God, please forgive our ignorance of others.

We all have red blood and white bones

Untitled, Made in America 2018, Hanya Reda

The story is already written...

OUR VOTES, OUR STORIES.

Guest Curator Jimmy Nunn, Jr.

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OUR VOTES, OUR STORIES.

October 14 – November 18, 2023

WORKS BY

Harper Bella
Greta Chapin-McGill
Sandra Charles
Brianna Harlan
Carla Rae Johnson
Lorie Novak
Taylor Sanders
Vitus Shell

OUR VOTES, OUR STORIES.

Ashley M. Jones

My family always votes together – except for the three years my older sister and I lived in Miami, Florida, of course. During those three years, the two of us cast our votes for President Barack Obama's second term after a phone call back home to Birmingham, Alabama, where the rest of our family prepared to do the same. Except for those three years, every time I cast my vote, my whole family is doing the same in the same room at the same time. I've been registered to vote since my 18th birthday, which will make 15 years of voting eligibility this year. There was never any doubt that I'd be registered, just as my older sister had been two years before me, and just as my younger sister and brother were years after us. There was never any doubt that I'd vote in every single election. No plans to stop voting because the candidates weren't ideal or because I was tired that day or even because of work. I've been fortunate in life to have jobs which allow time for voting. That isn't true for everyone.

I've also been fortunate to exist with a certain amount of optimism–it can't be overstated that the idea of a vote "meaning" something significant isn't always the most logical conclusion. And no, I'm not saying we shouldn't vote, but there are so many signals telling us that our vote has a long, long way to go before it gets to "counting" in the ways which, well, count.

I am a descendant of enslaved African people. My people somehow ended up in Alabama. I grew up in Birmingham. All those facts tell us many things about my vote. In 1776, when the founding fathers wrote all the documents and stuck it to the British, a vote like mine was not yet born. In fact, personhood of my people was not yet born, legally. In 1776, enslaved Africans were counted as property. And, how could we vote if we could not yet legally read or write? In 1865, my people were emancipated but not truly freed. Maybe we could escape the plantation, but Black Codes and lynchings and convict leasing awaited us. And even the Fifteenth Amendment could not be enforced–the grandfather clause legally excluded us until 1915, and all the while, violence, Jim Crow and a culture of hatred kept us away from the vote. All the while, "Black voters were systematically turned away from state polling places" and practices like "poll taxes, literacy tests, fraud and intimidation" (Library of Congress) all disenfranchised us. The struggle to stay alive, to earn money, to have a family, to simply cross the street without offending a white person to the point of lynching became more pressing than casting our vote. The system, by which I mean the people who uphold that system, made our lives an unsolvable maze through which to navigate. How could such a system ever represent us? And then, come 1963 in Birmingham, where we marched and saw our children murdered. 1965 found our bodies strewn across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, where we marched for the right to vote. Despite the Voting Rights Act, there have been, even now in this new century, laws passed regarding IDs, early and absentee voting, and even the imaginary "curbside voting" in my state, all of which predominantly impact minority voters.

And I have yet to mention mass incarceration–the Sentencing Project reports that "as of 2020, 5.2 million Americans were prohibited from voting due to laws that disenfranchise citizens convicted of felony offenses." And maybe you think that has nothing to do with me. But, according to the Population Reference Bureau (among countless other sources), "incarceration rates are significantly higher for Blacks and Latinos than for Whites." Our votes, behind bars.

So when I hear someone say it's hard for them to believe in a system which has done so much to make sure our votes aren't cast, counted, or heard, I understand their frustration. And I understand that I am privileged to have grown up in a family that impressed upon me that even the right to contemplate the futility of voting is something our ancestors died for. I understand that even as someone who believes in voting, I am often discouraged by the games politicians play, by the way this system was set up without all of us in mind, and the way it seems we're stuck in an unending loop of voting for the least of two unsavory choices. It's hard.

But still, each election day, the Jones family ventures out early to do our civic duty. We watch the polls and discuss our views on the candidates. I realize, too, that it isn't always true that entire families can discuss politics and agree. I have known many people who can't even begin a conversation about any political issue at home. It was certainly true when I attended a progressive arts high school in Birmingham, Alabama. That school environment was a safe haven for many students whose parents were on the more conservative side of the aisle, but now, it isn't just the students who complain of an inability to discuss politics with their parents. The adults describe families broken apart by the 2016 election, and their struggle to keep things civil at holidays or when something big happens in the news. I've honestly never experienced that, and I know that is unusual, especially in the South. Especially in America.

