

KINDRED LINKS

by

Omari Booker & Henry L. Jones

This exhibit is an exploration of the global microcosm that is North Nashville. Our intention is that, by entering the community through the doorways of history, ancestry, family, and legacy, you will engage in conversations that highlight its past, illuminate its present, and reclaim its future.”

–Omari Booker, 2021

I am inspired by my memories of North Nashville. I found myself thinking back and comparing the changes. Now, when visiting and seeing a particular place there, the past returns like walking back in time. . . paths moving like a flowing river. This journey is spiritual as I link images, colors, or anything that will become part of a painting. It’s a combination of personal and social history to understand. Currently in the community, historical connections are being transmuted. Places just disappear.”

–Henry L. Jones, 2021



Presented by the Nashville Parthenon
and the following underwriters:



The
Memorial Foundation



SANDRA SCHATTEN
FOUNDATION



Henry L. Jones

For me, this exhibit is a journey into the realms of the past about Nashville, specifically North Nashville, and its changes. I'm an artist and a writer who delves deeply into the roots of subjects or events. I started with a question in mind: "How am I a part of this place?" Just because I'm Black doesn't mean I know and interact with every Black community, but I have two references. First, I attended Fisk University which is located in the heart of North Nashville. While a student in the 1980s, I explored many areas of the community, and this became a major part of my artistic development. Had I attended the university and never ventured out beyond its granite fences, my education would be incomplete. Secondly, after years later of living in many other cities, I returned to Nashville from Chicago in 1998 and immersed myself into the arts community. It was a wise move. It was the beginning of the Nashville Harlem Renaissance Movement where the arts were blooming. North Nashville was the hub and the inspiration.

Now that neighborhood is undergoing gentrification block after block. As a result, the Black presence is diminishing. The river I reference in the exhibit was made with the tears and sweat of many people – Black people who struggled and are still struggling. What I see today isn't progress but sadness. So much is vanishing and is replaced by an emptiness stamped with the title "Progress." Progress influenced my creativity and I pulled from my personal history as it related to the external. Spiritually, I embraced all my feelings and thoughts. This is how I paint – using my method I call "Gibbing," with which I've painted with since the early 1990s. Then, I dipped my hands inside the river's stream. I palmed up as many links of recall I could hold onto and created my paintings. Remove the water imagery and replace it with various colors. Gibbing involves painting mostly with my hands. I enjoy touching the colors as I apply while painting in a trance. It's like a piece of me is put into each painting. When the viewer sees what I've created, I want them to feel and think about what I've shared – to relate to the passage of time and to those changes. Then, ask themselves: "How am I part of this?" As a kindred spirit my purpose is to bring forth and share connections to help answer that question.

Omari Booker

A visual artist based in Los Angeles and Nashville, Omari Booker began his artist journey during his senior year at Montgomery Bell Academy. While attending Belmont University, he studied Mathematics and other more traditional curricula before focusing on studio art and graphic design. Graduating from Tennessee State University, he began to focus on painting, with oil as his predominant medium. Other media, including charcoal, ink, and found objects are also essential building blocks of his work, and used to create finished pieces. In addition, large scale work is a constant creative outlet, with murals consistently part of his art practice.

Taking a process-oriented approach to his art, he embraces it as a therapeutic modality through which he is able to express his passion for freedom and independence the creative process allows him to experience. His art is his personal therapy, and his desire is that those viewing it will have personal experiences of catharsis. The philosophy that undergirds Omari's work is FREEDOM THROUGH ART. He aspires to create images and objects that communicate to his audience their unique and intrinsic ability to be free.



Henry L. Jones
*Ever on the Altar, Many
Journeys*

Acrylic, collage, enamel, latex, ink,
burlap, graphite, and frottage prints
on wood

I am a graduate of Fisk University and this piece is dedicated to the school. I focused on some of Fisk's contributions to Nashville and the world. I felt connected to Cravath Hall, Dr. W.E.B. DuBois' statue, the Van Vechten Art Gallery, and the magnolia trees. They all have memories which shaped me and the community. As an alumnus I strive to make the world better using the arts, and Fisk is a part of my arts foundation. It is where my journey began, and I cling to its motto:

“Her sons and daughters are ever on the altar.”



