

The poems and prose throughout *Black Artists in America* were written by Sacramento area students in response to artworks on view.

Artworks by artists like David Clyde Driskell, Jack Whitten, and many others served as inspiration for these student-centered interpretations and is reflected in the way the written word sits in dialogue with its accompanying visual alongside the artwork's label.

Students from elementary schools, high schools, and universities across the region have contributed over 100 poems to the exhibition.

The poems are presented in collaboration with Shonna McDaniels, Founder and Director of Sacramento's Sojourner Truth African Heritage Museum, an institution that preserves Black history and celebrates the accomplishments of African American people and their legacy.

ARTWORK: BY EMMA AMOS, *THREE FIGURES*, 1966

The light that reflects
Off their brilliant skin
Unlike my
Dark and
unusual skin.

Always wanted to
Not be
Judged
By people
For my skin and
Where I came from.

Covering myself with an ocean blue
Fabric,
But it's not
Enough
To hide myself
From people's eyes.

— Asma Saqib, 10th Grade, Sheldon High School

ARTWORK: BENNY ANDREWS, *BEHOLDEN*, 1963

MAN

Many men in the world
Yet none look the same
Just like in this painting with this awkward-shaped man
He has peachy-colored paper,
Over his face
And only one arm for Christ's sake
Sitting down on the yellow-orange table
Holding an orange with his wrinkly hand
And his very black hair
Only wearing a long sleeve dark blue shirt
As if the color was inspired
By a dark blue whale

— Alexandra Cardenas-Silva, 11th Grade, Sheldon High School

ARTWORK: JOHN BIGGERS, *THE MAN*, CIRCA 1955

DEEPER MEANING OF A MAN

Simplicity

At its core

Complexity

As you decide to look more.

A man maybe perplexed,

A heart perhaps

annexed.

A man with a slight smile on his face

Distancing

Giving space...

Not sure what to say,

Slowly spiraling away...

Wanted to look happy,

Unfortunately, he couldn't be that way...

"Anyway..."

— Austin Stanley, 10th Grade, Sheldon High School

ARTWORK: FREDERICK J. BROWN, *IN THE
BEGINNING*, 1971

In the beginning
I remember opening
my tiny and tired eyes
Seeing my mother's face
And feeling her warmth
I look around and
See the unbelievable
Colors of life
The green of the dancing leaves,
The blue of the ever-growing sky
And the red of the
Glowing sun at sunset.
All these colors mashed together
Creating a colorful and
Chaotic picture
That I wish I could see
Once again.

— Ethan Vang, 11th Grade, Sheldon High School

ARTWORK: MARIE JOHNSON CALLOWAY, *MOTHER AND DAUGHTER*, 1970

A MOTHERS LOVE

To the beautiful black girl,
I adore.

You have felt my love.

Just as the sun nourishes the earth,
love nurtures the soul.

I protect you,
as you go in the world,
To succeed.

A dream of the world,
Of your own.

— Jacqueline Sinegal, 12th Grade, Sheldon High School

ARTWORK: ED CLARK, *UNTITLED*, 1962

WHALE'S DAY

A painting of what looks like
a whale tail coming
out of the water.

Splashing the water at the canvas
it comes to be different shades of blue.
The tail makes the painting look even
more beautiful than it already is.

The blues are what the whale
feels with her tail showing that she will
be kind and happy to everyone that sees her.

As it continues to splash around,
the whale makes scattered water drops the
same color as her tail.

Till she can no longer make beautiful colors
she goes back to her family and rests.

— Maddison Lueck, 11th Grade, Sheldon High School

ARTWORK: HARVEY CROPPER, *UNTITLED*, 1964

With creepy expressions
It stares into our soul.
Reaping into our thoughts
Digging into our skin like butter
Shivering with the taste of fear
It slowly twists its head,
Like a doll
With deep black eyes as the night
It watches us like an owl as a predator,
Staring silently
And quietly in the dark

— Eric Tran, 11th Grade, Sheldon High School

ARTWORK: HARVEY CROPPER, *UNTITLED*, 1964

There are too many faces,
It doesn't look human,
I can't see its emotion,
Oval sideways floating on water
Face screaming as if in pain,
Eye swollen shut
Dreadlocks
Face resting atop a horse,
Smiling as if they've just received the best news in the
world,
The faces scare me.

