

ARTIST

TONI SCOTT

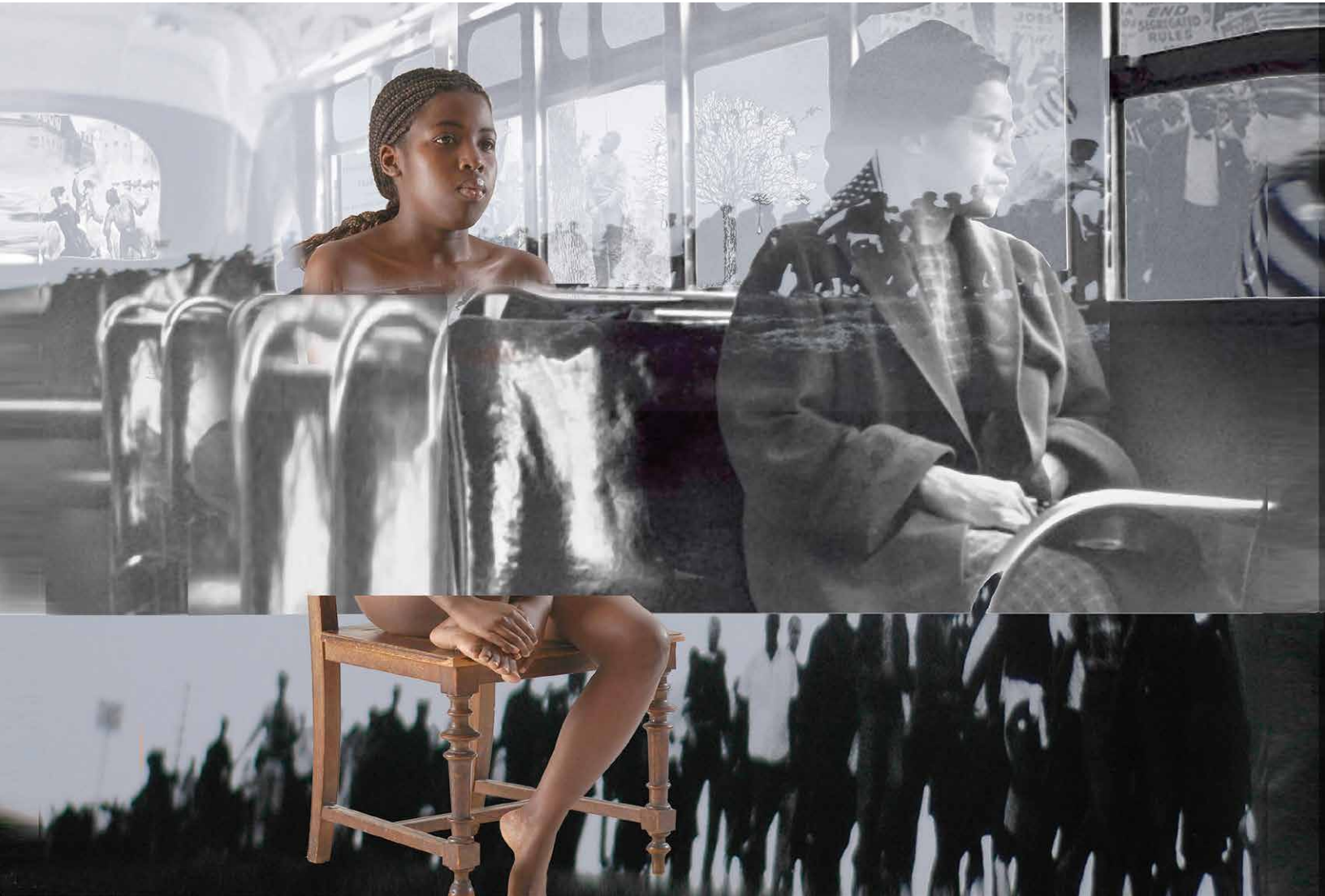
THE FINE ART OF TURNING ON THE LIGHTS

STORY BY
JEFF WING

“[MY UNCLE’S RESEARCH OF OUR FAMILY] CHANGED THE COURSE OF MY ART. SEEING THE PHOTOS OF FAMILY MEMBERS WHO WERE SLAVES, SLAVEHOLDERS, AND MY INDIGENOUS ANCESTORS – THIS GALVANIZED A DESIRE TO EXPLORE AMERICAN HISTORY, TO GIVE VOICE TO THE VOICELESS, TO TAKE PRIDE IN MY FAMILY’S RESILIENCE.”



