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Work of two Atlanta artists acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art

Dawn Williams Boyd and Julie Torres were surprised by the news.

Rosalind Bentley - Aug 12, 2021



Dawn Williams Boyd, *Sankofa*, 2010, Mixed Media, 73 x 51 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Fort Gansevoort.

For an artist, having your work acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York is a signal, but rare, achievement.

Often ranked as one of the top 10 museums in the world, with holdings of more than two million paintings, sculptures, prints, drawings and artifacts spanning 300,000 years BCE to the present, the Met's collection is as expansive as it is selective. And there is, of course, the highly anticipated annual benefit Met Gala, that draws about as much national attention (and money) to the museum's costume collection as it does to the celebrities who show up in gowns and costumes tailored to instantly go viral. So, it was with equal measures of pride and disbelief that Atlanta artists Dawn Williams Boyd and Julie Torres greeted the news that the 151-year-old institution had acquired their work a few weeks ago.

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In the case of Torres, 41, her screen-print portrait of the late U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg was immediately included in the new Met exhibition, “Revolution, Resistance and Activism,” which opened July 29. For Boyd, 69, The Met’s purchase of her piece, “Sankofa,” marked the culmination of decades of telling complex stories about racial injustice, feminism and inequity through cloth paintings reminiscent of quilts. When she got the news, “I felt like jumping up and down,” Boyd said.

Both artists have shows on view locally. Torres is part of the group show “Love Always Wins” at the Maune Contemporary gallery in Buckhead, which has been extended through the end of August. Boyd’s traveling exhibition “Woe,” premieres on Aug. 26, at the Lupin Foundation Gallery at the Lamar Dodd School of Art at the University of Georgia and runs there through Nov. 19.



Bad Blood: Tuskegee Syphilis Experiments – Macon County, AL 1932 – 1972, 2016
Mixed media, 53 x 68 in. Courtesy of the artist and Fort Gansevoort.

“YES!”

The final steps in Boyd’s path to The Met came last year when the gallery representing her, Fort Gansevoort in New York, mounted a virtual exhibition of her cloth paintings. While she uses quilting technique, Boyd’s large-scale textiles tell stories of what it’s like, and has been like, to be Black in America. From the Tuskegee experiment to the slaying of Medgar Evers, to the joys of getting ready for a night out on the town with friends, Boyd uses organza, wool, silk and soft cotton to create a record.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution profiled Boyd last year during the virtual show. But Kelly Baum, curator in the Modern and Contemporary Art Department, and Sheena Wagstaff, chair

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of that department, were able to see the show in person. Boyd's semi-autobiographical piece, "Sankofa," references her childhood in Atlanta (including her 8th-grade report card) and her subsequent path as an artist.

"Kelly came in to inspect the work and fell in love with the piece and that's how the acquisition happened," said Alja Freier, associate director of Fort Gansevoort.

Boyd got word in mid-June that her piece would join the permanent collection.

"You know how you bend your arms and pull down and say, 'YES!,' I felt like jumping up and down," Boyd said when she got final word.



Credit: Dawn Williams Boyd, artist, quilter

Subsequently the Birmingham Museum of Art in Alabama acquired her cloth painting, "The Three Marys." Only two museums in Georgia have Boyd's work in their permanent collections, The Columbus Museum and the Omenala Griot Afrocentric Teaching Museum and Event Center, established by Boyd's mother, Narvie Williams Puls, in Atlanta's West End.

Torres and Boyd are working on new pieces for upcoming exhibitions, excited for what the future holds.