For as long as I can remember, my parents discussed the candidates together and made a choice–there have been very few times that they voted for different local candidates, but always the same one for national elections–and once I was able to vote, the discussion broadened to me. It was up to all of us to research candidates, watch debates, and share our findings with each other so we could make the best choice. It was a family effort. You may think all the research and discussion was solely focused on finding out which candidates aligned with our shared values. While that was a small part of it, the biggest part, which may be true for all marginalized people in this country, was to find out which candidate was the least committed to upholding the most violent parts of white supremacy. All of them, we knew, were operating within that system and were going to commit some sort of harm to us, politically or otherwise, but we needed the candidate who we thought might do the least. Yes, being killed slowly still ends in death, but with more time, there may be a chance to find an escape route before the final blow is dealt.

I can't say for sure when I learned that voting wasn't something my people could always do. I had to be young, certainly, because I remember being three or four when I learned about slavery. My parents sat us all down to watch ROOTS, and I found myself terrified of the things that could be done to my people because of the hatred in the hearts of others. Here is where I often say–because I tell this story in my travels a lot–that the fear I felt is nothing like the imagined fear and discomfort of "students" in arguments made by lawmakers to ban books and limit the teaching of history. Instead, the fear I felt was because I truly found racism and its violence terrifying. There was no making it go away, even when I tried to stop reading my Addy books or other Black texts. There was no pretending I didn't feel hurt by racism at school. There was no writing away my history. Instead, there was an opportunity to, yes, learn those horrible things, but also learn that none of them were the fault of Blackness. We weren't denied rights, raped, pillaged, and disenfranchised because Black was inherently bad. I had to learn through reading those history texts and through reading books that affirmed the beauty of Blackness, that I, as Whitman said, could contain multitudes.

Although I don't know when I learned it, here's what I know: I know that Fannie Lou Hamer gave her life–and no, she didn't die during the height of her activism, but the body is worn down all the same–for the right to vote. I know Jimmy Lee Jackson was murdered for the right to vote. I know John Lewis was beaten nearly to death on the Edmund Pettus Bridge for the right to vote. This year, I had the opportunity to visit that bridge on the anniversary of Bloody Sunday, and to call it humbling is an understatement. We should never have had to cross that or any bridge for the rights which should have been granted simply by our birth in this country. It staggers me to see the bigness of that bridge and to feel the ghosts there, crying out from assault. It staggers me that some folks walk into the voting booth with their mind on the same kind of blood–the same kind of assault.

In 2023, during my time in Selma, Congresswoman Terri Sewell and others urged their colleagues to finally pass the John Lewis Voting Rights Act, which would strengthen the 1965 Act and fight against further voter disenfranchisement. As of the writing of this essay, this bill has failed twice. Even a vote, especially for a bill which emphasizes the rights of all people, in the House and Senate has a long way to go to "count."

One of the last things my father did before he passed away in April of 2021 was vote Donald Trump out of office. We did it, as always, as a family. His picture ended up on a local radio station's Facebook page–that photo, which I took, features my older sister wrapped up in a coat, scarf, hat, latex gloves, and a blue face mask; my younger brother in a jacket, scarf, hat, and gray face mask; and my dad, not dressed heavily enough for the freezing temperatures, but smiling behind his black face mask. In the photo, he wears a shirt and hat representing his fraternity, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. In my lifetime, I've always seen people in my community wear their Divine 9 paraphernalia to vote. I've seen the older men with deep, sharp creases in their blue jeans and a weary back that has seen labor I can't even imagine. I have seen mothers bringing their children along to the polls, trying to keep them still long enough for the task to be done so the squirming child could be satisfied by the "I Voted" sticker before walking out the door. I have seen the eyes of poll workers when I say "Democrat" instead of "Republican." In my area, there is, like many places in America, a racial divide along the party lines. And the poll workers in my area are often on the "right" side of the line, so they seem to be visibly annoyed to have to pick up the Democratic ballot and hand it our way. Maybe I'm imagining that distaste, but if there's anything I've learned in my 32 years on earth, it is that I can trust my eyes and my gut. This country is well versed in gaslighting and disenfranchising my people. But we enjoyed the vote all the same–that day and all the days we voted together. That year,

it truly felt like our vote was a weapon in the war to survive America. I think it will be that way for many more years in my lifetime. Maybe my unborn children's lifetimes, too.

