In *Her* Place

Nashville Artists in the Twenty-First Century

Educator Guide

Frist Art Museum

Contents

Cover: Karen Seapker. *You are Spring*, 2023. Oil on canvas; 72 x 48 in. Collection of Sasha and Charlie Sealy. © Karen Seapker. Photo: Sam Angel

In Her Place: Nashville Artists in the Twenty–First Century

January 29–April 26, 2026 • Ingram Gallery

Women have long been at the center of Nashville's vibrant visual arts community. Especially now, during the city's current period of growth, an outsized number of local women artists are receiving prestigious grants, residencies, and awards; are written about by respected critics; and are showing their work across the globe. Many have also dedicated years, even decades, to teaching or building impactful community organizations.

In Her Place highlights this prominent position of women artists here in Music City and beyond through nearly one hundred artworks spanning painting, sculpture, textile, and installation. Selected works by this intergenerational group of Nashville-based women relate broadly to place—whether conceived of as the view of a garden outside a studio window, the influence of being raised in the American South, a moment in time, or the evocation of an ancestral homeland outside of the United States.

Critiquing the exclusion of women from the art-historical canon, scholar Linda Nochlin famously asked in 1971, "Why have there been no great women artists?" In response to her rhetorical question, we offer this exhibition in our largest gallery space as part of our twenty-fifth anniversary to celebrate the achievements of women artists right here in Nashville over the last four decades.

Featured Artists

Beizar Aradini

Alex Blau

Jane Braddock

Lakesha Calvin

María Magdalena Campos-Pons

Ashley Doggett

Raheleh Filsoofi

LiFran Fort

Lanie Gannon

Lauren Gregory

Kristi Hargrove

Briena Harmening

Jana Harper

Jodi Hays

Alicia Henry

Mandy Rogers Horton

Kimia Ferdowsi Kline

Shannon Cartier Lucy

Carol Mode

Elisheba Israel Mrozik

Marilyn Murphy

Sisavanh Phouthavong Houghton

Kit Reuther

Karen Seapker

Vadis Turner

Yanira Vissepó

Emily Weiner

Kelly S. Williams

For more resources and to listen to artist interviews, visit FristArtMuseum.org/In-Her-Place or scan this QR code.

Curriculum Connections

Tennessee Academic Standards

Fine Arts: Visual Arts

Grades K–12

CREATE: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.; Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.; Refine and complete artistic work.
PRESENT: Select, analyze and interpret artistic work for production.; Develop and refine artistic work for production.; Convery and express meaning through the production of artistic work.
RESPOND: Perceive and analyze artistic work.; Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.; Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.
CONNECT: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to artistic endeavors.; Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context.

English Language Arts

Grades K–12: Reading Cornerstone Standards

R.CS.6 Cornerstone: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
R.IKI.7 Cornerstone: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Social Studies

Grades K–12: Social Studies Practices

SSP.01: Gather information from a variety of sources, including: Printed materials (e.g., literary texts, newspapers, political cartoons, autobiographies, speeches, letters, personal journals); Graphic representations (e.g., maps, timelines, charts, artwork); Artifacts; Media and technology sources.

Grades K–5

K.02: Compare and contrast family traditions and customs, including food, clothing, homes, and games.
1.25: Compare ways people lived in the past to how they live today, including: forms of communication, modes of transportation, and types of clothing.
2.01: Identify various cultural groups within the U.S. and the students' community.
2.02: Compare and contrast the beliefs, customs, ceremonies, and traditions of the various cultures represented in the U.S.
2.03: Distinguish how people from various cultures in the community and nation share principles, goals, and traditions.
2.28: Describe the fundamental principles of American democracy, including: equality, fair treatment for all, and respect for the property of others.
5.24: Analyze the key people and events of the Civil Rights Movement.

Grades 3–12

SSP.05: Develop historical awareness by: Recognizing how and why historical accounts change over time (Grades 3–12); Recognizing how past events and issues

might have been experienced by the people of that time, with historical context and empathy rather than present–mindedness (Grades 3–12); Evaluating how unique circumstances of time and place create context and contribute to action and reaction (Grades 6–12); Identify patterns of continuity and change over time, making connections to the present (Grades 3–12).

Grades 9–12

S.07: Describe components of culture (e.g., nonmaterial culture, norms and values, material culture, subcultures).
S.08: Explain how the various components of culture form a whole culture. Identify common patterns.
S.10: Compare and contrast various cultures of the world.
S.12: Analyze how culture influences individuals (e.g., ethnocentrism, cultural relativity, culture shock, American values).
S.13: Describe how the social structure of a culture affects social interaction.
S.29: Identify common patterns of social inequality (i.e., privilege, poverty, power, race, ethnicity, class, gender).
AAH.41: Describe various methods employed by African Americans to obtain civil rights.
AAH.45: Assess the extent to which the Civil Rights Movement transformed American politics and society.
AAH.49: Compare and contrast the responses of African Americans to the economic, social, and political challenges in the contemporary U.S.
AAH.50: Identify and evaluate major contemporary African American issues confronting society.
AAH.52: Identify the major contributions of contemporary African Americans in business, education, the arts, politics, sports, science, technology, and society in general.
CI.03: Analyze how cultural characteristics (e.g., language, religion, ethnicity, gender roles) link, divide, and/or define regions.
CI.08: Analyze how causal factors (e.g., cultural differences, boundary disputes, imperialism, and religious conflicts) fostered past and current conflicts.
CI.20: Compare and contrast folk and/or traditional culture with popular culture, and analyze efforts to preserve folk culture amid the spread of popular culture.
CI.22: Explain multiculturalism, and analyze trends in acculturation and assimilation.
CI.23: Analyze types, patterns, and attitudes regarding discrimination.

