



JOHN J. TECKLENBURG  
MAYOR

*City of Charleston  
South Carolina*

OFFICE OF  
COMMUNICATIONS

**For Release: January 4, 2022**

## **The City of Charleston Office of Cultural Affairs Announces *Griots of Cotton, Indigo, and Clay***

**Charleston, S.C.**—The City of Charleston Office of Cultural Affairs presents ***Griots of Cotton, Indigo, and Clay***, on view January 17 through February 28, 2022 at City Gallery, located at 34 Prioleau Street.

***Griots of Cotton, Indigo, and Clay*** debuts the permanent collection of the Acres of Ancestry Initiative/Black Agrarian Fund, an evolution of the advocacy efforts of the Black Belt Justice Center. Curated by Torreah “Cookie” Washington, and featuring more than 100 pieces of artwork commissioned from Black fiber artists in the South Carolina Lowcountry, the Black Belt South and the African Diaspora at large, this vast array of textile art portrays the power of the Black imagination to extend beyond colonial frameworks, centering narratives of self-sustained land ownership and spirit-cultural reclamation.

Inspired by the movement for restoration of eco-cultural traditional practices, ***Griots of Cotton, Indigo, and Clay*** showcases the rich tradition of fiber art as material culture and tells the untold stories of struggle and resilience rooted in black ecocultural traditions and textile arts. The artworks of more than four dozen artisans will be on view, including works by the artists of **The Return of the Bees Collective**. The collected artworks examine the ideals of racial pride, social power, identity, and the importance of land, heritage and culture.

Exhibiting artist and curator Cookie Washington said, “Black fiber artisans uphold the charge of griots, weaving together narratives of resistance into tactile expressions of land memory and visions for the future.”

This exhibition is generously supported by the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation and received funding from the National Museum of Women in the Arts.

**About the curator:** Torreah "Cookie" Washington is a textile designer who has been a working studio artist for more than 25 years. Washington has designed costumes for theater, film and stage, as well as high fashion wedding gowns and soft fashion accessories for women. Her proudest accomplishment to date is having been selected as one of 44 Master Art Quilters to create a quilt honoring President Barack Obama. For 16 years, Washington has also worked as a curator for the African American Fiber Arts Exhibit, which is part of the North Charleston Cultural Arts Festival.

Washington's passion is fiber art muralism that celebrates African American culture and history, and the Divine Feminine. Washington has been featured in three documentary films about African American Art Quilters: *The Wayshowers*, which she shared executive producer credit on, the film *Skin Quilt* by Lauren Cross, as well as the 2020 film *Gratitude*, a short film by Gavin Shelton.

Washington said, "I find that textile design emits a spirit, a presence, an energy, a vitality unlike that of any other medium. Quilting is in my blood. Enslaved Africans used quilting to tell their stories. I wish to keep this tradition alive and, through my work, validate our culture by weaving stories of the African or African-American experience into my quilts, just as my foremothers did almost four hundred years ago. Even though I'm working in a centuries old medium, I believe art quilters are shifting to accommodate our new application. Art quilting, an emerging art form, is a fairly small part of the art world. I am thrilled to be part of it."

### **About the Black Belt Justice Center, Acres of Ancestry and Return of the Bees Collective:**

**Black Belt Justice Center** is a legal and advocacy nonprofit organization dedicated to assisting African American farmers, landowners and communities in the Black Belt region in efforts to retain and increase landownership; to create sustainable land-based cooperatives and entrepreneurial businesses; and to ensure intergenerational and community wealth.

Acres of Ancestry Initiative/Black Agrarian Fund is a multidisciplinary, cooperative ecosystem rooted in Black ecocultural traditions and textile arts to regenerate custodial landownership, ecological stewardship, and food and fiber economies in the South.

Supported by the Acres of Ancestry Initiative/Black Agrarian Fund, the Return of the Bees Collective is a supportive and active community whose mission is to raise visibility of and educate the public about the vast spectrum of African American textile art and artists. Return of the Bees Hive Members work out of their own homes or small studios. They strive to gain strength, share knowledge and support each other's projects, and they take part at least twice a year in a traditional quilting bee gathering, usually at their group shows.

**COVID-19 Information:** City Gallery guests are asked to reserve free tickets for timed admission into the gallery in advance of their visit. Tickets can be reserved online at [www.charleston-sc.gov/citygallery](http://www.charleston-sc.gov/citygallery) or by calling the gallery at (843) 958-6484 during normal business hours. Per the city's current COVID-19 safety protocols, all visitors to the gallery will be required to wear masks.

**About City Gallery:** The City Gallery, which is owned by the City of Charleston and operated by the City of Charleston Office of Cultural Affairs, presents an annual program of exhibitions and events featuring the finest contemporary art from local, regional, national and international artists, with a focus on the Lowcountry. Gallery hours of operation are 12-5 p.m. Thursday through Sunday. For more information and holiday closures, visit [www.charleston-sc.gov/citygallery](http://www.charleston-sc.gov/citygallery) or call 843-958-6484.

### **MEDIA CONTACT:**

Jack O'Toole, Director of Communications  
Media Relations/Public Information  
(843) 518-3228  
[otoolej@charleston-sc.gov](mailto:otoolej@charleston-sc.gov)