These days I wonder what it will mean to vote for a candidate out of true and leisurely agreement on political ideals instead of what I feel, and perhaps have felt my whole life: a panicked attempt to keep the knife a few more inches away from my jugular vein.

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Ashley M. Jones is the Poet Laureate of the state of Alabama (2022-2026). She received an MFA in Poetry from Florida International University (FIU), where she was a John S. and James L. Knight Foundation Fellow. Her book, *dark // thing*, won the 2018 Lena-Miles Wever Todd Prize for Poetry from Pleiades Press. Her third collection, REPARATIONS NOW! launched in 2021 from Hub City Press. She currently lives in Birmingham, Alabama, where she is Associate Director of the University Honors Program at UAB.

ashleymjonespoetry.com

Vote. Our democratic lives are in the balance.

Gretchen Sorin

Throughout the history of the United States, individual Americans have fought for the right to vote. While the Constitution as originally written did not have a great deal to say about voting, what was left unsaid spoke volumes. Decisions about eligibility for casting a ballot were left to the states, who generally decided that only white male landowners could participate. New Jersey "accidentally" permitted black men and white women to vote for a time in the eighteenth century, but soon corrected that "error" and limited the franchise. Like most other states, voting was a right afforded only to land-owning white men. Several western states, Wyoming being the first, granted women the right to vote in the late 19th century. These new states believed that women would be a civilizing force on the wild frontier and wanted to attract more women to settle there.

Gradually, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, African Americans and women fought to have their citizenship recognized and to become full participants in American democracy. Beside them stood white allies also willing to stand up to oppression and support expanding the electoral franchise. So important was the right to vote, that there are now five Constitutional Amendments (the 13th, 14th, 15th, 19th, and 24th) devoted to protecting and expanding the franchise to all citizens ages 18 or over without regard to race or gender.

During the Civil Rights Movement of the '50s and '60s men and women gave their lives to expand the right to vote to African Americans and their sacrifices still inspire us today:

Pastor and founder of the local NAACP chapter in Belzoni, Mississippi, Reverend George Lee, fought for the right to vote for the black citizens of his county. In 1955 he was shot while driving home – a bullet tearing into his jaw. He died in the hospital soon thereafter. The local sheriff was complicit in the murder, claiming that Rev. Lee died in an automobile accident and was found with a mouth full of lead dental fillings, not bullets.

In March of 1965, Viola Liuzzo, a young mother of five volunteered to serve as a driver for a group of individuals in the Selma to Montgomery marches to urge passage of the Voting Rights Act. As a group of Ku Klux Klan members pursued her car and drove alongside her vehicle, one of the members fired two bullets into the car, killing her instantly. The Klan's opposition to her work and courage demonstrates the importance of Viola Liuzzo's actions.

The right to vote was so meaningful that these activists petitioned, demonstrated, were arrested and jailed, even beaten and murdered, to gain and protect the right to vote. Today, many of us take voting for granted, but it is the cornerstone of our democracy and it enables us to continue to live as free people. Undermining this right to vote moves us away from democracy and thus away from a government by the people.

All of us stand on the shoulders of these Americans who have sacrificed their time, their energy, and their bodies to stand up against the forces who would take away the right to vote. Democracies are fragile and they must continually be nurtured and protected, or they will not last. Protecting this right is something that is the responsibility of all of us. Voting is the foundation of a representative government and for our values as American citizens.

This exhibition invites young African American artists and artist activists to share their ideas about voting rights and to inspire us to renew our commitment to being active rather than passive citizens. We hope that their work will inspire you to learn more about the history of voting and to encourage others to make participatory democracy a priority.

We are deeply grateful to Golden Artists Colors and particularly to Mark Golden, for his vision and support. His passion for the role that each of us can play as engaged citizens is an inspiration.

Gretchen Sorin is the distinguished professor and director of the Cooperstown Graduate Program of the State University of New York. Dr. Sorin has curated innumerable exhibits—including with the Smithsonian, the Jewish Museum and the New York State Historical Association. Her books include *Touring Historic Harlem: Four Walks in Northern Manhattan* with architectural historian Andrew Dolkart, *In the Spirit of Martin: The Living Legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*, *Through the Eyes of Others: African Americans and Identity in American Art* and *Case Studies in Cultural Entrepreneurship: How to Create Relevant and Sustainable Institutions*. In 2020, Sorin's book *Driving While Black: African American Travel and the Road to Civil Rights* became the scholarship and inspiration for the PBS documentary by Ric Burns, which received national acclaim.

