



Bisa Butler: Weaving the Stories of African Americans, Their History, Ancestry, and Culture



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Portrait of Artist Bisa Butler

Katonah Museum of Art

ARTS ACTIVE

Katonah Museum of Art located in Katonah, NY is an undeniably unique museum. KMA is non-collecting institution, ensuring there will always be a diverse range art and artists on display, and new stories being told.

The KMA is dedicated to presenting art from all cultures and time periods. The flexibility of the exhibition programs is what make this art museum distinct.

KMA is also the site of Bisa Butler's first solo exhibition.

Bisa Butler: **Portraits** is a phenomenal display of the unlimited possibilities of art. Butler is a fiber artist, trading canvas and paint brushes in for fabrics and sewing needles.

Step inside the studio of Bisa Butler as she discusses her background and artistic process, take a **virtual tour** of the *Portraits* exhibition, **view a slideshow**, and even **watch Butler** as she creat fiber art.

Butler is a storyteller for African American history and culture. She weaves portraits on to quilts, portraits of people who have long passed, and those who are often unnamed. The subjects are ordinary people, but their existence was and still is important. Through her fiber art, Butler is acknowledging their presence in history and bringing their lives and stories into our contemporary age.

Narratives can often be skewed by those who want to control them. Throughout history African American culture and stories have been ignored and often misrepresented. *Portraits* is one way the narrative can be told freely and without prejudice.

Looking through vintage black and white photographs, Butler finds her subjects. These photographs then get turned into quilted portraiture, teeming with textures, colors, and personality.

At first glance, the quilts look like they have been painted. Paint is never used. Instead hundreds of fabrics are stitched together to make the portraits.

It can take up to 200 hours for Butler to complete these intricate quilts.

The fabrics themselves carry meaning. Butler's choice of motifs, embellishments and patterning in African textiles represents her Ghanaian descent and cultural background.

Butler's fabrics are world travelers. The [artist](#) uses African fabrics from her father's homeland of Ghana, batiks from Nigeria, and prints from South Africa. These quilts are reminiscent of traditional African American quilts, and also representative of Africa.

Working with chiffon, cotton, satin, silk and lace the meticulous process leaves us with captivating art.

[Butler discusses](#) how quilting is rooted in African American history. As enslaved people were forcibly brought to these lands and needed to keep warm, they would take scraps of fabrics, creating quilts from all they had.

A means of survival turned into a tradition, an aesthetic.

The quilted portraits are breathtaking. With their beauty unquestioned, this is an important moment to see past the vibrant colors and into the stories created around each image.

Butler's fiber art is created to give African ancestry back to its people and to give ancestors their rightful place in the story of America. Correcting the misinformation that has spread throughout history with artistic methods.

In a recent announcement, the *Portraits* exhibition will finally be opening to the public July 2

visitors can read the safety measures put in place and purchase a timed entry ticket [here](#). Tickets are available for purchase starting July 26th until August 30, 2020.

If you are wanting even more of Bisa Butler, KMA is hosting the event [Bisa Butler: Live in Conversation](#) on Sunday August 2 from 4:00-5:30 PM. This event will be a virtual conversation between KMA Executive Director Michael Gitlitz and Butler as she discusses her work and influences. [Register for the event](#) at \$5 a ticket, all proceeds from ticket sales and donations will be contributed to [Black Lives Matter](#).

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Southside Sunday Morning, 2018, Silk and cotton, 73 x 109 in. (185.4 x 276.8 cm), Courtesy of the Bill and Christy Gautreaux Collection, Kansas City, Missouri

