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‘You can’t hide it — tell the whole story’: Free exhibit features Black San Antonio artists

By **Vincent T. Davis**, *Staff writer*
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Gift Article

Artists Edward Warren Harris, Deborah Moore Harris and Lisa Jackson look over the public art exhibit titled “Between Yesterday and Tomorrow: Perspectives from Black Contemporary Artists of San Antonio.” The exhibit is on display at the Cultural Commons Gallery located behind City Hall.
Robin Jerstad, San Antonio Express-News

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SAN ANTONIO — The long cloth quilt hangs heavy with the weight of the past.

Made of fiber and faux leather, it’s stitched with details that invite the viewer to linger.

The quilt is punctuated with the words and dates of turning points in African American history — from when the first enslaved Africans were brought to America in 1619 to when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on a woman's right to abortion in 1973.

This is quilt maker Deborah A. Moore Harris' reflection of America. Harris, an 11-year-Army veteran, has quilted for more than 20 years. Her fraternal grandmother taught her to sew.

"I'm very vocal through my art," said Harris, 67. "This is American legacy. Our history helps to form how we think and behave in the future. You can't hide it — tell the whole story."

Harris' piece is one of 36 in an exhibition titled "Between Yesterday & Tomorrow: Perspectives from Black Contemporary Artists of San Antonio." The work of 17 Black artists from San Antonio will be on display through Nov. 17 at the Culture Commons Gallery, 115 Plaza de Armas.

Barbara Felix, who curated the exhibit, said the diversity of art tells the story of San Antonio's Black experience.

The exhibit features collage, digital media, drawings, paintings, photography, printmaking, sculpture and found objects. There is also mixed media, such as "The Crutch Series" by Bernice Appelin-Williams. She uses photos found in flea markets and newsprint of federal Works Progress Administration interviews with former Texas slaves to represent wealth gained through the slave trade.

"There is a wealth of talent that San Antonio has," Felix said. "And it's wonderful that the city is giving this amount of time for people to come and see these works, experience different perspectives of all of the artists. In this multicultural city that we live in, these people are part of the fiber, and they need to be represented."

Last week, a trio of artists met in the gallery's long hallway.

Kaldric Dow, 32, discussed the collage on his portraits, "Dynamic" and "Wave King." Dow is known for his fabric artwork and a Black on Black series representing Black culture. He's used materials from Goodwill and fabric stores for textures that depict a range of lighting and skin tones.

"We already get negative imagery of us everywhere," Dow said. "I want to reverse that and show positive imagery of strength and dignity."

Calvin Pressley's oil painting "Contemplating Flight" features a figure sitting atop a building with untested feathers. Pressley completed it while finishing his master's degree at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia. He called the 60-inch-by-80-inch piece "self-referential," created when he was ready to "take off and soar."

"I feel honored to be part of a community I claim as my own," Pressley said.

Don Stewart's space featured three of his works, titled "Now," "Serenity" and "Brain, What You Thinking." He described his art as a figurative and narrative expression of the individual's journey psychologically and socially. Stewart, an Army veteran, has taken part in several local exhibitions at places such as the Carver Community Cultural Center, Galería Ortiz and the Eye of the Beholder Gallery.

On an oval canvas, he painted a brain centered over neurons firing in different directions.

"It's taking it to a level most people won't go to," Stewart said of his piece. "It's the actual function of the brain."

Spokeswoman Lisa Jackson said viewers would be moved by the artwork she called intriguing and steeped with deep messaging.

"It's a unique opportunity to showcase African American art in San Antonio," Jackson said. "I appreciate the city giving a space for the artists to shine."

Located behind City Hall, the gallery is managed by the city's arts and culture department. The exhibition is free, is open to the public and can be viewed Wednesday through Friday from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

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An Air Force veteran, he started at the San Antonio Express-News in 1999 as a part-time editorial assistant working nights and weekends while attending San Antonio College and working on the staff of the campus newspaper, The Ranger.
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