Science

Kindergarten

K.PS1: Matter and Its Interactions: 1) Plan and conduct an investigation to describe and classify different kinds of materials including wood, plastic, metal, cloth, and paper by their observable properties (color, texture, hardness, and flexibility) and whether they are natural or human–made.

Excerpt from the Exhibition Catalogue for *In Her Place: Nashville Artists in the Twenty–First Century*

The Power to Imagine: The Artist-Educators of *In Her Place*

By Shaun Giles

In the past, teaching was one of few viable career options available to women who wanted to be taken seriously, secure a stable income, and build a reputation as an art professional. Today, many of the leading figures of Nashville's art community are women, and several work as teachers—but not because they have no other options. These artists teach because they love teaching, and they are committed to helping develop the next generation of artists. The dual roles of artist and art educator can intersect or even merge into a single identity and practice. What happens in the classroom may inform what takes place in the artist's studio and vice versa. Jana Harper, interdisciplinary artist and professor at Vanderbilt University, states, "In some ways making art and teaching are the same because at their root, they are both about transformation. Transformation of materials, ideas, and even, possibly, paradigms or consciousness" (fig. 1).[1] Classrooms can also become creative communities in which artist-educators and their students grow together. When Lakesha Calvin began teaching at Fisk University in 2022 after several years at Tennessee State University, she gained well-respected colleagues in artists LiFran Fort—who studied under legendary Harlem Renaissance artist Aaron Douglas—and Alicia Henry, who taught at Fisk from 1997 until her death in 2024. For more than fifteen years, Calvin, a painter and collage artist, has been a full-time arts educator. She is inspired by her students and says that engaging with them "keeps her work honest." Part of Calvin's mission as an educator is to "lift students up so their stories of life and growth can be seen and heard."[2] Similarly, Sisavanh Phouthavong Houghton's art practice and work in the classroom are tied together. The painting professor at Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro has taught at the university level for twenty-five years. "I enjoy talking to my students about problem-solving for their projects and speaking to them about technical and professional developmental skills," she says. "As a practicing artist, my experience helps inform my upper-division students about what it takes to be a professional artist. These intense and meaningful conversations remind me of my struggles as an artist, and I practice what I preach."[3]

Fig. 1: Jana Harper leads a performance workshop in 2022 at the International Museum of Art and Science, McAllen, Texas, with students from the University of Texas, Rio Grande Valley. Photo: Carlos Limas

Fig. 2: Sisavanh Phouthavong Houghton engages with Mena Tanious in her painting class at Middle Tennessee State University, 2025. Photo: Faith Rodriguez

Teaching also encourages art educators to stay up to date as educators and artists. Harper is always reading and researching.

"That research also informs my own practice because sometimes I learn about neglected or forgotten histories or inspiring projects that I might never have come across in daily life," she notes.[4] Mandy Rogers Horton, painter and assistant professor of art at Watkins College of Art at Belmont University, acknowledges that through teaching, "I am following conversations in contemporary art and considering how to add to it meaningfully. Observation, research, and sensitivity to our ever-evolving culture are practices I aim to help students develop."[5] Such a synergy between art teacher and art student is not only found in the university classroom. Briena Harmening, a text-based textile artist and art teacher at James Lawson High School in Nashville, credits teaching with enhancing her studio practice. In an interview for the Drawing South podcast, she said, "I think I got better [as a teacher] because I was looking at more work myself and that was translating to me showing the kids more work . . . when I was making soft sculpture here [in my studio], we were making it in school."[6]

Community

Building technical skills and preparing students for a future in the arts is a goal for many teachers, especially for those teaching at the university level, but artist-educators also place great importance on fostering a sense of community. Harmening works to create a safe and trusting environment for her high school students. "I think it really came from wanting to create an atmosphere of trust and freedom," she says. "You know, if you don't have that, then they don't want to make stuff in front of each other."[7] A trusting environment breeds inquiry, exchange, and collaboration—key factors in any learning environment and often critical qualities of a professional art practice as well. Such environments are also inspiring to artist-educators who may be encouraged by their students to experiment and approach their work with fresh eyes. Phouthavong Houghton reflects on her creative experiences in the classroom: "Being in a creative atmosphere and community is always lovely, regardless of your level. They [students] remind me to continue experimenting and enjoy the craziness of being a process mixed-media artist. I get to explore and develop alongside them, making it all worthwhile. I have some outstanding students with big ideas, and I thrive on their energy. They constantly support me as much as I support them, and that mutual respect is why I continue to teach" (fig. 2).[8] Harper contemplates what

collaboration and community mean to her art practice and her teaching: "In my studio practice, I am interested in collaborating with ancestors and natural elements, but this kind of thinking or collaboration represents a paradigm shift for many people."[9] For her, teaching can be part of her creative process, and it does not need to happen in an academic setting. In 2020, she made *This Holding: Traces of Contact*, a film that addresses burdens, anxieties, and hopes during the COVID-19 pandemic. "For my project *This Holding*, I led dozens of community movement workshops with a wide range of people," she explains. "At the university, you have a job to do—an obligation to convey certain information or teach certain skills— but in workshops, you can have more of a reciprocal relationship, pose questions that you are asking in your own practice and then share outcomes."[10]

Future Generations

Artist-educators grow as artists while laying a foundation for the next generation. They teach because they are deeply invested in their students. They grow in community with their students while evolving as artists. Harper is committed to the Indigenous concept of seven generations thinking—that is, a responsibility to three generations in the past and three in the future. "This relates to teaching because we study the past in order to understand and make work in the present," she says. "But our students represent the future, so I try to see the world through their eyes and think about what they will need to carry them through."[11] Through her art-making and teaching practices, Harper expresses the desire to find beauty in the discord around us.

