

artscope

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ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

**ASHLEY BRYAN/
PAULA WILSON: TAKE
THE WORLD INTO
YOUR ARMS**

**COLBY COLLEGE
MUSEUM OF ART**

**JOAN DIGNAM
SCHMALTZ GALLERY
OF ART**

**PAUL J. SCHUPF ART
CENTER**

**93 MAIN STREET
WATERVILLE, MAINE**

**PAULA WILSON
PAULAJWILSON.COM**

THROUGH JULY 31

For the second-ever exhibition in their newly constructed Joan Dignam Schmaltz Gallery of Art at the Paul J. Schupf Art Center in downtown Waterville, Maine, the Colby College Museum of Art is showcasing the thought-provoking interplay between the thematically connected work of two otherwise utterly distinct artists.

This exhibition, "Ashley Bryan/Paula Wilson: Take the World into Your Arms" — guest curated by Jennifer R. Gross, the inaugural executive director of the Hauser & Wirth Institute and founding director of the Institute of Contemporary Art at Maine College of Art & Design — brings together these two extraordinary artists for a fascinating look at their dynamic creative pursuits.

"This exhibition introduces Wilson to Maine audiences," stated Gross, "and offers a new perspective on Bryan, an artist who was beloved for his children's books but is insufficiently recognized for his contributions as a

contemporary artist. With knowing and critical eyes, Bryan and Wilson also examine cultural history and tropes of identity and self-representation. Each encourages us to look around us with greater care and listen to one another more attentively."

Ashley Bryan (1923-2022) was a celebrated artist, teacher and author whose legacy lives on through his remarkable contributions to the art world. His artworks, which include paintings, intricate woodcuts, puppets and stained-glass windows, were inspired by — and sometimes crafted from — salvaged material found near his chosen home of Little Cranberry Island, Maine. Selections from his work in each of these mediums have been brought together for "Take the World into Your Arms."

As an artist, author and teacher, Bryan was passionately dedicated to filling the void of Black representation in children's literature. He is known for his vibrant and

Ashley Bryan, *Still Life*, c. 1965, oil on canvas, 36" x 48". Colby College Museum of Art, Gift of the Ashley Bryan Center.

colorful illustrations which are inspired by African American folktales and his own life experiences. Bryan's artworks often feature themes of hope, love and resilience. His vibrant use of color is a hallmark of his style.

Bryan's passion for creating books that depict the African and African American experience has left an indelible mark on children's literature. He illustrated more than 50 books of poems and stories, including "Freedom Over Me," "Who Built the Stable?" and "Let It Shine," each one imbued with his unique vision and artistic flair. Illustrations from each of these three books, plus others, are included for viewing in this exhibition.

Bryan's commitment to Black representation has not gone unnoticed. Over the years, he received numerous awards and honors, including several Coretta Scott King awards. His lifelong dedication to his craft and advocacy for representation in the arts continue to inspire and educate artists and art enthusiasts alike. His commitment to representation and inclusion serves as a reminder of the power of art to inspire change and create a more inclusive world.

Paula Wilson (born 1975) is a mixed media artist who leverages a vast constellation of techniques to create hybrid works that commonly probe questions of cultural identity and representation. Wilson consistently reasserts the presence of multiracial women in art history and often makes herself a subject in her own work.

Born in Chicago, Wilson holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Washington University and a Master of



Fine Arts from Columbia University. Since 2007, Wilson has made her home in Carrizozo, New Mexico (population 972), where she lives with her woodworking partner and collaborator, Mike Lagg.

Wilson is also a 2022–23 senior fellow and Alfonso Ossorio Creative Production Grant recipient at the Colby Museum's Lunder Institute for American Art.

Wilson's oeuvre extends across eclectic expanses, it includes ambitious large-scale relief constructions, bookmaking, clothing, video, through to sculpture, collage, assemblage, painting, installation and printmaking methods such as silkscreen, lithography and woodblock.