In this video, Henry L. Jones demonstrates the hands on painting technique he calls "Gibbing" during the making of Memories of Interweaving Journeys, September 12, 2021. Video by Lesa Dowdy. 1 minute.

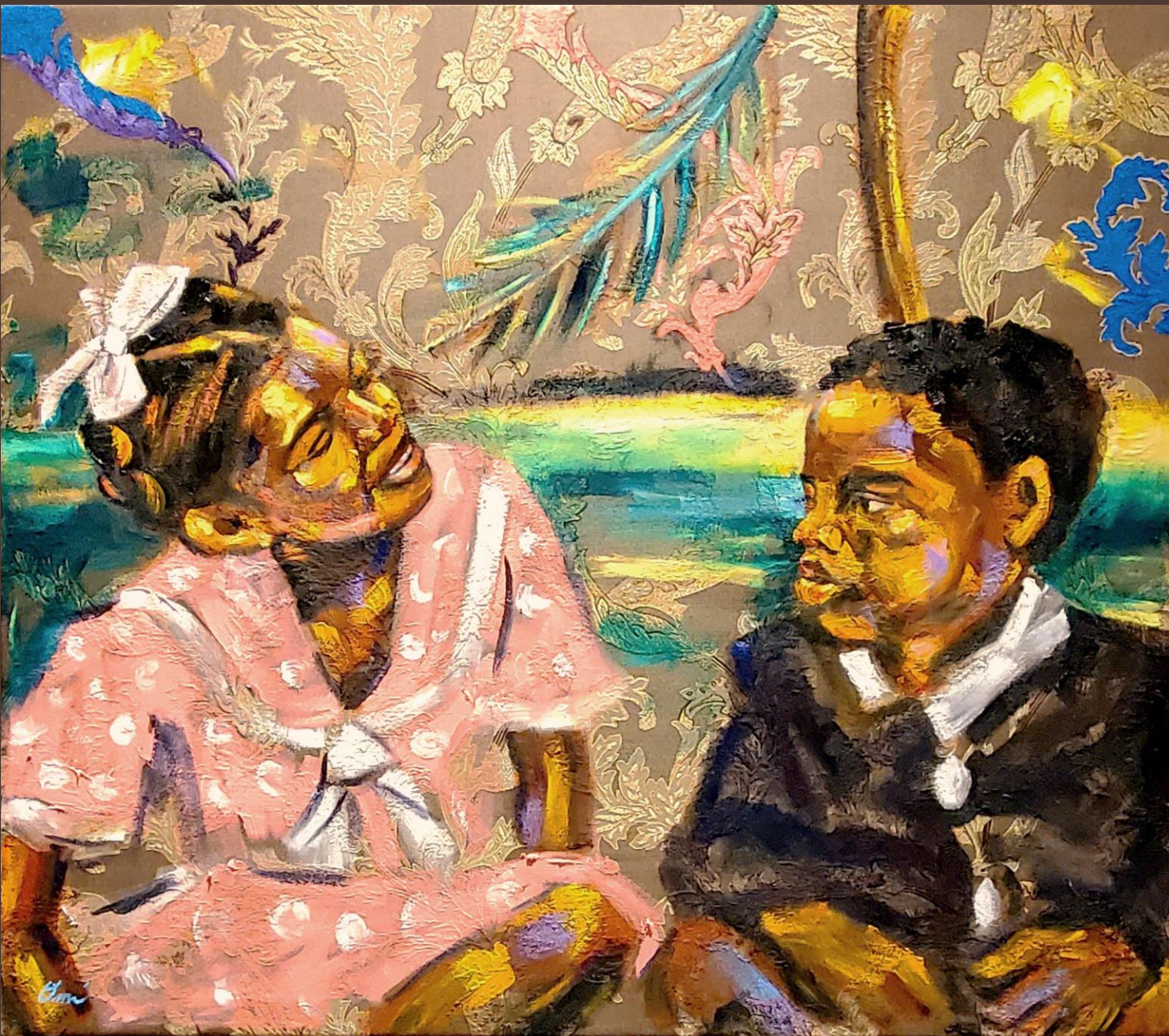
[Henry L. Jones demonstrates Gibbing](#)