"Teaching is a constant reminder of this," she says. "The power of art is the power to imagine new worlds, and we have to give future generations the skills to keep dreaming."[12] Art requires discipline and commitment. Calvin encourages consistency and curiosity (fig. 3). She tells young artists to have a disciplined practice of making art every day, asking questions, and sharing experiences with others in order to continue developing as artists. Phouthavong Houghton encourages students to face challenges and uncertainty while they develop as artists. "I believe that if you don't have some self-doubt, then you haven't lived the life of a creative person, and your journey is rich with experiences along the way," says Phouthavong Houghton. "I continue to teach and follow the path of a creative human because I believe I can still make a difference in this chaotic world."[13]

Fig. 3: Lakesha Calvin with students in Jubilee Hall at Fisk University, 2025

Notes

1. Jana Harper, email message to author, January 26, 2025.
2. “Virtual Exhibit: Lakesha Moore Calvin – I Am/ We Are,” Tennessee Arts Commission, February 2, 2023, https://tnartscommission.org/news/ virtual-exhibit-lakesha-moore-calvin-i-am-we-are/.
3. Sisavanh Phouthavong Houghton, email message to author, January 24, 2025.
4. Harper, email.
5. Mandy Rogers Horton, email message to author, February 5, 2025.
6. mikewindy, host, “Conversation with Briena Harmening,” *Drawing South* (podcast), episode 28, June 18, 2024, https://creators.spotify.com/pod/ show/drawing-south/episodes/Conversation-with-Briena-Harmeninge2l1ql0/a-abcavom. 7. mikewindy, “Conversation with Briena Harmening.”
8. Phouthavong Houghton, email.
9. Harper, email.
10. Harper, email.
11. Harper, email.
12. Harper, email.
13. Phouthavong Houghton, email.

Remembering Alicia Henry (1966–2024)

Alicia Henry. *Untitled (Inspiration for Clerestory)*, 2018. Mixed media; 96 x 120 in. Courtesy of Trépanier Baer Gallery, Calgary. © 2025 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

Artist-educators, the teachers who guided them, and the students they mentor all contribute to a creative network that continually shapes Nashville's art community. Alicia Henry was one of these influential figures, whose nearly three decades of teaching and art making at Fisk University left a lasting mark on generations of artists before she passed away during the planning of this exhibition. Her work and legacy reflect the deep connection between creating, teaching, and sustaining artistic community.

Throughout her career, she stitched together cloth, leather, paper board, and other materials to create work that examines the relationship between the individual and society. Pinned directly onto the wall, Henry's amorphous figures, almost exclusively women and young girls, often feature bodies with missing limbs and anonymous faces reminiscent of the West African masks she saw while working in the Peace Corps in the early 1990s. This large-scale installation and her other artworks in this exhibition were selected to highlight the artist's love of the natural world; the birds and colorful flowers suggest beauty, life, and humanity's capacity to overcome isolation, judgement, and pain.

The artist considered her figures to be a multitude of individuals, taking inspiration from the interactions humans have with one another and the communities they foster. While acknowledging their presence in the fluid landscape of race, culture, and gender, Henry activated her figures with a transcendent joy meant to overcome the isolating nature of a society that critiques standards of beauty, the body, and identity.

Materiality and Memory

Materials used in art often carry associations with time, place, and identity. Those chosen by the artists in this section are central to their art-making practices. They often creatively repurpose these media, transforming them into representations of personal stories or shared traditions. Jodi Hays, for example, uses old cardboard, textiles, and found objects to consider the associations of those modest materials with class, region, and the history of art. Vadis Turner works with textiles and domestic materials such as bedsheets to challenge the connections we make between materials and stories about gender. Lakesha Calvin creates art in a variety of media, from 2D work to installations and sculptures, selecting her materials based on the stories they tell. For example, the collage below, which represents Calvin's journey of healing, includes pieces of her own prints from years ago, as well as ginkgo leaves she gathers walking through Fisk University's campus, where she teaches.

Lakesha Calvin. *Revival*, 2025. Mixed media; 31 1/2 x 16 1/2 in. Courtesy of the artist. © 2025 Lakesha Calvin. Photo: John Schweikert

Artist and educator **Lakesha Calvin** draws heavily on memory and personal experience as sources of inspiration for her practice. Much of her recent work reflects her journey of healing and subsequent motherhood. The deep red and golden yellow seen in her collages evoke the colors of beets and turmeric, to which Calvin attributes her recovery. Depictions of rays of light symbolize hope. Silhouettes of babies represent her younger brother and her infant daughter, reminding viewers of the restorative power of family and the possibility of new life.

Calvin has proudly stated that she first discovered her creativity as a student in the classrooms of Metro Nashville Public Schools. She now continues that legacy by inspiring new generations as an assistant professor and gallery coordinator at Fisk University. In addition to being a Nashville native, Calvin also has a strong connection to the Caribbean. From 2010 to 2013, she lived in Saint Thomas, US Virgin Islands, where she taught art at Charlotte Amalie High School. Influenced by her family, friends, and surroundings, she creates layered landscapes of color and form that merge dreams with materiality. She considers the process of mixing her palette and preparing her materials to be a meditative act that underscores her appreciation for art's ability to heal, connect, and inspire others.

Discussion Questions

- If you made a collage about a time of healing in your life, what materials might you include?
- What materials, symbols, or colors would you choose for this collage to represent your own memories?
- How can an artist's choice of materials help communicate emotions or experiences?

Materiality and Memory: Jodi Hays

Jodi Hays. *Elaine*, 2022. Dye and cardboard collage on custom strainer; 76 x 52 in. Courtesy of the artist and David Lusk Gallery. © 2025 Jodi Hays. Photo: Nik Massey

A Nashville resident since 2005, Jodi Hays shifted from painting toward assemblage and collage during the COVID-19 pandemic. Working with bleached and stained cardboard boxes from the many deliveries that sustained her family during quarantine, Hays creates a dialogue between international art movements like arte povera and abstract expressionism and rural Southern traditions such as quilting and creatively repurposing scarce resources.

