



Art League Houston  
Jimmy Castillo  
Director of Exhibitions & Curatorial Projects  
jimmy@artleaguehouston.org  
713-523-9530

## For Immediate Release

August 30, Houston, TX - Art League Houston is proud to present, *Bitter Waters Sweet*, an exhibition of new work by Fort Worth artist, Letitia Huckaby, the 2022 Texas Artist of the Year.

### ***Bitter Waters Sweet***

Letitia Huckaby  
Main Gallery

Exhibition Dates:  
September 16 – December 3, 2022

Opening Reception:  
6 – 8 PM, Friday, September 16, 2022

(image on right) *Ms. Rose*, 2022  
Pigment Print on Fabric with Embroidery  
71" x 41"  
Photo courtesy of Talley Dunn Gallery



In her exhibition as the Art League Houston (ALH), 2022 Texas Artist of the Year, Letitia Huckaby explores the legacy of Africatown, the historic community near Mobile, Alabama, that was founded by a group of West African people who were trafficked to the U.S. as slaves shortly before Emancipation, and long after the Atlantic slave trade was banned. The ship that brought them, the *Clotilda*, was scuttled in Mobile Bay shortly after delivering its cargo in 1860 to conceal its illegal activity. The wreckage was rediscovered in 2018 and is currently the subject of active archaeological research.

Huckaby's photographs, printed on cotton fabric, bring together the legacy of Africatown, its founders and their descendants, with the history of the ship *Clotilda* and its persistent physical proximity to the community. Through her imagery and materials, her work ties the past to the present as she examines history and its contemporary connection to the black experience. A catalog published by ALH and



designed by Shefon N. Taylor will be available in conjunction with this exhibition. The catalog includes works from the project and a critical essay by Christopher Blay, a writer and Chief Curator at the Houston Museum of African American Culture in Houston, Texas.

**2022 Texas Artist of the Year  
Letitia Huckaby**



Artist Letitia Huckaby (photo: Rambo)  
Image courtesy of the Artist

Letitia Huckaby's career as a photographer did not start with a camera, but with ballet slippers. In 1988 and 1989, she was chosen to participate in the prestigious Oklahoma Summer Arts Institute, and study Modern dance for two weeks under Fulbright scholar and Guggenheim Fellow Pat Catterson of New York City, at Quartz Mountain. Along with dance, the residency offered classes in writing, orchestral and choral music, acting, painting, drawing, and photography. Students came from all over the state to study in all these various disciplines and it was her first exposure to the power of photography as an art form. She was immediately enamored with the process of capturing and printing an image. Unfortunately, her parents were not as impressed with her career prospects in photography, so at the University of Oklahoma, she studied Journalism with an emphasis on Advertising.

After graduating in 1994 with a BA in Journalism, she went on to secure a position at a radio station in Lawton, OK as the Promotions Coordinator. Although she thoroughly





enjoyed that position, her mind kept wandering back to photography. She enrolled in a Vocational College, intending to make Photography her hobby, and immediately fell in love with the medium. It was around this time that the Oklahoma Arts Institute invited her back to assist in their Public Relations department, and she found herself wandering around the Photography exhibit of instructor Christopher James, an internationally known artist, and photographer. Mr. James' documentary project on India was a pivotal moment in her career. Specifically, James' image *Dying Man*, taken in Benares, India in 1985. This photograph captures an elderly man taking his last breath in a "death hotel." In the image, you can see the smoke from a single candle entering his nostrils and swirling around his head. It looked to Letitia as if Mr. James captured this gentleman's spirit exiting his body. She was so moved by this one photograph that she decided to go back to school and get a degree in photography and had the opportunity to study under Mr. James who was the Director of Photography at the Art Institute of Boston (now the art school for Lesley University).

While in Boston, she found her voice in documentary photography: documenting a dance studio that provided free classes to inner-city kids, a historic jazz club called Wally's that was on the Chitlin' Circuit (performance venues for black performers during the era of segregation), backstage at the Bobbi Brown cosmetics show, assisting a photographer at a wedding officiated by Bishop Desmond Tutu and just honing her craft by capturing city life with street photography. She received numerous awards and scholarships, started freelancing and selling her work, and held her first exhibition. After graduating in 2001 with a BFA in Photography, she moved back south to be closer to family. She established roots in the Dallas/Fort Worth area where she began freelancing for newspapers and school districts. She shot weddings, sports portraits, and babies. Eventually, she landed a job teaching high school photography, but this came after getting married, the birth of her first child, and the loss of her father. She decided to pursue a master's degree in Photography at the University of North Texas.

