

WE ARE
THE
DRUM AND
THE SCRIBE

Black Art in America Collection

January 20th–May 16th, 2026

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BLACK ART
IN AMERICA™

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FOREWORD

There is a difference—and it is not a small one, though we rarely talk about it—between people who collect art and those who truly see art. Collecting is driven by resources, taste, and, admittedly, social status. Truly seeing art is an imperative, an obligation, a necessity, and a mode of being. I have reflected on this contrast ever since I first walked into Najee and Seteria Dorsey's loft in Swift Mills, Columbus, Georgia, around 2015. I met Najee once or twice before. The details are blurry, as early meetings often are. On our second or third meeting, he invited me to his studio apartment in the mill. Najee and Seteria were living and working there, building more than a collection. They were creating a support system for artists, especially young Black artists. And they believed in this mission with a conviction I would come to see as deeply personal and almost prescient.

That afternoon, Najee showed me several pieces. And then he showed me *Mary P.* by Alfred Conteh, and I could not stop looking at it. This is not a figure of speech. Standing in front of that painting—about seven feet tall, maybe four feet wide, commanding the wall—I experienced something I can only describe as a kind of arrest. Part of this was technical; Conteh's facility is exceptional. But the larger part was the content itself, a rendering of Black life, of presence and dignity and complexity, that I realized I had not adequately reckoned with before. Which is a humbling thing to admit, given that I have spent my entire professional life in the art world. But there it is. I looked at that painting, and I thought: Najee and Seteria have a remarkable eye. They see something that most of us were not seeing at the time.



I share this story because it reveals what the Dorseys have built. Black Art in America began in 2010 as an idea: a belief that there should be a place to document, preserve, and promote African American visual culture. Now, it's a 4,000-square-foot gallery, sculpture garden, and cultural hub in East Point, Georgia. But it's more than that. Najee and Seteria built a place where artists are seen, mentored, celebrated, and valued at every stage of their careers. They built real support and a true community, not by waiting for the museums to take the lead, but by taking the lead themselves. I have seen them spot emerging artists who later shaped the field, and I have seen them donate art to public institutions because they believe Black artistic heritage should be in public spaces, open to all.

The title of this exhibition *We Are the Drum and the Scribe* is meaningful to the Dorseys. The drum stands for the collective, heritage, and the cultural heartbeat. The scribe stands for documentation, testimony,



and history. These two forces are inseparable in the African American experience. Together, they show that this exhibition is a celebration and a means of preserving culture. It makes clear that Black art is not on the edge of American art history, but part of it. The Dorseys saw this before many others, and they have spent over a decade building on it and ensuring it remains true.

It is my privilege to welcome this collection to the Bo Bartlett Center. I still think about that afternoon in the Swift Mills, standing in front of *Mary P.* and realizing I was looking at something I had not known how to see. That is what great collectors and artists do. That is what Najee and Seteria Dorsey do. They teach us to see. ■

Michael McFalls

CADENCE AND CHRONICLE: CHAMPIONING BLACK ART WITH NAJEE AND SETERIA DORSEY

KELLI MORGAN, PH.D.



◀ Akinola Taoheed, *Weekend Hangout 2 (detail)*
Acrylic and charcoal on card
36 x 48 in

We Are the Drum and the Scribe: *Black Art in America Collection* at the Bo Bartlett Center, is an exhibition that is both a celebration and a profound statement about Black artistic presence in the United States. Hosted in a university museum space known for engaging with American figurative traditions, the exhibition brings into focus a thriving, often under-recognized sphere of cultural production curated and supported by Najee and Seteria Dorsey—two of the most significant champions of Black art today. This show not only presents a remarkable collection of African American visual expression; it enshrines the Dorseys' dedicated practice of collecting, advocating, and building infrastructure for artists whose voices might otherwise be sidelined in mainstream narratives.

