

FORT GANSEVOORT



FORT GANSEVOORT ANNOUNCES REPRESENTATION OF AMINAH BRENDA LYNN ROBINSON ESTATE

Gallery's First Exhibition

Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson: Character Studies

Fort Gansevoort, 5 Ninth Avenue, New York, NY

Opening: Thursday, November 14, 2024, 6-8 PM

On View: November 15, 2024– January 25, 2025

"I let all forms inspire me and set me in motion...I begin to listen to the language of forms. The whole world is there to be looked at in creative and exploratory fashion." — Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson

New York... Fort Gansevoort is pleased to announce the gallery's exclusive US representation of the estate of multidisciplinary artist Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson (1940–2015). Working in close collaboration with the Columbus Museum of Art (CMA), Fort Gansevoort will develop exhibitions highlighting various currents within the noted artist's sprawling, multifaceted practice. To inaugurate this innovative partnership and its goal to further elucidate Robinson's oeuvre and contributions as an artist and educator, the gallery will present ***Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson: Character Studies*** focusing on portraiture in Robinson's drawings and mixed-media sculptures. The exhibition will be on view at Fort Gansevoort, November 14, 2024–January 25, 2025.

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Upon her death in 2015, Robinson bequeathed all her work and personal effects, including her home studio in Columbus, to CMA, reflecting the close relationship she maintained with the museum during her lifetime. As the primary steward of Robinson's artistic legacy, CMA subsequently developed the Aminah Robinson Legacy Project, an initiative to support ongoing engagement with the artist's practice. Through the sale of select works from the estate, Fort Gansevoort's partnership with the museum is designed to help fund the Aminah Robinson Legacy Project, which encompasses annual three-month fellowships and residencies for African American artists and writers, conservation of Robinson's home studio and work, and related museum exhibitions and educational programming.

"We are thrilled to announce this new partnership between CMA and Fort Gansevoort, set to further amplify Aminah's transformative cultural contributions and introduce new audiences to her work," said **Brooke A. Minto, Executive Director and CEO at CMA**. "Aminah's expansive oeuvre speaks to the widespread resonance of her work throughout her career, and the Aminah Robinson Legacy Project has enabled others to continue drawing inspiration from her practice and further expand upon the ideas she championed during her lifetime. We look forward to collaborating with Fort Gansevoort to continue these efforts in preserving and honoring Aminah's work for future generations."

"It is a tremendous honor and privilege to present our first exhibition of Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson's art at Fort Gansevoort. We are grateful to the Columbus Museum of Art and its talented, passionate team and for their stewardship of the legacy of an artist we have long admired," said **Adam Shopkorn, Founder of Fort Gansevoort**. "Aminah is a true American master whose vision and achievements deserve far-reaching critical attention and public engagement. We are delighted to embark upon this collaborative mission to share her gifts with the wider world."

About the exhibition

Recognized in 2004 with a MacArthur Fellowship in celebration of her "freestanding monuments and fractional components of an ongoing odyssey," Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson was a prolific artist, storyteller, and visual historian whose astonishingly diverse, multi-medium oeuvre celebrates and memorializes the community of her childhood in Columbus, Ohio and her journeys to and from her home. In drawings, paintings, sculpture, puppetry, music boxes, handmade books, textile-based pieces, and poetry, she reflects on themes of family and ancestry, and the grandeur of simple objects and everyday tasks. Her art blends personal experiences with historical references to convey narratives of African American life and her passion for community preservation and shared knowledge. Engaging multiple senses at once, the tactility of Robinson's work creates dynamic tension through the juxtaposition of found objects with ephemeral media, acknowledging the inherent history of her materials while imbuing them with new meaning through her own artistic intervention.

Both her work's materiality and subject matter were informed by her upbringing in Poindexter Village, one of the nation's first federally funded public housing developments, located in Columbus, Ohio's Bronzeville neighborhood. Robinson's father taught his young daughter how to make *hogmawg*—a mix of mud, sticks, pig grease, lime, glue, and other bits of life—seen in several of the multimedia sculptures that will be presented in ***Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson: Character Studies***. These works feature heads fashioned from *hogmawg*, adorned with human hair, button eyes, and pigment, as well as costuming and accessories culled from a combination of repurposed clothing and handcrafted accoutrements. Distinctive traces of the artist's hand—from the visages in gestural drawings to the modeled faces of multimedia sculptures—amplify the strong emotive impact of Robinson's work. The undulating movement of her work's brown clay-like surfaces convey the imperfections of human flesh with an exaggerated expressivity, using an embodied process to craft vessels for storytelling.

During her youth, Robinson also absorbed the vibrant oral traditions from storytellers in her community; her great-aunt Cornelia Johnson's tales of the Middle Passage and experiences of enslavement exerted a profound influence.

