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The Columbus Dispatch

'Journeys Home' exhibition to tell late artist Aminah Robinson's story nationwide

By Bilinda M. Paschal

The impact of Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson on the Columbus art community cannot be understated. One can scarcely throw a rock without hitting someone who has been influenced by the late artist.

Robinson carved an indelible mark in the annals of artistry with her prolific output over seven decades, beginning in childhood and continuing steadily until her death in 2015. In the nearly 10 years since her passing, her legacy has continued to grow, spreading seeds of inspiration to a legion of local creatives.

Soon, those seeds will be sown across the country, as Columbus Museum of Art (CMA) prepares to launch "Aminah Robinson: Journeys Home, a Visual Memoir," an exhibition of 60 works that will tour the U.S. through 2028.



"Easter Egg Hunt," created in 1993 with watercolor and string, is part of "Aminah Robinson: Journeys Home, a Visual Memoir," a nationally touring exhibition of the late Columbus artist's work. The exhibition will make its first stop Saturday at the Springfield Museum of Art, where it will be on view through July 13. The full tour will run through 2028. Columbus Museum Of Art/Gift Of The Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson Trust

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“Aminah is so well-known in Columbus, and this is a wonderful opportunity to share her legacy and storytelling across the nation,” said Lydia Simon, director of communications and marketing at CMA.

“Part of our mission at the museum is to steward her legacy and increase her name recognition across the country.”

The show is touring with backing from the Art Bridges Foundation, which supports the creation of collection-based exhibitions of American art at museums of all sizes.

Art recognition; OSU professor and artist Jared Thorne begins 2025 Aminah Robinson Fellowship

“They have a special program they do with museums by providing the opportunity to get really wonderful artwork out of storage,” said Deidre Hamlar, director of the Aminah Robinson Legacy Project at CMA.

“They create this sort of bridge for a museum that would not have the funds otherwise to do a touring show.”

The first stop for “Journeys Home” will be the Springfield Museum of Art, where it will open Saturday and run through July 13. From there, the show will travel to the Newark Museum of Art in New Jersey and the Mobile Museum of Art in Alabama. More venues will be announced later.

The journey to ‘Journeys Home’

“Journeys Home” is Robinson’s first major museum presentation since CMA’s critically lauded “Raggin’ On: The Art of Aminah Robinson’s House and Journals” in 2020. Curating a traveling exhibition by an artist with such a large body of work is no small feat and it took a great deal of coordination, according to Hamlar.

“It took some masterful choreography of all the people in the museum, with multiple people doing multiple things, as well as outside of the organization. There are so many things behind the scenes. Myriad things go into making it happen,” she said.

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At the Columbus Museum of Art in 2002, Aminah Robinson sits in a chair she created. Eric Albrecht/Columbus Dispatch
File Photo

Narrowing the 200 pieces of Robinson's work in the museum's permanent collection down to a manageable number for the exhibition was a herculean task as well.

"It was a challenge. Aminah worked very small, very large and in between, so to make it a manageable show, I had to keep it to 50-60 works. That gave me an outline to tell her story through her eyes," she said.

"I looked at works I thought would be striking to the eye and bring people in. Aminah was a storyteller in every single work, so it's not going to fail."

A look back at Aminah's house : Renovated Aminah Robinson house ready for artists (2020)

Hamlar said she chose pieces that would create a timeline of Robinson's life and work at different periods — one self-portrait dates back to the artist's childhood. The exhibition also includes digitized versions of Robinson's journals. "We wanted it to be a natural progression, a timeline of sorts that people can follow that makes sense, a linear type of story. The text is sort of a timeline as well; it tells her story from beginning to end," Hamlar said.

"Hopefully, this is a microcosm of her life in a way that is ingestible, accessible and memorable."

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“This is her expressing her life. Aminah was an artist through and through. Everything she saw, everything she felt, she did through her art. I hope the work speaks for her.”



Aminah Robinson's "*Organ Grinder*," made in 1996 with hogmawg and found objects, is part of a national tour of the late Columbus artist's work heading first to Springfield. Columbus Museum Of Art/Gift Of The Artist

What's in a name?

“We call it a ‘visual memoir’ because Aminah was a storyteller. We wanted the show to tell her story, things she saw, things she believed and things she wanted to tell,” Hamlar said.

The title “Journeys Home” is a nod to Robinson’s concepts of home, a motif that runs through much of her art. The exhibition is arranged into four thematic sections: childhood home, ancestral home, spiritual home and journey home.

“At every age and stage, we’re looking at her journeys to her childhood home, her ancestral home — she traveled to Africa and around the U.S., always seeking a connection to her people in the African diaspora throughout the world,” Hamlar said.

“She also was a very spiritual being inspired by so many things around her and the final section, journey home, creates this final place for her.

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“But as we know, things don’t end with Aminah. We’re always continuing the journey home with her.”



"Untitled (Child and Malcolm, Dedicated to Pepo Vitani)," a graphite drawing done in 1956 by Aminah Robinson, will be among the works by the late Columbus artist in a touring exhibition that begins Saturday at the Springfield Museum of Art. Columbus Museum Of Art/Gift Of The Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson Trust

Hogmawg heaven

Hamlar said she hopes patrons at museums on the tour will see what she sees in Robinson’s art: something new with every viewing.

“Every single time I enter a space with Aminah’s work in it, I see something new. She worked in layers. There’s this process of reentering her work,” Hamlar said.

“It’s a compilation, it’s accessible, it’s not too much. People go away knowing her. Some of the gallery shows focus on one type of media, but this is multimedia.”

Opinion: Aminah Robinson filled ‘blank pages’ with joys, horrors experienced by African Americans

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Indeed, “Journeys Home” is a panoply of drawings, prints, paintings, textiles, collages, her monumental “RagGonNon” tapestries and “hogmawg” sculptures.

A malleable, durable material made from mud, glue, hog grease, lime and other natural ingredients and cooked on a stove, hogmawg appears in many of Robinson’s pieces.

“Aminah learned to make it from her father, who was an artisan himself, a draftsman and a carpenter. He clearly knew a little bit of science in terms of artmaking materials,” Hamlar said.

In addition to sculpting, Robinson used hogmawg as a shellac and a binding agent, as well as to create faces and accentuate other materials in her artwork.

“Some of these (works) were made 40-50 years ago, so this material has stood the test of time,” Hamlar said. “I’m sure Aminah is smiling from above.”

And making hogmawg in heaven, no doubt.