The exhibition stems from the deep work of *Black Art in America* (BAIA)—a multi-faceted initiative founded by Najee Dorsey in 2010 as a digital platform for Black art. What began as an online magazine and resource hub has grown into a 4,000-square-foot gallery, sculpture garden, and cultural hub in East Point, Georgia, offering exhibition space, community programming, and an archive dedicated to African American visual culture. BAIA was explicitly created as “a space to document, preserve, and promote African American visual culture,” one where artists, collectors, and enthusiasts could gather, grow, and share work without the constraints of traditional institutional gatekeeping.¹

Najee Dorsey himself is a self-taught artist whose practice spans mixed media, collage, and painting grounded in Southern African American experiences. His artistic work is deeply narrative—often exploring memory, place, and untold stories of Black life in the South. But equally important is his vision as a collector and connector—someone who recognized early that building community and support structures for Black artists would require more than personal success; it would require creating platforms where artists could see themselves reflected, celebrated, and valued at every stage of their careers.

To that end, Najee and Seteria Dorsey have also distinguished themselves through their early identification of emerging artists whose practices would soon shape the field—among them Khalif Tahir Thompson, a New York-based painter whose lush, psychologically resonant portraits have quickly garnered international and institutional attention. Thompson, who was represented by BAIA for the first two years of his career, earned his MFA in painting/printmaking from Yale, and is now well-known for figurative works that draw from family archives, intimate memory, and cultural iconography, often rendered in layered compositions that fuse oil paint with collage and handmade paper.² Over the last five years, his career has accelerated significantly: he has mounted solo exhibitions with the international gallery Zidoun-Bossuyt across Luxembourg and Dubai, and received his first institutional solo exhibition in the United States—*Cherry*—at the Harvey B. Gantt Center. The Dorseys' vision is underscored by Thompson's inclusion in this exhibition through his painting *Baldwin*—a work that signals both their sustained commitment to artists they believe in and their ability to "collect forward," capturing not only established legacies but the contemporary figures actively shaping Black cultural discourse in real time.

1. <https://www.atlantamagazine.com/news-culture-articles/najee-dorsey-creates-a-home-for-black-artists/>

2. <https://zidoun-bossuyt.com/artists/khalif-tahir-thompson/>

Najee and his wife Seteria Dorsey, also an artist and CEO/CFO of *Black Art in America*, have anchored their work in the belief that visual art is essential to the longevity and integrity of cultural history. The *Atlanta Magazine* described the BAIA gallery and sculpture garden as a "home for Black artists," a statement that captures the deeply relational ethos animating their practice: creating space—literally and figuratively—for Black artistic expression to thrive.



Photography: Travis Dodd



COLLECTING AS CULTURAL PRACTICE

The Dorseys' collecting is not primarily about market value or prestige; it is about community assertion and historical inclusion. Over more than a decade, *Black Art in America* has amassed a broad and important body of work representing both master artists and emerging voices. Thus, the show foregrounds work collected across generations of African American artists. The collection's breadth—drawing from painting, sculpture, print works, and mixed media—reveals a curatorial intelligence rooted in narrative and representation rather than trends. Works by figures like John Biggers, Kerry James Marshall, Jamal Barber, Traci Mims, Wadsworth Jarell, Michael Ellison and others are featured in the exhibition, illustrating how the Dorseys center artists who shape and expand our understanding of Black visual culture.



This intentional relationality—the awareness that collecting is not simply an acquisition of objects, but a cultivation of networks, histories, and futures—is what distinguishes the Dorseys from other popular collectors of Black contemporary art. Their work foregrounds artists as living agents of cultural memory, rather than objects of aesthetic consumption. In this sense, their practice echoes broader movements within Black art history that resist extraction-oriented collecting and instead emphasize collaborative documentation and communal stewardship.

Moreover, their practice extends beyond exhibition: through digital channels, editorial platforms, and community programming, BAIA has become a node in a larger network of artists, scholars, and institutions. The BAIA online portal, which draws visitors from over 100 countries each month, serves as both an archive and a living site of exchange where works are documented, contextualized, and shared with a global audience.

Most tellingly, the Dorseys have leveraged their collection to support public institutions and diversify permanent holdings. In 2020, they donated works by fifteen African American artists to The Columbus Museum, strengthening the institution's holdings in key areas



and ensuring that artists like Elizabeth Catlett and Kerry James Marshall—some of whom were not previously represented in the museum’s collection—would be included in public cultural narratives. In 2025, they donated another fifteen works to the Clark Atlanta University Museum. This act of giving exemplifies their commitment to both preserving Black artistic heritage and ensuring its accessibility within public spaces.

