

PROGRESS REPORT

THE MINT MUSEUM

NORTH CAROLINA BLACK ARTISTS FOR LIBERATION





INTRODUCTION

Shortly after George Floyd's death, Mint President and CEO Todd A. Herman, PhD, [wrote a statement that focused on fighting racial injustice](#) and the role museums and artists can play in helping support dialogue. Herman [later released a second statement](#) that addressed how the Mint's own past hasn't lived up to the ideals we aspire to today — and what we're doing to actively combat inequities in Charlotte and in the art world more broadly.

NOTE: Many of the initiatives, exhibitions and acquisitions mentioned below were in the works prior to the death of George Floyd and the call to action from the NC Black Artists for Liberation. Some were years in the making.

However, the cries for social justice and greater equity in the arts space have intensified the museum's resolve and inspired a greater commitment—both ideologically and financially.

INWARD-FACING EFFORTS

- **One of the key items we identified was having BIPOC members of the Mint staff and community at the table for decision-making at the highest levels, from the senior leadership team to exhibition planning to deciding what works of art to acquire.**
Ebony House-Bradshaw, director of human relations at the Mint, was promoted to the museum's senior leadership team, bringing years of expertise and experience as one of the founding members of the Mint's Diversity Equity Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA) committee (details below). We also created an exhibition selection committee, made up of a diverse group of staff, who will be present and voting on what exhibitions we take on. The new committee has met once already, with another meeting planned within the month.
- **The Mint developed a formalized Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA) plan that plays a major role in the Mint's five-year strategic plan,** which was approved unanimously by the Board of Trustees in February 2021. For two years, the museum has had a museum-wide DEIA committee, led by Director of Community Relations Rubie Britt-Height and HR Director Ebony House-Bradshaw, with representatives from every department. The committee has offered staff training and promoted programming that offers diverse perspectives. However, having these efforts now part of a formal strategic plan offers a new Board-level accountability for implementation. The strategic commitments outlined in the new plan are far-reaching and include the following:
 - Plans to diversify the Mint's boards to better reflect the composition of the community, prioritizing diversity in the selection process. Board Chair Natalie Frazier Allen is BIPOC (she was selected for this role two years ago—this was not a recent action), as is Board Vice Chair Milton Prime. In total, the board is 20 percent BIPOC. The executive committee is 50 percent BIPOC.
 - Goals for diversifying the staff and senior leadership while implementing programs to broaden the pool of candidates. Similar goals to increase diversity among general membership and donors.
 - An annual evaluation of the Mint vendor list and plans to actively pursue more diverse vendors.
 - Goals for seeking a balance of projects that work with culturally and ethnically diverse artists, scholars, themes and private collectors when developing future exhibitions, installations and programs.
 - ***ALREADY IMPLEMENTED*** A new, more diverse committee of staff who will be present during the selection and planning process for exhibitions.

- **The Mint hosted two staff-wide training sessions on diversity and inclusion**, facilitated by Jonell Logan, the creative director of The McColl Center for Arts + Innovation. As both a longtime leader in the Charlotte arts community and a Black woman, Logan offered a perspective that prompted staff to reckon with their internal biases as well as those inherent within an arts institution that's nearly 85 years old — and understand the need to make significant change to combat them. We know that these sessions alone are not enough and have committed to ongoing, yearly training and interactive sessions on equity and empathy.
- **We continue our focus on expanding the Mint's collection by acquiring work by female, black, LGBTQ, Latinx and other traditionally marginalized artists** to represent a more inclusive look at our shared creative history, while also reevaluating the narratives and perspectives told through our permanent collection. In 2020 alone, of the 19 contemporary works we acquired, more than half are by women artists, and half are by BIPOC and LGBTQ artists.

Since 2017, we have acquired 126 works of art made by artists who identify as Black, LatinX, or Indigenous American. They range from museum purchases, such as *Conversation* by Leo Twiggs (acquired in 2018) and *Juke Joint* and *Generations* by Nellie Ashford (both acquired in 2020) to museum gifts, such as *Mama* by Ruben Natal-San Miguel, the photographer behind the museum's current online exhibition, [*Women R Beautiful*](#), and a series of stunning Kuba textiles, gifted by the Wesley Mancini Textile Collection.

- **An official Collections Committee was established in 2019**, under the guidance of Chief Curator and Curator of Contemporary Art Jen Sudul Edwards, PhD. This group of people (40 percent BIPOC) is in charge of approving the Mint's purchases and gifts.
- In response to the increased focus on having a diverse group of staff involved in exhibition-planning decisions, **an Exhibition Selection Committee was formed, including members from the DEIA committee such as DEIA co-leader Rubie Britt-Height.**
- **Staff members were encouraged to join United Way's 21-Day Racial Equity Challenge and were given permission to do the self-guided process during the workday.** A number of staff have taken advantage of the opportunity and testified to the value of the experience at a recent staff meeting.

