



Black History Month by Robby Moore

The Arthur Eubank Gallery - Concord University

Augu 14 - Sept 16, 2023

# Black History Month

An Exhibition Guide



*View online here.*





"For Your Consideration," Mixed Media, 2023

## Exhibition Statement from Artist

I am not a historian, but I do enjoy old things from the past. These art works are based on historical events and figures, perceived by a contemporary Black American Appalachian Artist, and expressed through the memory of objects from my childhood home in West Virginia.

I wanted the work to look like something I might have found in a forgotten corner of a disused drawer in 1992; something my Granny saved from her childhood, and it ended up folded, under sheets and towels in our closet.

There were many treasures that fit this description in my parent's house. Being

curious as a kid led to me find all their hiding spots. This may be the origin story for my nostalgia. I tend to imbue sentiment on most items I encounter, and when I found old "antique" objects, I would become attached. I find wear on an object and the patina of age to be one of the most beautiful things to view. Those kinds of markings ignite my imagination and I begin to make-up a story to fill in the missing parts.

When you're black, every month is Black History Month. At times, it's exhausting to be a Black American; at any moment, your life may be taken, your rights questioned, your hope tarnished, your land stolen. Your accomplishments may always have an asterisk beside them because American history is designed to remind you that you are an *other*. Black history is designated to a month, making us believe that it is optional or seasonal.

So much of this exhibition's theme is about my own ignorance of Black American history. I've only recently learned many of these stories that I chose as inspiration. There's a part of me that feels guilty/foolish because I

did not know the names, images and stories of people who suffered and lead the way for me to have the freedom and privilege to create this art. Then, I thought about why I wasn't taught this in US history class, at home or anywhere. I only learned about the Tulsa Massacre in 2020. How about you? My conclusion is that America doesn't want me (or any of us) to know about this history. I would like to note that America suppresses atrocities like Tulsa and Seneca Village, as well as Black American achievements, making the action seem to be motivated by racism. Black history was/is consistently erased, suppressed, and overlooked. Now, more than ever, we need to learn this history, because Black History is again under siege and is being whitewashed. Just like our Founding Fathers, current politicians, mothers, and "patriots" want to redact this section of American history, because they deem it unworthy. It is apparent to me that this is prompted by racism and anti-Black sentiment.

The theme of Black History is too vast for me to create one exhibition to encompass its complexity. I intend for this exhibition to be living. I have plans to tour it throughout Appalachia for the next year. In that time, I will make new work to add and substitute. I already have several pieces in progress and new ideas. Scan the QR code to view my website with more information about the works in the exhibition, references I used as inspiration, additional content, and information about me. Thank you for taking time to view and consider my work. I hope that it inspires you to learn and share Black History every month of the year.



*This exhibition was made possible through the generosity of the Way Makers Collective and New Media Advocacy Project's Appalachia Reframed. Special thanks to James Biggs and Concord University.*

***Generational Warmth*** is about family and what they provide to the next generation. It's about the wealth that's passed down through generations that is not in the form of currency. It's a wealth earned through strife, trauma, and resilience. America has systematically and expertly stripped generational wealth from all Black Americans. My parents, their parents, and *their* parents suffered through Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and the fight for civil rights, all while raising children and passing on work ethic and kindness. In my experience, even in the absence of wealth, there was always the warmth that came from the knowledge that I can make something from nothing, like my father and his. The squares in the quilt represent family members. I will never know about some of their existences. I know that some were denied their inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. I imagine that some of them were like me, and that is why I am like I am. One big difference is probably my privilege to take time to make and consider art. I hope they would approve of my taking time to comment on their struggles with mixed media art.



*The view from Bluefield State University's Conley Hall*

***Small Town Prayers, or May We Lay Our Heads Apart*** is the story of all small towns and big cities in West Virginia. Most modern churches are self-segregated in my hometown. The act of praying is used to separate as much as unite.

