



Raven Halfmoon: Flags of Our Mothers (installation view), The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, June 25, 2023 to January 7, 2024.

Photo: Jason Mandella.

Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts Presents Two New Exhibitions

OMAHA, Neb. (April 15, 2024) — Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts is pleased to announce two new exhibitions: [***Raven Halfmoon: Flags of Our Mothers***](#) and [***Paul Stephen Benjamin: Black of Night***](#). Both exhibitions open May 18, 2024 and continue through September 15, 2024.

Raven Halfmoon: Flags of Our Mothers is the first major traveling exhibition for Halfmoon and includes new and recent works made over the last five years. This exhibition is co-organized by [Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts](#) and [The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum](#). Halfmoon was commissioned by both institutions for the exhibition to create some of her largest works to date, including *Flagbearer*, a three-part stacked ceramic sculpture standing over 12 feet tall, greeting visitors at the entrance to Bemis's building.

BEMIS × CENTER

Halfmoon's practice spans torso-scaled and colossal-sized glazed stoneware sculptures, with their enormous scale and visual power opposing existing stereotypes and biases to create new monuments that honor the artist's Caddo Nation ancestors and their traditions, including her elders from whom she learned about ceramics as a teenager. Inspiration stems from ancient Indigenous pottery, the colossal Olmec stone heads in Mexico, the Moai statues on Easter Island, and the major earth mounds her Caddo ancestors erected as temples, tombs, and residences for tribal leaders and priests. Halfmoon fuses Caddo pottery traditions — a history of making mostly done by women — with more contemporary gestures, often tagging her work as a reference to Caddo tattooing and ancient pottery motifs. Her works reflect stories of the Caddo Nation, specifically her feminist lineage and the power of its complexities.

"We are thrilled to announce Raven Halfmoon's inaugural major traveling exhibition in Omaha. This marks a significant moment not only for Halfmoon's career but also for our community, as we have the privilege of experiencing her groundbreaking work firsthand," said Rachel Adams, Chief Curator and Director of Programs at Bemis Center. "As a community that is supportive of diverse voices and one that values ceramic work, *Flags of Our Mothers* is an important exhibition in highlighting Bemis's mission, vision and values."

Working mainly in portraiture and hand building each work using a coil method, her surfaces are expressive and show deep finger impressions and dramatic dripping glazes — a physicality that presents her as both maker and matter. Her specific palette matches both the clay bodies she selects and the glazes she fires with: reds, after the Oklahoma soil and the blood of murdered Indigenous women; blacks, referencing the natural clay native to the Red River; and buff creams. Oftentimes she stacks and repeats imagery, creating totemic forms that represent herself and her maternal ancestry while also referencing the multiplicities that exist inside all of us. *Flags of Our Mothers* is a tribute to the matriarchs in her life and all the Indigenous women, who over many centuries, have created and endured, keeping their stories and traditions present, active, and alive.

Raven Halfmoon: Flags of Our Mothers is co-curated by Bemis Center's Chief Curator and Director of Programs Rachel Adams and The Aldrich's Chief Curator Amy Smith-Stewart. The exhibition is accompanied by the artist's first museum catalogue, co-published by The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, and Gregory R. Miller & Co., including an introduction and interview with the artist by Amy Smith-Stewart, an essay by Rachel Adams, and a poem commission by Kinsale Drake.

Support for *Raven Halfmoon: Flags of Our Mothers* was provided by Douglas County Visitor Improvement Fund; Mutual of Omaha; Michel Cohen, Collection Montparnasse; Mid-America

BEMIS × CENTER

Arts Alliance; Nebraska Arts Council/Nebraska Cultural Endowment; Omaha Steaks; and the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Arts.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Raven Halfmoon was born in 1991 in Norman, Oklahoma, where she presently lives and works. She is a member of the Caddo Nation, a federally recognized Tribal Nation headquartered in Binger, Oklahoma with a rich history of many thousands of years in the Southeastern region of the United States. Halfmoon received her BFA from the University of Arkansas, where she double majored in ceramics and cultural anthropology.



Paul Stephen Benjamin, *Black Suns*, 2023. Black light, Black power strip, Black extension cord. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Paul Stephen Benjamin's practice is an ongoing investigation of blackness through concept, thought, and perception. From wordplay with the actual letters that comprise "BLACK," to utilizing the expanse of shades of black house paint — including as *Nightfall*, *Soot*, *Ebony Field*, and *Black Beauty* — to posing the question, "If the color black had a sound, what would it be?" Benjamin calls attention to the color's deep historical and social resonance. In addition, across his practice, the artist's work references integral moments in Black history as well as art history.

BEMIS × CENTER

In *Black of Night*, Benjamin presents new and recent video installations, paintings, text-based work, and sculpture, as conceptual entry points for dialogue around identity, race, and patriotism. By continually “documenting” the color black through his multifaceted practice, he is also deconstructing its meaning — breaking it down to its simplest form and allowing for it to operate as a medium for interpretation and introspection. As a survey of Benjamin’s work to date, *Black of Night* includes a variety of work, from single- and multi-channel videos to sculpture and painting to site-specific installations. The title stems from the Sherwin-Williams shade of house paint Black of Night, utilized in the exhibition on the wall as well as in the title. Focusing on the connotations of the color black in society, culture and language, Benjamin incorporates history, text, imagery and sound from popular culture, in turn discussing the absence and presence of color.

