

Eleanor Norcross Story

There are thousands of museums all over the world and some of the most popular museums contain famous images and well known artists' pieces, which draws a constant audience to the museum to come and check it out. There is a museum located in the center of Fitchburg, MA that Eleanor Norcross helped create and fund. The artist, Eleanor Norcross, was born and raised in Fitchburg. She has helped pave the way for women artists. Her pieces have been in several museums as well as one of the best museums in the world, the Louvre, in Paris, France. I asked Natasha, a local citizen of Fitchburg, her opinion on how she feels about having a famous and successful artist like Eleanor Norcross being raised in Fitchburg. "I have been there, I've gone as a kid and also have gone in the last year to check out a few exhibits for an art class I was taking. As a kid, I don't remember much when going there but when I did go in the last year I was fascinated and excited about going. Going to the art museum seemed like a fun and exciting assignment that made me open my mind to new concepts of colors and textures and also the form of structures that I was exposed to. It was a great experience and I would even go again at my own will. I did not know that Eleanor had artworks in other parts of the world. I feel like I have heard of the artist but didn't know much about them. That is an exciting fact to know that her work is all over and I will definitely have to check out some of her work."

Speaking with Natasha about the museum and Norcross was eye opening to hear what she thinks of the museum. It shows that the museum was and is continuing to building a name for itself, showing people and students that the museum has much culture, history, and dedication. Eleanor Norcross had so much to offer to the community and the City of Fitchburg and is giving us an opportunity to experience her works and the works of others.

-Rebecca Chin

Global Africa Story

Global Africa at FAM is a unique cultural experience unlike other exhibits. *The Indigo Project*, by Ifé Franklin, stands out in the room, but why Indigo? Speaking with FAM's Consulting Curator, Jean Borgatti, I gained an inside scoop on the piece.

Every piece of art in that room has a lot of history behind it. There are different style indigo cloths, made with traditional to synthetic dyes and a variety of styles.

The grand piece among these clothes is a to-scale slave cabin. The door is open to guests, allowing viewers to take a look inside. Going inside the cabin, you get a feel for how small the living conditions were back in the American South years ago for enslaved people. The cabins were used primarily for sleeping quarters, since space was scarce. Days were spent outside, whether working, cooking, eating, or other activities. Cold wasn't much of a problem, so the purpose of the cabins was instead to keep out critters and negative spirits by closing the shutters.

Not only was this creation of historical significance, but it also was created with a different look. Making up the walls and roof of the cabin are pieces of dyed indigo fabric created by using the Nigerian cloth dying technique, adire. The cloths are spread over the physical wooden skeleton of the house, transforming the space into a spectacle.

Why did Ifé choose indigo? According to the artist, "Her ancestors told her to do it". She wanted to honor her ancestors working in cotton and indigo fields of the Carolinas and the American South. This piece transformed the symbol of a shameful time in world history into a community involved work of art, turning something old into something new.

In this community project, Ifé taught volunteers the process of dyeing fabric over months. These volunteers exchanged their own stories, conversing and becoming friends. The designs they created represented their modern stories while also paying homage to African ancestors. While *Project Indigo* is a piece to give your focus to, the rest of the Global Africa exhibit is packed with more artifacts to check out.

On the wall opposite from the cabin, near the metal artifacts are traditional indigo cloths. These have a dark jean color created with indigo rather than using synthetic indigo, which has a brighter more vibrant blue. The patterns of these traditional cloths were created using different methods. Cloths were tied, sewn with cloth, stitched, or painted on with starch resist. The starch created the white areas on the cloth, where the indigo color isn't. The starch is painted on to create the cloth's detailed pattern. Then, the cloth is dumped in a dye bath to get its color. Another style is batic, which is an Indian method of tie dye with paint.

Near these cloths is a jacket created by fashion designer Ade Bakare in 2015. This is a modern piece, unique from the rest, made from linen and silk. He pulled from his roots, being of Yoruba (Nigerian) descent by creating a pattern of similar appearance to adire patterns.

On the opposite wall of this room lie the Ghanaian cloths, made using Dutch wax. These cloths were described as African but not quite. They were originally invented based on Indonesian cloth patterns, but they were printed by the Dutch instead of hand made. With the printed versions, there were some flaws that deterred the Dutch from buying it. On the coast of Ghana, there were some Dutch with these cloths. The people of Ghana liked the cloth, which had appealing colors and printing flaws that seemed unique. So, they adopted the style, using these bright colors to create the Ghanaian style cloth as we know it. Clothes are still made in this style in Holland by the fashion house, Vlisco.

All of that is only part of one of the rooms in this exhibit. Take a trip to the Global Africa exhibit at the Fitchburg Art museum to visit the other artists' creations, as well as to experience old artifacts and moving sculptures while taking new knowledge of African culture with you.

I'd like to thank Jean Borgatti for meeting with me, who put together this exhibit.

-Emily Floyd

Nayda Cuevas Story

Everyone has a story whether if it's from experience or a lesson learned. Nayda's story was rooted from her family and heritage, the values and belief of what personally defined her. Nayda Cuevas was born and raised in her hometown Caguas, Puerto Rico. Nayda and her family immigrated to the States for better education and opportunities, leaving everything behind including her family members, and friends all at the age of 10. Her parents discussed with them as children about what previously happened at the grocery store, that she should still keep true to her culture, still speak Spanish at home. Her parents would do things in the children's best interest. Her parents had a large influence on her. Cuevas told us that her father was from Bridgeport, Connecticut. Her grandparents wanted to go back to the island, and that where her father met her mother. The way her parents raised her, kept her passionate about her own culture.