Henry L. Jones, *Memories of Interweaving Journeys*

Acrylic on found sheet metal

This represents a flowing stream of colors. I connect with water and the movement of currents and enjoy the constant rippling when swimming in the ocean. With this painting I kept my hands moving reminding me of flowing water but with color. Water makes me think of birth, tears of pain, tears of joy, sweating, rain and many other experiences. The flowing connection to North Nashville is the movement needed to improve homes, communicate with homeowners, and bring together residents. I saw tears of joy when we repaired homes as the Monroe Street Volunteers. There were tears of anger when piles of garbage were thrown onto yards. We removed so much trash for them. This piece connects to the colors and that constant stream inside me. Regardless of problems the key was to stay focused on the dream of having a beautiful community free of fear and intimidation. I have those feelings most when I'm in water.



Omari
Booker
Love, Me

Oil on fabric

Love, Me is created as a visual love letter to my deceased sister, Damali Ayana Booker. Once our physical relationship ended I was forced to find ways to communicate spiritually. My artistic practice has allowed me to remain connected and communicate with Her.



Based on the painting *Love, Me*, Booker's mural *You Must Love Me* was created for Nashville's Off the Wall Project. It is located at 28th Avenue and Charlotte Pike. According to Omari Booker,

Love, family, togetherness, and resilience inspired "You Must Love Me." The title is drawn from a Jay-Z song that tells intimate details of family and community love in the face of adversity and even rivalry.

The Charlotte corridor that holds the murals is an important part of Nashville. One side of the street leads to Centennial Park and over to Vanderbilt, while the other side leads to Hadley Park, Tennessee State University, and Fisk University. I would like there to be a representation of the whole neighborhood, and the community love and resilience of North Nashville. The challenges of North Nashville and the entire city are ever-present, but the children breath life, hope, and love into our community.

As the city grows and shifts I would love to see images of kids that represent all of the love and togetherness that I have felt on both sides of Charlotte and throughout Nashville.



Omari Booker

Born

Oil on panel with repurposed window



Omari Booker

Bred

Oil on panel with repurposed window



Omari Booker
Haddox

Oil on door

Haddox Pharmacy was a black owned business on Charlotte Pike a few miles away from downtown Nashville. The Haddox family served the North Nashville Community from this location for 37 years. Everything from medication to concert tickets could be found at the neighborhood establishment. Today a Marriott hotel is where the pharmacy was once located.



Seen here in 2017, Haddox Pharmacy was at 1508 Charlotte Pike. Image courtesy of *The Tennessean*



Omari
Booker
The Creator

Oil on canvas

This painting was inspired by an indigenous civil rights protest during the 1970s.



Omari Booker
This Blackbird

Oil on panels

This Black Bird

by Omari Booker

This black bird lands on my window
The same bird every morning
I guess it's the same
All I've seen is its shadow
But it says hello every day, every morning

I fly away with my little black friend
Every day, every morning
My mind on its back
Free on its wings
Though I only see it through bars
We meet at the screen
It visits me every morning, every day

It brings me hope
It feeds my dreams
They're only bars, they're only screens
It's only tears, it's only screams
And to be born, we need these things

So for now, I guess I'm free
My little black friend
It visits me
Every morning, every day

Written at Charles Bass Correctional Complex, 2012



Henry L. Jones
Takin' the Griots (the Storytellers)