“I am honored to present Paul Stephen Benjamin's upcoming exhibition at Bemis Center. Benjamin's work is a testament to the power of artistic innovation. Through his personal interests, his conceptual practice has significant cultural resonance,” said Rachel Adams. “*Black of Night* is his first exhibition in the region, which is an unprecedented opportunity for our community to immerse themselves in his profound exploration of identity, race, and memory. Benjamin's artistry transcends boundaries, inviting viewers to engage in critical dialogues and introspection.”

Support for *Paul Stephen Benjamin: Black of Night* was provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art. Additional support by Douglas County Visitor Improvement Fund, Mutual of Omaha, Nebraska Arts Council/Nebraska Cultural Endowment, Omaha Steaks, and the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Arts.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Paul Stephen Benjamin was born in Chicago, IL, and lives and works in Atlanta, GA. He earned his BA from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and his MFA from Georgia State University in 2013. Recently Benjamin has exhibited at Hammonds House Museum, Atlanta, GA (2023), Blackness at the Montresso Art Foundation, Marrakesh, Morocco, (2023), The Thoma Foundation Art Vault, Santa Fe, NM (2022–2023), and a solo exhibition at the Van Every-Smith Galleries, Davidson College, Davidson, NC (2022). He has been included in solo and group exhibitions at a variety of institutions and art spaces, including Prospect.5 New Orleans, LA (2021–2022). Gavlak, Los Angeles, CA (2021), The Dirty South at the Virginia Museum of Fine Art, Richmond VA (2021), David Lusk Gallery, Nashville, TN (2021), Crystal Bridges Museum and the Momentary, Bentonville, AR (2020), The MAC, Belfast, UK (2019), VC Institute for Contemporary Art, Richmond, VA (2019), The Havana Biennial in Matanzas, Cuba (2019), Marianne Boesky Gallery, NY, NY (2019), Tacoma Art Museum, Tacoma, WA

BEMIS × CENTER

(2018), Telfair Museum Jepson Center, Savannah, GA (2018), The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY (2017), Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia, Atlanta, GA (2017), High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA (2016), among others. He has received a range of awards and fellowships, including The Hudgens Prize (2019), Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters and Sculptors Grant (2019), Hambidge Distinguished Fellowship (2019), The Southern Art Prize (2018), The State Fellow of Georgia (2018), Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia (WAP) Fellow (2017), Artadia Award (2014), Winnie B. Chandler Fellowship, and the Forward Arts Emerging Artists Award.

EXHIBITION PROGRAMS

Opening Reception

Saturday, May 18, 4–6 p.m. CT

Join us to celebrate the opening of *Raven Halfmoon: Flags of Our Mothers* and *Paul Stephen Benjamin: Black of Night*. The artists will be in attendance.

Poetry Reading + Workshop with Kinsale Drake + Maritza Estrada

Saturday, June 8, 2–4 p.m. CT

Join poets Kinsale Drake and Maritza Estrada for a reading and discussion, followed by an ekphrastic poetry workshop in conjunction with Raven Halfmoon's exhibition *Flags of Our Mothers*. Poems written during this workshop will be collected into a chapbook available for download.

Curator-Led Tour

Thursday, July 25, 6 p.m. CT

Join Rachel Adams, Chief Curator and Director of Programs, for a tour and discussion of both exhibitions on view at Bemis Center.

In Conversation: Raven Halfmoon with Rachel Adams

Saturday, August 10, 4 p.m. CT

Join exhibiting artist Raven Halfmoon in conversation with Rachel Adams, Chief Curator and Director of Programs at Bemis Center. They will speak about Halfmoon's expansive artistic practice and her influences.

Julius Eastman / Seth Parker Woods: *The Holy Presence of Joan d'Arc* (1981)

For ten cellos

Transcribed by Clarice Jensen, multi-tracked version by Seth Parker Woods

Thursday, August 15, 8 p.m. CT

BEMIS × CENTER

In conjunction with Paul Stephen Benjamin's exhibition *Black of Night*, join Grammy-nominated cellist Seth Parker Woods playing his new version of Eastman's piece *The Holy Presence of Joan d'Arc* for cello and electronics.

More events to be announced.

VISIT BEMIS CENTER

Location: Corner of 12th and Leavenworth Street (724 S 12th St, Omaha, NE 68102) in the Old Market, Omaha's downtown-area arts and culture district

Admission: Free for exhibitions and public programs

Gallery hours: Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday 11 a.m.–5 p.m.; Thursday 11 a.m.–9 p.m.

Accessibility: Details at bemiscenter.org/accessibility

Gallery materials available in English and Spanish

ABOUT BEMIS CENTER

Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts facilitates the creation, presentation, and understanding of contemporary art through an international residency program, exhibitions, and educational programs to inspire an open and diverse dialogue on the critical issues that give shape and meaning to the human condition. Visit bemiscenter.org for more information.

###