



About the Artist:

For three decades, **Dorian Sylvain** has created and lead public art projects that empower community and expose children to art making, partnering with organizations such as Chicago History Museum, South Side Community Art Center, Museum of Contemporary Art, National Museum of Mexican Art, DuSable Museum, Chicago Park District and the Chicago Public Art Group. Her work can be experienced throughout Chicago's cityscape. She most recently completed a large public sculpture commission in collaboration with Arlene Turner-Crawford and other artists titled, Sankofa for the Earth (2016) installed in the Burnham Wildlife Corridor in Bronzeville. Her work can also be seen in a painted mural / installation, Sunflower Road (2017) at Dyett High School for the Arts. She earned degrees from the American Academy of Art and San Francisco State University and teaches youth art classes at Hyde Park Art Center.

The Artist's Artist: Bill Walker

Wednesday, January 31

6:00 - 8:00 p.m.

Sylvain joins artist and educator **Turtel Onli**, photographer and author **John Pitman Weber**, and artist and activist **Arlene Turner-Crawford** in discussing the pivotal role Walker and his artwork played in the Chicago art community.

Reception

Sunday, May 6

3:00 - 5:00 p.m.

Meet the artist and celebrate the opening of co-current exhibitions. Light refreshments will be served.

Hyde Park **ARTCENTER**

5020 South Cornell Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60615 773.324.5520 www.hydeparkart.org. Hyde Park Art Center is a unique resource that advances contemporary visual art in Chicago by connecting artists and communities in unexpected ways. The Art Center is funded in part by the: Alphawood Foundation; Andy Warhol Foundation for Visual Arts; a City Arts III grant from the City of Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events; Field Foundation of Illinois; Harpo Foundation; Harper Court Arts Council; Illinois Arts Council, a state agency; The Irving Harris Foundation; The Joyce Foundation; Leo S. Guthman Fund; Lloyd A. Fry Foundation; MacArthur Fund for Arts and Culture at Prince; Polk Bros. Foundation; Searle Funds at The Chicago Community Trust; and the generosity of people like you.

Dorian Sylvain

Embedded: Artist as Citizen

Gallery 5

January 28 - July 29, 2018



Embedded: Artist as Citizen (installation shot), 2018, acylic paint, wall paint and woven materials, 9 1/2 x 77 3/4 feet

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What is the purpose of a mural? Beautification? Self-representation? A political platform? *Embedded: Artist As Citizen* unites all of these ideals into one 80-ft mural. *Embedded* draws from contemporary and historic imagery from near and far, inviting viewers to envision a more positive future. Murals by celebrated Southside Chicago artist **William Walker** are integral to both the artistic style that **Dorian Sylvain** employs, and how she conceptualized *Embedded*. As a young girl in neighborhood of South Shore, Walker’s murals presented Sylvain with positive Black role models with whom to aspire. Walker’s murals depicted Black musicians, artists, and poets: people with ingenuity and passion. These images resonated with Sylvain as her childhood neighborhood eventually began to experience “white flight,” the rapid movement of white families out of inner cities and into suburban housing developments. As the demographics of her neighborhood shifted through the 1960s, Sylvain found Walker’s murals to symbolize the indomitable courage of Black people in America.

Through the Black Arts Movement and the development of the Civil Rights Movement, Sylvain built her growing social consciousness and politic through the knowledge and mere presence of organizations such as: Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists (AfriCOBRA), ETA Theater, Experiment Black Actors Guild (X-BAG), South Side Community Art Center(SSCAC). As havens for Black communities, these organizations were inspiring, powerful and nurturing spaces where members could openly discuss Black culture, politics, and social thought. These places gave Sylvain the opportunity to take classes, build scenery, paint, hang art shows, and listen to Black music and poetry. This was Sylvain's first access to exploring the African diaspora, a subject still visible in her artwork today. Integrated across *Embedded* are patterns and designs from Egypt,



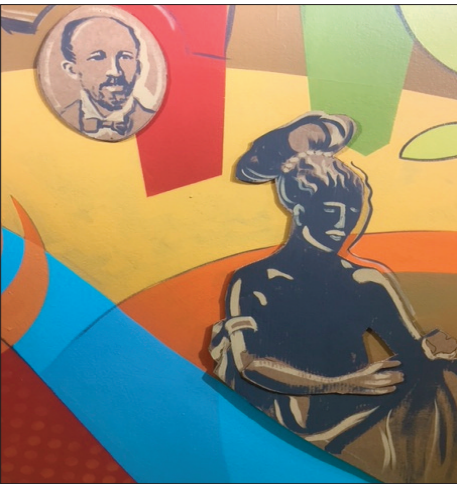
Detail of the *Embedded* mural featuring architecture from Chicago’s cultural heritage sites, 2018, acrylic paint, wall paint and woven materials

South Africa, and Senegal-- fused together into an unfurling stream of colors. By integrating these different elements from the African diaspora, the mural reminds us of the global community that can provide a system of support, a foundation of culture, and a source of pride and inspiration.

As Black communities continue to be subjected to the most deplorable acts in American history from neighborhood red-lining (a policy to refuse a loan or

insurance to someone because they live in an area deemed to be a poor financial risk), police brutality, negative media portrayal, an influx of drugs and guns, and other deep forms of systematic oppression, these images and connections remain even more important. Despite hardships, Black communities have persisted and displayed strong resilience in many ways, but especially through the visual arts, performing arts, music, and poetry.

Integrated into *Embedded* are cut-outs from corrugated cardboard. The distinct brown of the material creates the color foundation for the entire painting. Sylvain appropriates the medium of handmade protest signs to reference the power that individuals and groups can generate when they



Detail of the *Embedded* mural featuring W.E.B. DuBois and an African sculpture, 2018, acrylic paint, wall paint and woven materials



Detail of the *Embedded* mural featuring a compound of figures in the style of William Walker’s mural *Childhood is Without Prejudice*, 2018, acrylic paint, wall paint and woven materials

voice their opinions to injustice onto something as simple as a handwritten sign. Akin to a public mural, a protest sign gives the carrier a platform for self-representation. The elements Sylvain creates on cardboard - a standing portrait of poet Haki Madhubuti, bust of Dr. Margaret Burroughs, the Adinkra symbol of the Sankofa (meaning to learn from the past), the iconic architecture of SSCAC - are meant to imply Black pride. Sylvain explains, “In the racist climate of America, expressing our cultural pride is considered a militant act. Black folk in America were told to assimilate – ‘more White, less Black!’. Here I imagine the streets of our community lined with images of Black cultural icons: monuments to historical figures and architectural elements, ancient symbols. All of these icons ‘embedded’ in our public spaces...it would be a cultural revolution!”

Walker and Sylvain legacies remain important exemplars of the agency we each have to alter the course of history. By combining all of these elements onto one surface, Sylvain imagines a community inspired by the positivity that could arise if our public spaces contained more art generated by and for the public it serves.

Sylvain believes positivity, and courage are the essential subjects of *Embedded*.

Danielle Eady
Curatorial Fellow at Hyde Park Art Center