artists. *Testimony: African American Artists Collective*, features the work of 36 local artists, including painters, sculptors, poets, photographers, performance artists, and illustrators.

“This inaugural exhibition affirms the Nelson-Atkins’ commitment to local as well as global art as we robustly engage with Kansas City-area artists,” said Julián Zugazagoitia, Menefee D. and Mary Louise Blackwell CEO & Director of the Nelson-Atkins. “African American and Black art is expansive, generated from truths and experiences as diverse as its makers. This exhibition is revelatory and timely.”



Testimony embodies the power of speaking one’s own truth and of being called to stand in witness. Together, the joint work of telling and receiving truth lays the foundations for community. This exhibition will feature the testimonies of more than three dozen local artists through their art. The museum was honored to invite the Kansas City-based African American Artists Collective to collaborate on this exhibition. AAAC was formed in 2014 and actively advocates for artists, builds networks, and engages in social justice movements. Many of AAAC’s nearly 150 members have served as partners with the museum in past years.



“Art can serve as a testimony that provides an opportunity to speak and also to be heard. More than half the artists featured in this exhibition are creating new work inspired by the reciprocal power of this interaction between artist and audience,” said Stephanie Fox Knappe, Samuel Sosland Curator, American Art. “The deeply personal truths expressed in *Testimony* range from meditations on the past and present to celebrations of Black futures, all while underscoring the fact that there is no monolithic Black experience or Black art.”

Members of the AAAC identify and catalyze their practice as a means to support the African American and Black Arts Movement in Kansas City, throughout the country, and across the globe. The Collective advocates for other artists, advances professional development, builds networks, and provides mentorship.

“*Testimony* marks a historical moment for the African American Artists Collective as the Nelson-Atkins recognizes the significance of the canon of African American art and the immeasurable contributions African American artists have made over the past 200 years,” said Sara Sonié Joi Thompson-Ruffin, AAAC Founding Member. “The Collective supports the museum’s efforts to propel Kansas City to the forefront of the global arts and culture community by embracing arts excellence right here at home and establishing a long overdue precedent for other major arts institutions.”

Ongoing initiatives include generating exhibitions and performances, developing an endowment, and securing digital resources. The Collective’s efforts also span social justice movements in the arts.

“As an artist of merit, I never thought that I would see my work hanging in a museum in my lifetime,” said Michelle Monette Beasley, who has a painting in the exhibition. “But here I am, one of the first local African American and Black artists to exhibit at this prestigious, internationally known museum in the city that I was born in, the city I was raised in, the city I was educated and work in, the city I’ve called home all my life, in a museum that I visited as a little girl.”

The following artists are represented in this exhibition:

Tyrone Aiken

Michelle Monette Beasley

J. LeRoy Beasley

Charles A. Bibbs

NedRa L. Bonds

Michael A. Brantley

Larry Poncho Brown

Taylor Renee Brown

JT Daniels

Ramona Elizabeth Davis

Najee Dorsey

Gerald D. Dunn

Ed Dwight

Everett Freeman

Diallo Javonne French

Robert Hale

Juliette Hemingway

Kimberlyn Jones

Clarissa Knighten

Tracy Milsap

Sherry Lyn Mirador

Dean Lamont Mitchell

Arie Dee Monroe

Joseph A. Newton

Joseph Tyler Newton, Sr.

Kim Alexis Newton

Glenn A. North, Jr.

Michael Tjon Patton

Jason D. Piggie

Lisa Shephard

Harold David Smith

David Stevens

Sara Sonié-Joi Thompson-Ruffin

Michael Vance Toombs

Alton "AT" Webb

Jason Wilcox



Photo credit: Jim Barcus

Image credits: Harold Smith, American (born 1962). Friday Night Blues, 2021. Acrylic, spray paint, fabric on canvas. 48 x 60 inches (129.9 x 152.4 cm. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Dean Lamont Mitchell, American (b. 1957). Mr. Dan Bradford, 2021. Oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Connie Mitchell. Photo courtesy George Cott.

Kim Alexis Newton, American (b. 1972). Embraced Promises, 2020. Cotton, Indonesian Batik cotton, fabric fusing, and quilting, 54 x 44 inches. Courtesy of Anne Devereux-Mills and David Mills. Photo courtesy John W. Hans.

This exhibition is organized by The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. Generous support provided by the Rheta Sosland Endowment Fund and Dr. Douglas L. and Dana H. Nelson.

Media partner: The Independent

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

The Nelson-Atkins in Kansas City is recognized nationally and internationally as one of America's finest art museums. The museum, which strives to be the place *where the power of art engages the spirit of community*, opens its doors free of charge to people of all backgrounds. The museum is an institution that both challenges and comforts, that both inspires and soothes, and it is a destination for inspiration, reflection and connecting with others.

The Nelson-Atkins serves the community by providing access to its renowned collection of more than 42,000 art objects and is best known for its Asian art, European and American paintings, photography, modern sculpture, and Native American and Egyptian galleries. Housing a major art research library and the Ford Learning Center, the Museum is a key educational resource for the region. In 2017, the Nelson-Atkins celebrated the 10-year anniversary of the Bloch Building, a critically acclaimed addition to the original 1933 Nelson-Atkins Building.

The Nelson-Atkins is located at 45th and Oak Streets, Kansas City, MO. Hours are 10 a.m.–5 p.m. Friday through Monday; 10 a.m.–9 p.m. Thursday; closed Tuesday and Wednesday. Admission to the museum is free to everyone. For museum information, phone 816.751.1ART (1278) or visit nelson-atkins.org.

For media interested in receiving further information, please contact:

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