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The Columbus Dispatch

The power of Aminah Robinson: She captured 'Black love' living in plain sight.

Terrance Dean- October 29, 2021



'Porch Livin' by Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson (2006) Courtesy of the Columbus Museum of Art

If you missed the beautiful masterpiece exhibition of Columbus artist Aminah Robinson while it was on display at the Columbus Museum of Art, you missed brilliance at its finest. Although her exhibition, *Raggin' On*, has ended, its message is forever embedded on the hearts, minds, bodies, and memories for those of us who had the fortune to experience her...Aminah...And the residents of Poindexter Village. You may have had missed brilliance at its finest.

My first visit to the now-closed Aminah Robinson exhibition "*Raggin' On*" at the Columbus Museum of Art left me breathless. Mesmerized. I made four trips to the museum in an effort to meditate and take in all of what Aminah left behind for us to marvel and experience. When I entered the exhibit, the sign, "Come In" above the ornament door of her house made me feel as if I stepped into a portal, a time space vortex of there ... a place ... Poindexter Village. The genius of Aminah's work is that we became time travelers into her world, community and life. We were transported into spaces and times and moments that signified a people, Black people's homes and lives. We were, if only for a moment, in Poindexter. Observing her work, I wondered about home.

My place in Columbus, and my people and their people. I reflected on Aminah's piece, "*Themba Bears Witness*," where she deeply examines the Diaspora, those who escaped slavery and those who migrated from Jim Crow south to Ohio escaping the horrors of racism. They found their way to Columbus, and made a home in the Bottoms, eventually settling in Poindexter Village. Her work made me ponder, more reflectively on the question often asked, Where your

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people from? Who are you related to? I know that my people migrated from Georgia, at one time, lived on Engler Street, in Downtown Columbus. Home.

Who your people? Where you from? Aminah's work is many designations ... locations ... homes. Her paintings, figures, drawings and words travel from Africa making their way to Poindexter where she locates and situates the Black experience of those who once lived in the housing complex. Her work helps us to find and locate one's self within community, a community of family and friends. It is about locating Blackness and Black life, illustrating the Black lived experience. What does it mean to be Black in America, but more poignantly Black in Columbus? She finds and captures moments of Black love within this community and tells the story of those who lived there. We find out what it means to live in a Black world, but mainly Black love, Black joy, Black happiness, and Black resiliency. There are many faces, people, and lives that shape and form her understanding of economics, resourcefulness, and resiliency. We find ourselves visiting with her on Sunday afternoons for art lessons with Uncle Alvin. We are invited to the Christmas Day in Poindexter Village and the Easter Egg Hunt outside Beatty Center.

We are ragged on to join the Block Party, which she keenly identifies with street markers, buildings and businesses. We experience the Chickenfoot Woman, who sold chicken feet, and the Brownskin Man who sold pork rinds. She reminds of School Days in Columbus – Alley School, Seventh Street School, Third Street School, and Mt. Vernon School. There was a life living, breathing, and operating within those spaces. Black people's lives were visible, living in plain sight within a boundary of Columbus.



The studio in the renovated home of artist Aminah Robinson. Eric Albrecht/ Dispatch

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It is here, in Poindexter Village, that we find a well-meaning and intentional life amongst those who were oftentimes marginalized from the greater community. Aminah invites us in to see and be part of the experience, yet sacredly she yields and holds that which is dearest to Black folks, and for those who can read and see the hidden messages inscribed and imbued within her paintings and drawings. She is sending us a message, telling us, "I see you. Do you see you?" Poindexter Village is not just a community, but a Black thriving, loving, engaging, caring, nurturing, saved and sanctified community. Aminah reminds us in Incantations, from Themba: A Life of Grace and Hope that we are bathed in the Holy Ghost of Black Jesus. Poindexter is no different than Detroit, Harlem, St. Louis, Atlanta, Chicago, and Los Angeles. It is representative of all black communities of those who have been forced to the margins, on the outside and periphery of life. Those of us who had been discarded and made to be invisible. She reminds us that we have life, a home, a place for us.

Never forget home. Never forget community. Never forget your folks. In the piece, Uncle Alvin Says ... she reminds us of the legends her uncle Alvin told her as a child that African explorer settled in Ohio Valley as early as the 1200s. She asks of us, "What will become of the sacred ancient and historical land of the near eastside of Columbus, Ohio?"

Aminah is mother, daughter, sister, friend and lover. She loves us. She is in love with us. She is in an intimate relationship with those she represents in her drawings and paintings. She deeply confides within each of these persons a type of care and passion and desire. She pays homage to heroes and sheroes who inspire and encourage not only her, but all of us. Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman. James Baldwin. Martin Luther King, Jr. And Malcolm X. She threads us, our story, the Black story, within the fabrics of American history. Making use of cloth, parchment paper, and all the raw and earthly materials. She threads us, the red thread, representing the blood and lifeline of Black folks, into the narrative and story of Columbus, and American history. She fastens this story with buttons. They hold in place the story, and the pages and passages that have been missing. These are the stories and lives that are untold, hidden within plain sight. Aminah loves Black people. She intimately designs and fashions us within the quilt of folklife in Columbus.

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Aminah Robinson with her dog, Baby, at her home in Columbus in 2015, a few months before she died. Eric Albrecht/Dispatch

Aminah is able to commune with the ancestors and lift their voices and stories onto the canvas of life. She molds, shapes, and forms life through the materiality of that which is placed in front of her, under her, and around her. Earth. It is hers. She knows how to tend to Mother Earth, and gather up the dust, and dirt, and roots and listens to its cries. She hears and sees, visions form, and constructs a divine life.

Thank you, Aminah, for allowing us to keep, Raggin on.