

“I work from what I feel”

Neal-Marshall Black Culture Center Interviews

Artist Jacquelyn Hughes-Mooney

Meagan Mitchell--What inspired you to write and make quilts?

Jacquelyn Hughes Mooney - People, books, and music. I have always loved reading books. I also have a love for words and finding different ways of expressing myself. I began as a dancer but as I got older my body was unable to do the things that I wanted it to do so I began making quilts.

MM--What hardship did you have to overcome being an artist?

JHM-- I had to sacrifice a lot, but I am fortunate enough to have found something that I love doing. In my early days as an artist Maya Angelou told me that recognition come first and then money. Over night success is rare. Some artists work on their crafts for years before they are even recognized. During my journey, I gave up a lot of things. There were times when I had to choose between buying food or thread and I choose to buy thread.

MM--How do you begin the process of making a quilt?

JHM- I do not pre-plan. Sometimes I will have a vision and other times I will just create a picture as I work. Sometimes as I am day dreaming or reading, the whole quilt will just appears. I can also pick a topic and work from it. I work from what I feel.

MM--What inspired your exhibit “*Changed Waters: The Aftermath of Katrina*”?

JHM- I am originally from New Orleans, although I was not there during the storm, I struggled with the people. I averaged about two hours of sleep a day for two weeks. I could not physically be there, so the one thing I knew I could do well was record the stories of the people. It became my purpose to be the voice of my people. New Orleans is home and my home was drowning. Last time I counted more than 30 of my pieces (quilts) were lost in the storm. But I heard stories of people going back into their homes and finding some of my work and that means a lot to me. As this project has evolved we are making these stories and quilts into a documentary. We are looking for people to submit their stories. They can be submitted to me at: changewatersseries@gmail.com

MM-What advice would you give to aspiring artist?

JHM- Keep a sense of humor. Do not put too much emphasis on the opinion of others. Treat your art as a business, and finally, if it doesn't feel right, be prepared to walk away!

MM - Were you always a poet?

JHM - Yes and no. I did not always know I was a poet just like I did not always know I was quilter. As I look back at my past journals that I wrote nearly 20 years ago I now realize that I was writing poetry, but I never thought of myself as a poet. I was told that being an artist was not a practical thing to do.

MM - Was there any particular person who inspired you?

JHM - My favorite poets are Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston. A few of my favorite quilters are Carolyn Mazloomi and Michael Cummings. These are the people who I look up to and admire.

MM - How have you changed as a person and as an artist from the beginning of your work until now?

JHM - *I do not sweat the small stuff anymore. I do not apologize for the work that I do because it is not for everyone. I am more observant. I really feel privileged to have found my passion because some people live their whole lives without knowing their purpose in life.*