After immersing paper, textiles, or cardboard into dye and bleach baths, Hays creates assemblages that represent the familiar patterns and designs found in textiles. Throughout this process, she considers the history of these found materials and their connections to resourceful labor, which resonates deeply with the historical legacy of crafts created by women. Hays views her work as building upon the visual vocabulary of the South, weaving together new material and cultural narratives that reflect the region's heritage and evolving transformations.

Discussion questions

- How does the artist transform ordinary materials into something new or surprising?
- How does the use of repurposed everyday materials contribute to an artwork's themes and help tell a story?
- How would the feel of this artwork change if the materials were fully transformed so you couldn't see that it was made of repurposed cardboard?

Activity: Material Transformation (Inspired by Jodi Hays)

Objective

Students will explore how everyday materials can be transformed through manipulation and layering while considering texture, form, and personal expression.

Materials

- Everyday household materials for reuse, such as old mail, receipts, or paper; clothing or fabrics no longer in use; toilet paper rolls; bottle caps; and cardboard boxes.
- A variety of art supplies and tools such as scissors, glue, tape, string, paint, markers, dye, and needle and thread.
- Optional: Students may bring in additional materials from home, especially any that might hold meaning related to the themes of their finished artwork

Instructions

Step 1: Material Exploration

- Select one primary material to focus on.
- Experiment with manipulating the material in as many ways as possible—cutting, folding, gluing, braiding, dyeing, painting, stitching, etc.
- Consider how different manipulations create texture, depth, and visual interest.

Step 2: Develop Manipulations

- Identify which manipulations feel most compelling.
- Create additional pieces using the chosen manipulation technique and play around with layering and combining to produce different effects.

Step 3: Create the Artwork

- Use your manipulated materials to construct a cohesive piece.
- Think about composition, layering, and how each material transformation contributes to the overall effect and feel of the work.

Step 4: Reflection

- How did transforming the materials change your perception of what can be an art material?
- How might using repurposed or everyday materials contribute to the story or theme of your artwork?
- Which techniques were most successful in creating texture or visual interest?

Materiality and Memory: Vadis Turner

Vadis Turner. *Celestial Megaliths*, 2024. Bed sheets, dye, thread, resin, Tyvek, and aluminum; 105 x 113 x 6 in. Courtesy of the artist and Mindy Solomon Gallery. © Vadis Turner. Photo: John Schweikert

Vadis Turner's textile-driven works challenge narratives historically associated with women. Working with materials with gendered and domestic associations such as ribbons, curtains, and bedsheets, Turner tears, dyes, braids, and binds them and combines them with resin, gravel, concrete, or ash. In doing so, she aims to demonstrate how women can defy expectations and behavioral norms.

In *Celestial Megaliths*, Turner also engages with the grid, a foundational element in modern art often associated with male artists; using soft materials, she brings fluidity to the rigid form. *Celestial Megaliths* also references Neolithic-era megaliths and the formation of gender roles as humans moved from hunter-gatherer societies to agrarian civilizations.

Discussion Questions

- Why do you think Vadis Turner combines soft, domestic materials with heavy, industrial ones? What message might that send?
- What materials do you think are used in this artwork? Check the label. Are you surprised by any of the materials listed? How do the materials look, feel, or behave in ways that are different than you might expect?

Activity: Expressive Fabric Sculpture (Inspired by Vadis Turner)

Objective
Use a mesh base and a variety of fabrics to create an expressive sculpture that represents a meaningful emotion or memory.

Materials
Mesh
Scissors
Assorted fabrics
Double-sided tape
Paperclips

Instructions
Step 1: Think of a memory or emotion you would like to express through your sculpture.

Step 2: Consider how you would make your sculpture using the mesh sheets provided. Experiment with forming 3D shapes by folding or rolling the mesh. If you have a specific shape in mind, try making it. You may also cut the mesh sheets into strips or smaller pieces.

Step 3: Use paperclips to clip the mesh in place so that it holds its shape. You may attach multiple pieces of mesh together to create shapes that express your idea.

Step 4: Use scissors to shape the sculpture or cut down any excess mesh.

Step 5: Select the pieces of fabric you would like to use to cover your sculpture. Are there specific colors or patterns you want to include? Are there certain types of fabrics that you associate with specific emotions or memories?

Step 6: Attach fabric to the surface of your sculpture using double-sided tape. The fabric should cover all the mesh.

Cultural Foundations

As a community passes down traditions, it forms a culture, often rooted in a geographical place. In the works in this section, artists examine their relationships to ancestral cultures, maintaining roots both here and abroad. Tehran-born ceramicist Raheleh Filsoofi makes vessels and prints from clay gathered in Nashville and other US cities. Briena Harmening, who was born and raised in the American South, explores aspects of Southern identity through text-based quilts that feature common colloquial expressions. Persian American artist Kimia Ferdowsi Kline blends Eastern ornamentation and symmetry with Western modernist and folk-art traditions to bridge cultures and tell layered stories. María Magdalena Campos-Pons and Yanira Vissepó maintain connections to the Caribbean, where they were both born, by featuring botanicals native to that region in their work.

Raheleh Filsoofi. *I am earth, dreaming, dreaming, dreaming to be a woman*, 2024. Argillotype (clay print); five parts: 16 x 12 in. each. Courtesy of the artist. © 2025 Raheleh Filsoofi. Photo: Silvia Ros

Raheleh Filsoofi is an Iranian American artist, curator, and community advocate whose interdisciplinary practice bridges clay, sound, and performance to explore themes of migration, identity, and sociopolitical dynamics. Her work fosters dialogue and reflection on the connections between personal experience and collective memory. Clay plays a central role in Filsoofi's art, symbolizing the histories, traditions, and labor of creation. In some of her installations she reimagines the clay as more than just a material used to create ceramic vessels but also as a container of sound and memory.