—Aaron Saechao, 11th Grade, Sheldon High School

ARTWORK: JEFF DONALDSON, *AMOS AND ANDY*
1972, 1970

They are hidden in the walls,
Watching abstract colors
With their environment
At first glance there isn't anyone
But with a second glance two appear
With faces of years of experience
As their hands collide
A weight of intimidation pressures me
Two have been through thick and thin.

— Alex Vu, 12th Grade, Sheldon High School

ARTWORK: DAVID CLYDE DRISKELL, *WOMAN WITH FLOWERS*, 1972

THE BEAUTIFUL ROSES

Beautiful roses
Full of pink and that sweet smell
So much full of life
That brings out happiness within us,
But it also has its backstory,
Like we all do
But then who
Knows the pain that all these roses go through,
If we don't see them only as objects
If only we could see them as babies
To take care of them and be there when they need it.
When they need water or when they need to get a change
of soil,
Be there for them not only to view their beauty but also
To caress and take care of them as a baby.

— Perla Zambrano, 11th Grade, Sheldon High School

ARTWORK: LUTHER HAMPTON, *WOMAN AT PEACE*,
1973

In a young child's eyes
she's just a stiff beautiful sculptor
Her marble body sits
bent and curved in strange motions

In a man's eyes
he may think nothing of her
Only slightly tempted by her peculiar grace
He doesn't hesitate to continue forward

In a woman's eyes
A real woman's eyes
She'll see her
Only she will see her for what she's worth

A real woman knows that she
is not at peace
A real woman
sees her struggle to breathe

She can feel the pain
The pain as she twists and turns
She can hear the screams
The screams that are faint to others

How long?
a real woman will ask herself

How long did it take for her to break?
How long did it take for her to stop feeling?

Of all people
a woman knows
She knows what it's like
to be pushed and pulled and twisted

Push.
Pulled.
Beaten.
Twisted.

The woman at peace
Every real woman knows
She sits frozen
as a bittersweet beauty

— Emily Barnes, 10th Grade, Sheldon High School

ARTWORK: RICHARD HUNT, *WINGED HYBRID*, 1964

WINGED HYBRID

That the feather of the crow may differ from that of the swan, is a given.

One is of ebony; shining with a vibrant iridescence.

One is of lily; sleek to the touch of cold dewy water.

Why then, would either the crow in his majesty, or the swan in his beauty, be treated any differently?

Beneath the feathers, the mites and the dust, is the same deep red flesh, the same rushing ruby blood.

Through the nostrils of these creatures' beaks is breathed the same air, through these creature's eyes are born the same salty tears.

But the swan, his tears are heard. They are cuddled and wiped away by the fingertips of a biased system of the similar.

The crow has no choice but to cry alone. His tears pour into the wounds created by the self proclaimed 'righteous' and he is forced to dress them with his own stripped feathers.

The crow feels alone, when the only welcoming palms he may seek are that of his own tattered wings.

But the crow is not alone.

Uplifted by sisters, brothers, fathers and mothers, he is heard. His voice reaches out up to the blue blue heavens in an angry cry for mercy, for explanation, for *why me?*

And then, another voice joins him. Then another, and another. The entire population of shining shades of ebony raise their calls toward the white sun in not only a plea, but a protest.

As their shrieks become unified into one single chorus, every crow's voice melds into one winged hybrid. A voice that sings:

You may have abandoned our humanity, but we have not forgotten our strength.

—Juanita Gonzales, 20, Sacramento City College

ARTWORK: NORMAN LEWIS, *UNTITLED*, 1966

Colors clashing
Colors calming
Where do we go?
Figures unseen
A family broken,
A family is like a snowflake,
Every member unique
Ever member special
The path ahead unknown
Who are we to judge?
A Mom and Dad
Try their best,
Who are we?