Thus, *We Are the Drum and the Scribe* arises not from institutional acquisition, but from community-driven collecting. The Dorseys have not waited for major museums to lead; they have built their own infrastructure to ensure preservation and visibility. Their gallery and programming have offered

artists not just exhibition opportunities, but mentorship, recognition, and community engagement. They have provided emerging talents with platforms for professional development such as artists’ talks, mentorship, educational programs, participation in art fairs and museum shows, and featured essays, extending the impact of their practice beyond the walls of the gallery and into the fabric of community life.

WE ARE THE DRUM AND THE SCRIBE:

A CULTURAL MANIFESTO

The exhibition title—*We Are the Drum and the Scribe*—carries symbolic weight. The drum suggests collective rhythm, lineage, and cultural heartbeat; the scribe suggests documentation, testimony, and history. Together, they frame the exhibition as both a celebration of artistic achievement and an act of cultural record-keeping. It posits Black art not as peripheral or supplemental to American art history, but as central, dynamic, and foundational.

Additionally, it affirms that the stories contained in the BAIA collection are both individual and collective. Each work speaks not merely to artistic innovation, but to narratives of memory, resistance, social history, and community. In assembling these works into a coherent exhibition at the Bo Bartlett Center, the Dorseys amplify voices that are often overlooked by mainstream institutions, which transcends the typical modes of retrospective or survey. Rather, it is a cultural intervention—a deliberate assertion of presence, meaning, and historical continuity. Through their collecting and support practices, Najee and Seteria Dorsey have created a space where Black artists are seen, heard, and preserved for future generations.

Their work exemplifies how collectors can do more than accumulate objects; they can build legacies, cultivate communities, and reframe cultural narratives. In doing so, they embody a practice of collecting as historiography—one that not only safeguards artistic expression but also reshapes our understanding of American art history itself. ■

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***Fatiha & Door of Return Series,
Untitled #2***

Acrylic and gloss medium on gessoed canvas and
burlap on wood stretcher
120 x 60 in



Ochanya

Bonded marble sculpture
16 x 20 x 10 in





Untamed/Free

Metal sculpture, limited edition of 10
45 x 45 in



One of Many

Metal sculpture, limited edition of 10
36 x 37 in



▲ **A Council of Women**

Relief printmaking woodblock
48 x 84 in



◀ **Heir to the Land**

Woodblock print on fabric
49 x 97 in

▶ Relief printmaking woodblock
49 x 97 in



Family Ark Triptych (Color)