Harper Bella is an award-winning fine art photographer and curator working in New York City. Her practice pulls from historical data and the lives of contemporary Black people to create narratives through her striking photographs. These works illuminate the multifaceted world of the Black experience in the United States while also preserving the stories of her community – a central concern for Bella as an artist.

Bella's photography has appeared at the Rockefeller Center, the Museum of Contemporary Arts in Long Island, Miami Art Week, collections both private and public, as well as in multiple publications. Her international shows include events in Spain, Italy, and London. Bella is the recipient of various grants, including the Creatives Rebuild New York and the 2022 Demystifying NFTs Award.

harperbella.com

As a fine art photographer, my visual narrative navigates the silent, revealing journey that confronts the viewer with the grim reality that, despite the passage of time, the deep-seated roots of racism persist. The dual nature of my images captures the stark contrast between the overt strides toward equity and the subtle yet profound prejudice that continues to shape lives. Even as the Jim Crow era officially ended in the 1960s, I illustrate how vestiges of that fraught time continue to linger, now cloaked in subtler forms and woven into the fabric of modern society.

The momentous shifts in the Civil Rights decisions made by the United States Supreme Court, such as the repeal of Section 5 preclearance in the Voting Rights Act and the discontinuation of affirmative action in institutions of higher learning, compels us to examine whether if in the United States, actions are indicative of a genuine effort to heal historical wounds or, conversely, if it risks perpetuating them.

Drawing inspiration from recent events, musician Nina Simone and author James Baldwin, I interpret my experiences of living in this country as a Black woman through all of its nuanced layers. The spotlight is constant, for better and for worse, with an ever-present reminder that I belong to a distinct class of Americans. Through rejection and dismissals, learning about the country's stance never stops. Community and self-affirmation make the difference.

Untitled, Made in America, Installation with Photography on Silk and Painted Washing Machine, 2023

Greta Chapin-McGill is a US based artist working in acrylics, oils and collage elements, and narrative painter exploring the world through the eyes of a Black American woman. Wanting her work to show the viewer the vision she sees every day in every sense of how she lives her life and creates her art. This careful thought is part of a new and fresh way of approaching the cultural products she is creating.

The paintings are built with layers of paint, fabric and objects some familiar only to McGill but common objects. We are living in a transitional period of history carrying with it great responsibility. The work portrays a legacy of millions of indigenous souls who faced down the wrath of the past and dreamed of more to give in the future.

McGill started her art studies at the Corcoran School of Art in Washington, DC and went on to study at Howard University. She earned certificates from Harvard X the online initiative of Harvard University; The Pyramids of GIZA, Ancient Egyptian Art and Archaeology and Tangible Things Discovering Art through art works artifacts and scientific specimens.

McGill's practice encompasses restoration, cleaning and conservation projects on Jefferson Memorial, The US Capitol, the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum, private estate work, and cleaning and restoration of oil and acrylic paintings.

Abstractly real in her work and in her life, McGill paints, writes and lives to bring the vision within her head, these thoughts and creations from the invisible to the visible reality of her work.

chapinmcgill.com

The word democracy is by definition a system of government by the whole population. The story of the American Democracy is ... for this artist, one of words. Words are the basis for any story. Examine the words of the story, examine the authors of those words. This is the basis for this work ... titled simply, "WORDS".

When thinking about this work I chose to focus on the documents of the democracy. As a school girl, this artist was asked to memorize the words. I took civics in school and came to understand voting was part of my right, privilege, and duty to do.

As Americans we must read and understand the words our country is built on. I am a Black American, descendent of the tribe of kidnapped Africans. Undeniably transported to this part of the globe in the bowels of ships just as the Jewish people were transported in boxcars. This mass genocide affects the continent of Africa profoundly to this day.

Transported Black Africans were put to labor and built this country. They are buried in unmarked graves where the land has incorporated their bodies into itself. Yet in the midst of their lives, they learned of the words. Words like "freedom" and "equality", phrases like "All men are created equal." They were led to believe "... all men shall be free to profess and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion." "... laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind. As that becomes more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made, new truths disclosed, and manners and opinions change with the change of circumstances, institutions must advance also, and keep pace with the times. We might as well require a man to wear still the coat which fitted him when a boy, as civilized society to remain ever under the regimen of their barbarous ancestors."

At this critical juncture in the history of a fragile concept called democracy, our votes and our voices are important to preserve the integrity of the words. I quote Senator Raphael Warnock, "every vote is a prayer for democracy". I envision this work to be an altarpiece to the embodiment of voter rights, civil rights and the preservation of the American democracy.

