

Personal Structures

The beauty and confidence of Blackness



Embracing the identity and memory of African-American history and empowerment through an artistic lens at the European Cultural Centre

Within the Venetian building of Palazzo Bembo, one can find a diverse combination of artworks coming from all over the world. Abstract paintings, sculptures, intimate photography and documentary from Japan, the Czech Republic, India and the United States, amongst many others. Each piece is singular and unique in its own way, but there is one thing that unites three particular rooms. The installations by artist Khari Turner represented by Destinee Ross-Sutton Gallery, Atlanta-based artist Shanequa Gay curated by Shannon Morris, and Galerie Myrtis with its eight artists all constitute emerging African-American art.

Palazzo Bembo | Photo credits: Matteo Losurdo

From different creative standpoints, each one of them brings forward important issues and intimate reflections at hand, ranging from the empowerment of Black communities throughout history and the remembrance of ancestors to the embracement of Black emerging art and artists and the advocacy of a future of freedom, pride and inclusion. Shown at the biennial contemporary art exhibition *Personal Structures - Reflections*, each one employs their interpretation of Afro-diasporic sensibilities differently and the artistic outcomes, either through paint and sculpture or photography and video, offer an intimate view of the Black collective unconscious of the past, present and future.

Exploring Blackness

As one of the first rooms to open the exhibition is ***The Afro-Futurist Manifesto: Blackness Reimagined***. With this installation, Galerie Myrtis seeks to provide insight into the socio-political concerns of the African-American community and celebrates black culture by paying tribute to the reliance, creativity, ingenuity, and spirituality that has historically sustained Black people, bringing it into a completely new setting of Venetian landscapes.



Galerie Myrtis | Photo credits: Riccardo Grassetti

In a conversation with Myrtis Bedolla, Curator and Founding Director of Galerie Myrtis, she explains how the exhibition *Personal Structures* has “allowed the gallery to present the concerns of African-Americans



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The presentation, in fact, explores Blackness and the future of Black humanity and does so thanks to the expressions of eight African-American artists. Some of them pull from their own memories and experiences like Tawny Chatmon does to celebrate the beauty of black childhood, and

Delita Martin to offer identities for women of colour. Others investigate narratives of vulnerability and isolation such as Morel Doucet’s work, or of toughness and agency as we can witness with Larry Cook’s *The Other Side Of Landscape* series. Meanwhile, artists including M. Scott Johnson, Monica Ikegwu and Arvie Smith offer alternate observations on Black aesthetic syncretism, self-identity and dignity. According to Smith himself, all of these creations carry a significant message. While visiting the European Cultural Centre, Smith explained how with his works he “attempts to make the world aware about the responsibility of artists to talk about the things we don’t talk about, about the things that make White people uncomfortable and to refocus and not leave ignored where we are today”.

Galerie Myrtis Installation | Photo credits: Clelia Cadamuro

The women in our lives

On the same floor and only a couple of rooms apart, visitors can find another powerful installation, this time by Destinee Ross-Sutton Gallery with artist Khari Turner. Titled *Blue Moon*, this show presents a set of paintings combining water and bright colours with rough brushstrokes that bring the installation to life. Deepness, confidence and recognition define this collection. One can easily get absorbed by the impressions and swim from one painting to another. But it is especially the shapes underneath and the message within that trigger our attention: the sensual lines of lips, nose and hands of Black women as a celebration of their beauty and identity throughout history.



Blue Moon | Photo credits: Federico Vespignani

“My paintings and drawings combine abstraction with realistic renderings of Black noses and lips to rejuvenate the relationship of my history to my ancestor’s history with water. I use water from oceans, lakes, and rivers from places that have either a historical or personal connection to black history – water that I collect to mix with and pour onto my paintings”, explains the artist.

With these eight auspicious paintings, Ross-Sutton Gallery and Khari Turner take the opportunity to honour those who surround us every day. They do not only define an alternate narrative of being Black but make space to celebrate the women in their life and their uniqueness.



'Blue Moon' | Photo credits: Federico Vespignani

In a similar line and only one floor higher, we can connect with artist Shanequa Gay and her work *Daughters of Metropolitan* presented together with curator Shannon Morris.

Unlike *Blue Moon*, Shanequa Gay puts the spotlight on the strength and joy of young girls. Gay's installation reimagines spaces where Black girls can play in their most vital and exuberant way. With this work, Shanequa illustrates a story about strength, grace, wisdom, and power, as well as invites us to explore the deep waters of blighted, forgotten, and disappearing communities. "The installation is about memory, about my experiences from the place where I grew up but also about reimagination", says Shanequa. "The work creates, rebuilds and reimagines a familiar place but from a different perspective, offering a new vision of the past".

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'Daughters of the metropolitan' | Photo credits: Federico Vespiagnani

By playing with light and shapes, childhood and adultery, past and present, *Daughters of Metropolitan* serves as a reminder about the important things in our lives and how there are many versions of the same story, and each one of them ought to have its moment to be told and listened to.

Artistic tipping points

Art provides a space to think, ponder and remember what is being discussed but moreover, and sometimes most importantly, what is left unsaid or silenced. It is imperative that within the annals of social discourse and visual culture, African-Americans have a voice in portraying and critiquing the world we live in with their own words. In a time when civil rights are being questioned and scrutinised, it is essential to include those voices and allow for reflections to flourish in the political and social spheres as well as in the cultural and artistic realms.



Khari Turner & Blue Moon | Photo credits: Riccardo Grasseti

By presenting pieces of African-American art in *Personal Structures*, the European Cultural Centre not only aims to celebrate and provide space to the artists of this time but all the generations that came before.

The creations shown at Palazzo Bembo evoke dialogues and reflections on African-American art, history, culture and people. They are important tipping points. They capture the eye thanks to the shapes and forms that characterise the exhibition, and engage the mind with the dialogues they propose along with other works at *Personal Structures*. But they also capture the heart. They bring the voices of those who throughout history have been erased and reintroduce them into a conversation of Blackness by embracing the past, contesting the injustices of the present, and serving as a promising opening for the future.

You can visit all installations at Palazzo Bembo until the 27th of November or discover their work by exploring the [virtual tours](#) online. Discover more about Destinee-Sutton Gallery and Khari Turner, and Shanequa Gay by watching the [video interviews](#).