During her studies, influenced by the loss of her father who was from Greenwood, Mississippi she began to push beyond the straight image. She felt a need to layer additional information into the work, and she started by looking at cotton. Greenwood is the fourth-largest producer of cotton, and after her father passed, she noticed that her grandmother's neighborhood was surrounded by cotton fields on three sides. Her exploration of materials led her to the practice of printing her images onto cotton fabric: sometimes vintage, sometimes heirloom, and sometimes just plain, white cotton fabric. As a Black person in America, cotton symbolizes the history and a connection to ancestry. It symbolizes struggles, hardships, and accomplishments. It links across history and ties the past to the present, and has become the foundation of Huckaby's work. She first began by quilting images together, then making dresses out of family



photographs, printing on vintage feed sacks and cotton-picking sacks, framed photographic quilt tops, and finally, progressing to installation artwork.

Her thesis exhibition, *LA 19 (Daughters of God)*, was a mixed media documentary project on her family and heritage. For this body of work, she created environmental portraits of her extended family on her mother's side in the backwoods of Louisiana off Highway 19, just north of Baton Rouge. The images were printed onto fabric, cut into strips, and hand sewn into traditionally African American quilting patterns that referenced the quilts of Gee's Bend. Once the photographic quilt tops were complete, they were displayed in antique frames. The exhibition debuted at the South Dallas Cultural Center, TX (2010) and traveled to the Galveston Arts Center, TX (2010); Dallas Contemporary, TX (2010); and was featured in Photo Nola at the McKenna Museum in New Orleans, LA (2010); Next Wall Gallery in conjunction with FotoFest, Houston, TX (2012), and in a one-person show at the Walton Arts Center in Fayetteville, AR (2012).

Since obtaining her MFA in Photography (2010) from the University of North Texas, she has exhibited both nationally and internationally. She has exhibited as an emerging artist at Phillips, New York City (2019); Harlem School of the Arts, NY (2019); Tyler Museum of Art, TX (2018); Texas Biennial at Blue Star Contemporary, Houston, TX (2013); Camden Palace Hotel Community Arts Centre, Cork City, Ireland (2012); Renaissance Fine Art Gallery curated by Deborah Willis, Ph.D. Harlem, NY (2010); and McKenna Museum, New Orleans, LA (2010). More recently, her work has been featured in exhibitions at Bridge Projects, Los Angeles, CA (2021); 108 Contemporary, Tulsa, OK (2021); McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, TX (2021); Masur Museum, Monroe, LA (2021); Hillard Museum, Lafayette, LA (2021); LSU Museum of Art, Baton Rouge, LA (2021); and at Foto Relevance in conjunction with FotoFest, Houston, TX (2020). Huckaby's work is in the permanent collections of several prestigious museums, including the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, Washington DC; Houston Civic Art Collection, Art at Houston Airport Systems, Houston, TX; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX; Hillard Art Museum, the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, LA; Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, AR; Library of Congress, Washington, DC; Art Museum of Southeast Texas, Beaumont, TX; Brandywine Workshop in Philadelphia, PA; and the Samella Lewis Contemporary Art Collection at Scripps College in Claremont, CA.

Additionally, she was a featured artist in *MAP2020: The Further We Roll, The More We Gain* at the Amon Carter Museum of American Art (2020), and *State of the Art 2020* at Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, AR (2020). She has participated in numerous national and international residencies including ArtPace in San Antonio, TX Curated by Lauren Cross, Ph.D. (Fall 2020); Tallgrass Artist Residency in Matfield Green, KS (2019); In Situ Artist Residency in Tuscany, Italy (2018) Brandywine Workshop





residency in Philadelphia, PA (2010); and Gee's Bend – Artist Residency Under the tutelage of Lucy Mingo, a Gee's Bend quilter in Boykin, AL (2007). Most notably, her exhibition *Lagniappe: Works by Letitia Huckaby* was listed #2 in Glasstire's top five shows in Texas by critics Christina Rees and Brandon Zech (2019) and #3 for a group exhibition entitled *Limitless! Five Women Reshape Contemporary Art* with Martine Gutierrez, Yayoi Kusama, Sandy Skoglund, Jennifer Steinkamp at the McNay Museum of Art in San Antonio, TX (2020). She is the recipient of numerous awards and honors, including the Hopper Prize (2018), Critical Mass Finalist (2014 & 2013), Directors Choice Award Center for Fine Art Photography selected by Hamidah Glasgow, Executive Director, and Curator at the Center for Fine Art Photography in Denver, CO (2013), Juror's Choice Award in the *American Dream* Exhibition by Deborah Willis, Ph.D. at New Orleans Photo Alliance, LA (2010), and was one of 76 artworks to be acquired by the City of Houston (out of 670 submissions) for the Houston Airport's Civic Art Collection to be on view at George Bush Intercontinental (IAH) and William P. Hobby Airports (HOU). (2021).

