



The Michael C. Carlos Museum Presents *Indigo Prayers: A Creation Story*



[Atlanta, Georgia- March 14, 2021]— On March 19, the Michael C. Carlos Museum of Emory University will present the exhibition, *Indigo Prayers: A Creation Story*, a series of paintings by local Atlanta artist, Charmaine Minniefield, inspired by her time in the Gambia, West Africa searching for her grandmother’s ancestral lines. The resulting body of work builds on an ongoing exploration of the Ring Shout, an African American practice of resistance whose West African origins predate enslavement. This full-bodied rhythmic prayer was taught to Minniefield by her great-grandmother. It was performed by her ancestors during enslavement as a way to secretly preserve their African identity.

Minniefield’s work explores indigenous pigments like indigo, crushed oyster shells, and mahogany bark as evidence of cultural preservation through time and across the Middle Passage. Her work recalls the history of these elements as ancestral totems reaffirming identity, like the Adinkra symbols in freedom quilts, hidden in plain sight to show the way home. Minniefield inserts her own body into each work as an act of remembrance. Her movements, embodied memories of her maternal ancestors, reassert Black identity and resilience as resistance today.

Indigo Prayers: A Creation Story is being presented in conjunction with Minniefield’s Praise Houses, which recreate the small, single-room structures in which enslaved people gathered to worship. The first in the series of Praise Houses was

constructed at Oakland Cemetery in conjunction with Flux Projects to celebrate Juneteenth 2021 and honor the over 800 enslaved people interred in the cemetery’s African American burial grounds. While Minniefield’s Praise House at Oakland has now closed, she plans future locations in downtown Decatur, on Emory University’s Atlanta campus, and at South-View Cemetery, where Congressman John Lewis was laid to rest.

About the Artist

Firmly rooted in womanist social theory and ancestral veneration, the work of Charmaine Minniefield draws from indigenous traditions as seen throughout Africa and the Diaspora to explore African and African-American history, memory, and ritual as an intentional push back against erasure. Minniefield’s creative practice is community-based. Her research and resulting bodies of work often draw from public archives as she excavates the stories of African-American women-led resistance, spirituality, and power. She recently served as the Stuart A. Rose Library artist-in-residence at Emory University. Through a collaboration with Flux Projects, she presented her work *Remembrance as Resistance: Preserving Black Narratives* in Atlanta’s historically segregated cemetery to honor the over 800 unmarked graves that were discovered in the African-American burial grounds. Minniefield was awarded the prestigious National Endowment for the Arts Our Town Grant to present her Praise House project at three different locations in the metro Atlanta area to celebrate the African-American history of those



communities. She currently splits her time in residence between Atlanta and the Gambia, where she continues to study the origins of her cultural identity and Indigenous traditions by tracing the Ring Shout.

For more information about this exhibition, please visit the exhibition page, <https://carlos.emory.edu/exhibition/indigo-prayers-creation-story>.

Credit

The exhibition is made possible by the Massey Charitable Trust.

About the Michael C. Carlos Museum

Since its formal establishment on Emory's Atlanta campus in 1919, the Michael C. Carlos Museum has become one of the premier museums in the Southeast. The museum holds one of the most comprehensive collections in the region with artwork from ancient Egypt, Nubia, and the Near East; Greece and Rome; the Americas; Africa; and Asia as well as a collection of works on paper from the Renaissance to the present.

Through world-class permanent collections, special exhibitions, innovative programming, and one-of-a-kind opportunities to engage with art firsthand, the Carlos Museum serves Emory University and the Atlanta community as a dynamic interdisciplinary center that cultivates literacy in the arts and fosters understanding of diverse cultures.

Images

Left: Charmaine Minniefield (American), *Freedom*, 2020, indigo and crushed oyster on canvas, © Charmaine Minniefield, Courtesy of Charmaine Minniefield

Right: Photo of Charmaine Minniefield, credit ©JerrySiegel.com

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