

## Interwoven

This installation explores the interweaving of tradition, memory, and identity through works of art by four contemporary American artists of African and Afro-Caribbean descent: Amalia Amaki, Sonya Clark, Deborah Dancy, and Richard Yarde. Taking textiles as a material or conceptual point of departure, these artists link the fabric of self and society with histories of cotton production and diverse textile traditions.

Cloth often evokes personal memory and embodied experience: threads spun and woven, fabrics worn and wrapped, fragments sewn and saved. Textiles also connect individual experience with broader cultural and historical narratives. As Sonya Clark explains, in her work, fiber-based materials enable her “to claim [her] place in the African textile continuum that was brought to the Western Hemisphere during transatlantic slavery and continually re-embodies itself today in the African American quilt-making tradition, African Caribbean carnivals and the work of many contemporary artists.”

Each of the artists represented in this installation powerfully examines how past and present, here and there, are necessarily entangled in an understanding of contemporary America. Two Amherst College seniors—Rena Milton '15 and Briana Wiggins '15—who are currently completing a Special Topics Course on Weaving in African American Culture with Senior Resident Artist Betsey Garand, continue this thread. The images below are scenes from their works in progress.

This installation was organized by Amy Halliday, acting curator of academic programs.



FAR LEFT:  
Rena Milton '15 spinning Huacaya/Suri  
alpaca rovings with a drop spindle

LEFT:  
Briana Wiggins '15 weaving on a four-  
shaft Mountain loom with acrylic yarn

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Deborah Dancy  
Born Alabama, 1949

**Untitled**, 2001  
Cardboard intaglio

Purchase with Wise Funds for Fine Arts  
2001.668

In 1991, during the construction of a federal building in Lower Manhattan, workers discovered graves located twenty-five feet below the surface. They had found a long-forgotten burial ground for black New Yorkers—many of whom had worked in slavery—from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The discovery foregrounded the forgotten history of enslaved Africans in the area, and their crucial contribution to the development of colonial and federal New York City.

In both *Untitled* and *Nameless*, Dancy responds to the African Burial Ground, which is now a national monument. The works navigate the interstices of history and memory, of abstraction and representation. *Untitled* operates as a visual elegy: the warp and weft of a linen-like surface evokes the shrouds in which many of the deceased were buried, while names and magnified fingerprints offer elusive traces of presence.

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Deborah Dancy  
Born Alabama, 1949

**Nameless**, 2001  
Cardboard intaglio

Purchase with Wise Funds for Fine Arts  
2001.669

Two dark hands emerge, like a spectral presence, from a worn and rusted ground. On close inspection, the hands appear to be carding cotton, brushing the raw or washed fibers to prepare them for spinning. The unformed raw cotton contrasts with the delicate finish of the ruffled cuffs, a poignant reminder of how the harsh conditions of enslaved labor were integral to, yet often rendered invisible in, the finished textiles of a global trade. In the intricate detailing of these hands, the hand of the artist is also brought to bear, suggesting Dancy's artistic commitment to articulating the presence of the past.



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Sonya Clark  
Born Washington, DC, 1967

**Pitchy Patchy**, 1995  
Silk, cloth, wire

Museum Purchase  
2002.18

Fiber artist Sonya Clark (Amherst College, Class of 1989) finds her medium particularly evocative both formally and historically. As Clark explains, "**Pitchy Patchy** was created to celebrate the legacy of the Yoruba ancestral masquerade, the Egungun, and its retention in Jamaican culture as 'Pitchy Patchy.'" While studying at Amherst College, Clark took courses with Professor Rowland Abiodun, and worked closely with the Mead's collection of Yoruba art, including textiles.



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Richard Yarde  
Boston 1939–2011 Northampton, Massachusetts

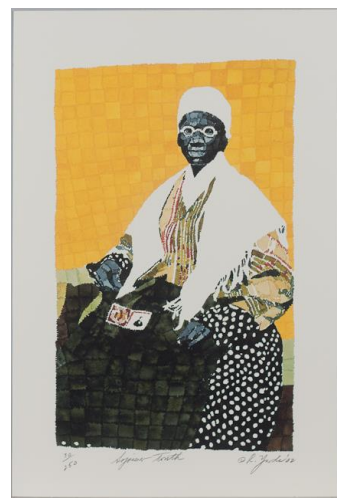
**Sojourner Truth, 2002**

Giclée print

Purchase with William K. Allison (Class of 1920) Memorial Fund  
2002.355

This portrait of Sojourner Truth—abolitionist, women’s rights advocate, and former slave—is based on a photograph used for a widely circulated series of *cartes de visite* (small albumen prints mounted on cards). Truth sold the cards to promote and raise money for her causes.

Yarde transforms the photographic referent through the colors, forms, and rhythm of another visual tradition: quilt making. He reimagines Truth’s face and hands, as well as the background and table, as a patchwork of interlocking, subtly modulated facets, while her clothes are wrought of vibrantly patterned textiles framed by the vivid white expanse of her fringed shawl. Yarde acknowledges the influence of his seamstress mother and the vibrant quilt making of his grandmother on his own aesthetic choices.



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Amalia Amaki  
Born Atlanta, 1949

**Three Cheers for the Red, White and Blue #15**, 1995  
Cyanotype on cotton

Gift of Allegra and H. Nichols B. Clark in loving memory of Trinkett Clark and in honor of Billy McBride  
2014.73

Simultaneously quilt and flag, Amalia Amaki's *Three Cheers for the Red, White and Blue #15* locates black history, culture, and experience as an integral part of the social fabric of "Americanness." The stars and stripes of the American flag appear as irregular segments on the right and left of the central horizontal band, but it is the saturated blue stripes that are most striking. The stripes, which consist of photographic images printed as negatives and stitched together, depict a range of African Americans, from famous singers like Billie Holiday (center row, far left) to unidentified enslaved Africans (bottom row, far left). Some are from postcards, others are photographs salvaged at yard sales or cherished snapshots from the artist's family albums. At the far right of the top row, Amaki identifies two maternal great-aunts, "Aunts Celie and Bee standing on the steps of their home in the 1920s."

The original American flag was, like this quilt, made of cotton, using blue derived from the indigo plant. Both cotton and indigo were dominant products in the plantation economy of the transatlantic slave trade. Indigo was also part of centuries-old textile traditions in West Africa, where it was a technology often practiced by women (for example, the making of **adire** among the Yoruba). Amaki includes further traces of labor and history through the iron marks on the quilt, which allude to fortitude, courage, and collective memory.



