

Black History Month



In honor of Black History Month, the Clark College Bookstore window is displaying an exhibit featuring the work of two local Black artists, Claudia Starr Carter and Philemon Reid. The exhibit is on loan from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) of Vancouver. The artwork was curated by Carter's sister, Bridgette Fahnbulleh of NAACP and Holly Jander Williams, a NAACP volunteer who worked with Carter on exhibits. *View images from the exhibit at the end of the article.*

What: Black History Month focus on local artists

Who: Sculptor Claudia Star Carter and painter Philemon Reid

Where: Clark College Bookstore exterior window

When: Through March 4

Art loaned by: NAACP of Vancouver

Rosalba Pitkin in the college's Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (ODEI) office coordinated with NAACP to bring

the exhibit to the campus bookstore to share with the Clark community. Monica Knowles worked with Pitkin to showcase the art in the bookstore window.

Pitkin said, "Recognizing these Black artists celebrates cultural richness, promotes representation, and contributes to a more inclusive environment." She added, "I am grateful to NAACP for sharing this art, to Bridgette Fahnbulleh and Holly Jander Williams for selecting these pieces. This provides an opportunity for more people to enjoy this art and learn about these artists."

When 150 Black high school students, faculty, and administrators visit campus on February 28, they will have an opportunity to see the exhibit.

Claudia Starr Carter



Photo courtesy of Holly Jander Williams

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Carter produced the bulk of her work in the ceramics lab at Clark College, where she took classes. Professor Lisa Conway from Clark's Art department said Carter was her student first, and then volunteered for several years for the college's ceramics studio, helping to keep the ceramics lab open later in the day and evenings so students could work.

"Claudia Carter was a wonderful, warm presence in the ceramics studio at Clark College for many years," said Professor Conway. "She started here as a student herself, then later worked as a studio monitor, helping other students realize their creations. Claudia was very giving and helpful in the studio at Clark and had a great sense of the power of her inner creativity. Claudia drew strong connections between her artwork, her family, culture, and history. She was experimental in her artwork, and her enthusiasm for the material and the creative process were a source of inspiration for others."

Almost a year after Carter's death, a retrospective of her work was displayed in Gaiser Hall and Frost Arts Center at Clark College in February 2023 to celebrate Black History Month.

Fellow Vancouver sculptor Russel Ford said he and Carter became friends when Clark's ceramics studio was closed during the pandemic, and he invited her to use his kiln. Their connection grew.

Ford wrote: "Claudia was deeply invested in telling the story of the Black community in Vancouver. Her goal was to create works that would inspire members of the black community to feel that this land was their land, that they were in no way excluded from the fabric of this community. She encountered little in terms of black art growing up and she wanted to help change that by working passionately in her chosen medium:

ceramics and sculpture... Clark College offered her an opportunity to do just that. For many years, she could be found volunteering at the Frost Art Center, encouraging the many students that she encountered, and whenever possible, delving into the history of Black Vancouver.”

NAACP Vancouver wrote this tribute: “A concern over the scarcity of books and art depicting the history and contributions of African Americans in Vancouver and the Pacific Northwest eventually led Claudia to become both a tireless researcher and collector of local Black History and folklore. She was also an advocate of educating African American children about their history and roots in Vancouver and Clark County. Under Claudia’s leadership, the NAACP began an annual exhibition at Vancouver Community Library addressing Black History in Vancouver, the State and Northwest from early explorers through World War II. Claudia was committed to increasing education and dialogue on Black History in schools and in the community.”

Where to see Carter’s work: Carter’s sculpture “Elephant Goddess” is on permanent display in Vancouver Community Library, 901 ‘C’ Street, Vancouver.

Learn

more:

<https://pnwsculptors.org/retrospectiveclaudia-star-carter/>
(includes photo of Carter and her artwork)

Philemon Reid



Photo courtesy of the NAACP

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Reid said about his art, "From an early age I was drawn to Cubism and the artist Picasso... I developed my own style... One of my main subjects has been music. I have a great love for blues and jazz, and I create from my moods and the feelings I experience while listening to music or just from my subconscious being."

After Reid's death, journalist Bob Hicks wrote an in memoriam of Reid: "He did the thing he loved to do, which was to paint and sculpt images of the African American musicians who played the blues and jazz. He often listened to Coltrane or Miles or Ella while he was making his own art."

The Skanner newspaper wrote: "Reid's love for blues and jazz, particularly musicians John Coltrane, Miles Davis and singers Ella Fitzgerald and Nancy Wilson, was reflected in his colorful paintings and sculptures. Although Reid's only formal art training was in high school, he developed his own unique style that was heavily influenced by Cubism and the artist Picasso."

Barry Johnson of OregonLive wrote that Reid's work "often featured characterizations of musicians, and there's something vaguely jazzy about his work—loose but formful and

transporting. Where do they take you? To an ideal world, I think, where art and music are what matters. And his African American subjects, painted in a style that recalls the Harlem Renaissance gone cubist, somehow imply a sense of both singular creativity and community, especially his representations of small combos... I find that Reid's work makes me want to 'play,' too – not jazz, necessarily, but anything that requires some intensity and creativity, anything that the company of other creators enhances.”

Where to see Reid's work: Currently on view as part of the Portland Art Museum's Black Artists of Oregon exhibit until March 31.

Learn more:
<https://www.theskanner.com/news/northwest/5198-services-held-for-painter-philemon-reid-63-2009-06-18>.

