Filsoofi uses sound, with its ephemeral and emotional qualities, as both a tool and a symbol, helping connect materials and meaning. Filsoofi describes her artistic approach as *itinerant*, as it reflects the transitions and negotiations involved with moving between different cultures and places. Through her art, she aims to build understanding, break down borders, and create spaces where people from different backgrounds can share ideas and connect.

Discussion Questions

- How does turning this phrase into a visual artwork expand its meaning beyond the words alone? How do the materials and imagery used add to your understanding of the phrase?
- Clay plays a central role in Raheleh Filsoofi's art. What are some themes you could associate with clay?

Activity: Nature Speaks (Inspired by Raheleh Filsoofi)

Objective

Students will explore stream-of-consciousness writing as a method for generating ideas and create a mixed-media artwork using natural materials to express a story, emotion, or theme.

Materials

- Paper and pencils or pens
- Natural materials (leaves, twigs, dried plants or flowers, dirt, sand, etc.)
- Mixed-media art supplies (paint, glue, scissors, etc.)

Instructions

Note: You may lead stream-of-consciousness writing exercises over one class, or you may start several class periods with a short writing exercise until students have several pieces to examine.

Step One: Warm-Up Writing

- Present a prompt related to themes you want students to explore. See below for some examples inspired by Raheleh Filsoofi's *I am earth, dreaming, dreaming, dreaming to be a woman*.
    1. What do you think the earth would dream about?
    2. What is a tree, plant, or natural object that feels important or familiar to you? What meaning does it hold?
    3. If you could have a conversation with an object from nature, which would you choose and what would you ask it?
- Once you present your writing prompt, introduce the idea of a stream-of-consciousness writing exercise. For five minutes, students should write freely and continuously, letting thoughts flow without worrying about grammar or structure. Tell them that, if they feel stuck, they can just write "I don't know what to say" until they have a new idea.
- Students can start by responding to the prompt but should be encouraged to let their mind wander. They can write down any thought, question, or sentence that pops into their heads. Tell them it's okay if their ideas change as they go and they find themselves writing about an unrelated thought!
- Repeat a second five-minute writing round to help students get comfortable with stream-of-consciousness writing.

Step Two: Reflection

- Students read over their writing and circle any lines that feel may be interesting to explore or that they might be curious to write about further.

Step Three: Follow-Up Writing

- For the final writing prompt, students expand on one of their starred ideas.

    - This can happen in one session or across multiple days.
    - Encourage students to notice recurring themes or emotions.

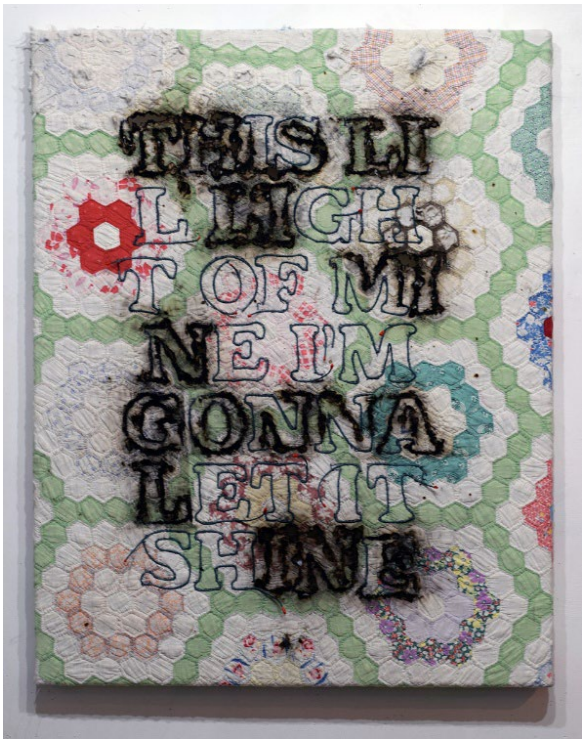
Step Four: Select a Line

- Students choose one sentence, phrase, or question that resonates with them.

Step Five: Create an Artwork

- Students make a text-based mixed-media artwork incorporating their chosen line.
- Ask them to consider which natural materials connect to the theme or feeling.
- The text can be the main focus of the artwork or subtly integrated into the design.
- Encourage students to think about how the textures and qualities of natural materials add meaning to their words.

Cultural Foundations: Briena Harmening



Briena Harmening. *Never Burnout*, 2024. Fuses and thread on burned antique quilt; 38 x 30 in. Courtesy of the artist. © Briena Harmening

Briena Harmening combines humor, critique, and Southern identity in her transformed domestic and recycled textiles. She sews, quilts, screenprints, even burns text onto nostalgic materials like quilts, kaftans, tarps, and tablecloths. Her pieces play with word spacing, repetition, and masking, creating visual puzzles that challenge how viewers process text. Harmening's work is rooted in Southern storytelling and draws from familial sayings, regional politics, and the complexities of inherited traditions. Raised in Tennessee by a grandmother who was a seamstress and a mother who was a needleworker, she considers her work a collaboration with the women who originally crafted the textiles she deconstructs and reimagines.

Discussion Questions

- Pretend you're a detective. What can you guess or what do you wonder about the family traditions or culture represented in *Never Burnout*? What clues do you see that inform your guess?
- Why might an artist mix traditional and modern styles and techniques, as Brienna Harmening does in her work?
- What do you notice about how the words are formatted in *Never Burnout*? How might this arrangement help add to the meaning of the artwork?

Cultural Foundations: Beizar Aradini

Beizar Aradini. *in the shifting ground, I found the shape of my mother's voice*, 2025. Polyester, cotton, and amulets; 51 x 27 1/2 in. Courtesy of the artist. © 2026 Beizar Aradini. Photo: Eugene Tang

Beizar Aradini creates fiber-based work that considers her family's history and tells stories of survival and belonging. Born in a Kurdish refugee camp after her family fled persecution in Iraq, Aradini immigrated to Nashville as a young child in 1992. (Nashville is home to the largest community of ethnic Kurds in the US—as of 2023, the estimated population was twenty thousand.)

