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Life

Museum of Art to host first national stop of new exhibition

Brett Turner— Jan 29, 2025

Work of acclaimed late Ohio artist Aminah Robinson to be displayed through July



"Life Along Water Street," composed of white paper sewn with buttons, will be among the numerous works in the Springfield Museum of Art's latest exhibition, "Aminah Robinson: Journeys Home, a Visual Memoir" opening Saturday.

A traveling national exhibit celebrating the seven-decade career of a renowned Ohio-born artist will have its debut in Springfield starting on Saturday.

"Aminah Robinson: Journeys Home, a Visual Memoir" will display more than 60 pieces from a woman who made art out of about anything she came into contact with at the Springfield Museum of Art (SMOA) with an opening reception, 5-7 p.m. Saturday, and will be on display in the museum's McGregor Gallery through July 13.

The exhibition is organized by the Columbus Museum of Art and supported by the Art Bridges Foundation.

SMOA executive director Jessimi Jones met Robinson, who passed in 2015, and left an impression that made her determined to make Springfield a destination for the exhibit and was thrilled it's the starting point. She said it will figure into other activities and events over the next six months.

"It's an honor and privilege to host this exhibition of this extraordinary artist. It's important for a museum like ours to celebrate Ohio artists and to have it launch the first day of Black History Month is also fitting," Jones said.

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Robinson, who was born in Columbus and raised in Poindexter Village, one of the country's first federally funded metropolitan housing developments, created art to communicate before she could speak and it remained integral to her life, becoming a teacher, mother, researcher and historian. Her art often spoke to the everyday lives of Black people, their endurance of centuries of injustice and preserving the stories of marginalized communities.

SMOA curator Jennifer Wenker said the exhibition is accessible to visitors in many ways, especially with some of the many materials Robinson used: paint, buttons, music boxes, fabrics, found objects and even came up with her own sculptural material of pig grease, mud, homemade dyes and glue she dubbed hogmawg.

"She used every type of surface and thought so visually so there was never an excuse not to make art and she just kept on making it," she said. "It's fascinating in that she looked all the way back to imagined ancestry using visual storytelling."

Robinson would often rise at 4 a.m. to work on her various projects as she was a meticulous researcher, especially with people, places and landmarks to inform her art and to tell the stories of her culture.

Robinson loved traveling, valuing the educational aspect of going to Africa, the Middle East and South America. Born Brenda Lynn Robinson, it was in Egypt a holy man gave her the name Aminah, meaning trustworthy, honest and faithful, and it stuck; she later found it was actually a family name belonging to her paternal grandmother and aunt.

She gained national and international recognition with her exhibitions. Upon her passing, Robinson left her entire estate, including her home and collection, to the Columbus Museum of Art.

"It was from this gift we receive this exhibition," said Jones.

The exhibition will feature a unique format with four thematic sections—Childhood Home, Ancestral Home, Spiritual Home and Journeys Home, showing Robinson's life and vision.

Robinson's work may be already familiar in Springfield. Her works are in the SMOA's "Celebrating Women" exhibition. Visitors to the Clark State Performing Arts Center may have also seen one of her works that was displayed there and will be in this exhibition.

The SMOA will continue its tradition of using an exhibition for further community involvement, for which museum educator Amy Korpieski is enthused.

"It's exciting what the people will be seeing with this exhibition," she said.

The first is "Art That Bonds," 5:30-7:30 p.m. Feb. 11, presented by "Dance, Stomp Shake," and open to the public. It will include a pop-up exhibition featuring middle school student artwork inspired by Robinson's themes, spoken word performances by middle and high school students and live demonstrations.

The monthly "Come Find Art" free-admission days will offer all ages days of creativity with artists on-site and a hands-on open studio. They will be 12:30-4:30 p.m. Feb. 9, March 9 and April 13.

A hands-on art gallery in the SMOA's Chakeres Gallery allows visitors a hands-on studio to make art inspired by the Robinson exhibition throughout its run.

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Preschool students from Clark Early Learning Center doing trips to the SMOA will create art related to Robinson. The SMOA will also tie the exhibition into various spring and summer events in Springfield.

“As a museum, our goal is to build community engagement and going to partner in addition to what we do here is part of that. You can learn a lot about history through Aminah’s artwork,” Jones said.

Following Springfield, the exhibition will go to Newark, N.J. and Mobile, Ala. through early 2027.