Offset lithograph on paper
29.5 x 49.5 in



Untitled

Mixed media oil on canvas
11 x 18 in



◀ **Jade**

Acrylic paint and urethane
plastic on canvas
47.5 x 84 in

▲ **Pat and Lil Pat**

Acrylic paint on canvas
47.5 x 84 in



In the Parlor

Mixed media on gallery-wrapped canvas
60 x 48 in



Her Hat is Her Halo

Original hand painted mono plate
24 x 24 in



Monoprint on paper, limited edition 36/40
22 x 30 in

Flip-Flops

Color reduction print on paper
13.75 x 21.5 in





◀ **Road to Jehovah**

Color reduction print on paper
18.5 x 23 in

▲ **Boozers**

Color reduction print on paper
21 x 22 in



Untitled

Mixed media
39 x 27 in

Untitled

Acrylic on canvas
36 x 60 in

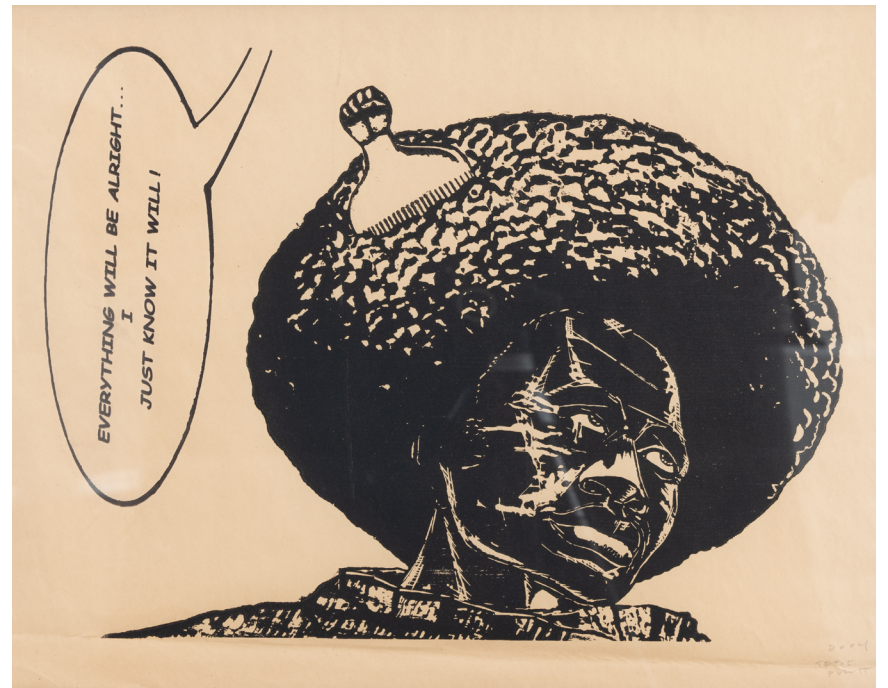
42 **GERALD LOVELL**



***Everything Will Be Alright,
I Just Know It Will***

Relief printmaking woodblock
18.5 x 13.5 in

Woodblock silkscreen on paper, test print
16 x 21 in





◀ **Rooted**

Color reduction woodcut print on
paper
18 x 24 in

▲ **Renaissance Man**

Color reduction woodcut print on
paper
36 x 40 in



▲ **Because They Stood**

Color reduction woodcut print on paper
24 x 18 in

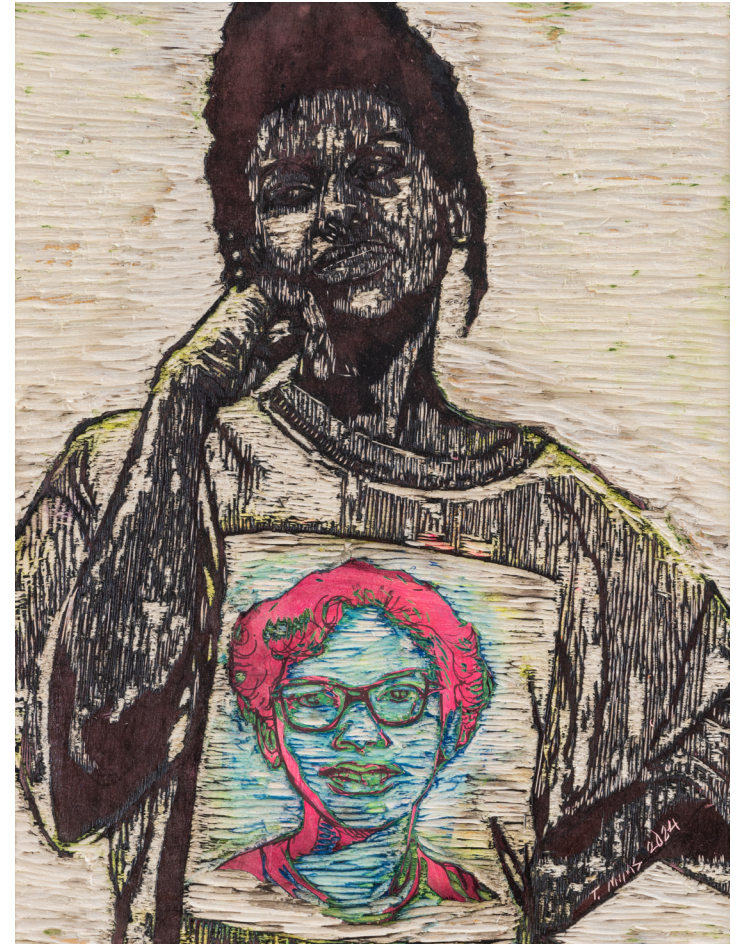
Color reduction relief printmaking
woodblock
24 x 18 in