Aradini's practice honors her family's Kurdish heritage and reflects the broader history of Kurdish resilience in the face of statelessness. She recreates scenes drawn from family photographs using traditional Kurdish embroidery and weaving techniques, maintaining ties to her community and culture of origin.

Discussion Questions

- How do these artworks explore ideas about community, family, or identity?
- How does learning about this artwork make you think about your own identity or community?
- Spend time closely examining the artwork with students by asking: What do you notice? What do you wonder? Next, share the title of the piece, *in the shifting ground, I found the shape of my mother's voice*. Explain that the artist uses traditional weaving and embroidery techniques connected to her Kurdish heritage and that she aims to tell stories about survival and belonging. Ask students: what new things do you notice or wonder about this artwork after learning a bit about the artist's background and influences?

Activity: Memory Threads (Inspired by Beizar Aradini)

Step 1: Select a Photo
Ask students to submit a photograph that holds meaning for their family, culture, or personal identity. Print copies they can manipulate later with art supplies. It could be:

- A family photo
- A picture of a place that is important to them
- A snapshot from a meaningful event or experience
- A photo of a special object that represents a memory

If students don't have access to their own photos, they can also search for a photo online of a place, object, or cultural practice that evokes a special memory from their life.

Step 2: Reflect on the Memory
Students spend a few minutes writing or sketching details about the memories connected to the photo. Encourage students to think about why this image is important—the story or memory it represents. Here are some prompts:

- What was happening at the time this photo was made?
- Who was there with you, and how did you feel?
- Are there details from your memory that the photo doesn't show?
- How does this memory connect to your family, culture, or personal identity?

Step 3: Create Your Artwork

- Attach your copied photo to a surface (paper, cardboard, wood, or fabric).
- Surround, layer, or combine the photo with drawings, symbols, or textures inspired by your memory. Aim to visually connect your photo with your personal story or experience by collaging symbols into your artwork.
- Draw or paint patterns or designs that express emotions or reflect cultural heritage. You can also use lines, shapes, or abstract marks to show movement, time, or relationships.
- Consider incorporating collage materials such as small objects, cutouts, or threads.

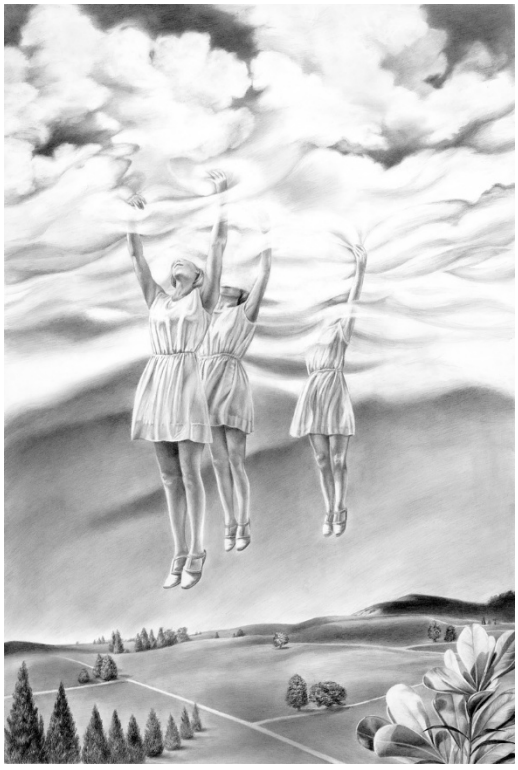
Step 4: Reflect

- Students share their work with peers in pairs or small groups. Optional: Students may develop a title for their artwork that complements the memory that inspired it. Suggested discussion question: How does the photo, your added imagery, and your title work together to reflect your story?

Scenes and Dreams

The notion of place can extend beyond our everyday reality. The artists featured in this section blend the familiar with the unexpected to create dreamlike worlds that explore such topics as history, disruption, and transformation. Ashley Doggett positions civil rights figures from the past and the present together in her work, paying tribute to the fight for social equality and underscoring persistence in the face of injustice. Shannon Cartier Lucy turns ordinary activities into surreal moments; in one work, a woman reads on the couch, not noticing that it is on fire. Inspired by magazines from the 1940s and '50s, Marilyn Murphy's precisely rendered graphite drawings and paintings set otherwise familiar scenes in impossible settings, such as among the clouds, imbuing them with a sense of the uncanny. Paintings by Emily Weiner and Karen Seapker feature a range of recognizable elements ranging from gothic architecture to plants and human hands, but their stylization adds a distinct otherworldliness.

Marilyn Murphy is a professor emerita of art at Vanderbilt University, where she taught from 1980 until 2017. She is known for her meticulously rendered paintings and drawings of women in clothing and domestic environments inspired by those of the 1940s and '50s. As seen in these drawings of women floating within cloudscapes, her scenes always incorporate unrealistic or improbable details, and she typically obscures her protagonists' faces. Her film noir–like compositions often feature wildfires, tornadoes (she grew up in the Great Plains' "Tornado Alley"), and flying objects or people that may inspire curiosity and give her work a mysterious quality.



Marilyn Murphy. *Air and Dreams*, 2020. Graphite on paper; 44 x 30 in. Collection of Eliot Michael, Nashville. © 2025 Marilyn Murphy

Discussion Questions

- As a group, observe quietly. Then ask students these Visual Thinking Strategy (VTS) questions: What's going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that? What more can we find?
- Why do you think Marilyn Murphy chose to hide the faces of the figures in her work? Why might an artist reveal some details while keeping others hidden? How does this affect the mood or meaning of the artwork?