TONI SCOTT, WHO RECEIVED HER MFA FROM UC SANTA BARBARA IN 2018 AND WAS ARTIST IN RESIDENCE AT THE UNIVERSITY’S COLLEGE OF CREATIVE STUDIES UNTIL 2019, AT HER STUDIO IN GOLETA
(PHOTO BY EDWARD CLYNES)



THE BUS TO EQUALITY WITH ROSA PARKS
TIME TRAVELER SERIES | COLLAGE ON CANVAS | 24”H X 28”W
THIS SERIES FOLLOWS A YOUNG AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN AS SHE TRAVELS THROUGH HISTORY OF THE BLACK AMERICAN EXPERIENCE. CRISPUS ATTUCKS, STRANGE FRUIT, JIM CROW, TO THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, THE BUS TO EQUALITY WITH ROSA PARKS.

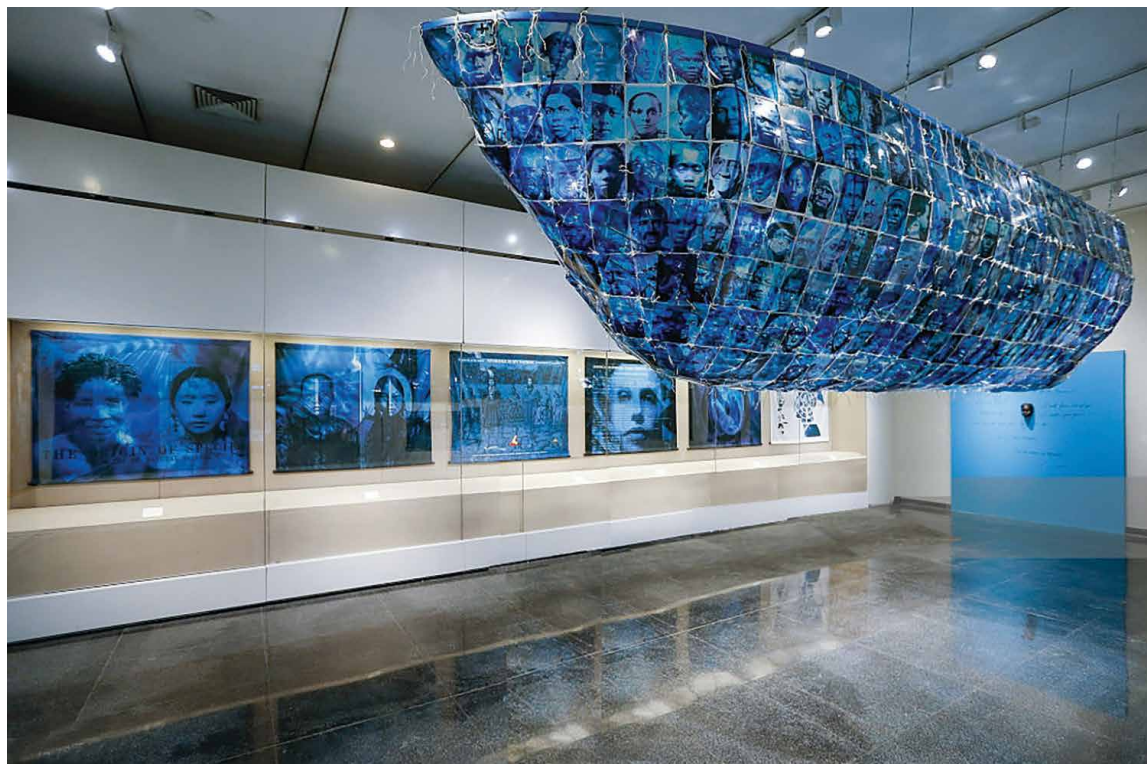
Toni Scott is the perfect storm. A celebrated multimedia artist with a seemingly boundless expressive range, Scott is also the literal personification of a blood legacy that begs a messenger – a storyteller with the means to illuminate a narrative whose density has made it all but impenetrable. The turbulent and interrelated social histories that comprise our nation find their confluence in the singular Toni Scott. “I have a multi-ethnic ancestry of African, European, and Native American,” she says. “I’m a member of the Muscogee Creek Nation and a descendant of emancipated African Americans – slaves on three plantations in the South. My European ancestors arrived before the *Mayflower*, and later joined the pilgrimage of deliberate New World colonists.”

