



### About the artist:

Malika Jackson is an interdisciplinary artist, whose work has been exhibited widely in the U.S. Her work has been exhibited in group shows at Chicago State University, Hyde Park Art Center, Woman Made Gallery, Museum of Science and Industry, South Side Community Art Center, and numerous other venues. Malika has received awards from the Diaspora Rhythms Foundation and the City of Chicago. She has taught at Chicago Public Schools and various community organizations and has curated the Cultural Connections Fine Art Festival for the past twenty years. Malika has a BFA and MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and has studied at Illinois State University. Malika is also a long-time student of Painting and Ceramics at the Hyde Park Art Center and former Center Program participant.

### Related Programs

#### Whispers of Words: A Poetry Event

April 2, 2-4pm

Join us in kicking off National Poetry Month while celebrating Malika Jackson's exhibition, which features artworks by the artist paired with poems by poets like Langston Hughes and Sonia Sanchez. Local poets will bring the featured poetry to life and perform work of their own. Guests will even be able to take home a customized typewriter poem from poetry collective, Poems While You Wait.

Many of the artworks on view are available for purchase through the Hyde Park Art Center. Pricelists are available at the front desk. If interested, contact [exhibitions@hydeparkart.org](mailto:exhibitions@hydeparkart.org).

## Hyde Park ARTCENTER

5020 South Cornell Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60615 773.324.5520 [www.hydeparkart.org](http://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.

# Malika Jackson: Whispers of a World Without Words

Gallery 5  
February 5 - May 28, 2022



Installation view of work Malika Jackson's *Guardians of Olodumare* (2019) at Hyde Park Art Center.

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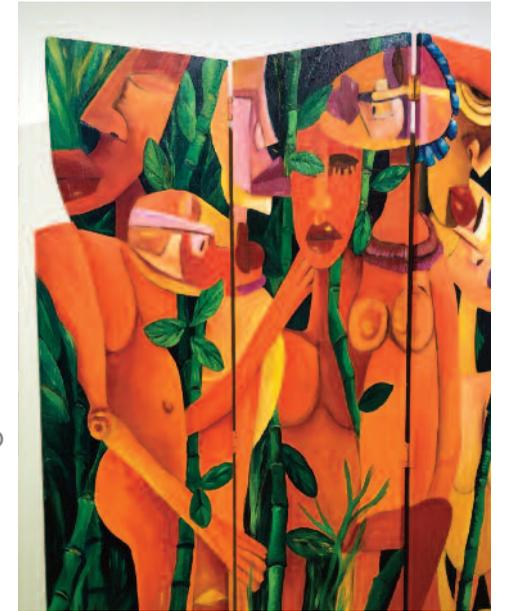
The dreary Midwestern winter melts away when standing among Malika Jackson's paintings, drawings and sculptures in *Whispers in a World Without Words*. Wrapped in deep jewel tones of green, blue, red, gold and orange, the artwork elicits thoughts of lush landscapes and warmer geographies. Abundant plant life swirling among sunlit bodies and purple shadows celebrates the resilience of nature as well as its ability to heal bodies and souls. Jackson's seductive color palette, in combination with sharp-edged geometric abstraction, create the language the artist uses to address the Black American experience.

Tropical imagery in Jackson's work provides an alternative universe to envision social change. Influenced by Afro-Cuban artist Wilfredo Lam and poet Maya Angelou, she borrows modernist techniques like fragmentation common in cubism and the dreamy juxtaposition of bodies and nature found in surrealism to create her playful and uncanny environments. Art historian Samantha Noël explains that this strategy of representing tropical aesthetics in black modernism allows artists to create a structure for freedom by defining a world on their own terms. She writes, "Since geography in a material and discursive sense is never fully secure, given that three-dimensional space is socially produced, the idea that belonging to a place could lead to a sociospatial liberation is seldom realized for many Black people. Due to these limitations, tropical aesthetics allows for a critical imaging and reclaiming of space." (1) Jackson's work reveals a woman-centric world that fosters a tight-knit network of relationships to promote fertile imagination and self-guided strength necessary for women of color in the United States.

On the surface, the work appears joyfully rhythmic and bright, however therein lies a struggle underneath. Jackson explains, "As in life, the brilliancy of color connotes positive energy. We so often see the outside, and not take the time to delve beyond the brilliancy of the façade. We are so attracted to the exterior we don't see the pain, abuse and incest that is hidden from those looking from the outside." In the series of house sculptures, titled "In My Father's House", Jackson cut down pieces of furniture to create shotgun-style houses, common in the Antebellum South. The sculptures maintain the scale and innocence of a dollhouse or birdhouse, yet they are as impenetrable as a prison. Eyes

look out from them suggesting souls awaiting release. Jackson attaches skeleton keys to the house exteriors, which implicates the viewer to metaphorically aid in their escape.

The series "I Too Am America" (2019) stands out in the show for being highly representational as well as confrontational. The assemblages depict a more political side of the South Shore artist. Made towards the end of the Trump Administration, the faces shrouded in the American flag express the exhaustion and endurance of the Black community in fighting for a more equitable America. Jackson states, "We can no longer hide the fact that these United States of America have distinct rules in a Black and White world."



Malika Jackson, *Garden of Eves (Tribute to Wilfredo Lam)*, 2015, acrylic paint on wood, 71 1/2 x 46 x 10 inches.

Jackson is mostly known in the Hyde Park Art Center community for her small clay sculptures of black women in contemplative poses. A few of these sculptures can be seen in the window across from the front desk on the first floor. This exhibition intentionally highlights Jackson's extensive art practice that traverses media and genres beyond ceramics. Although she has been making art since the 1970s, Jackson continues to expand her craft and learn through teaching and taking art classes in the Oakman Clinton School and Studios at the Art Center since 2010 as well as shaping small creative minds at Dixon Elementary School in the Chatham neighborhood for decades.

Allison Peters Quinn  
Director of Exhibitions and Residency Programs

(1) Samantha A. Noël, *Tropical Aesthetics of Black Modernism*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2021, 15.