There is a kindness to the racism in Appalachia. West Virginians may work together, help each other, and even

share a meal; only when it's time to lay our heads down to rest, we segregate ourselves. Some may interject that redlining policies are the reason we are segregated still, and that it is not us self-segregating but staying where they put us. I see clear divisions of race in business, leadership, social interactions, and religious practices in Beckley. I was inspired to make this piece after I visited the campus of Bluefield State University in Bluefield, WV. There, I contemplated the phrase, "the wrong side of the tracks," and how its meaning shifts depending on what side of the tracks you reside. Throughout my life, I have heard disparaging sentiments about "my side of town," traditionally the part of town where the Black community lived.



**Founders** is a portrait of the first black Americans elected to Congress. The imagery was inspired by the lithograph pictured here, titled *The first colored senator and representatives - in the 41st and 42nd Congress of the United States*. The piece represents a group portrait of the legislators Robert C. De Large, Jefferson H. Long, H.R. Revels, Benj. S. Turner, Josiah T. Walls, Joseph H. Rainey [i.e., Rainey], and R. Brown Elliot.



"The first colored senator and representatives - in the 41st and 42nd Congress of the United States," Published by Currier & Ives, 1872. Library of Congress

**The Program** is my version of a funeral program/obituary for Dr. Carter G Woodson, an author, editor, publisher, and historian. He is considered the Father of Black History. Dr. Woodson saw the need to highlight Black American achievements. 73 years after his death, there is still a threat of the erasure of Black American achievements and history.

**The Persistence of Time** is about Benjamin Banneker, an American omitted from my American history lessons. I first learned about Banneker as I started my research for this project. He was a naturalist, mathematician, astronomer, and almanac author. "In 1752, Banneker garnered public acclaim by building a clock entirely out of wood. The clock, believed to be the first built in America, kept precise time for decades." – Library of Congress.

### ***Show Me Where They Hurt You - Therapy Dolls***

In this work, I am exploring mental health and trauma for Black Americans. Every Black American has a scar caused by the trauma of systemic racism and white supremacy. Some of the scars are literally tragic, e.g., George Floyd, Breonna, Taylor, or Emmett Till, to sadly, name a very few. Many scars are unseen and lie within the confines of the mind. The first time I was ever called the N-word, I was walking to my first period Art class in high school. When I got to class one of my friends asked what was on my shoulder. There on my shirt was spit from the person who

yelled the racial slur at me as they drove past. I discreetly wiped it off and didn't tell my white classmates. I made this piece as a reminder to not internalize racism, and to talk about and seek help for its invisible trauma. This piece also stems from my contemplation about family and distant relatives that our country erased from existence. I think about their aspirations and wonder how their lives would have been different under different circumstances.



*Leather medallion necklace, popular Hip Hop fashion in the 1980s and 90s.*

### ***Money Piece***

When I was a teenager, there was a renaissance of Black film, music, fashion, and culture. Because of this, there was a greater emphasis on Black History during this time, e.g., biopics, music samples featuring classic soul and R&B, and in inspiration from Harlem Renaissance artists. I learned about important American figures who had been ignored because of their race. This piece is a comment on the monetization and invalidation of Black labor and creatively. In the 90's, my brother gave me a necklace like the one pictured here, they were popular with my peers.

Money is an evergreen theme in Rap and Hip-Hop culture. In this piece, I reimagined the medallion and replaced the shape of Africa with my interpretation of a piece of scrip from the Cranberry Coal Company. This is where my Paw Paw (parental grandfather) worked to make enough money to open his own business. The financial structure in a coal camp, was a method of control over its workers, enslaving their work force, profiting the company, instead of the community.



*Scrip from Cranberry Coal Company*

For me, living in Southern WV during the 1990's, was disorienting. There were positive milestones made in mainstream Arts and Culture for Black Artists and stories. At the same time, an abundance of violence was

inflicted on Black Americans. Black communities suffered social catastrophes, while Black entertainment invaded suburban screens and airwaves. From my teenage perspective, I saw atrocities and celebration through a rural veil. Living in West Virginia provided me with a distance from the true violence and epidemics Black Americans were experiencing in large cities nationwide.

Upon entering college in 1998, I began to discover the term Appalachia. A term and identity of which I was not familiar. I listened to Old Time music for the first time and worked as a costumer for two historical dramas at an outdoor theatre. I began to explore my identity as an Appalachian. Now in my 40's, I am answering questions I have about my place in both cultures.