BLACK MONA LISA
HERITAGE SERIES
OIL ON CANVAS | 30"H X 15"W
THE HERITAGE SERIES IS A PAINTING AND SCULPTURE
SERIES THAT CELEBRATES THE AFRICAN DIASPORA
AND SEEKS TO FILL THE GAP OF UNDERREPRESENTED
WOMEN AND PEOPLE OF COLOR IN MUSEUMS



Her renowned “Bloodlines” exhibition – a variously harrowing and exalting immersion in the historical slave trade through sculpture, photography, personal narratives, and Scott’s own genealogy – was the first installation specifically designed for the California African American Museum in Los Angeles, where the exhibition had its inaugural public unveiling in 2012. “Bloodlines” included life-size body casts of the descendants of slaves, a large ship that carried enslaved Africans, a 12-foot slave cabin, a life-sized cotton picker in a cotton field, a six-foot suspended embarkation canoe, a seven-foot sculpture of *Eve* representing the first enslaved woman in America to be sold on an auction block, and an extensive family tree of my ancestors.”

THE FORGOTTEN
TRANSPARENCY, ACETATE, BAMBOO, SISAL, PLASTIC | 24'L X 10'H X 8'D
THE FORGOTTEN FEATURING 600 FACES OF SLAVES, REMEMBERING THOSE WHOSE LIVES WERE TAKEN



FORMER GREENHOUSE REIMAGINED AS A SPARK-THROWING ART ENGINE
(PHOTO BY EDWARD CLYNES)





NUBIAN QUEEN
CARRARA MARBLE ON BLACK BELGIUM MARBLE | 25" H X 14"W X 10"D
BLACK WOMAN CARVED IN CLASSICAL WHITE MARBLE
FILLING A VOID OF BLACK PEOPLE MISSING IN CLASSICAL SCULPTURE



TONI SCOTT IN PIETRASANTA, CARVING BLACK BELGIUM MARBLE
"I LISTEN FOR THE FIGURE IN THE STONE. THE STONE SPEAKS TO ME, I CARVE AND LIBERATE THE FIGURE."



THE KINGDOM HAT
SHEPST
CHLORITE | 14"H X 10"W X 6"D
THE FIRST WOMAN PHARAOH

The arguable anchor of "Bloodlines" is a suspended 24-foot slave ship replica whose hull is constituted of some 500 actual images of slaves – blue-tinted, translucent, and dazzlingly lit from within; the electric beauty of the piece at odds with the unmediated horror of what it represents. "Bloodlines" has traveled the United States, and in 2015 and '16 had a much talked-about sojourn at the Museum of Art and Archaeology at Peking University in Beijing, resulting in Scott's subsequent invite to be the first international artist to mount a solo exhibition at the Changzhou Museum in Jiangsu Province of China. It was in Peking that Scott's expressionist slave ship, *The Forgotten*, was added to and debuted in the exhibit "DNA: Bloodlines and the Family of Mankind," before travelling on to Changzhou.



I CAN'T BREATHE (FOREGROUND); INDIGO PAINTINGS (BACKGROUND) CEMENT, WOOD, LINEN | 16"H X 12"W X 74"D
SCULPTURE WAS FIRST CREATED IN PLASTER IN 2009 IN RESPONSE TO THE MURDER OF OSCAR GRANT. I RECAST THE SCULPTURE IN 2020 IN RESPONSE TO GEORGE FLOYD.

Celebrating Montecito's Architectural Icon, George Washington Smith



The Johnson Estate, referred to as "La Toscana," is located in Montecito, California. *George Washington Smith* built the home in 1929 for the president of First National Bank of Beverly Hills, Kirk Johnson, and his family. Smith constructed the property to showcase a lush and bountiful garden, hiring renowned landscaper, A. E. Hanson. During his time as an architect, Smith designed some 80 homes in Santa Barbara County, not including his extensive work nationwide.

