Art Gallery Guide
CURATOR’S STATEMENT

Home is an idea, a place and a feeling. The five artists exhibiting at WA Na Wari right now are all investigating these ideas in different ways. Nastassja Swift pays homage to Black women’s ancestral mothers and their migration, enslavement and displacement in Virginia. Henry Jackson-Spieker calls attention to the intimate moments in our homes, shared with family. Martine Syms interrogates the desire of space and how capitalism removes Black people from their neighborhoods. Marita Dingus says, “the goal of my art remains to show how people not only survive but prosper under dire circumstances.” Lastly, Xenobia Bailey uses one of the rooms to create a healing space for African Americans inspired by the unique design aesthetics of the Pacific Northwest. For three of these artists Seattle is home, whether they were born here, or they moved here. The experience of displacement is changing Black communities across the nation, so it is no surprise to see all the artists wrestling with the idea of belonging and survival.

In power,

WNN

GALLERY KYLE

Natassja Swift

Remembering Her Homecoming

Journey. Geography. Ancestors. Narrative. Through the exploitation of our bodies the stories of Black women are simultaneously invisible-ized and hyper-visible-ized with vicious regularity. The combined forces of toxic masculinity, misogynoir, enslaver shame, and man-made boundaries makes every step Black women take a potential minefield. Conversely, through our own agency, these tensions that bind the bodies of Black women are transformed into time-traveling signifiers, signposts at every crossroad, multiple living intersections bursting with our truths.

We are called to join a circle of Black women as they remember and reflect upon their lives and, in adorning the masks of their ancestral mothers, the stories of Black women preceding them. They move through and archive their own temporal/spatial travels by foot along the James River, from the trail of Enslaved Africans to Leigh Street in the Jackson Ward Neighborhood of Richmond, VA. In this way Nastassja is using her gifts to portray a “larger than life” way of seeing Black women’s path within the African Diaspora, lifting up their collective story of movement from continent to continent. From lands where Black bodies were stolen to lands where Black bodies were sold. From spaces that gave us all we needed to spaces that we created. Here she is offering a testimony to the truths of Black women’s bodies as they existed, and do exist, in Richmond, Rio De Janeiro, London and Lagos.

Historically, Black women have always rejected the visible/invisible binary discourse of our bodies by always seeing and centering our own narratives. I see Nastassja Swift continuing and extending this tradition through her wool renderings of the faces of our foremothers in their ancestral glory, then embodying them with dance, storytelling, song and film. This is an invitation into other ways of hearing and witnessing the journey of Black bodies. This installation lifts up the bodies and stories of Black women. It is a part of the continual resetting of the terms of the conversation on Black woman-ness. Nastassja Swift avails her understanding of being a Black Woman in these lands through ‘Remembering Her Homcoming’.

-Evemarie Kigvamsudvashti
**WILSON HALL**

**Henry Jackson-Spieker**

**Points Of View**

For myself I’ve come to understand that, as an artist, at my core is an unrelenting relationship with persistence. We encounter the world daily, explore and experience all it has to offer up. We take it home and attempt to make sense in a critical, empathetic, ironic or romantic way with movement, beauty, lyrics, lines, form or rhythms. We re-imagine its impact on us. We build things up and fail often, turning deeply in and out of ourselves, lending a changing focus between our reality and perceptions. We again persist through asking, playing, standing and falling. Points of View, by Henry Jackson Spieker, evokes an authentic sense of nostalgia through a playful, thoughtful lens to consider place in his installation at Wa Na Wari.

The strategic suspension and placement of materials throughout the Greene family home provides an opportunity for a storied reflection of the space itself. As a viewer, you experience a distorted view of common areas of congregation. Space becomes skewed as does the reflection of the viewer within it. Points of View speaks very directly to change, perception and persistence. Spieker’s work is a layered site-responsive installation that punctuates the value, shifts and complex identities of the space it is housed.

-Eve Sanford

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**GALLERY BIRDIE**

**Xenobia Bailey**

**Vibration & Frequency Experiment**

**Funktional Material Culture Design Lab**

A stretch of magenta underlays an iterative pattern of images. Some include portraiture photographs of black people. In one: a gold loop earring centers a feminine figure whose afro, cheek, and shoulder also frame the portrait. In another, dreadlocks of differing lengths cascade vertically and horizontally atop a second figure’s head. In a third image, a bright pink flower and gauge earring adorn the sideways portrait of another feminine figure who glances upwards. Under each image, a light purple color encircles and highlights the regal and quiet of composure of each subject.

This art – wallpaper by Xenobia Bailey – begins to answer the question: what does it feel like to be surrounded by blackness? That blackness includes these stylized images of black people, as well as other representations, such of ram sculptures, that also re-occur across the wallpaper. Bailey, a Seattle-based artist trained in ethnomusicology and known for a “cosmic-funk” aesthetic, has long made work committed to the haptic, or to touch. From vibrant, swirled-colored crocheted hats and mandalas, to stylized black doll ensembles that evoke scenes of support and joy, Bailey’s work makes exuberant worlds and experiences to sit with feelings of being with, and being surrounded by, black people. In the Central District, in Seattle, and across the United States, black people continue to be displaced and not attended to with care and with feeling. In this wallpaper, Bailey invites us to consider how we might feel, support, and be with the worlds and feelings of black people.

-Jasmine Mahmoud
Marita Dingus
Selected Works

The Black Experience in America is always difficult to define. The truth about what it is to be a human being in a land that is not representative of your roots, to have been enslaved and turned into a profit-making commodity, to be continually oppressed and treated as “less than” while being massaged enough to keep you comfortable to continue to contribute to this country’s “greatness” is not something that words can always convey. Marita’s work does what words cannot.

Pieces that have been discarded, torn away, re-defined, re-distributed or just plain used to death are brought lovingly together to create something new and unlike anything else in existence. Structurally, no two are alike. But all are demonstrative of the universal truth that nothing real can be threatened and matter can only be transformed, it can never truly be destroyed. This means that while there may be varying parts, it all comes together to form a complete whole. Her use of found parts that are brought together to create a sculptural form are indicative of the various pieces that make up the Black American in all its ultimately unified, undefinable glory. From the ashes rises the immortal phoenix.

-Myesha Clayton

WA NA WARI LAWN

Martine Syms
Some What?

There are times when location intensifies an artwork’s meaning. “Some What?” takes an appropriated image from a publication and re-sites it in various places; a storefront gallery, a billboard, and now the lawn of Wa Na Wari. Wa Na Wari is a Black arts space in a gentrified neighborhood. Once 80% African American, the Central District is now 8% Black. This kind of change is dramatic and trauma inducing. Many Black people have expressed that they feel like they have been removed from the Central Area and “Some What”, in this context, feels like it is asking the question “Do you want this home too?” “Some What?” has the opportunity to challenge viewers to see the impact of changing communities, and displacement. White desire is rooted in colonialism; its contemporary expression is connected to violence and gentrification. “Some What?” questions the action of taking space without offering an answer.

The language of signage is universal, especially in the Western context. We see signs everyday offering directions, inducing us to buy things, and warning us of dangers. “Some What?” is both directional signage and a warning. It shows us how we have been letting money and greed change our cities and warns us that we can stop this before it is too late.

-Elisheba Johnson