Acrylic, enamel, and ink on canvas

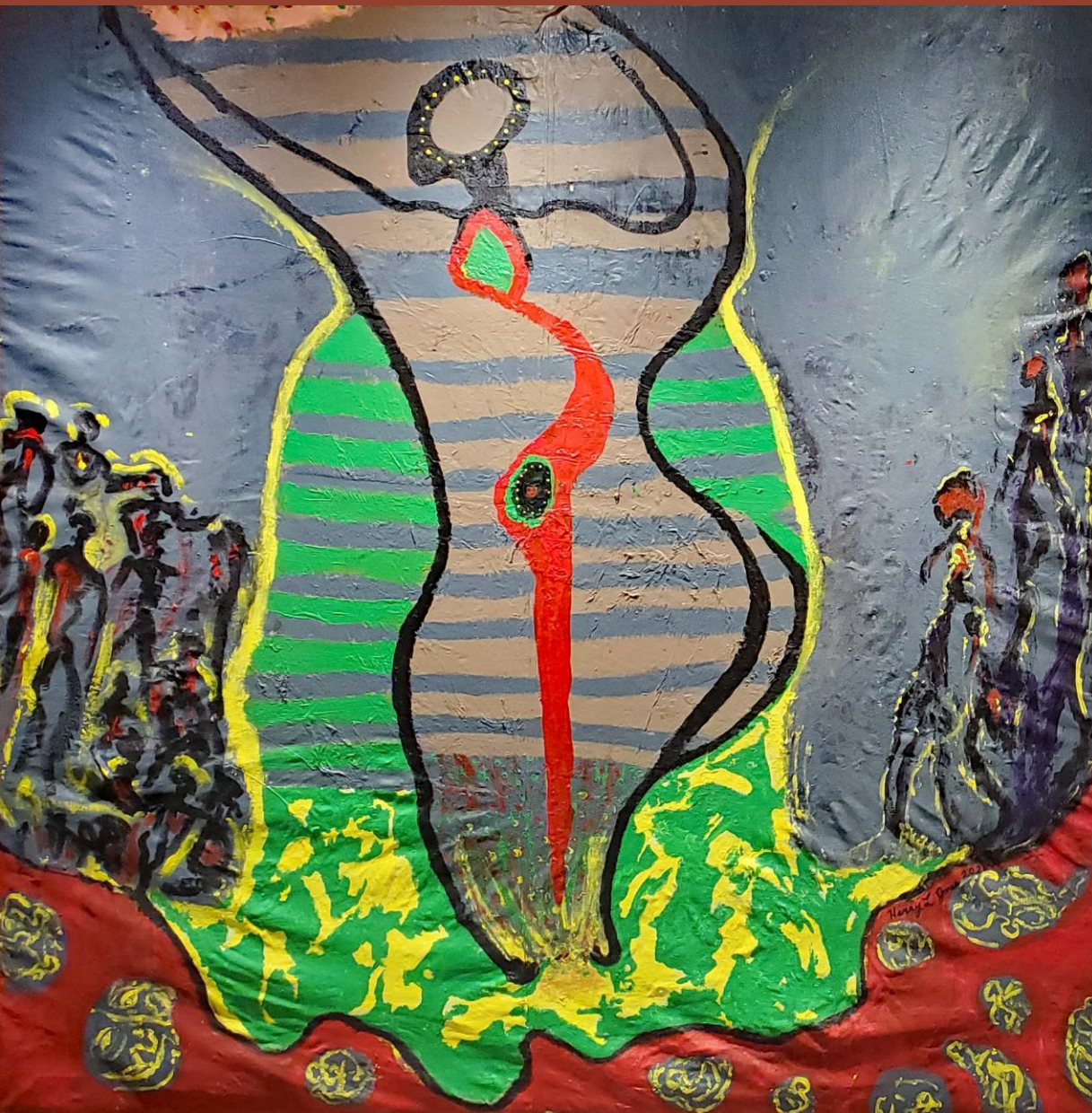
A griot (pronounced: gree-oh) is a West African word referring to oral poets, singers, and storytellers who share and maintain the history of a community. This painting represents many griots as they share stories to their communities. It's filled with whirls of tension and frustration shared by griots. In modern times, when this word is used among Black literary figures, it means a poet or spoken word artist. As a poet, I embrace the word griot. My purpose and style of writing poetry is to transport listeners to another realm. North Nashville had (and still has) a thriving community of poets. Some met and read at Fisk University (*The Fisk Herald Literary Journal*) and Tennessee State University (*Sketches*), as well as commercial venues. I hosted poetry *chills* in the 1980s while attending Fisk University, and in the early 2000s Navita Gunter and I hosted a weekly open-mic poetry night at Jefferson Street's Kijiji's Coffee House. A favorite griot there was James Floyd, aka "The Jefferson Street Poet."



