



AUGUST WILSON AFRICAN AMERICAN CULTURAL CENTER TO REOPEN MAY 22, 2021

WITH NEW VISUAL ARTS EXHIBITION:

Minding My Business (i said what i said)

Exhibition featuring works by Rabéa Ballin, Krista Franklin, Deun Ivory, Tonika Lewis Johnson, Pia Love, Natalie Lauren Sims, and SHAN Wallace
Curated by Selenite Arts Advisory

May 5, 2021 – Pittsburgh, PA – The August Wilson African American Cultural Center (AWAACC) announced today that it will reopen to the public on **Saturday, May 22, 2021** with the group exhibition *Minding My Business (i said what i said)*, featuring works by **Rabéa Ballin, Krista Franklin, Deun Ivory, Tonika Lewis Johnson, Pia Love, Natalie Lauren Sims, and SHAN Wallace** in the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation Gallery, on view through September 12, 2021. As one of the largest cultural centers in the country focused exclusively on the African American experience, in conjunction with the opportunity for patrons to visit the exhibition in-person, the Center will again offer a virtual tour of the art exhibition on its website in the coming weeks, allowing audiences in Pittsburgh and around the globe the opportunity to experience the work. Both the in-person and virtual exhibition remain free of charge. Additional details about the Center's new gallery hours and reopening safety procedures can be found below and online at aacc-awc.org/welcome-back.

“After months of being closed to the public, we look forward to reopening our galleries with the work of seven incredible women artists from around the country. The dynamic works speak to some of the most pressing questions of our time facing not only women, but society as a whole, and we are thrilled to share their works with the Pittsburgh community,” said **Janis Burley Wilson, President and CEO of August Wilson African American Cultural Center**.

Curated by Janice Bond and Sadie Woods of **Selenite Arts Advisory**, a multidisciplinary art advisory and curatorial consultancy, *Minding My Business (i said what i said)* will explore self-authorship as means to a liberated future through photography, video, and works on paper. Selenite Arts Advisory will also expand AWAACC's visual arts programming throughout the AWAACC, activating spaces beyond the dedicated galleries, advancing Black artistic voices through exhibitions, educational programs, and original publications. **Additional *Minding My Business (I said what I said)* programs are included below. For additional details, visit the website at aacc-awc.org.**

Saturday, June 19 at 1:00pm ET - Zoom

- Artist Lecture: *The Musical Life and Activist Spirit of Nina Simone*
DJ and scholar **Lynnée Denise** reflects on the life and music of Nina Simone through archival material, exploring the social context and political undercurrents of Simone's artistic career.

Saturday, June 19 at 6:00pm ET – Youtube

- Artist Performance: *NuHymes/Black Liberatory Practices*
Multidisciplinary artist **Frewuhn** presents a musical timeline of performance and dialogue surrounding present-future notions of protest and practices of freedom. She engages liberatory practice in performance to contextualize freedom through cross pollinating music of black pride with nu-hymns.

Thursday, July 8 at 5:00pm ET - August Wilson African American Cultural Center

- Artist Talk: *CREATING BLACK AUTONOMOUS SPACES*

Led by Baltimore-native photographer, artist and archivist **SHAN Wallace** and Pittsburgh-based artist and administrator **Jessica Gaynelle Moss**, *CREATING BLACK AUTONOMOUS SPACES* will investigate the past and imagine the future of Black Autonomous Spaces through an examination of Wallace's most recent body of work, *The Avenue*.

Thursday, August 12 at 1:00pm ET - Instagram Live via [@augustwilsonculturalcenter](https://www.instagram.com/augustwilsonculturalcenter)

- Artist Talk: *Under the Knife*

Poet and visual artist **Krista Franklin** joins librarian, author and curator **Tracie Hall** to explore storytelling, memory, family histories and excerpts from Franklin's recent publication *Under the Knife*.

Thursday, September 9 at 1:00pm ET - Instagram Live via [@augustwilsonculturalcenter](https://www.instagram.com/augustwilsonculturalcenter)

- Artist talk: *The Body Tells A Story*

Dancer and choreographer **Pia Love** and multi-sensory storyteller **Natalie Lauren Sims** share performance practices to explore movement, rest and restoration as forms of liberatory practices.

COVID-19 Safety Policies and Procedures

In accordance with new guidelines and protocols set by state and local officials, AWAACC has developed safety procedures to ensure that all who visit have an enjoyable and stress-free experience. Upon reopening, all patrons are required to submit to a temperature check. Additionally, capacity in the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation Gallery will be reduced to 10%, to allow all guests to remain socially distant. As required by Pennsylvania state regulations, staff and visitors to the AWAACC are required to wear protective face masks while inside the building regardless of vaccine status, and new cleaning procedures have also been implemented. AWAACC encourages guests to review the new safety protocols prior to visiting. The complete list of policies can be found at aacc-awc.org/welcome-back.