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Several of Robinson's Rag Paintings foster a direct material relationship with this familial history by incorporating fragments of quilts Cornelia Johnson made when she was enslaved. Other works embody a more symbolic approach to historical reckoning, such as the pastel and acrylic work *Field Hand—Hands of an Artist* (1978), representing the enslaved Black women who were forced to labor as field workers by day yet became artisans by night. Inherited generational trauma is honored here in a single portrait of an elderly woman exuding resilience and reverence, titled in recognition of the lineage linking Robinson to her portrayed subject.

In addition to grappling with the past, ***Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson: Character Studies*** showcases how Robinson frequently chronicled local stories of neighborhood characters, as is seen in works such as the colorful table-top sculpture *Brownyskin Man* (1997), modeled after a local street vendor who was a fixture in the artist's childhood. On loan to the exhibition from CMA's permanent collection, *Brownyskin Man* has a jaunty checkered-print cap and matching coat, hand-sewn to fit his small frame, and draped with a garland of multi-colored cloth sacks. The sacks represent the vessels in which he would carry pork rinds (also known as brown skins). With narrative specificity, such sculptures embody human ingenuity that arises in the face of struggle and represent the vibrancy and eccentricities of the individuals who made up the artist's close-knit community.

Robinson's specific attention to the rendering of facial features and hands enhances the individuality of her subjects, illuminating the deep, shared humanity of neighbors, loved ones, and observed strangers she portrayed. In 1989, Robinson participated in a summer-long residency at P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center (now MoMA PS1) in New York City, where she sketched the faces of strangers during her daily commute. On view in the exhibition, these intimate drawings—many depicting impoverished and unhoused individuals—document the economic and social disparity Robinson witnessed in New York. Representing her subjects with dignity and empathy, these anonymous portraits showcase Robinson's authentic commitment to giving visibility to disenfranchised communities.

Robinson used the term "RagGonNon" to describe her complex artworks that continue to evolve by way of the observer's contemplation. She believed her art's meaning expands continuously as viewers bring their own perspectives and interpretations to it. As new audiences encounter and immerse themselves in Robinson's work, this resonant dialogue between viewer and maker will unfurl and enrich, building upon the artist's legacy for generations to come.

About the artist

Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson was born in Columbus, Ohio in 1940 where she passed away in 2015. Her art is included in the collections of the Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY; Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, OH; JP Morgan Chase Art Collection, Columbus, OH; National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, Cincinnati, OH; Newark Museum, Newark, NJ; Richmond Art Museum, Richmond, IN; Southern Ohio Museum, Portsmouth, OH; and Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, OH among others. In 1991, she received an honorary master's degree from CCAD. In 2002, she was awarded an honorary Doctorate from Ohio Dominican University. In 2003, she received a commission to create a monumental work for the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati, OH. In 2004, Robinson was honored with a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship Award. The Columbus Museum of Art organized the major retrospective, *Symphonic Poem: The Art of Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson* in 2006. The exhibition later traveled to the Brooklyn Museum, the Tacoma Art Museum, Toledo Art Museum, and other venues nationwide. A comprehensive catalogue documents this important multi-venue museum exhibition. In 2015, Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson bequeathed most of her estate in Trust to the Columbus Museum of Art. In 2020-2021, the Columbus Museum of Art presented *Raggin' On: The Art of Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson's House and Journals*, an exhibition and accompanying catalogue highlighting seven decades of Robinson's art and writing.

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About Fort Gansevoort

Established in 2015 and located in the heart of New York's Meatpacking District, Fort Gansevoort is a contemporary art gallery set in a Greek Revival row house built in 1849. The gallery represents artists and artists' estates from around the world. Fort Gansevoort emphasizes art that engages with cultural storytelling, social justice, and identity formation. The gallery values stories from and about subcultures that are not primarily known for artmaking. Many represented artists are community leaders, activism-oriented creators, and innovators of vernacular art-making traditions. Fort Gansevoort prides itself in presenting thoroughly contextualized exhibitions and cultivating strong relationships with museums and public institutions who exhibit and collect the work of the gallery's artists. By championing diverse perspectives, Fort Gansevoort celebrates art that inspires, empowers, and educates.

About Columbus Museum of Art

CMA is where creativity and the daily life of its community intersect and thrive, as the museum champions new and different ways of thinking and doing. CMA celebrates the creative process and sets the stage for people to experience art, ideas and relationships that spark creativity and nurture collective, courageous imagination.

CMA's collection includes outstanding late 19th- and early 20th-century American and European modern works of art, grounded in the Ferdinand Howald and the Howard D. and Babette L. Sirak Collections. The museum houses the world's largest collections of works by beloved Columbus-connected artists Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson, Elijah Pierce and George Bellows and acclaimed collections such as The Photo League and the Philip J. and Suzanne Schiller Collection of American Social Commentary Art. The recently established Scantland Collection of the Columbus Museum of Art also continues CMA's dedication to showcasing the art of our time.

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Caption and courtesy information:

Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson

The Brownyskin Man

1997

Hogmawg, fabric, and mixed media

18.5 x 10.5 x 7 inches

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