An exhibition presented by the World Bank Art Program in partnership with the Diversity and Inclusion Office and in collaboration with the International Finance Corporation African American Employee Resource Group, the World Bank Group Staff African American Association, and the US Executive Directors Office.

**September 19 – November 19, 2018**

The World Bank Group
Fabric and textile art from across the world embodies a bold delicacy—one that shows a homely, yet global perspective, and emits a personal, yet communal energy. Whether it is the fineness of the medium or the association with the hand-made, textile and fabric arts truly are a style all their own. The World Bank Group's art collection includes stunning examples of such artworks: 19th century Indian-artisan applique cotton works, contemporary quilts from the Philippines, and delicate works from Kyrgyz Republic, Uzbekistan, Georgia, Turkmenistan, Sierra Leone, Central African Republic, Senegal, and Central America. We are delighted to now launch an exhibition showcasing how African-American artists harness the power of this medium to deepen an understanding of the African-American social and political history—both the beauty and the immense hardship. This exhibition is also exciting as it is one of the first related to a donor country to the World Bank Group.

The artistry in Confronting History shows great intentionality in considerations of individual identity, communal culture, and the defining hallmarks of an African-American heritage. Artist Karen McKie takes inspiration from her family of women who labored as domestics, factory, and service workers. She observes how “each of these women seriously mined their respective roles as ‘culture bearers’.” Her doll artworks are an “ongoing reflection on these ‘house shoe heroes’, the lives that they touched, and cultures they have turned over and enriched.” Michael Cummings synthesizes folk art, African art, and jazz to create works that celebrate moments such as the Harlem jazz scene, or that confront the harsh reality of the sharecropper system. For Carole Harris, what began as an interest in making functional quilts turned into a love of using the scraps to create abstract pieces. Her practice grew to focus on the beauty of that which is left over, discarded, or frayed. Carolyn Mazloomi sees a very particular power of the quilted medium. Dr. Mazloomi observes that it is cloth which first touches us at birth, and which lastly touches us at death. Her works deepen viewers understanding of nuanced historical, political, and social conditions by harnessing the medium's ability to warmly draw viewers in through its “language of familiarity.” These examples are just a small sampling of the range of perspectives this exhibition showcases, and the depth of introspection this exhibition invites. In total, there are eleven artists on view: Alice Beasley, Carolyn Crump, Michael Cummings, Carole Harris, Cynthia Lockhart, Coleman Marion, Carolyn Mazloomi, Karen McKie, April Shipp, Jim Smoote, and Valerie White.

We are thrilled to present this exhibition in partnership with the Diversity and Inclusion Office of the World Bank Group. And, we would like to extend a heartfelt thanks to our collaborator, Margaret Dimond, who introduced us to these artists in the first place, and set the foundation for a true opportunity of cultural enrichment.

Juliana Biondo
ASSISTANT CURATOR, THE WORLD BANK ART PROGRAM

Exhibition curated by Juliana Biondo, Assistant Curator, and Marina Galvani, Curator, the World Bank Art Program
MANAGER, WORLD BANK GROUP DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION OFFICE

Alison Cave

When the Art Program announced the Confronting History exhibition, the World Bank Group Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Office saw an opportunity to leverage the program to showcase and celebrate African American history and culture. To coincide with the exhibition, which runs from mid-September to mid-November, the D&I Office is planning a series of events in coordination with the IFC African American Employee Resource Group and the World Bank Group/IMF Staff African American Association. The events also tie into the commemoration of the UN International Decade for People of African Descent which aims to highlight the important contributions made by people of African descent to our societies and to propose concrete measures to promote their full inclusion.

Art is a powerful way of storytelling, and the Confronting History exhibition illustrates the history, culture, beauty, and the struggles of the African American experience. We hope that all who experience the art exhibition will come away with a deeper appreciation of the rich cultural heritage of African Americans as seen through the eyes of these inspiring artists.

“We are pleased to partner with the D&I Office on this event, and other events being planned from now until mid-November, to celebrate the African American experience. While the African American culture is a unique set of experiences which we hope comes through in this exhibition, as with all cultures there are many similarities. We hope you appreciate the uniqueness but also find the common themes on which all cultures are based: Tradition, Family, Community, Respect and Struggle. We then realize that despite our uniqueness, we have a lot more in common than meets the eye.”

Douglas Grayson
PRESIDENT, IFC AFRICAN AMERICAN EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUP


The World Bank Art Program, founded in 1997, works at the intersection of global development, social awareness, and contemporary art. The Art Program maintains a robust schedule of monthly exhibitions that highlight development issues such as child labor and human trafficking, celebrate countries economic achievements, and tackle sensitive global emergencies such as climate change and gender-based violence. Additionally, the Art Program manages, and protects, the permanent art collection of the World Bank, which encompasses over 5,800 international works of art. These works tell the stories of personal and communal struggles and hopes experienced across the globe as we work towards our goal of fighting extreme poverty, and boosting shared prosperity.

Confronting History

Contemporary Fabrics and the African-American Experience