Words, 40" x 54", Mixed Media Collage, 2023

Sandra Charles is a contemporary figurative oil painter who resides in Louisville, KY. Her work focuses on the history, self-esteem and issues that affect African American Women. Sandra began her art career as a figurative batik fiber artist, but she also had a deep love of oil painting. In order to explore this aspect of her creativity, she decided to return to school after a forty year absence to complete her studies. In 2015 she obtained a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree with a concentration in painting. In 2016 she retired from her job of twenty years to focus on her developing art career. Sandra's artistic path continued with grants awarded from the Kentucky Foundation for Women in 2016, a Great Meadows Travel Grant to the 2019 Venice Biennale and a Residency Unlimited Grant, Brooklyn, NY in 2021. Sandra's notable exhibits include a solo exhibit at the KMAC Contemporary Art Museum, Louisville, KY, invitational group exhibits at the Owensboro Museum of Art, Owensboro, KY, and the Carnegie Center for Art and History, New Albany, IN. Group exhibits include the Gowanus Studio Artist Exhibit, Brooklyn, NY, Roots 101 African American Museum, Louisville, KY, and Art Center of the Bluegrass, Danville, KY.

scharlesart.com

My artwork explores the issues that affect Black women. Each painting focuses on the essence that lies behind the façade of society's perceptions. My work was fueled by childhood memories of the underappreciated women in my life and later those in the corporate workplace. I explore the removal of the hegemonic veil which covers the struggle between self and the perceived social order. The subjects of my paintings push away the boundaries of society's false perceptions, which I represent by placing each woman the length of the painting pushing against the confines of the canvas. Acknowledging this internal struggle, my work moves away from traditional portraits and becomes interpretive portraiture that recognizes the person outside as well as the one within.

Grandma's Vote, 60" x 48", Oil on Canvas, 2019

Her Vote, 60" x 48", Oil on Canvas, 2020

Walking Liberty, 60" x 48", Oil on Canvas, 2023

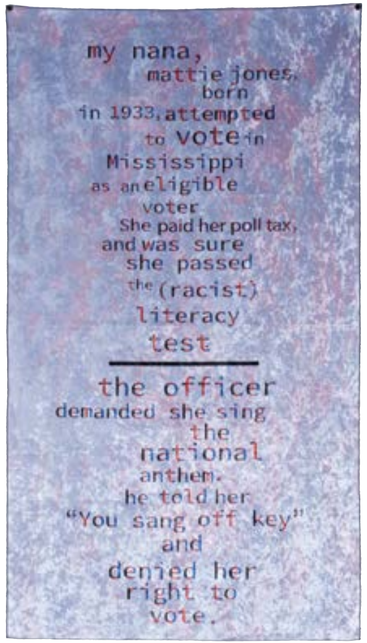
Brianna Harlan is a multiform artist and organizer. She works in community intervention and re-contextualized objects to innovate on how sociopolitical identity affects health, selfhood, and community. Her debut solo exhibition was a non commercial showing in New York at Field Projects Gallery. She opened her solo exhibition, "Glass House" at Oklahoma State University in January 2022 and "A Collection," at Eastern Kentucky University in February 2022. She has been the artist in residence or had a fellowship at The Laundromat Project, SECAC, Oxbow, Materia Abierta, and the DreamYard Project. In 2020 she collaborated with 21c museum hotels, 4th wall, and Breonna Taylor's family to create an augmented reality memorial monument. Brianna has been published in several forms as a voice in cultural activism nationally and internationally, including in ARTnews for her equity in art report. She completed her MFA in Art and Social Action at Queens College and was named a Young Distinguished Alumni by her alma mater, Hanover College. Brianna also works as a creative, community organizer and strategist for several community initiatives around the country including City University of New York's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Incubator and the Studio Museum in Harlem and MoMA's public programs fellowship.