— Justin Ma, 11th Grade, Sheldon High School

ARTWORK: NORMAN LEWIS, *UNTITLED*, 1966

VOICES

Consuming
It's all consuming me,
Feeling blurry,
Distorted, out of place,
like a ghost
But others feel that too,
All made of tiny little voices taunting them,
Me,
Us all,
But no one sees it on others,
Not even a glance towards others
Towards me
Just themselves

— Lizette Delgadillo, 10th Grade, Sheldon High School

ARTWORK: SAMELLA LEWIS, *MIGRANTS*, 1949/2006

FIVE MEN, ONE DREAM

The room is filled with
a void
crammed in like a can
of sardines

wondering if it was all worth it,
leaving everything
we knew
all for something
we can't reach

like animals in a zoo
trying to be free,
trapped.
judged.

all of this for the joy of others,
to support others
the room gets darker with
the frowns
the only source of light is in
our dream
hoping we'll make it
making it out this void
and make the dream

a reality

— Kim Khong, 10th Grade, Sheldon High School

ARTWORK: AL LOVING, *SEVEN SEPTAHEDRONS*,
1969

HUGE BERGS AT DUSK

The way they connect; it's really
confusing.

like huge bergs at dusk, or lovely, small rooftops.

The intricate shape,
like that of a leaf.

Of foliage, of trees, and of nearly everything in between.

But they can be sharp
like spears shining in the light;
maybe a representation of preparing for a fight?

No matter berg, nor roof,
nor spears of some pawns,
nor leaf of tree, or lily of pond

One thing remains true, though.

Always.

They're simply shapes with no meaning.

Only seven septahedrons.

—William Walton, 11th Grade, Sheldon High School

ARTWORK: JAMES A. PORTER, *LAGOS, NIGERIA*, 1964

OCEAN

The eyes are compared
To shining diamonds
Life has crashing waves
That we must learn to ride
This art is the prettiest place ever
I feel relaxed by the ocean
Not a pretty sight
Means something is not
Nice to look at
Scribble and lines
Make a master
Pieces

— Angel Singh, 9th Grade, Sheldon High School

ARTWORK: BETYE SAAR, *REMEMBER FRIENDSHIP*,
1975

Friendship

Such a beautiful word, isn't it?

From strangers,
to become close friends.

Sun always shines on the sunflowers

And you are my sunshine

You light up my life

Makes it more meaningful.

I am a sunflower,
which represents loyalty.

Saying no to betray

Always turn towards the sun.

No matter

how long this journey is

I am thankful

to have you be my friend.

— Ha Thy Tran, 10th Grade, Sheldon High School

ARTWORK: THOMAS SILLS, *AFTER GLOW*, 1959

FOG

Dark, silent night, bathed in the gentle light.

Red and black unite,

twirling in sight.

Black shadows portrayed, like a message to convey.

In the dark night, their beauty shines.

Red mist, vibrant yet dangerous.

Black mist, dark yet pure.

Like a dance warm and nice,

That is how they intertwine.

Red and black, creating a dance so divine,

Embracing beauty, they intertwine.

— Anmolpreet Kaur, 12th Grade, Sheldon High School

ARTWORK: THOMAS SILLS, *AFTER GLOW*, 1959

THE FIRST HOME

The dark, rubbery, and wet walls of my home
are like the wind.

Sometimes it bounces me around,
like a trampoline

or

A mosh pit during the biggest concert in the world.

It guides my body like a wave rising and falling as a tide
does,

And flows like a frustrated washing machine does
cleaning a hard stain.

Other times,

It caresses me kindly.

Similar to how a family of dandelions graze past your
cheeks.

Or a field of logs hugging to create a fire.

The moisture coats me,

So we become one.

It welcomes me,

as I read using my fingers around the roots of these walls
as braille.

In these roots are a marathon of runners in a tube,
probably finishing a race.

Reaching a destination, I will never know of.

When these walls and I meet, I could also hear.