Omari Booker
Red Line 3

Oil and razor wire on panel

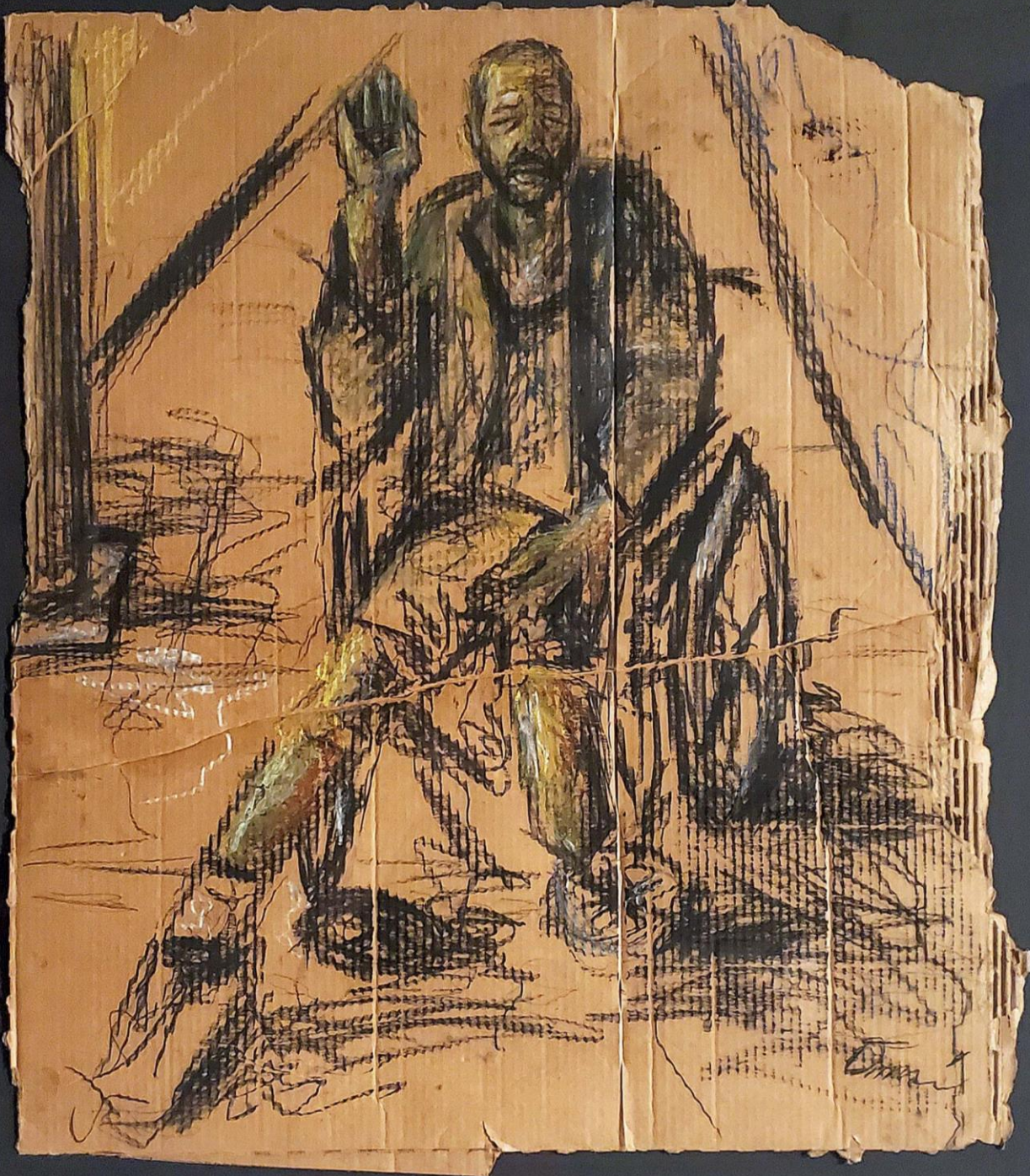
Redlining references discriminatory housing laws that were a part of the New Deal during the 1930s. The laws prohibited African Americans and immigrants from buying homes in certain areas and thus created underfunded black communities. These same communities, once labeled “inner city,” are now becoming upscale as property is sold and redeveloped.