Her work has been featured in several prestigious newspapers, magazines, novels, catalogues, and broadcast stations. Including *Promise and Peril* by Darryl Ratcliff, Dallas Morning News (2020), *Human Stories* by Rebecca Sherman, PaperCity Magazine (2020), *Voices Raised* by Aja Martin, Patron Magazine (2020), *Double Exposure* Modern Luxury Houston Magazine (2020), *Full of Love: Letitia Huckaby in Conversation*, by Taylor Janay Manigoult, Burnaway (2021), *Letitia Huckaby in Conversation with Jonathan Square* for the Textile Association of America (2021), and a feature on *Art Rocks* a national syndication of Louisiana Public Broadcasting by Senior Producer Dorothy Kendrick (2020). Selected novels and catalogues include *Collecting Black Studies: The Art of Material Culture*, edited by Lise Ragbir and Cherise Smith (2020), *Tales Of Courage In The Heartland: Symphony in the Flint Hills Field Journal*, Volume XII (2020), *All That She Carried: The Journey of Ashley's Sack* by Harvard Professor Tiya Miles (2021), *Athenaeum Review* edited by Dr. Benjamin Lima, the University of Texas at Dallas, Issue 5, Winter (2021), and *Otherwise/Revival* by Cara Megan Lewis and Jasmine McNeal (2021), a catalogue which featured thirty artists, including Trenton Doyle Hancock, Clementine Hunter, Lezley Saar, Genesis Tramaine and Kehinde Wiley.

Working from the perspective of a documentary photographer but outputting the images as unique fabric pieces, her subject matter has remained focused on history, culture, and storytelling. One project, in particular, *A Tale of Two Greenwoods*, documents two residential blocks in two different cities. Could this become two sentences instead of one sentence? Consider: One block is located in Tulsa, Oklahoma on Haskell Place in a neighborhood adjoining historic Greenwood. Greenwood was one of the most prosperous African American communities in the early 20th century, which was





desecrated by the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. The other residential block is located on St. Charles Street in the town of Greenwood, Mississippi—the namesake of the district in Tulsa and the birthplace of her father. The images are printed onto cotton fabric and framed in embroidery hoops hinged together, like the bifold frames people displayed of loved ones in their homes. The work speaks to the desire for people to build a home of their own, the struggles that hinder the “American Dream” for far too many of its citizens, and a present nostalgia (living in a state that is linked heavily to the past). This body of work was most recently displayed in Tulsa during the centennial of the Tulsa Race Massacre at 108 Contemporary. It will be traveling to St. Edward’s University, Austin, TX in the fall of 2022 and will be featured in a 2023 exhibition, *Emancipation* at the Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth, TX.

Letitia Huckaby is a co-founder of *Kinfolk House*, a new creative project space in the predominantly Black and Latina/e/o neighborhood of Polytechnic in Fort Worth, TX. Founded with her husband, Sedrick Huckaby, *Kinfolk House* inhabits a 100-year-old historic home owned by Sedrick’s grandmother, Hallie Beatrice Carpenter. The inaugural exhibition opened on March 5, 2022, and features work by both Letitia and Sedrick. Letitia lives and works in Fort Worth, TX with her husband Sedrick Huckaby and is the mother of three children, Rising Sun, Halle Lujah, and Rhema Rain. She is represented by Talley Dunn Gallery in Dallas, TX.

Major funding for the exhibition and catalog was generously provided by the Jacques Louis Vidal Charitable Fund, Edaren Foundation, Kathrine McGovern Foundation, and Talley Dunn Gallery.





Art League Houston is funded in part by a grant from the City of Houston through the Houston Arts Alliance, Houston Endowment, Inc. Brown Foundation, Inc. Texas Commission on the Arts, and National Endowment for the Arts.



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Art League Houston acknowledges the following individuals, private foundations, public funders, and corporations for their support this season:

Catherine D. Anspen • Christian Barker & Dr. Grant Hopping • Minnette B. Boesel • Amy Blakemore • Brown Foundation, Inc. • Jereann Chaney • Rania & Jamal Daniel • Talley Dunn Gallery • Field of Study • Michael Golden • Zachary Gresham & Pablo Moreno Harris County Department of Education: CASE for Kids – City Connections • Heights Grocer • Daniel & Aimee Heimbinder • The Heimbinder Family Foundation • Houston Endowment, Inc • Humanities Texas • Jessica & Brian Leeke • The Levant Foundation • Marlene Marker, The Marker Group • Kathrine G. McGovern John P. McGovern Foundation in the name of Kathrine G. McGovern • Janet McNeill • National Endowment for the Arts • National Guild for Community Arts Education • Judy & Scott Nyquist • Crystal & Don Owens • The Powell Foundation • Saint Arnold Brewing Company • SK Foundation • Anita & Gerald Smith • Leigh & Reggie Smith • Scott Sparvero • Jacques Louis Vidal Charitable Fund • Workhorse Printmakers • Wortham Foundation • Lauri & Robert Wray



1953 Montrose Blvd.  
Houston, Texas 77006  
[artleaguehouston.org](http://artleaguehouston.org)