Prior to the States she wasn't exposed to Prejudice and Racism, these topics were not typically discussed and she didn't experience it on the island. There was this one story where she was with her family at the grocery and talking in Spanish after they recently arrived and a man behind them said speak English you're an American and later the father was talking to her "Do not let people tell you that you cannot speak Spanish. Be proud of where you are from. Be proud of your culture. We will always continue to speak Spanish in this household and yes it is important to learn English, we need to move forward" (2:50).

The Fitchburg Art Museum's latest exhibit, *People Watching: Then and Now* includes Nayda's piece, *#Latina: ReclaimingTheLatinaTag*, created in 2016. These are a set of oil paintings of various Latina women. Five years ago, Nayda created a blog. Her goal was to counteract the stereotype that Latinas are hypersexualized. She encouraged real, Latina women to post selfies to her blog. These selfies ranged from caps and gowns to first generation Latina women. The pictures were in the public domain, where anyone can post. The selfies of all the various Latina women then became a step removed. Nayda combined the digital world with portraits by creating mini paintings, 5x3

inches. This is the size of a cell phone, where the pictures would normally be seen on social media. The small paintings resonate with the tradition of miniatures, which were small portraits as well. In most of her work, her focus is on portraits and some self-portraits. Nayda even painted a self-portrait of herself among the portraits in this piece. The portraits have been hung in a line in the past for more focus on each as individual pieces, but they are currently hung as a group, to appear more like a blog on the wall. These women are seen how they want to be seen within the selfies. Emphasis is on the importance of the individual within her culture.

Her Puerto Rican heritage is what she strives to express through her artwork. Nayda has been involved in the community with Puerto Rico Relief Fundraising. After the Orlando shooting, she painted a set of portraits of the victims. Nayda's work also ties in with the Bilingual Initiative of FAM as well. By expressing diversity through the exhibits shown, the initiative is more successful. So, not only does Nayda's work artistically enhance the museum, but also ties in with the museum's mission. Labels and information throughout the museum is in both English and Spanish. FAM wants to have a way to best serve the community. The three largest spanish-speaking groups in the Fitchburg population are Puerto Rican, Dominican, and Uruguayan. FAM recently held a Uruguayan film fest yo have new diverse events to bring people in.

-Rebecca Chin and Emily Floyd

Susan White Brown Story

Susan White Brown's work is showcased in the People Watching exhibit at the Fitchburg Art Museum. She explores the idea of a person's identity through their surroundings. Susan often paints portraits with concealed faces, and it is up to the viewer for interpretation.

Susan learned the craftsmanship and techniques of art at an early age from her mother, a very creative woman. Susan, born in Germany, grew up in many places, including Hawaii and Texas as well as other locations due to her father's enrollment in the army. She attended Purdue college, where her brother also attended. Susan has always brought her identity with her, no matter where she lived or who her friends were, she found comfort in who she was. Some of her pieces include the idea of a hidden identity. She created portraits with the subject holding up a blank white rectangle, choosing what to reveal with purpose. Susan believes that one of the great joys of art is to hear what connections people make from viewing her work, rather than trying to get a specific message across. At times, she has been told she should add objects to some of her pieces to move the eye and create a scene. Some objects are placed as uncanny objects that add a mystical feel and some objects are placed to make very specific references within the painting. She doesn't necessarily get attached to her paintings, perhaps to the people she creates in a sense. She is fortunate enough to have painting be her occupation now, rather than working a job on top of it. Ultimately, she paints to have her work be in a viewed space, since that creates a whole new context for the painting. Susan describes a universal state that people experience at some point when viewing a painting. For a moment, the viewer is outside of themselves.

She drew life-size charcoal drawings for a long time before getting into painting as a medium. Before having kids, she worked for years as a graphic designer. She would go to the MFA occasionally with her son in his stroller, but then started attending a free evening class Monday nights 6-9 at the MFA: Drawing in Galleries. She began taking continuing ed. Classes at the MFA which reconnected her with art and colleagues. One class was lithography which was rigorous, and

eventually she felt as if the plate was in the way. So, instead of painting asphalt on plate, she decided to try painting. She fell in love with color, and now has been painting for six years. She took inspiration from Wayne Teboe with colorful edges and shadows. She currently has a fellowship from the MFA at Tufts to help her continue to create. In her installations, the paintings give off a certain energy when they are together.

To see some of her work, follow Susan on instagram @susanwhitebrown. Or come see her work in the People Watching exhibit at the Fitchburg Art Museum for the full experience.

-Emily Floyd

Egypt Story

Fresh Princess Behind the Scenes

The Egypt exhibition is a well-known exhibition at the museum. Often used for educational purposes, many teachers book the exhibit to showcase Egypt for their students. Giving them a taste for the times and also a chance to soak in all the beauty there is to offer. There is a vast history behind the Pharaohs and of course the mummies that lay in the tomb. The reasons why they mummify not only people, but animals as well. The exhibit allows you to physically connect yourself with Egyptians by being able to walk through a tomb they've built in the wall with the exact measurements of one that was built many years ago in Egypt. Not, only do younger children use the Exhibit, but the students from Fitchburg state university as well to film their Fresh Prince of Bel-Air spin off. This exhibit was chosen because it is on the first level so the idea behind the video was to have a big focus point of the museum as an opening. The Egypt exhibition is also very dark and this was a big challenge behind the scenes for the Fresh Prince spin off. Trying to get the color scheme to match the second floor and third floor was a big issue. We had many members of the team hold up lights and mic's to get the quality as close to perfect as we could. Another reason we picked this as an opening is because it's one of the few exhibits that you can actually touch the art and interact on a hands on environment. We got to use the throne as the "princess" chair. Overall shooting at the museum posed challenges as far as working around times they were booked for class's and having to get the job done under stressed circumstances.

-Martha Melendez