



Newark Museum of Art installs African-themed sculptures at entrance

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The Newark Museum of Art will hold an unveiling ceremony Friday night for a work of sculpture by artist Sanford Biggers. The pair of marble busts, titled "Apollo (Diptych)," were mounted this week on either side of the museum's 1926 entrance on Washington Street, opposite Harriet Tubman Square. Steve Hockstein | For NJ Advance

The [Newark Museum of Art](#) will unveil a permanent addition to its façade on Friday night, reflecting the nature and complexity of contemporary art, the evolution of the surrounding [Harriet Tubman Square neighborhood](#), and the diversity of the state's largest city.

Apollo (Diptych) is a pair of sculptures by contemporary artist [Sanford Biggers](#) that flank the historic 1926 entrance to the museum on Washington Street. The 3-foot marble sculptures — one black and one white — are of the head and shoulders of [the Greek sun god Apollo](#) wearing a mask with African motifs. Each head is mounted on a double-stepped bronze pedestal, slightly turned away from the museum's brass and glass double doors in a mirror image of one another.

The museum's director and CEO, Linda Harrison, said she was “thrilled” to incorporate the recently-acquired sculptures into the collection of the state's largest art museum, in a setting highly visible to patrons and the public alike.



The busts are mirror images of each other in black and white, flanking the museum's entrance on Washington Street. Steve Hockstein | For NJ Advance

“By placing them prominently at our entrance, we signal our commitment to community and ongoing efforts to make visible the layered and under-told stories of American art in all of its complexity,” Harrison stated in an announcement of the 6 p.m. unveiling outside the museum.

The museum entrance is opposite [Harriet Tubman Square](#), the downtown Newark park highlighted by a monument to the famed abolitionist who escaped enslavement and pioneered the Underground Railroad. Last year, Newark Mayor Ras J. Baraka renamed the former Washington Park to honor Tubman and better reflect the city's increasingly [diverse population](#), which was 48% African-American and 90% of color in 2022, according to Census figures.



The Newark Museum of Art's 1926 entrance, newly flanked by marble busts created by Sanford Biggers, looks north up Washington Street, toward the red brick Ballantine Mansion. Steve Hockstein | For NJ Advance

The work is part of Biggers' Chimera series of sculptures, in which the 54-year-old Harlem-based artist juxtaposes Greco-Roman and African themes. In a review of the Chimera series on [HomourInTheArts.com](#), critic Emma Sullivan described the "disruption to social convention at work in Biggers' composites, which fuse two idioms normally kept well apart."

"The mashups create a complex and tonally ambiguous effect – incongruous certainly, but not necessarily comic," Sullivan wrote. "Biggers has spoken about his interest in artwork that has an 'unfamiliar' tone, arguing that 'a great artwork can make you cringe', and this cue offers one way into the work."

Biggers, a native of Los Angeles who is African-American, said he was “deeply honored” to debut *Apollo (Diptych)* as a permanent installation in front of the museum.

“In Greek mythology, Apollo was revered as the god of truth and prophecy, poetry, music, and the arts — an embodiment of creativity and intellectual endeavors,” Biggers stated in the announcement. “I hope this symbolism, intertwined with the multifaceted themes of the *Chimera* series, sets the stage for *Apollo (Diptych)* to inspire thought and foster dialogue as it welcomes visitors to the museum.”