Henry L. Jones
Child of the Diaspora 2

Acrylic, enamel, ink, charcoal,
pastels on canvas

“Diaspora” is a word referring to the period when African people were enslaved and scattered to various parts of the world to work – the word literally means a *scattering* or *throwing out*. The first *Child of the Diaspora* I painted many years ago as a tribute to my wife. This updated version is also a tribute to her, and it extends to the families within North Nashville and other communities. It depicts the duality of a Black person who is bridged between two worlds: biological roots form Africa and national roots of their home country. This struggle is common for Black people regardless of where they are in the world. While living in North Nashville, I attended programs and saw exhibits dealing with the search for cultural identity. *Child of the Diaspora* symbolizes self-love while finding identity.



Omari Booker
Roll On, Buchanan

Mixed Media (Charcoal, Chalk,
and Pastel) on cardboard



Henry L. Jones
We're Changing Worlds

Enamel, acrylic, and ink on wood

This painting is symbolic of the homes as they're torn down to become replaced with gray, white, and black two-story houses. The color selections seem impersonal to me. As more of them rise, I envision the tension rising as well, due to the new development on many blocks. The architecture differs so much. The older homes, block after block, are colorful, charming with character. It is true some aren't in the best shape, but people live in them. They are homes. The gray hues seem to circle and surround them. Combine this with incidents of violence which leave marks in the streets. Nashville does have such as past and I wanted to tap into those anxieties using colors which show a needed healing. We must always have that hope. Black people have and are enduring so much. Somehow we thrive.



Omari Booker
Reverend Kelly Miller Smith, Sr.

Oil on canvas

It was an honor to create a portrait of Reverend Kelly Miller Smith. He was a pillar of the North Nashville Community and his activism during the Civil Rights Movement paved the way for current social justice movements.

Courtesy of the Kelly Miller Smith Foundation



Omari Booker
W. E. B. DuBois

Oil on house wrap and door

In this image, Woke 3, a muralist and founder of the Norf Art Collective, stands in North Nashville looking at a mural of activist W. E. B. DuBois painted by Brad Wells. Artists in the area have been adversely affected by rising costs resulting from development and gentrification. This included the original members of the Norf Art Collective, Thanxton Waters's Art History Class, as well as the artists behind the first Jefferson Street Art Crawl.



Omari Booker
By Any Means

Oil on plywood with repurposed window



Omari Booker
Fusion

Oil on panel with repurposed window



Henry L. Jones
We Long to Be

Enamel and acrylic on wood

Within the realms of this painting, I present the inner journeys needed to retrace the steps which make us feel whole and even real. Imagine a person walking through a community which is becoming less like what they have known. Communities are places of identity. As gentrification removes so many Black homes, the demographic makeup of North Nashville changes. Residents are displaced – their identities lost.



Omari Booker
*A Different
Cloth*

Oil and razor wire on
panel



Omari Booker
For the Good Times

Oil on fabric



Omari Booker
Panthers (Bobby Seale and Huey Newton)

Oil on drawer



Omari Booker
John Trudell

Oil on drawer burned

John Trudell was a poet, activist, and leader in the indigenous civil rights movement. He fought passionately for the rights of Native Americans. After burning an American flag on the steps of Congress in protest of the treatment of the indigenous people who resided in what is now called America, his home was burned to the ground. His pregnant wife, mother-in-law, and three living children were all killed in the fire.



Omari Booker
John Trudell's House
Oil on drawer burned





In this video, Omari Booker sets fire to the pieces *John Trudell* and *John Trudell's House*, August 29, 2021. Video by Lesa Dowdy. 57 seconds.

[Kindred Links - Omari Booker sets fire](#)



Omari Booker

Begin Again

Oil on drawer

The portrait of James Baldwin and Eddie Glaude Jr. are tucked away in this drawer from my childhood home. It is part of a series called *Put Away*. By displaying drawers so we can see inside I hope to highlight people and realities that are often “put away.” American History has consistently been misremembered because of how hard it is to face the truth. *Put Away* was created to look into the face of difficult truths.

