



January 18, 2023

"Cycle of Creativity" Coming to Art@Bainbridge Gallery



“JITTERBUG”: This work by Alison Saar is featured in “Cycle of Creativity: Alison Saar and the Toni Morrison Papers,” on view at Princeton University Art Museum’s Art@Bainbridge gallery on Nassau Street February 25 through July 9.

As part of a campus-wide celebration of the life’s work of Toni Morrison (1931–2019) — acclaimed author, essayist, Nobel laureate, and Princeton professor — the Princeton University Art Museum will present an exhibition bringing together selections from the Toni Morrison Papers with sculptures, prints, and textiles by the artist Alison Saar (born 1956). Morrison and Saar both draw inspiration from artistic techniques, cultural beliefs, and historical truths of the African American experience for their work, and both speak about the importance of using their work to foster the creativity of future generations of Black artists.

This exhibition takes its title from Saar’s term “cycle of creativity,” used to describe the process of intergenerational exchange. “Cycle of Creativity: Alison Saar and the Toni Morrison Papers,” will be on view at the museum’s Art@Bainbridge gallery from February 25 through July 9, 2023.

“Toni Morrison and her legacy are inseparable from Princeton University, and her work, in its extraordinary fecundity and breadth, resonates far beyond our institution,” said James Steward, Nancy A. Nasher–David J. Haemisegger, Class of 1976, Director of the museum. “By placing selections from Morrison’s papers alongside Saar’s potent artworks in various media, we will have the rare opportunity to see the overlaps between two brilliant minds at work.”

Organized around themes of musicality, labor, and ancestors, the exhibition underscores how those ideas are woven into the work of both Saar and Morrison — in their subject matter and in their working processes through composition, voice, and audience. Saar is well represented in the Princeton University Art Museum’s collections, and the exhibition brings a selection of her prints — on paper and textile — into conversation with selections from the vast trove of Morrison’s papers held in the Princeton University Library. The Princeton University Art Museum owns 13 works by Saar, 11 of which will be included in the exhibition.

Alongside these works drawn from across the University’s collections, important loans from Saar and from private collections expand and enrich our understanding of the artist’s practice. Among the loans is *Torch Song* (2020), a six-foot-tall sculpture of a jazz singer enrobed in a necklace of piano keys and holding a burning flame. The sculpture is made of tin ceiling tiles, which have been a signature of Saar’s practice since she began collecting them around Harlem during her residency at the Studio Museum in the early 1980s. Additional significant loans include a bronze study for the full-scale sculpture of Harriet Tubman that was permanently installed in Harlem in 2008, at which time it was the first public memorial to an African American woman in the city; and the striking sculpture *Cotton*, whose subject finds echoes in the museum’s textile work *Reapers* and the large-scale print *White Guise*, each invoking the historical intertwining of cotton picking and identity in the American South.

“In shaping her papers, Morrison saw the collection not only as an archive of documents from the past but also as a springboard for future creative possibilities. In accepting our invitation to join the campus-wide conversations about Toni Morrison’s practice, Alison Saar has embraced the opportunity for her works to remain open-ended, accruing additional meanings in relationship to Morrison’s writings,” said Mitra Abbaspour, the Museum’s Haskell Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art. “Through their

practices which span materials, media, and forms of engagement, Saar and Morrison reveal the ways in which they have each innovated and explored; now with this exhibition, we invite the wider public into this conversation.”

“Cycle of Creativity: Alison Saar and the Toni Morrison Papers” accompanies a series of related initiatives, including “Sites of Memory: The Archival World of Toni Morrison,” an exhibition of the author’s papers at the University’s Milberg Gallery at Firestone Library, opening on February 22; “Sites of Memory: Practice, Performance, Perception,” a symposium taking place from March 23 to 25; and a suite of new performance commissions at the McCarter Theatre Center, also scheduled for spring 2023. Altogether, the project aims to assert the vital legacy of Morrison’s work and explore the ways in which it continues to ground American culture.

Art@Bainbridge is housed in the carefully restored colonial-era Bainbridge House at 158 Nassau Street in downtown Princeton. Admission is free. For more information, visit artmuseum.princeton.edu.

<https://www.towntopics.com/wordpress/2023/01/18/cycle-of-creativity-coming-to-artbainbridge-gallery/>