briannaharlan.com

Voting should feel like a secure concept, straightforward and full of clarity. Flaws, as found in any human system, can be edited and part of the growth of a society. The issue with the voting system in the United States isn't the flaws, it's the sabotage. It is because of this that I believe the USA is not performing as (acting as) a democracy, but is instead performing (falsely presenting as) democracy. We are provided a child's education about government function in grade school, voting day isn't a federal holiday to make sure people have a best chance at making it to the polls, our access to certain ways of life are controlled to keep possibility away from us, and then there's structural values rooted in racism, patriarchy, religion, classism, and more toxic hierarchical systems. Candidates are limited by these truths, purposefully. So Whose Game is it? It certainly isn't by the people, for the people. The people are frustrated, confused, divided within themselves and with each other. Who does the voting structure serve? Who does it protect? Based on evidence and not ideas ... we're being played. Violently. You Sang Off Key, my nana being forced to sing the national anthem to vote in Mississippi and denied because she was "off key" (she wasn't) was not too long ago and the only thing that has changed is the optics and strategies. Just like the United States works relentlessly to destabilize other countries to maintain its power for the people who have that power, it does the same here. A global power shouldn't have so many social inequities. If we have the means but not the priority, then we, us, the American people aren't being chosen either. When we band together to care for one another, heal, or protest injustice it is squashed, systematically destroyed. We can't claim the system as ineffective because its goal is clear and accomplished. Look at the earth, the climate, the lack of regard in pursuit of their unsustainable capitalist mission. What is a true democracy? Where is our choice? I made a toy out of the ballot box, a playful symbol, a devastating reality.

I vote so they can't say I didn't speak. Not because I believe they value my voice.

Whose Game?, 12" x 19 1/2" x 16", Sculpture, 2023



You Sang Off Key 1, 52 1/2" x 26 1/2", Print on Silk, 2020

You Sang Off Key 2, 52 1/2" x 26 1/2", Print on Silk, 2020

You Sang Off Key 3, 52 1/2" x 26 1/2", Print on Silk, 2020

Carla Rae Johnson is an artist whose media include drawing, sculpture, conceptual, performance, and installation art. She is a New York Foundation for the Arts 2005 Fellow in Sculpture and a 1990 recipient of a Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant. Her work has been exhibited in solo, invitational, and curated shows in museums and galleries nationally and is included in numerous public and private collections. Since the mid 1980's, the work has been consistently exhibited in the New York City area. Works by Carla Rae Johnson have been reviewed in The New York Times, The Village Voice, The New Haven Register, The Journal News, and The Times Herald Record. She has been represented by Ceres Gallery in Chelsea, and Maxwell Fine Arts in Peekskill, NY.

Having received a BS from Ball State University, and an MFA from the University of Iowa, Ms. Johnson has been making and teaching art for nearly 30 years. She is currently an Associate Professor of Art at Westchester Community College, SUNY.

carlaraejohnson.org

This sculpture is a voting booth for Fannie Lou Hamer.

In the 1960's, Mrs. Hamer lost her job and her home. She had her life threatened numerous times, had been jailed, and badly beaten for her voting-rights activism.

Born to sharecroppers in Mississippi, the youngest of 20 children, Fannie Lou Hamer worked in cotton fields from the age of six. Allowed no education beyond grade 6, she was among the first in line when activists came to register voters in 1962. She worked with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee fighting for voting rights and against the many racial injustices to which Black Mississippians were subjected. In 1964, she co-founded the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.

Fannie Lou Hamer's ability to organize, as well as her ability to inspire people, won her a national reputation during the Civil Rights Movement. I admire her courage, brilliance, integrity, and persistence in the face of a brutally racist system. Now, more than ever, her example should be before us as we work to preserve and defend our democracy and I believe that Mrs. Hamer deserves a voting booth all her own.

It is a quote from Fannie Lou Hamer that inspires this voting booth. When asked if she was afraid, she might die while working for the cause, Fannie Lou stated that she was "...fully prepared to fall five-feet, four-inches forward in the fight for freedom."

Voting Booth for Fannie Lou Hamer, 64" x 24" x 42", Sculpture: Wood & Tape Measures, 2017

Lorie Novak's photo-based works, installations, and web projects use various technologies of representation to explore issues of memory and transmission, identity and loss, presence and absence, shifting cultural meanings of photographs, and the relationship between the intimate and the public. She has been the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowships, a NEA Fellowship, and residencies at the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Center (Italy), Bogliasco Foundation, (Italy); ArtSway (England), MacDowell, Yaddo, and the Djerassi Foundation (U.S). Novak's work has been shown in numerous exhibitions both nationally and internationally including International Center for Photography, NY; Photoville, Brooklyn, NY; Center for Creative Photography, Tuscon; Museum of Modern Art, NY; Off Bratislava, Slovakia; Fotodok, Utrecht, the Netherlands; and Fotofestiwal, Lodz, Poland, among others. Her photographs are in many museums' permanent collections–Museum of Modern Art, NY, Center for Creative Photography, Tuscon, the Jewish Museum, NY, the Art Institute of Chicago, and more. Her Internet projects include www.migraineregister.net, and her collaborative collectedvisions.net, 1996-present, exploring how family photographs shape our memory, was one of the earliest interactive storytelling sites. She is Professor Emerita of Photography & Imaging and founder of Tisch Future Imagemakers, a free photography workshop for NYC area high school students at NYU Tisch School of the Arts. She was born in Los Angeles, California, and lives in Brooklyn, New York.