Kindred Links
by Omari Booker and
Henry L. Jones

Video

Photographed during a Sunday afternoon ride through North Nashville with Booker, Jones, and curator Mark Medley, this documentary by filmmaker Lesa Dowdy highlights the area's cultural and historical significance, reflects on changes currently happening there, and considers the neighborhood's future.

14 minutes and 15 seconds

[Kindred Links by Omari Booker and Henry L. Jones](#)

This video is dedicated to former Parthenon Curator Susan Shockley.

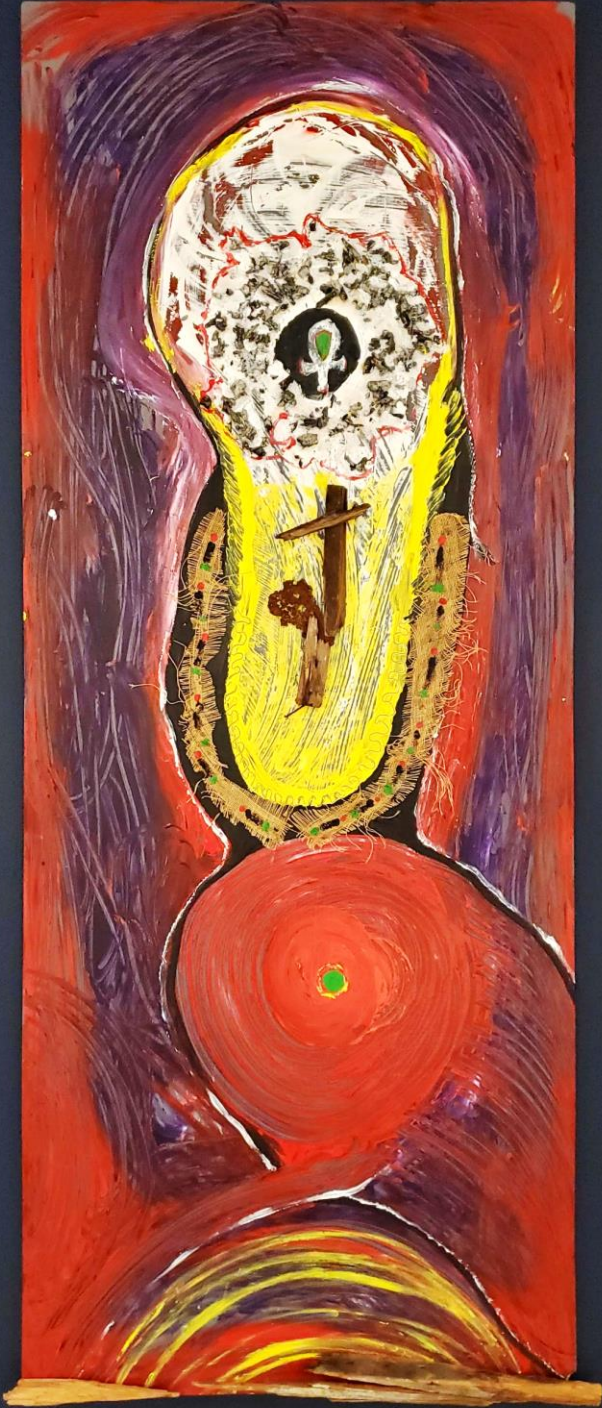


Henry L. Jones

Reaching Within Ourselves, Being Safe, Feeling Whole

Tile, wood, galvanized wire, enamel, latex, acrylic, ink, paper, construction wrap, burlap, collage on wood

This piece is about the home located at 1006 Monroe Street. It was the residence of Reverend Temore Willis and the base for his organization, The Monroe Street Volunteers. He rented rooms in his home. I lived there one summer as a student and became involved in the community affairs. The organization brought youth together to learn construction skills used to renovate homes in the Monroe Street neighborhood. The Volunteers were a hub of hope. This painting depicts demolished objects from 1006 Monroe, which was nearly destroyed by fire in 2018 and then a tornado in 2020. It is now rebuilt.



The house at 1006 Monroe Street is the former residence of Reverend Temore Willis, founder of the Monroe Street Volunteers.

