

# Unspoken Voices



Honoring the Legacy of Black America

An exhibition by:



Featuring:

**Sheila Prevost,**

**Rachel Sydlowski with Marquise Foster,**

and

**Gwendolyn Black with Wilma Ann Sealy**

As we embark on a new exhibition in collaboration with three local artists, each moved by the subject matter of the research that the Dyckman Farmhouse Museum has been doing on the people that were enslaved on the Dyckman Farm, there are so many factors at play. We are in the midst of a global pandemic and the racial injustices in this country have reached a tipping point. Now more than ever, we at the Dyckman Farmhouse Museum feel that it is imperative that we continue to expand upon the narrative that we tell at the museum. We are so happy to have Gwendolyn Black, Sheila Prevost and Rachel Sydlowski here to react to these previously untold and important stories in their own way.

Meredith Horsford  
Executive Director

## First Floor Hallway

### Sheila Prevost

*Humanity VS Insanity*

#1

*Forces of Harmony*

2020

18 x 24 Mix Medium on Paper

The price of freedom is a loss of physical life.

An enslaved African beginning phase into an angel.

#2

*Ancestral Angel*

2020

18 x 24 Mix Medium on Paper

Free from the burden of the slave owners

bond;

nature welcomes another angel.

#3

*Dreams Reimagined*

2020

Video Montague Projection.

Companion: Words +

Music Song Unsung via QR code

### Gwendolyn Black, Creator

Clothing By Wilma Ann Sealy

*My Soul Sings of Freedom*(tm)

2020

Life Size Figures, paint, fabric and other materials

Music By Emme Kemp

Lyrics Written by Milton Polsky

*Like Leaves*

Revamped 2020

Singing and Music

## Parlor

### Rachel Sydlowski and Marquise Foster

*Assembly of Ciphers*

Rachel Sydlowski

*Assembly of Ciphers*

2020

Screenprint collage, hand printed upholstery,

vintage chairs and table, acrylic paint,

cardboard,

UV-A light,

Marquise Foster

*Ceremonial Clothing*

2020

Gown; black embroidered lace with small crystals throughout the gown and gloves

Suit; black heavy shin satin cotton paired with a white high neck cotton shirt and a pair of high waist satin cotton pants

## Relic Room

### Sheila Prevost

*Humanity VS Insanity*

#4

*Hope Through Contrast*

2020

30x30 Mix Medium on Paper

Enslaved African man bearing his scarred back of the dark pain forced upon him.

Yet, holding onto hope as he builds the foundation of NYC — Brick by Brick.

## Second Floor Hallway

### Sheila Prevost

*Humanity VS Insanity*

#5

*Burial Ground of Human Nature*

*(an enslaved elderly mans face morphed)*

2020

16 x 20 Acrylic On Canvas

A portrayal of man and nature as one... although a human life is gone, the spirit lives on everywhere.

#6

*Hands in the Soil*

*(Portrait of a Enslaved African American Women)*

2020

16 x 20 Etching on Metallic

This African woman on foreign land has seen too much ugliness here; still she holds her head up with pride singing songs softly within.

#7

*"Uburu" Last Enslaved*

2020

16 x 20 Etching on Metallic

Uhuru is Swahili for Freedom -

Portrait of a proud African man who reveals a glimmer of hope in his eyes. He knows who he is deep inside and refuses to be broken.

## Second Floor Bedroom

### Gwendolyn Black, Creator

Clothing By Wilma Ann Sealy

*My Soul Sings of Freedom*(tm)

2020

Life Size Figures, paint, fabric and other materials

Music By Emme Kemp

Lyrics Written by Milton Polsky

Like Leaves

Revamped 2020

Singing and Music

## Winter Kitchen

### **Gwendolyn Black, Creator**

Clothing By Wilma Ann Sealy

*My Soul Sings of Freedom*(tm)

2020

Life Size Figures, paint, fabric and other materials

Music By Emme Kemp

Lyrics Written by Milton Polsky

Like Leaves

Revamped 2020

Singing and Music

## Artist Work Statements

### **Sheila Prevost**

As an African American artist, it's essential for me to present a visual narrative which reflects not only the inhuman conditions of slavery, but also the strength, will, contributions and unspeakable dreams that were deferred to future generations. The enslaved Africans countless sacrifices, strength and resilience laid the groundwork for us to be the possibility of free and equal people. In order to fully eradicate racism; we must continue the exploration and conservation of the past which will lead us to healthy resolutions.