► **Rooted - woodblock**

Color reduction relief printmaking
woodblock
18 x 24 in

► **Renaissance Man**

Color reduction relief printmaking
woodcut
36 x 40 in





Untitled
Clay sculpture
22 x 24 x 24 in

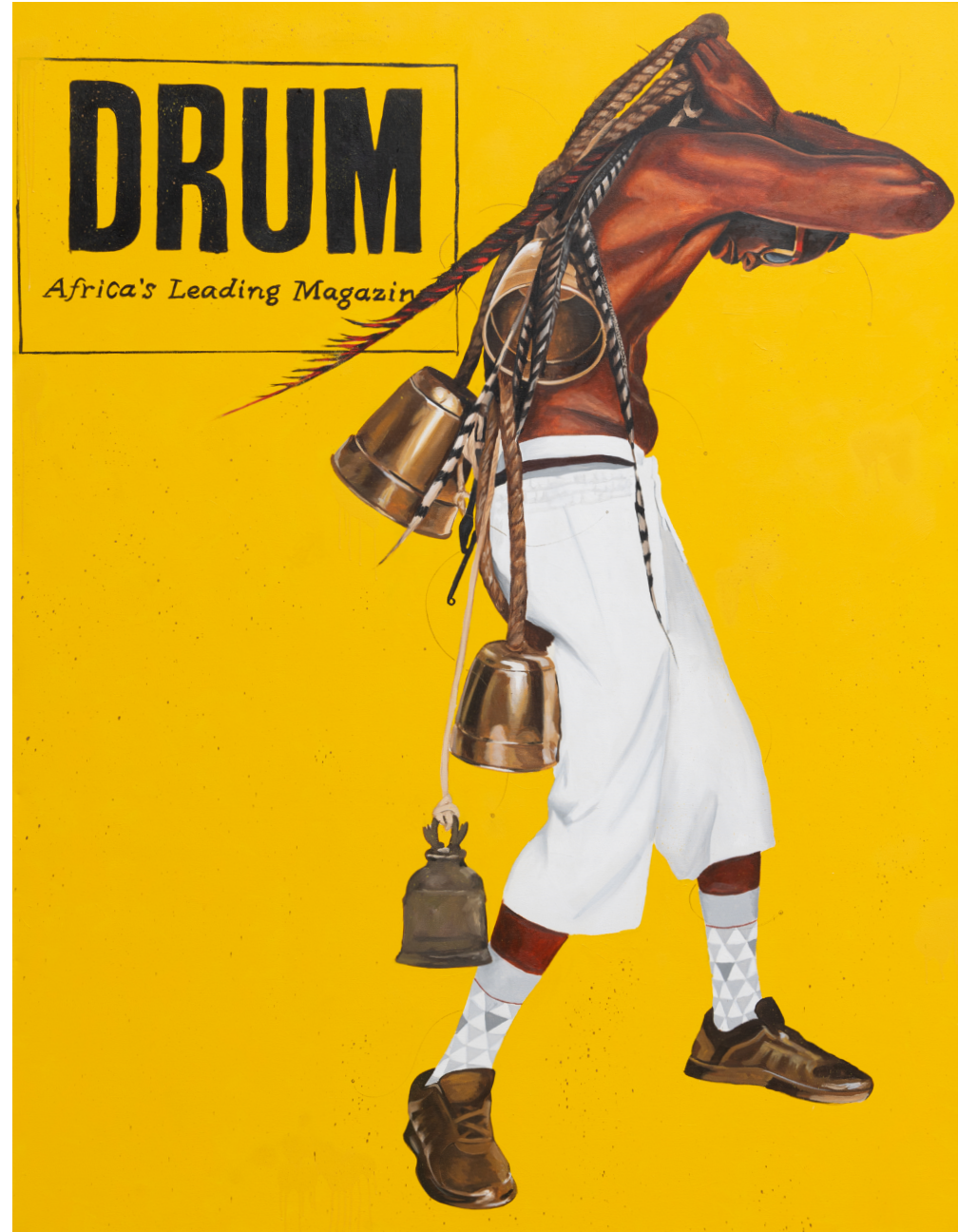


The Vogue

Acrylic on canvas
48 x 48 in

Many Rivers

Acrylic and spray paint on canvas
80 x 63 x 2 in





◀ **Vote**

Mixed media acrylic on wooden panel
12 x 26 in

▲ **Fred and Huey**

Mixed media acrylic on wooden panel
23.5 x 24 in



Untitled
Clay sculpture
13 x 24 x 16 in





Flour Power

Graphite drawing and mixed-media quilt
42 x 42 in

Weekend Hangout 2

Acrylic and charcoal on card
36 x 48 in





▲ **SAMO**

Oil, stick, handmade paper (abaca, cotton, & hemp), Japanese paper, leather, fabric, spray paint, colored pencil, and graphite on canvas
72 x 72 in

◀ **Baldwin**

Oil, handmade paper (abaca, cotton, & hemp), fabric, gold leaf, and construction paper on canvas
72 x 72 in



Cornrows

Oil and paper on canvas
70 x 66 in

Garden Bed

Oil and acrylic on canvas
56 x 54 in





◀ ***Migration of the Soul***

Mixed media sculpture
11 x 40 x 13 in

▲ ***Soul Transmission***

Mixed media sculpture
14.5 x 43 x 14 in



Date Night

Oil on canvas
48 x 72 in



ABOUT BLACK ART IN AMERICA™

For more than 16 years, **Black Art In America™ (BAIA™)** has been a leading platform for documenting, preserving, and advancing Black visual culture. Based in Metro Atlanta, BAIA is a multifaceted arts company offering curatorial services, art consulting, cultural programming, and media-driven storytelling that connects artists, collectors, and institutions nationwide.

At the core of BAIA's success is the facilitation of meaningful art transactions. By connecting artists with committed collectors, we help artists build sustainable careers, strengthen private and institutional collections, and generate the momentum that fuels everything we do.

BAIA operates a year-round gallery and sculpture garden in Metro Atlanta and is the founder of the nation's largest fine art print fair dedicated to African American printmakers. Produced in cities across the

country, our fairs and exhibitions serve as dynamic points of access—bringing scholarship, market visibility, and community engagement together in one space.