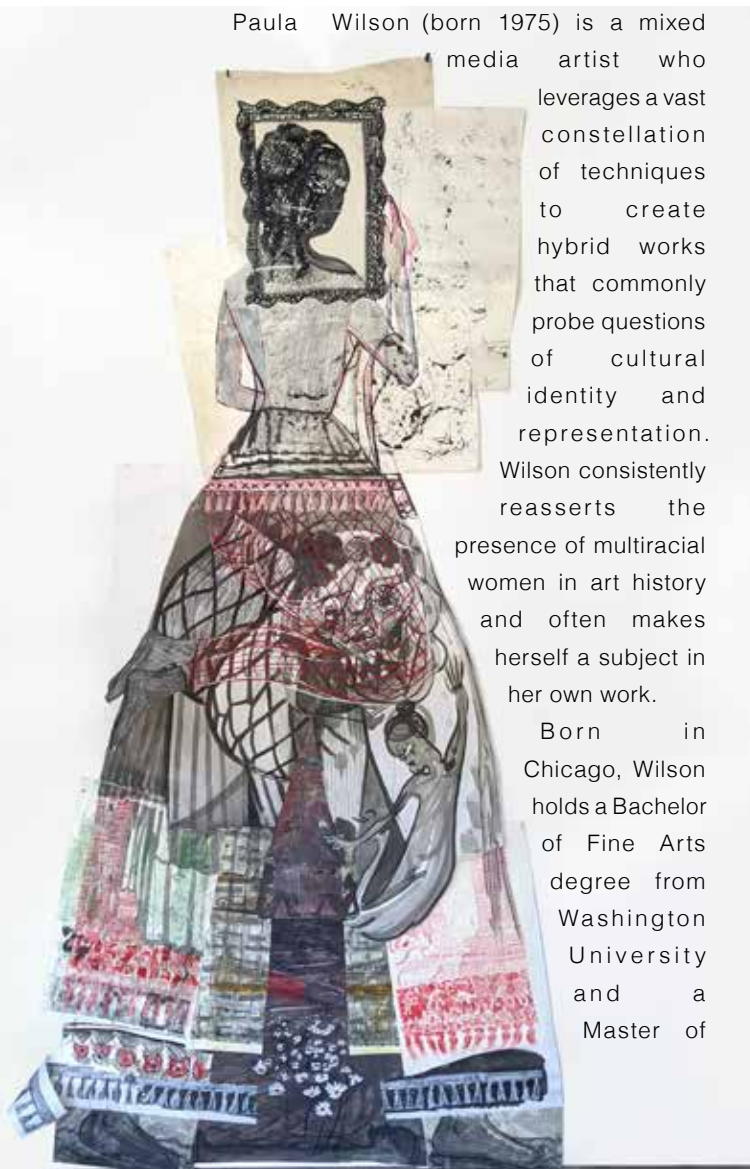
Wilson layers and blends, not only materials, practices, approaches to process, uses of color, and explorations of form, but also grand ideas, facets of self-identity and senses of place. Some of it leans on history. Some of it is present-moment current. Some of it echoes with a poignant timelessness.

There's a little of almost everything that Wilson does available for visitors to experience at "Take the World into Your Arms." Arranged together, the work is imbued with such compelling vigor and a tangible magnetism; a voice all its own speaking in a compelling and exceedingly inclusive language from which we can all derive some meaning. It's almost impossible not to be drawn in.

In "Ashley Bryan/Paula Wilson: Take the World into Your Arms," Gross has curated the multidimensional work of two innovative artists unwilling to allow themselves to be restricted by any sense of medium; driven to constantly create from, seemingly, any and all materials presently available. These are two artists, separated from each other

TOP: Paula Wilson, *Creatures of the Fire*, 2020, relief print, woodblock print and monotype with acrylic and oil paint on muslin and canvas, 64" x 57". Colby College Museum of Art; museum purchase from the A.A. D'Amico Art Collection Fund.

BOTTOM: Paula Wilson, *Thy Self*, 2020, monotypes on various papers and fabrics with India ink, pastel, charcoal and crayon, fasteners, acrylic paint on wood, 187" x 99". Collection of the artist.





LEFT: Ashley Bryan, *Dahlias*, c. 2000, acrylic on canvas, 48" x 36". Colby College Museum of Art, Gift of the Ashley Bryan Center.



RIGHT: Paula Wilson, *Picked*, 2016, two-color screenprint and woodblock with foil on paper, 22" x 30". Collection of the artist.

by their generations, unique experiences and physical locations; yet still similarly perma-energized to channel the feelings, emotions, notions, observances and truths in their lives through forms, textures, colors, light and objects.

What's the end result? The transformation of those raw materials into novel arrangements capable of making bold statements, opening pressing questions, eliciting visceral responses, and spurring important conversations about culture, race, identity, place, beauty and even art itself.

"This extraordinary exhibition will celebrate two artists who share a holistic, all-encompassing dedication to creativity as a source of inspiration, hope, and a way of life,"

stated Beth Finch, head curator of the Colby Museum. "Bryan and Wilson are the ideal cultural guides for the groundbreaking, place-based community-arts collaboration that the Schupf Art Center represents."

"Ashley Bryan/Paula Wilson: Take the World into Your Arms" is on view through July 31.

The Joan Dignam Schmaltz Gallery of Art is free and open to all. Operating hours are Wednesday through Sunday, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. The gallery will be closed on Tuesdays and select holidays. The Paul J. Schupf Art Center is located at 93 Main Street in downtown Waterville, Maine.

Eric J. Taubert



FALLING ICICLES I OIL ON PANEL 30 x 40

Nadia Parsons

SKYPAINTER

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ENCROACHING III OIL ON CANVAS PAPER 18 x 21