It is my honor to be a part of an exhibition which shines a light on the contributions of the African enslaved in New York and across the nation. I hope their dreams for freedom in spite of the contrast and heretic levels of cruelty and complexities encourage us all to expect better of ourselves and one another.

My Process: In the past year, I have created a series of integrated textured; mix mediums; hand drawn portraits. As an add-on, in addition I created a musical composition to accompany the artwork. The body of work entitled "Play on Culture and Play on Ritual" series serves as the foundation regarding style for "Humanity Vs Insanity" artwork in Unspoken Voices: Honoring the Legacy of Black America Exhibition at the Dyckman Farmhouse Museum.

### **Rachel Sydlowski with Marquise Foster**

Intervening with the architectural spaces of The Dyckman Farmhouse, Assembly of Ciphers inverts the systemic power and social structure of the front parlor from a leisure space for the Dyckman family into a space honoring and recognizing the lives of enslaved peoples of Upper Manhattan and those enslaved by the Dyckman family. Spaces such as these, force us to question history. How can we know the past? How do we connect with those who walked the land we now walk? What were their lives like? The viewer is bestowed the task of deciphering the past; to unearth the fragments, to interpret a code.

In their first collaboration together, artists Rachel Sydlowski and Marquise Foster negotiate with existing architecture, furniture, and decorative objects. Replacing the portraits of the Dyckman family is a collection of Dutch floral prints with hidden images revealed with UV-A light. Beneath each framed image is a collection of ceremonial or mourning clothes, a formal dress and suit by Marquise Foster. The conceptual framing of this clothing and its role as a false artifact presented as

fact, folds the past and present together. Printed flora and fauna, native, medicinal and popular garden plants are printed in cobalt blue, connecting with the pastoral and decorative imagery of the hearth's delft tiles. Adding to this transformation, artist Rachel Sydlowki, overprints in an invisible ultraviolet medium. Native plants from the ancestral lands of the enslaved, excerpts from documents, names of the enslaved and other cryptic symbols of are hidden throughout the room. To view these invisible images, visitors must investigate and search with the aid of a blacklight or UV-A lantern. Chairs from different historical periods form a circle in the center of the parlor signifying an assembly or meeting place.

Activation of the space allows visitors to consider the lives of the slaves and their untold histories by assembling in the same space that was once occupied by the original dwellers. By inhabiting the parlor and engaging with the past the complex code of history is activated. Rather than restoring lost histories the act of being present lays the groundwork in moving forward in becoming gifted architects of a more just and perfect future.

## **Gwendolyn Black with Wilma Ann Sealy**

As an artist, I create art to inspire and heal audiences. I see my art as a beacon of light into the past and inspiration into the future. I am motivated by people, world happenings and my deep spiritual beliefs. Through my collection of “My Soul Sings of Freedom” I aim to show the humanity of our enslaved ancestors who were, at this time in history, viewed as not human. Despite their suffering and bondage our enslaved ancestors were able to share their love with one another and remain hopeful that one day they would be free from bondage. Through my collection “My Soul Sings of Freedom,” I aim to bring to life several figures which represent what life was like at this time in America and on the Dyckman Farmhouse. Despite their conditions our enslaved ancestors were able to contribute greatly to the growth of America with their inventions, knowledge, food, and produce brought here from Africa—a legacy not to be forgotten.

Each figure, which is full life, is created using mixed mediums (paint, fabric and other materials). With assistance from Mrs. Wilma Ann Sealy, a well-respected designer and seamstress, we aim to capture daily life which includes fashion as worn during that time to give an important understanding of the history of life in America dating back to the 1800s. And with the music of Broadway Composer and Pianist Emme Kemp and written by Dr. Milton Polsky “Like Leaves” (which will be played during the exhibition to highlight the feelings of known slaves Blossom and Francis Cudjoe, who was ultimately given his freedom) the song captures the feelings of sadness and hope that is still a sentiment in Black America up until today.

Throughout my career, I have used my artistic talents to uplift our communities through the arts. I feel art bridges cultures and enables us to see the world around us. I am happy to be a part of Unspoken Voices: Honoring The Legacy of Black America and to bring to life the voices of our ancestors.



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