- If you could view this scene from another angle (for example, from above the clouds or from farther away), what additional details would you be most curious to see?

Scenes and Dreams: Karen Seapker

Karen Seapker. *You are Spring*, 2023. Oil on canvas; 72 x 48 in. Collection of Sasha and Charlie Sealy. © Karen Seapker. Photo: Sam Angel

Karen Seapker's paintings employ strong geometric patterns, and her dynamic, gestural style embraces movement and alludes to the power of human relationships and the natural environment. Many of the paintings Seapker has produced since 2020 are seasonal scenes drawn from her backyard garden, located just outside her studio, which she credits as a sanctuary and a teacher in relation to our greater world. Seapker draws parallels between painting and gardening—both require a balance between controlled action and attentive observation. She sees painting, like the garden she tends, as a practice to give herself over to continuously.

Discussion Questions

- What do you notice about the geometric patterns and gestures in Seapker's paintings? How do they create a sense of movement?
- Both gardening and painting teach Karen Seapker about balancing action and observation. What hobbies or practices do you enjoy, and what do they teach you? Can you find any similarities between the lessons you learn from your various activities?

Scenes and Dreams: Ashley Doggett

Ashley Doggett's practice confronts issues surrounding race, religion, gender, and class by exploring aspects of the Black American experience. Doggett's works on view in *In Her Place* reflect upon the history of Nashville as a site of political activism in the 1960s, highlighting the student-led sit-ins during the civil rights movement, including in this work featuring John Lewis.

Ashley Doggett. *John*, 2024. Sumi ink on cotton board; 20 x 16 in. Courtesy of the artist. © 2026 Ashley Doggett. Photo: John Schweikert

Through painting and drawing, Doggett incorporates personal memories and familial stories with historical references to unflinchingly address the United States' racist history. Her use of vivid color, symbolic elements, and references to local landmarks recontextualize ideas about the American South and offer a critique of oppressive systems. She depicts unapologetic, self-aware subjects with a sense of agency, and her work honors those who fought for social equality and equity. Doggett places family members with figures of recent history within the civil rights context, emphasizing their persistence against past and present injustices. Exploring the intersection of the civil rights movement and the formative role of African Americans in American history, Doggett situates her practice within the larger discourse on race in the US.

Discussions Questions

- When looking at art about historical figures, think about the story the artist is sharing about a moment in time. In this artwork depicting civil rights leader John Lewis, what story do you think Ashley Dodgett is telling, and what feelings does she show? What details in *John* contribute to the story?
- What do you think might have happened moments before this scene? What do you see that makes you say that?

Activity: Multiple Perspectives—Art and Primary Sources (Inspired by Ashley Doggett)

Objective

Students will:

1. Observe and describe visual details in a work of art.
2. Investigate the historical context of the artwork, connecting it to real people, events, and movements.
3. Compare the artistic representation of history with primary historical sources, such as texts or photographs, and explore how the perspectives of the artist or the creators of the historical sources influence our personal understanding of history.
4. Reflect on how our understanding of history is shaped by the perspectives of those who interpret history.

Supplies

- Reproductions or projections of Ashley Doggett's paintings that reference Nashville civil rights–era history
- Access to research materials (books, articles, or internet access)
- Optional: Handout with guidance on research and organizing findings

Instructions

Step One: Observation and Description

- Students choose one of Doggett's paintings to observe closely. Ask students to describe in detail what they notice:
    - People, objects, gestures, colors, or expressions
    - Emotions or actions depicted
    - Any symbols, text, or contextual clues that stand out in the painting
- Tip for discussing with younger students: Examine one artwork together as a group and guide a discussion by asking "What do you notice?" and "What do you wonder?"

Step Two: Research Historical Context

- Explain that Doggett's paintings are inspired by real events and figures from the civil rights movement.
- Students research the real-world people, places, or events depicted in the artwork. Encourage them to find a variety of primary and secondary sources, including text-based documentation and historical photographs. For younger students, provide preselected, age-appropriate readings and materials to guide their research.
- Students record key information including dates, locations, and significance.
- Students reflect:
    - How does the artist represent history or memory?

    - How does this representation compare to historical texts or photographs?
    - What perspectives, opinions, or narratives might influence both artistic and historical representations?
- Tip for younger students: Simplify guiding language. For example: What story is the painting telling? How is it the same or different from looking at a historical photo?
- Tip for older students: Encourage analysis of perspective, bias in primary and secondary sources, and artistic interpretation.

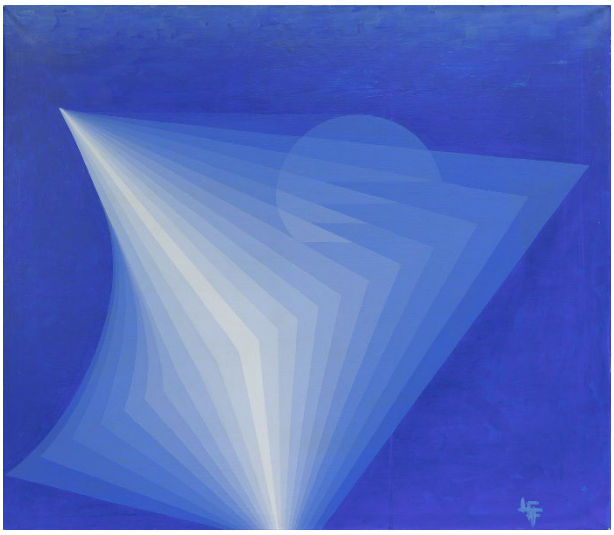
Step Three: Group Reflection

- Have students share their observations, research findings, and creative responses in pairs, small groups, or as a class.
- Discuss how art can be a lens for understanding history, emotion, and memory, complementing but differing from traditional historical sources.