New Gallery Hours:

Thursday 3–8 p.m.

Friday 3–8 p.m.

Saturday 12–5 p.m.

Sunday 12–5 p.m.

AWAACC Galleries are free and open to the public.

ARTIST BIOS:

Rabea Ballin, who was born in Germany, raised in Louisiana and is now a Houston-based artist, earned her BFA in design at McNeese State University and her MFA in drawing and painting at the University of Houston. Her multi-disciplinary works explore the uniqueness of self-identity, hair politics, and social commentary. She documents these themes primarily through drawing, digital photography and various printmaking practices. In addition to working as an independent artist, she is a member of the all-female ROUX printmaking collective. Ballin has served as an artist board member at both Art League Houston and DiverseWorks, and has completed residencies at DiverseWorks, Tougaloo College and Project Row Houses.

Krista Franklin is a writer and visual artist, the author of *Too Much Midnight* (Haymarket Books, 2020), the artist book *Under the Knife* (Candor Arts, 2018), and the chapbook *Study of Love & Black Body* (Willow Books, 2012). She is a Helen and Tim Meier Foundation for the Arts Achievement Awardee, and a recipient of the Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters and Sculptors Grant. Her visual art has exhibited at Poetry Foundation, Konsthall C, Rootwork Gallery, Museum of Contemporary Photography, Studio Museum in

Harlem, Chicago Cultural Center, National Museum of Mexican Art, and the set of 20th Century Fox's *Empire*. She has been published in *Poetry*, *Black Camera*, *The Offing*, *Vinyl*, and a number of anthologies and artist books.

Deun Ivory is an LA-based director, photographer and creative wellness designer who creates and curates visual experiences centered around storytelling, self-love, and self-empowerment for black women. As a multidisciplinary artist who has photographed for Apple, Nike, Glossier, *CRWN* Mag's cover of Issa Rae, and has worked as the art director for *Black Girl in Om*—Ivory has carved her own lane as a rare breed regarding her ability to effortlessly express her vision through various creative mediums. Ivory is the founder and creative director of the body: a home for love, a wellness non-profit shifting culture around how black women heal from sexual trauma that has received recognition and press coverage from *Vogue*, *Essence Magazine*, *Glamour*, *Refinery29* and more.

Tonika Johnson is a photographer and life-long resident of Chicago's South Side. She is also co-founder of two community-based organizations, Englewood Arts Collective and Resident Association of Greater Englewood, that seek to reframe the narrative of South Side communities and mobilize people and resources for positive change. Within her artistic practice, Johnson often explores urban segregation and documents the nuance and richness of the black community, countering pervasive media depictions of Chicago's violence and crime. She has been recognized by *Chicago Magazine* as a Chicagoan of the Year in 2017 and was named one of Field Foundation's Leaders for a New Chicago and appointed as a member of the Cultural Advisory Council of the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events by the Chicago City Council in 2019.

Pia Love is a gifted dancer who has traveled the world exploring healing, culture, gender roles and spirituality through visual storytelling. She's a celebrated performer, who has toured the world, made tv appearances and won national competitions. Amongst her many talents she produces breathtaking dance videos, often drawing inspiration from her African spirituality. Currently living in Puerto Rico, Love's work often features her tropical environment such as the rainforest, mountains, endless seascapes and riverbeds. She's currently producing a multimedia project called - *Sacred Puta*, which challenges Eurocentric patriarchal structures and dares to re-imagine the world (along with our collective religious history) where women can own their sexuality and still be revered saintly.

Natalie Lauren Sims is a musician, visual artist, writer, and music executive from Tulsa, Oklahoma. Her art is an homage created to disrupt the silence and the monolithic identity seeking to oppress black women by creating safe spaces for black women to explore the fullness of their humanity found in radical being instead of consistent doing. On her journey as an interdisciplinary artist, she has been instrumental in contributing to Grammy award-winning music and platinum-selling artists, all while directing visual pieces that have won the applause of *TIME* magazine and their peers. Currently, she is the founder and leader of Native Creative, a boutique creative agency for independent artists, and Curios Green, a 501 (c)3 non-profit re-imaging therapy for African American teens through the intersection of horticulture and environmental art.