For more information,
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PAST AND PRESENT
ORIGINAL PHOTOGRAPHY / DIGITAL RENDERING - COLLAGE ON CANVAS
FROM SLAVES TO MODERNITY AND DNA

These darkling human narratives – recapitulated as immersive, stirring works of artistic empathy – clearly transcend culture. “Art has always been a part of my life,” Scott says simply. “My great-grandmother created mosaics of our Muscogee Creek tribal designs, my grandmother was a ceramist, painter...and a professional whistler! My aunt was an opera singer, another aunt was a painter. My mom, Dolores, was a writer and singer.” Scott’s sister Sherry, a preternaturally gifted painter since the tender age of 5, ultimately covered the walls of the household with her murals. Scott’s brother was an audio experimenter and drummer. Scott’s father was the prototypical creator/innovator in the garage, toiling in a shower of sparks on projects young Toni only vaguely apprehended. But when you see a photo of our artist – one where she wears what looks like a rubberized butcher’s apron as she demurely hoists an enormous chisel or chainsaw? That’s all dad. “I spent a lot of time with Dad,” Scott says with a slight grin. “I guess you could call me a Daddy’s girl – gathering tools when he needed them, helping out here and there. Spending time with Dad in his garage helped shape me into a fearless sculptor.” So, yeah. This is Scott’s family. It may be fair to say young Toni’s chances of maturing into a certified public accountant were slim at best.



RAIN AND FIRE
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS | 48" X 36" W
"ELEMENTS INTEGRAL TO CEREMONIES OF MY
AFRICAN AND INDIGENOUS ANCESTRY.
RAIN DANCE AND FIRE DANCE"

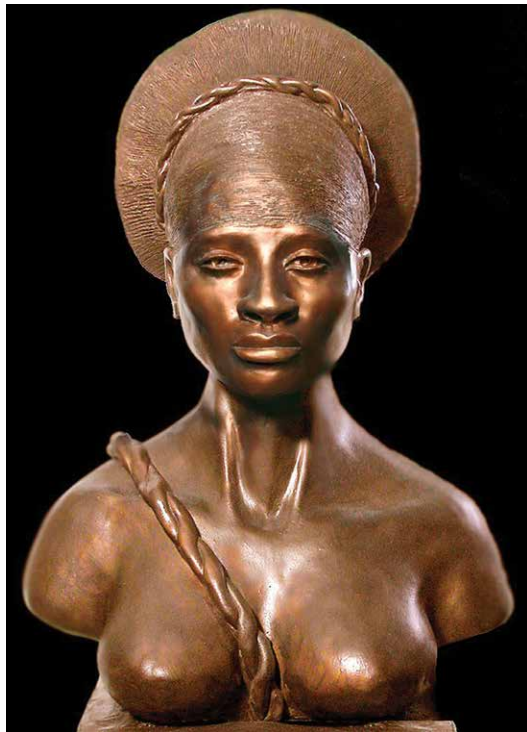


RAINMAKING RITUAL
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS | 6'H X 5' W
RAINMAKING CEREMONIES ARE AN IMPORTANT CULTURAL TRADITION FOR
INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD. THIS TRADITION IS STEEPED IN BRINGING
LIFE-GIVING WATER TO THE EARTH.



WE'RE ALL THE SAME UNDER THE SKIN
SUMI INK ON CANVAS
52" H X 96" W
CELEBRATION TO SIMILARITIES VERSUS DISSIMILARITIES

SCOTT’S HOME LIFE FORGED – FROM A
LOVING ABUNDANCE OF WILDLY VARIED
RAW MATERIALS – A WHOLE NEW ALLOY.



MANGBETU WOMAN
FIBERGLASS (OPTION FOR BRONZE) | 30”H X 23” W X 12” D
“THIS IS AN HOMAGE TO THE AFRICAN DIASPORA, AND IS PART OF MY HERITAGE SERIES, LOOKING BACK AND REACHING FORWARD, IMAGES OF MY ANCESTORS. THIS IS INSPIRED BY THE MANGBETU (ALSO SPELLED MONBUTTU) PEOPLES OF CENTRAL AFRICA LIVING TO THE SOUTH OF THE ZANDE IN NORTHEASTERN CONGO (KINSHASA). THE MANGBETU ARE KNOWN FOR THEIR HIGHLY DEVELOPED ART AND MUSIC. ONE INSTRUMENT ASSOCIATED WITH AND NAMED AFTER THEM IS THE MANGBETU HARP OR GUITAR.”