OUTWARD-FACING EFFORTS

- **The Mint's roster of existing and upcoming exhibitions**, including *Constellation CLT* (ongoing), *Silent Streets: Art in the Time of Pandemic* (opening April 2021) and *It Takes a Village* (opening in June 2021), **shows the museum's commitment to encouraging and supporting local artists of diverse backgrounds.** We've also begun a series of artist interventions, in which contemporary works are placed among permanent collection installations to create a critical dialogue between past and present. Charlotte artist Julio Gonzalez was the first represented in the series.
- In addition to exhibitions that showcase talented local artists of diverse backgrounds, **the Mint has taken on exhibitions of national and international artists of diverse backgrounds.** Consider *Expanding the Pantheon: Women R Beautiful*, (an online exhibition through June 30, 2021) and *The World of Anna Sui* (opening November 2021).
- Since we re-opened in September 2020, **the Mint has offered free admission to all frontline and essential workers**, including: healthcare workers, restaurant employees, grocery store employees, custodial staff, teachers and all school staff, and more. This free admission also extends to up to five family members of frontline and essential workers. This free admission will be offered through the end of the fiscal year in June 2021. (The Mint also still maintains its Free Wednesday Nights, where both locations are free from 5-9 p.m. every Wednesday.)
- **In March, the Mint partnered with Carla Aaron-Lopez, BlkMrktClt, the ASC and CLT is Creative to host LOCAL/STREET, a weekend-long showcase of more than 40 artists of color at Mint Museum Randolph.** The pop-up exhibition brought in hundreds of people, many of whom had never been to the Mint before. Aaron-Lopez organized the event, but the Mint promoted it and hosted it in galleries we'd used for our *Classic Black: The Basalt Sculptures of Wedgwood and His Contemporaries* exhibition. Local street muralist and Colombian-born artist known as Owl had been commissioned to paint her signature "blob language" as the backdrop for *Classic Black*, and the graphic treatments provided the perfect backdrop for the works of art featured in Local/Street.
- **Last fall, [the Mint unveiled a public anti-racism page](#)** full of staff recommendations and resources, ranging from films and books to podcasts and resources for raising anti-racist children. The goal: to inspire thoughtful reflection and action with regard to social justice and racism.
- **The Mint used [an experimental in-gallery technology to highlight works of art from the collection that speak to racial justice and the experience of being black in America](#).** The Mint partnered with other Charlotte museums, including The Bechtler Museum of Modern Art, the Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Arts + Culture, and the Levine Museum of the New South to unroll a joint project known as

Interactive CLT, which brought augmented reality into the museum galleries. With support from the Arts & Science Council, AVO Insights created an app that allows visitors to the museum the opportunity to see videos about select pieces in the galleries. After opening the app, guests hover their phones over the indicated works of art, and a video about the art appears. The Mint's videos are narrated by Senior Curator of American Art Jonathan Stuhlman, PhD and Community Relations Director Rubie Britt-Height.

- **Through The Mint Museum from Home website platform** — launched near the outset of Covid-19 when the Mint was forced to close its doors — **the museum has used interviews, curator videos and more to spotlight works of art by BIPOC artists**, such as [acclaimed fiber artist \(and aerospace engineer\) Carolyn Mazloomi](#), [illustrator Wolly McNair](#) and [Juan Logan](#), whose work includes painting, mixed media and sculptures. Curator videos spotlight works of art by Black artists and the stories behind them, including [a new acquisition from fiber artist Elizabeth Talford Scott](#) and a [Black Lives Matter mural by Jamil Dyair Steele](#), now on view in Mint Museum Uptown's Carroll Gallery.
- Through a collaboration with Young Affiliates of the Mint and Jen Sudul Edwards, PhD, the Mint's chief curator and curator of contemporary art, **the Mint's social media channels and site featured virtual studio tours with regional BIPOC artists**, such as Ken West and Kevin Cole, gave viewers a chance to hear the artists, ask questions and see works in progress.
- **The Mint's Community Relations team's mission is to showcase and celebrate diversity while also having critical conversations around race through the power of art.** The Mint remains committed to longstanding diverse programs spearheaded by this team, including: Community Conversations (an event series using art as a springboard for dialogue), Mint to Move Cultural Dance Night, Mint Música & Poesía Café, Bilingual Storytime, and the Grier Heights Community Youth Arts Program, now in its 18th year.
- **Even as in-person programming was limited due to Covid-19, the Mint continued its 16-year-old investment in the Grier Heights Community Youth Arts Program.** The Mint's Learning & Engagement team [provided free mini art kits to area students \(check out this video](#) made by a Myers Park High 10th-grader, as Grier Heights kids made T-shirts inspired by the Mint's Kuba textile collection.) This year's Giving Tuesday campaign was a virtual coat drive that raised \$3,600 to buy coats, hats, gloves, socks and sleeping bags for the Grier Heights Community Improvement Association, The Relatives, and The McCrorey Family YMCA. When Covid-19 first hit, we worked with an anonymous donor and Food Lion Stores to provide more than \$2,000 in gift cards and reusable Food Lion grocery bags to families in need from Grier Heights and the west Charlotte community.