As a trusted curatorial and media resource, BAIA collaborates with museums, universities, Fortune 500 companies, and cultural institutions to produce exhibitions, art fairs, and public programs. Our proprietary media platform and extensive network amplify artists' voices while expanding audience engagement around Black visual culture.

BAIA represents a diverse roster of artists—emerging, mid-career, and legacy—and works closely with artists' estates to steward and sustain their market presence. As a collecting institution active in both primary and secondary markets, BAIA has helped achieve record results for contemporary artists while placing significant works into private and institutional collections.

Led by a family of collectors and nationally recognized artist **Najee Dorsey**, BAIA brings decades of experience, deep relationships, and a personal commitment to every project. Through the BAIA Foundation, we extend our mission beyond the market—supporting arts education, increasing access to visual culture, and reinvesting in the communities that inspire our work.

Black Art In America is more than a gallery or media platform. We are a comprehensive ecosystem—where art, history, market, and community intersect to ensure Black visual culture is seen, valued, and sustained.

ABOUT THE BO BARTLETT CENTER



The Bo Bartlett Center is an 18,425-square-foot interactive gallery space housed on the River Park campus of Columbus State University in downtown Columbus, GA. The red brick, former textile warehouse turned gallery space, designed by AIA award-winning architect, Tom Kundig, sits on the banks of the Chattahoochee River. Complementing exhibitions in the CSU Department of Art's acclaimed Norman Shannon and Emmy Lou P. Illges Gallery, the Bartlett Center serves as an experiential learning center and cultural hub for the visual arts while affording visitors a broad range of arts experiences offered within the College's arts district. As part of the College of the Arts' Corn Center for Visual Arts, the Bo Bartlett Center is a pivotal element in the continued emergence of a national and international presence.

The Bo Bartlett Center aims to enhance the cultural and educational environment of the university and the community. We strive to provide access to art through exhibitions and cross-disciplinary programming that promote the appreciation and understanding of the arts.

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