lorienovak.com

For nine months in 1917, after years of street protests in support of women's suffrage, more than 1,000 women from across the country staged a daily protest in front of the White House – the first activists to ever do so – demanding the right to vote and asking President Woodrow Wilson, "How long must women wait?" The 19th amendment¬, ratified in 1920, prohibited the states from denying the right to vote based on sex, but this right was, in practice, only guaranteed for white women, even though many African American women were central to the struggle for suffrage.

How Long Must Women Wait? acknowledges the racial discrimination in the leading suffrage organizations of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Terrell, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, and Nannie Helen Burroughs are Black suffragists who I honor, along with Zitkála-Sa, who fought for voting and civil rights for Native Americans. In 1957 Elizabeth Eckford continued the fight for equality as one of the first students to desegregate schools in the Southern United States. It was the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origin and, then the Voting Rights Act of 1965 finally ensured that every U.S. citizen has the right to vote.

In rulings by the Supreme Court since 2013, however, the Voting Rights Act has been significantly weakened. According to the ACLU, in 2021 alone, more than 400 anti-voter measures were introduced by states across the country, many of which will disproportionately affect voters of color. Politician and activist Stacey Abrams and her Fair Fight Action PAC in Georgia are leading the fight for an equitable future by promoting fair elections and voter protections.

How Long Must Women Wait? and VOTE were created for the exhibition 100 Years | 100 Women at the Park Avenue Armory in New York City in 2020. Punctured medicine blister packs – which contained medication to relieve pain – serve as the frames through which to view the archival images. Through openings made by pushing out the pills, we view a lesser-known past that informs our current political landscape – a landscape in which voting continues to be ¬¬¬under siege, gender and racial pay gaps persist, and women are losing legal control of their bodies once again. How Long Must Women Wait? remains an urgent question, as does the need to fight for equitable and safe voting access for all.

Vote, 20 1/2" x 16 1/2", Mixed Media, 2020

How Long Must Women Wait?, 40" x 17 3/4", Mixed Media, 2020

Taylor Sanders resides in Louisville, Kentucky and studied at Spalding University earning a BFA in Interdisciplinary Sculpture with a minor in African American Studies. She is the creator and president of a non-profit, The Care Project Louisville and she teaches Children's Fine Arts Classes (CFAC) for Louisville Visual Art (LVA), She is also is the Social Media Marketing and Project Coordinator for LVA.

With no specific medium, her main focus is integrating found three-dimensional objects with multiple sculptural processes, techniques and materials while addressing relevant topics in history and in today's society. She expresses the importance of not only being creative but also being active in the community.

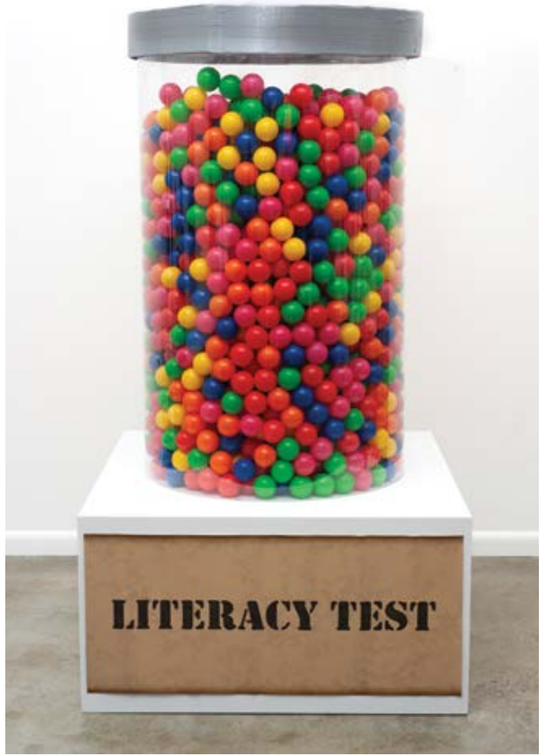
The purpose of her work is to confront racial and social issues through appropriated everyday items with installation. These research-based installations and sculptures are reflecting upon current and historical issues. By using material culture to make connections between slavery, the Jim Crow era, the Civil Rights movement, mass incarceration and other contemporary social issues, the goal is to raise awareness and encourage viewers to reconsider their personal views and connections to these events.

taylorsandersart.com

The struggle for equal voting rights has been a cornerstone of civil rights movements in the United States. For African Americans, attaining the right to vote was a long battle, characterized by systemic racism and discriminatory practices. One of the most insidious tools used to eliminate the number of African American voters was the implementation of literacy tests. These tests were designed to create a discriminatory barrier aimed at preventing African Americans from exercising their constitutional right to vote.