I could hear such strange sounds.
Such alienated, but familiar voices, even though we
haven't met.
Oh, how I feel so drawn to them.
So much that I wish to leave these dark, rubbery, and wet
walls of my home someday.
To swim against the tide of these bipolar waters,
To confront the walls of my dark, rubbery, and wet home,
To meet the voices that call from the other side.

— Amelie Alvarez, 11th Grade, Sheldon High School

ARTWORK: MERTON D. SIMPSON, *CONFRONTATION*
(#IA), 1957/1965

Dark and bright
Two faces of different sides
dancing together, making,
Two emotions.

In balance they dance
One good and one bad,
In shadows and light, the tale is spun,
Bad and good
The story of bad and good
The story unfolds...

— James Salumbre, 11th Grade, Sheldon High School

ARTWORK: NELSON STEVENS, *HEROIC-1*, 1970–1971

CHANGE

Red: Strength

Yellow: Knowledge

Blue: Devotion and Truth

White is Love

But Black gets to be evil?

No

Black is Protection and beauty,

This is beautiful,

They All represent a true hero,

A true hero indeed

A true hero has strength,

A true hero has knowledge,

A true hero has devotion and truth,

A true hero has love for others,

A true hero protects and is beautiful,

Inside and out

It's our African culture,

Our lives that were needed,

When we needed a hero

where were they,

Because our hair was different or

the color of our skin was different,

They looked at us differently,

They thought us weak,

But no
Were strong,
WE are devoted,
WE are truthful,
WE are loving,
WE are the protection,
AND
WE are powerful,
We are beautiful,
Nobody says otherwise,
WE fight
A mother told her child to keep going even in rough
times,
So, let's keep going,
Let's keep being heroic,
Let's keep being heroic to our communities,
Ain't nobody gon stop me,
Ain't Nobody gon stop US,
Put yourself in my shoes,
Walk in 'em
Walk good,
They think us ground zero,
Devastation
Backwardation
Cancellation
Misappreciation
They don't wanna put themselves in the rotation,
Abstract colors on white paper

It's beautiful to us but ugly to those who don't understand
the captivation,
Us negroes are heroic,
Someone understand it
Someone understand the change
Someone understand the abstraction
Someone understand the colors
Someone understand the power
Someone understand the rough times
Someone understand US
Because they don't want to
It's change,
Change

— Lugano Kitenza, 8th Grade, Katherine Albiani Middle
School

ARTWORK: BOB THOMPSON, *LA MORT DES ENFANT
DE BETHEL*, 1964–1965

UNITY OF COLORS

A legend whose
Where seas are glowing blue
Leaves on trees are a green-emerald view,
Stems are staying strong ebony brown,
As humans let's embrace this
Love it,
And not let differences be drawn.

— Hajer Burhan, 12th Grade, Sheldon High School

ARTWORK: WALTER WILLIAMS, *TWO BOYS AND A BUTTERFLY*, 1965

BROTHERS

Close to each other

I wonder if they're brothers

Will they die for one another?

Will they stick with one another?

Will they never separate from each other?

As the sun shines

The butterfly flies

They're freeing their minds

Telling no lies

Just to find

Their love for one another

After a long day as brothers but from another mother

— Angiladys Rivera, 10th Grade, Sheldon High School

ARTWORK: EBONY MAGAZINE EPHEMERA

BLACK FAMILYHOOD MEMORIALS

In the glow of Ebony Family's grace.
A strong Black family finds its sacred space.
Love intertwined with strength and might.
A tribute of resilience, shining so bright.

Hands held tight, a bond that won't ever sever.
Through generations, this love will last forever.
In their eyes, determination gleams.
A legacy of power, hopes, and dreams.
From the depths of history, their roots arise.
Nurturing the flame that never dies.

With every heartbeat, the spirit grows.
A testament to the love that eternally flows.
In the face of adversity, they stand tall.
United as one, they'll conquer all.
Through art and fashion, their story unfolds.
A symbol of strength that the world beholds.

Ebony Family, a testament of pride.
In their presence, love and power reside.
A beacon of light that will forever shine.
A strong Black family, divine and sublime.

— Kyle Hayes, 16, Elk Grove High School