SHAN Wallace is a nomadic award-winning visual artist, photographer, and educator from East Baltimore, MD. Inspired by the nuances of day-to-day life of her surroundings in Baltimore, not as fixed narratives but a multiplicity of experiences. It was in Baltimore where she learned about the importance of service, the power of collaboration and the effects of social change. Now, she uses her lens, collage and in situ installations as the basis of her work, demonstrating the cultural and political narratives of black life, confronting oppressive politics and histories within communities of the African diaspora, and challenging ideas surrounding existing collections, culture and archives of Blackness. Much of Wallace's work is focused on the Archive-- its history of development, challenges of the modern Archive, Archive as Artwork and how to ethically accumulate primary source documents.

PERFORMER BIOS:

Frewuhn Singer-Songwriter, Franchelle Lucas known as “Frewuhn,” was born in Houston, Texas, surrounded by a collage of musical inspiration. Sonically, she embodies a peaceful flow and ambient strength. She is heavily influenced by 90s rock, R&B, country, and artists like Res, Santigold, and Stevie Nicks. Her love of the sacred wisdom of folk songs, the blues, and gospel is coupled with her first love of music found in church where she gained her initial performance experience. Her background in Theology and performance influenced her production of *The Color of Frequency* lyric poetry book and the SoundLab sonic experiment. Frewuhn made her debut in 2008, singing with Alternative soul outfit Neon Collars, and has performed as a backing vocalist for many artists including CeCe Winans, and Solange. She released her first solo project *Stupid Carnival* in 2018. Frewuhn is a messenger who encourages listeners to go beyond the simplicity of her narratives to encourage freedom and healing from within.

Lynnée Denise was shaped as a DJ by her parent’s record collection. She’s an artist, scholar, and writer whose work reflects on underground cultural movements, the 1980s, migration studies, theories of escape, and electronic music of the African Diaspora. Denise coined the phrase ‘DJ Scholarship’ to re-position the role of the DJ from a party purveyor to an archivist, cultural custodian and information specialist of music with critical value. Through interactive workshops, lectures and presentations at universities, conferences and performance venues, Denise harnesses music as a medium for vital public dialogue on how to transform the way that music of the Black Atlantic is understood in its social context and beyond entertainment.

CURATOR BIOS:

Janice Bond’s driving force has been to develop a more inclusive, sustainable ecosystem for artists of color. Bond’s insight has also been an integral part of developing multidisciplinary programming and communications plans for independent artists, municipalities, and brands. She served as both a member of the Chicago Cultural Plan Advisory Council (2012) and the Navy Pier Arts Working Group (2016). From 2013 to 2015, she served as Director of Arts and Culture at Chicago’s Inner-City Muslim Action Network with a focus on using art as a foundation and pathway for social justice and restorative healing for both Chicago’s Southwest Side and in similar marginalized communities around the United States. In 2016, she became the Director of Music and Social Programming for The Kimpton Gray Hotel in Chicago, Illinois, then Hotel Van Zandt in Austin, Texas. In 2020, she was appointed as the Deputy Director of Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, a position she will maintain as she works with the Center.

Sadie Woods is an award-winning post disciplinary artist, curator and deejay who has showcased her myriad of creative practices from academia to nightclubs, boutiques to museums. She is the co-founder and artistic director of The Petty Biennial and the 2020 recipient of the City of Chicago’s Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events Esteemed Artist Award. Woods is currently Faculty at the School of the Art Institute, and Residents Orchestrate Project Manager at the Chicago Sinfonietta. She has exhibited her work and deejayed nationally and internationally. Publications include *Harald Szeemann Méthodologie Individuelle* published by JRP Ringier with Le Magasin—Centre National d’Art Contemporain de Grenoble, in collaboration with the Department of Curating Contemporary Art at the Royal College of Art, London.

About August Wilson African American Cultural Center

The August Wilson African American Cultural Center is a non-profit multidisciplinary arts center located in Pittsburgh’s cultural district that generates artistic, educational, and community initiatives that advance the legacy of Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright August Wilson. One of the largest cultural centers in the country focused exclusively on the African American experience and the celebration of Black culture and the African diaspora, the non-profit organization welcomes more than 80,000 visitors locally and nationally.

Through year-round programming such as the annual Pittsburgh International Jazz Festival, Black Bottom Film Festival, AWCommunity Days, TRUTHSayers speaker series, and rotating art exhibits in its two galleries, the Center provides a platform for established and emerging artists of color whose work reflects the universal issues of identity that Wilson tackled and which still resonate today. Opening in fall 2021, the Center will continue to expand its commitment to August Wilson's legacy with *August Wilson: A Writer's Landscape*, the first-ever permanent exhibition dedicated to the life and work of August Wilson.

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