As Scott grew, so did the range of her influencers. “Artists like Joan Carl inspired me. She introduced me to stone carving, wax sculpting, and her artistic purity helped me to focus and prioritize. Artists like John Ottobridge, Charles Dickson, Artis Lane, and John Paul Thornton – all greatly successful artistic purists – gave me manna for my art soul; gifts to survive and flourish.” A self-taught artist, Scott’s brief forays into formal art education were not initially nourishing experiences.



BLACK EYE (FOREGROUND):
WATER LIBATION (BACKGROUND)
RESIN, BLACK ACRYLIC PATINA | 7”H X 36”W X 30”D
BLACK EYE EMBRACES HER AFRICAN HERITAGE, STANDS TALL, TENACIOUS, AND RESILIENT



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TONI SCOTT — RAISED IN A CROWDED CHRYSALIS — HAD LITTLE CHOICE BUT TO EMERGE A MULTIMEDIA MESSENGER WITH A DAZZLING VOCABULARY (PHOTO BY EDWARD CLYNES)

“When I was in art school, I felt very discouraged and very alone,” says Scott. “So I left Otis [College of Art and Design]. USC international relations became my new teacher.” Scott found in her successful pivot a species of what fulfilled her in art: absorption in full-spectrum humanity. “International relations satisfied my interests: history, culture, global politics, and – most inspirationally – diplomacy.” Scott pauses. “The jump from art school to the IR program was a challenge. I still painted at night whenever possible.”

In 2004, Scott’s uncle – Richard Procello – surprised the family with a self-researched, self-published tome titled *Discovering Our Past: The May Family History 1705-2004*. As epiphanies go, this one was path-forking. “His research in the book changed the course of my art. Seeing the photos of family members who were slaves, slaveholders, and my indigenous ancestors – this galvanized a desire to explore American history, to give voice to the voiceless, to take pride in my family’s resilience.”



NUBIA
CLAY WITH OPTION FOR BRONZE | 30”H X 25”W X 12”
“THIS REPRESENTS A QUEEN FROM THE KINGDOM OF NUBIA (AN ANCIENT REGION IN NORTHEASTERN AFRICA, EXTENDING APPROXIMATELY FROM THE NILE RIVER VALLEY EASTWARD TO THE SHORES OF THE RED SEA, SOUTHWARD TO ABOUT KHARTOUM, IN WHAT IS NOW SUDAN), AND WESTWARD TO THE LIBYAN DESERT. THE SCULPTURE IS PART OF MY HERITAGE SERIES THAT CELEBRATES AFRICAN AND AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN. IT IS INSPIRED TO PROVIDE POSITIVE IMAGES OF BLACK PEOPLE THAT ARE ABSENT IN MAJOR ART COLLECTIONS.”



WHITE AND BLACK — EMERGENCE OF CULTURES
SUMI INK AND ACRYLIC ON CANVAS | 6’H X 5’W
“BRINGING TOGETHER ASPECTS OF MY ANCESTRY COMPRISED ON AFRICAN AND EUROPEAN HERITAGE.”

Her uncle Richard’s second volume, *Grandmother Dora (Knoll) May*, brought Scott’s indigenous heritage into focus – to put it mildly – and an artist was effectively reborn. “Making that historic connection to my ancestors was a thunderbolt of pride,” Scott says. When she avidly renewed her commitment to the art mission, her North Star shone with an unmistakable brilliance. Scott received her MFA from UC Santa Barbara in 2018 and was Artist in Residence at the university’s College of Creative Studies until 2019.

Scott’s almost uncanny mastery – of whatever medium she lays hands on – has served her well. Her explorations necessitate a range of materials equal to the gradations of the filigreed human story she continues to tell. Art speaks where words fail, and by this measure, Scott’s work is an uninterrupted flow of bracing, vitalizing eloquence that stuns and edifies.

America’s turbulent foundation story inheres in Toni Scott’s actual blood, but even that extraordinary heritage may have remained an unsung fact of cellular heraldry – had Scott not been raised in the right-brain rhapsody of a family restlessly alive with creativity. Crucible is a loaded word, but Scott’s home life forged – from a loving abundance of wildly varied raw materials – a whole new alloy. Her name is Toni Scott.

“I’ve sharpened my tools, so to speak,” she says declaratively, “and continue to deepen my journey.” **RIV**

the R.V.

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