In the aftermath of the Civil War and the abolition of slavery, African Americans were granted the right to vote through the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870. However, this right was significantly curtailed through the implementation of Jim Crow laws and discriminatory practices, such as poll taxes and literacy tests, predominantly in the Southern states. These measures were used to enforce racial segregation and suppress African American political power. Literacy tests were intentionally crafted to be confusing, overly complex, and nearly impossible for the average person to pass. Consequently, the number of registered African American voters plummeted in Southern states where literacy tests were prevalent. This contributed to a significant disparity in political representation, effectively rendering African Americans powerless in the democratic process.

Guessing Game is an installation about literacy tests and how ridiculous they were. Can you guess the number of gumballs in the jar? If you get the correct number, you're eligible to vote. Even if you're close, you're still wrong and you lose your right to vote in this election. Guessing games are fun at baby showers and birthday parties, but how often does someone guess the correct number? It's nearly impossible.



Guessing Game, 60˝ x 38˝ x 38˝, Mixed Media Sculpture, 2020

Vitus Shell is a mixed-media collage painter born in Monroe, LA, where he lives and works.

His work is geared toward the black experience, giving agency to people from this community through powerful images deconstructing, sampling, and remixing identity, civil rights, and contemporary black culture. He received a BFA in 2000 from Memphis College of Art in Tennessee and an MFA from the University of Mississippi in 2008.

Vitus Shell has been in residence at the Crosstown Arts, Anderson Ranch, Bemis Center for the Contemporary Arts, Mass MoCA, Joan Mitchell Center, New Orleans, Skowhegan School of Art, Tougaloo Art Colony, and Masur Museum of Art, Monroe, LA. To date, he has accumulated an impressive list of achievements, some of which include: participating in exhibits at universities, museums, and private galleries across the country including Soo Visual Arts Center, Minneapolis, MN; Thelma Sadoff Center of the Arts, Fond da Lac, WI; Tone Memphis, Art Center Sarasota, FL; Hilliard Art Museum, McKenna Museum of African American Art, New Orleans, LA; Gallery Aferro, Newark, NJ; New Orleans Museum of Art, University of Louisiana at Monroe, LA; Philander Smith College, Little Rock, AR; Cue Art Foundation, NYC; Stephen F. Austin University, Nacogdoches, TX; University of Minnesota at Minneapolis; Tennessee Art Commission Gallery, Nashville, TN; Miami University, Oxford, OH; painted murals for the National Civil Rights Museum's NBA Pioneers exhibit, Indianola City Pool in Indianola, MS; Union Parish Elementary School in Farmerville, LA; the City of Coldwater, MS; the city of Senatobia, MS; and being commissioned to do public art by the Memphis UrbanArt Commission. Shell has received numerous grants including the Joan Mitchell MFA Award and Camille Hanks-Cosby Scholarship and was named Louisianan Artist of the Year by Louisiana Life magazine for 2021.

As of 2020, Vitus Shell is currently a Visiting Assistant Professor at Louisiana Tech University.

theshellofvitus.com

André 3000 once said, "Y'all telling me that I need to get out and vote, huh, why?

Ain't nobody black running but crack-kers, so, why I got to register? I'm thinking of better shit to do with my time."

The right to vote for black Americans has consistently been attacked since the day the US constitution was signed. Tactics such as tax polls, literacy tests, gerrymandering, voter suppression and pure intimidation have been used to undermine and thwart black voters since the beginning. Now in 2023, young black voters are thinking, "Why vote? Nobody listens and representatives will do the same as always."

March Madness addresses the importance of not only voting, but also teaching community members how to truly advocate for themselves and the underserved in the political realm and holding incumbent and existing candidates accountable. True power comes from all parties being involved through the entire process, not using constituent behavior or apathy as the scapegoat.

March Madness, 82" x 67", Acrylic & Paper on Canvas, 2023

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