Resource Recommendation: To continue learning about John Lewis and the civil rights movement through artistic depictions, students may want to read the graphic novel *March: Book One* by John Lewis, Andrew Aydin, and Nate Powell (Top Shelf Productions, 2013).

Patterns and Abstraction

Some artists embrace abstraction, stripping away representational details to focus on formal exploration, as we see below in LiFran Fort's *Indigo Sunrise*. In works featured in *In Her Place*, Carol Mode uncovers, reconstructs, and reorganizes her surfaces with rich colors, shapes, and lines that interact with textured brush strokes in their backgrounds. While they share an abstract language of complex geometric patterns, rich tactile surfaces, and vibrant colors, works in this section express a variety of themes. Sisavanh Phouthavong Houghton's dynamic compositions of saturated colors, undulating lines, and fragmented forms refer to her experiences as a Laotian refugee and to the chaos and disruption of war. Evoking memory and family, the patterns in Kelly S. Williams's carefully rendered tondos are derived from her late grandmother's collection of domestic textiles.



LiFran Fort. *Indigo Sunrise*, 1985. Acrylic on canvas; 42 1/2 x 48 in. Courtesy of the artist. © LiFran Fort. Photo: John Schweikert

LiFran Fort's paintings and drawings reflect her decades of dedication to learning, teaching, and the arts. As an undergraduate, Fort studied at Fisk University with the renowned Harlem Renaissance artist Aaron Douglas, and she returned there to teach art in 1985. For more than forty years, Fort has taught art at Fisk, where she has been named Teacher of the Year four times, and was inducted into the university's Teachers Hall of Fame in the 1990s. Before her time at Fisk, she taught art at Washington Junior High School, Nashville, and was a staff lecturer in the Museum Education Department at the Art Institute of Chicago.

The semitransparent shapes and figures in Fort's paintings show Aaron Douglas's influence on her artistic practice. Much of Fort's work tells personal stories while advocating for women's rights and evolving perspectives of Blackness. In many of her paintings, including *Indigo Sunrise*, she sees the light she paints emanating from darkness as a symbol of the intrinsic good she finds in a dim world.

Discussion Questions

- If you could step inside this artwork, what would it feel like?
- If you could add one additional color, what would it be and why? How would it change the way this painting feels?

Activity: Abstracted Sunlight and Color Theory (Inspired by LiFran Fort)

Objectives

In this STEAM-based activity, students explore how both artists and scientists study light and color. Using *Indigo Sunrise* by LiFran Fort as inspiration, students will:

- Describe how sunlight allows us to see color.
- Understand and apply key color theory concepts: hue, tint, tone, and shade.
- Experiment with color mixing to create abstract sunrise or sunset artworks that represent the effects of light and atmosphere.

Materials

- Printed or Project image of *Indigo Sunrise* by LiFran Fort
- White paper or canvas
- Pencils
- White, black, and color paints
- Paint brushes
- Mixing trays or palettes

Instructions

Step One: Introduction—Seeing Color Through Light
Begin by explaining that sunlight is made up of many colors of light. When sunlight shines on an object, some wavelengths are absorbed and others are reflected. Those reflected wavelengths are what we perceive as color. Artists often take inspiration from how changes in light, such as sunrise or sunset, affect the colors we see.

Step Two: While viewing *Indigo Sunrise* by LiFran Fort, discuss:

- What do you notice about how Fort uses color in this painting?
- How do the light and color make you feel?
- What connections can you make between how sunlight appears in nature and how Fort has represented it in this abstract painting?

Step Three: Explore Color Theory Vocabulary
Introduce and define the following color theory terms:

- Hue: A pure base color such as red, blue, or yellow, without any addition of white, black, or gray.
- Tint: A hue lightened by adding white. Tints often appear softer or more pastel.
- Tone: A hue modified by adding gray (a mix of black and white), making it appear more muted.
- Shade: A hue darkened by adding black. Shades often appear deeper or richer.

After introducing these color theory terms, ask students to identify which describe the colors LiFran Fort is using in *Indigo Sunrise*. Point out how the variations of indigo hues and tints are used to evoke the glow of morning light.

Step Four: Create an Abstract Sunrise or Sunset Artwork
Students will:

- Select a base hue that they feel represents either a sunrise or sunset.
- Experiment with mixing paints to create tints, tones, and shades of that hue.
- Create a final abstract artwork that captures the mood of sunrise or sunset.

Tip for younger students: Focus on one hue and its tints (similar to *Indigo Sunrise*) before exploring the mixing of hues, tones, and shades.

Additional STEAM Extensions and Connections

- Science and the Physics of Color: Demonstrate how mixing light differs from mixing paint by comparing paint color blending with light color blending. Use a flashlight and colored transparencies, or a digital color-mixing tool, to show how light mixing adds color while paint mixing subtracts color. This shows that light and pigment behave differently, scientifically these are known as additive and subtractive color mixing.
    - Mixing light adds color: combining red, green, and blue light creates white light.
    - Mixing paint subtracts color: combining pigments absorbs more light, producing darker colors.
- Math and Measurements: Have students record the exact proportions of hue, tint, tone, and shades they mix together and use. They can measure paint amounts and, after using the paint, discuss how small changes in proportions affect visual outcomes.
- Science and History: Share that Sir Isaac Newton first established the foundations of color theory in 1666 when he used a prism to separate sunlight into the visible spectrum and subsequently formed the modern color wheel.

Step Five: Reflection and Discussion
Invite students to display their work and reflect:

- How did changing the tint, tone, or shade affect the mood of your artwork?
- What connections can you make between how artists and scientists study light and color?

In Her Place: Nashville Artists in the Twenty-First Century

January 29–April 26, 2026 ● Ingram Gallery

Organized by the Frist Art Museum and cocurated by Sai Clayton, independent curator and artist; Katie Delmez, Frist Art Museum senior curator; and Shaun Giles, Frist Art Museum community engagement director

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