



North Carolina Museum of Art

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 11, 2022

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Lost in Transition to Open in Wilmington, NC

Exhibition pulls forward the past, honoring a legacy of Black educators and examining their methods of teaching and preparing students for the world around them

Raleigh, NC—Michael S. Williams, consultant and Black On Black Project founder, presents [*Lost in Transition*](#), an art experience that celebrates the history of 20th-century Black educators from New Hanover County’s Wilmington, NC, on view July 21 through September 25, 2022. Using portraiture and performance, the project shares the educators’ profound influence before and after desegregation, evoking memories of both eras. The exhibition features charcoal portraits by Durham artist [Alexandria P. Clay](#) of Black educators who empowered generations of students to strive for academic excellence, and it presents performance art that highlights how Black educators cared for and taught their students.

“There was something about the way this generation of educators had to advocate for their students,” said Williams. “While living in a Jim Crow world themselves, educators continued the tradition of affirming their students’ culture and humanity while making sure they were solid academically. This helped students gain confidence in who they were and provided the necessary tools to navigate society.”

The project asserts there was something exceptional about Black institutions. Developed from educator oral histories and research spanning eight decades, and created in response to current New Hanover County student performance data from [Cape Fear Collective](#), NC School Report Cards, and [ProPublica](#), *Lost in Transition* celebrates the Black educational past, continues a dialogue about present learning conditions, and explores ideas to create equitable education. Despite being segregated in under-resourced facilities, these educators encouraged their students to thrive both academically and culturally. Building upon Black



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pride and deep communal relationships, schools and educators instilled a collective responsibility for success in their students so they could navigate the world around them. Then, integrated by court order into unsupportive environments devoid of familiar culture, students “lost a lot in that transition,” recalled Wilmington native and longtime educator Lethia S. Hankins in an oral history interview from the University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNCW).

Lost in Transition features portraits of ten Wilmington educators who taught in and led segregated and desegregated schools. Artist Clay employs a fluid and expressive wet charcoal technique that allows her to convey how fleeting our most precious memories can feel. At the same time, the heavy contrast of the pigmented black medium on white paper communicates a lasting impact and a determination to keep those memories alive. A charcoal and mixed-media collage artist, Clay received her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the Rhode Island School of Design. Her work reflects on the challenges of navigating everyday spaces as a Black woman and celebrates the tenderness that provides comfort in these difficult environments.

Lost in Transition the Performance uses oral history excerpts from Wilmington students and educators, sourced from the Randall Library Oral History Collection at UNCW and the Behind the Veil series from the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Duke University. Featuring UNCW theater students Addison Hamlet, Malik Fowler, and Khori Talley, the performance shares the impact and experience of Black educators as they navigated desegregation. Hamlet is a senior and a performance theater major from Reidsville, NC; Fowler grew up in Wilmington and is a junior majoring in theater with a concentration in performance; and Talley, raised primarily in Durham, is a sophomore majoring in theater with a concentration in performance.

This exhibition and related events are free; registration is required for specific events. The exhibition will be open July 21 to September 25, 2022, on Thursdays and Fridays from 3 to 7 pm and Saturdays and Sundays from noon to 4 pm at 210 Princess St., Wilmington. An opening event will be held at 6 pm on Thursday, July 21, and the exhibition will be open for Fourth Fridays on July 22, August 26, and September 23 from 6 to 9 pm. For information about events, visit lostintransition.art/events.

This exhibition is presented in partnership with the [North Carolina Museum of Art](#) (NCMA) and funded by the William R. Kenan Jr. Charitable Trust.

Image Caption:

Alexandria P. Clay, *B. Constance O’Dell*, 1953, charcoal on paper, 30 × 24 in.; photography by K. Malinofski and C. Ciccone

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About Curator Michael S. Williams

North Carolina native Michael S. Williams is a consultant and founder of the Black On Black Project, an organization that produces art exhibitions and short films that address issues affecting communities across the state. A graduate of North Carolina Central University, Williams spent 15 years working in media as a designer, writer, and community builder. This project is in partnership with the North Carolina Museum of Art and is made possible through funding from the William R. Kenan Jr. Charitable Trust.

About the North Carolina Museum of Art

The North Carolina Museum of Art's collection spans more than 5,000 years, from antiquity to the present, making the institution one of the premier art museums in the South. The Museum's collection provides educational, aesthetic, intellectual, and cultural experiences for the citizens of North Carolina and beyond. The 164-acre Museum Park showcases the connection between art and nature through site-specific works of environmental art. The Museum offers changing special exhibitions, classes, lectures, family activities, films, and concerts.

The Museum is located at 2110 Blue Ridge Road in Raleigh and is home to the People's Collection. It is the art museum of the State of North Carolina, under the auspices of Governor Roy Cooper; an agency of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, guided by the direction of Secretary D. Reid Wilson; and led by Director Valerie Hillings.