Appalachian and Hip-Hop cultures are often celebrated while being denigrated in America. Both cultures have roots in being overlooked, underserved, and discounted by "American" standards. Does the value of mainstream acceptance and appropriation ever benefit the community of origin?

### ***For Your Consideration***

Many of the historical events popularly designated as "Black" history begin with the funeral of a Black American. Often a Black life isn't considered worthy of acknowledgment, until after their death. At the time of a death, especially a tragic one, there is a consideration of that life. During the time I was creating the work for the exhibition, I attended two funerals of family members. Their funerals inspired this piece. At both, I learned new things about each of them. It made me think about all the Black History we will never know, because their Black lives aren't considered to be significant.

### ***Ona's Overnight Bag***


Ona Judge was a woman who was not benefited by slavery. This piece should remind us that the Forefathers owned slaves, condoned the practice of slavery, and made laws to ensure the prevalence of enslaving Black Americans.

When I heard about her story, July 23 of this year, I stopped working on all pieces and decided she needed an overnight bag. This piece started as historical fan fiction and evolved into a comment on commodifying cherry-picked Black stories. Once I decided to make a practical object to tell this story, my mind populated with 1990's clothes catalogs, e.g. The J.



Peterman Company catalog pictured here. The J. Peterman catalog features illustrations of unique fashion items coupled with a flowery, almost poetic description of the product. For some reason, this catalog was delivered to our house occasionally. I always looked through them to see the drawings and read the sales prose. I photographed this bag in a metaphorical fashion photo shoot for some pretend publication. You can see these on my website's Black History Month page.

Untamed.



She mastered the Oxer and the Liverpool with style and grace. The Grand Prix. The Prausance. She'd won them all. An hour in, she hadn't taken off her coat. And why would she? To see her on a horse they all said.

Style and Grace.

Similar. I'm sure to how she was handling this cocktail party.


I have to believe if a Hanoverian had run through at this very moment she wouldn't hesitate to take it out the stained glass window onto Oxford Street.

You can tell that's where her heart is. In the wild and untamed. With style and grace.

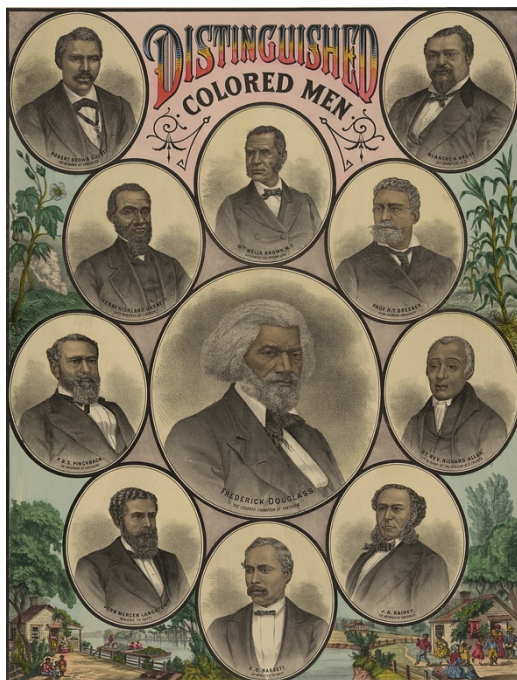
The Equestrian Coat (No. 3480), is perfect for any occasion where the above mentioned attributes seem appropriate. Also works (obviously) while riding English if that's your thing. Has a pop-up velveteen collar and peaked lapels. Hidden buttoning placket down the front.

Gathered sleeves with velvet buttoning cuffs. Fitting princess line from bust to side seam at hips with welt pockets along the princess line. Topstitching on pockets and all seams. Lightly padded shoulders. Separate belt with circle buckle. Fully lined.

Women's sizes: 2 through 18.  
Color: Black.  
Price: \$299.