Once We Ran With the Wind

by Henry L. Jones

Eyes searching for old paths
longing to find our lost dreams
once so easily found in the streets
named after no one we knew
or anyone who cared about us

legs racing for the house
seeing a beacon to get home
before the streetlights came on
lit for swift children to know
passing smiling, waving neighbors

better move your butt faster
they knew why you ran
to prevent whippings with a belt
for being late – NOT AGAIN!
so you ran like a gazelle

swallowing Wilma's breath
giving you a second wind
pretending to be the hero Flash
better get home soon Late Legs
as trails of dry leaves rise and fall

quickly hiding your direction
so hunters couldn't follow you home
mark that scared space as condemned
our house was all we had but just enough
to make us believe we were safe at night

a home where laughter coated the walls
layered memories of joy and pain
welcomed griot voices that echoed history
with stories about the Nile to Now
as bowlegs kept moving knowing

we walked on pothole filled roads to work
we marched on hot tar streets for justice
we ran through grassy fields to freedom
we danced to release all our heartaches
until weary and worn but kept moving

until those legs found their way back home
no matter how far they never stopped
finding a way to make a way back
'cause stopping isn't in us to do ever
so when we fall we rise mighty again

on strong currents with wide wings
we learned to fly away seeing
faces as pavers along the paths
these journeys of rising and falling
so many times we became dizzy

but we just smiled still moving
and changed motion into music
pulling out songs from our hearts
singing words from our longing
old spirituals of those way makers

still we struggle to keep going
no one can see us moving alone
ghostly glances of us pass new faces
twisted smiles stand their ground
new roads, new faces, new places

we just gone vanished over night
pretending we never existed
only secret remains found of us as
eyes searching for old paths
longing to find our lost dreams.



Henry L. Jones, *PAST, PRESENT, and FUTURE* Installation cases

Divided into three time segments, this installation is layered with found objects from seven North Nashville areas. The objects are presented in glass covered cases labeled *PAST*, *PRESENT*, and *FUTURE* featuring artistic and cultural components. For example, a trail of collaged pictures and chance materials interweave between the objects – symbolic of a journey or path taken. The found objects were gathered from construction sites, neighborhood streets, donations, historical and cultural links. Artistically, they present three montages conveying three stories.



I am inspired by my memories of North Nashville. I found myself often comparing the changes. Now, when visiting and seeing a particular place returns like walking back in time... paths moving like a flowing river spiritual as I look images, colors, or anything that will become part of a combination of personal and social history to understand. Currently the historical connections are being transmitted. Henry L. Jones, 2021

ARTS The Nashville Foundation RECOGNIZING

Henry L. Jones
PAST – We Looked After Each Other
Forms and found objects
The cylinder symbolizes the linear past in the path of time. North Nashville's medical and educational institutions have contributed to the progressive development and growth of the city. This structure taps into significant events from Nashville's rich social and cultural history.

Henry L. Jones

PAST – We Looked After Each Other

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PAST
A trail left behind

DRED LINKS

by

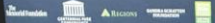
Booker & Henry L. Jones

An exploration of the global microcosm that is North Nashville. Then, by entering the community through the doorways of history and legacy, you will engage in conversations that highlight its past, present, and reclaim its future.

—Oran Booker, 2021

My memories of North Nashville. I found myself thinking back and forth. Some when riding and seeing a particular place then, the path leading back to time... paths moving like a flowing river. This journey is through images, colors, or anything that will become part of a journey. It is a ritual and social history to understand. Curiosity in the community and are being transmitted. Place just disappears.

—Henry L. Jones, 2021



Henry L. Jones

PRESENT – What are We Becoming Still?

Forms and found objects

The sphere symbolizes the desire to unify our world. While we confront issues and concerns in North Nashville, similar developments are occurring in many other communities, many other places. This piece is an expression of these ongoing global changes.



PRESENT

As a fight to be



Henry L. Jones

FUTURE – Reflections of the Future

Forms and found objects

The pyramid is an African reference to the foundational civilization of ancient Egypt. Once upon a time, Black and Brown people did not often appear in stories of the future. The entertainment industry continues to diversify, but what happens makes me wonder: “Will the marginalization of some people and cultures still occur as we travel to other worlds?”



FUTURE

Is Nature awaiting us

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