 **The J. Peterman Company.**

Page from The J. Peterman Company catalog



"Distinguished colored men," Published by A. Muller & Co., c1883, Library of Congress

**\*The Distinction Invalidates the Designation** is a piece inspired by a hand-colored lithograph print published in 1883, titled *Distinguished colored men*. The original print shows head-and-shoulders portraits of Frederick Douglass, Robert Brown Elliott, Blanche K. Bruce, William Wells Brown, Md., Prof. R.T. Greener, Rt. Rev. Richard Allen, J.H. Rainey, E.D. Bassett, John Mercer Langston, P.B.S. Pinchback, and Henry Highland Garnet. My version adds an empty space for the next Black American leader who may join their distinguishment, and their deliberate obscurity.

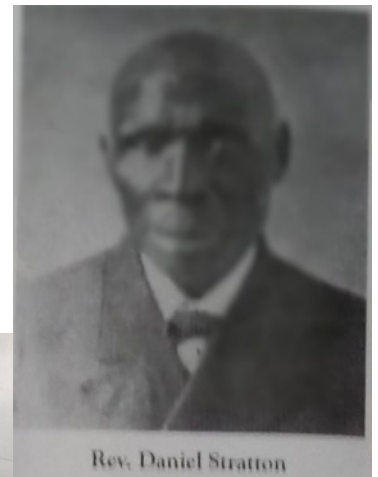
**Just Be Yourself When You're in the Room** is a piece about the elephant in the room, being the only Black person in the room, specifically professional and board rooms. It is a commentary on the perceived and expected decorum for these spaces. The mask/puppet is also a comment on the temptation to "perform" in these situations.



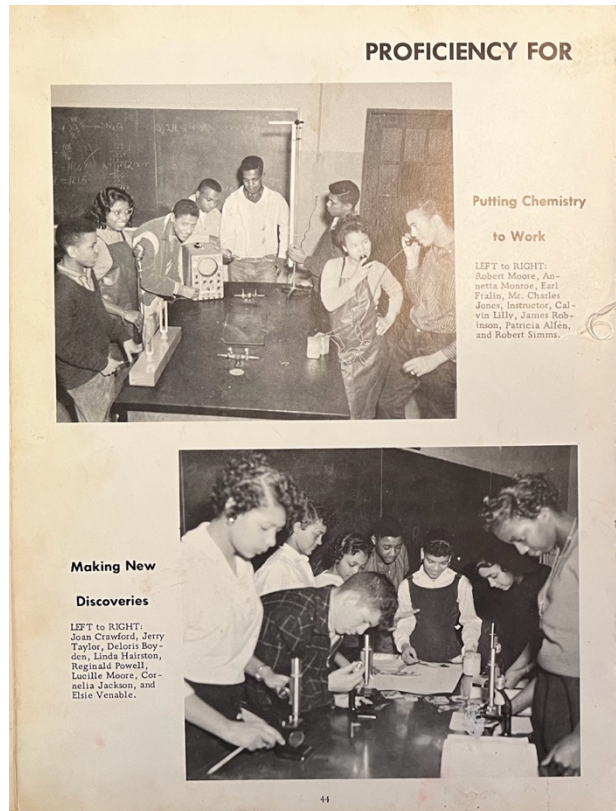
**Rev. Stratton and Page 44**

These pieces are about the first and only Black high school in Beckley WV, where my grandmother, father, aunts, and uncles graduated under segregation. Stratton High School was demolished by Raleigh County in August 2023. I have heard many stories about Stratton High over the years. When I started to research the historic school, I found very little information on the internet. Since then, I have started a project to digitize media about Stratton. The school was named after Reverend Daniel Stratton.

I wonder if the “whites only” high school will be saved in years to come.



Above: Reverend Daniel Stratton. Below: Stratton High circa 1950s



Page 44 is my version of a picture from a page in my father’s senior yearbook in 1958. Over the years, my family looked at this page frequently to see a glimpse at my dad and Aunt Lucille as teenagers. There are few older family photos from my father’s side of the family, I think mostly due to a tragic fire. My dad, Robert S. Moore Jr., is in top picture on the left. My aunt, Lucille [Moore] Jones is in the bottom picture, third from the right.

Page 44 from Stratton High School's 1958 Annual