

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Lavett Ballard: *The People Who Could Fly*

March 31 - May 24, 2025

Reception and Artist Talk: Thursday, April 3, 5:00-7:00 PM

GLASSBORO, NJ – Rowan University Art Gallery & Museum is proud to present *Lavett Ballard: The People Who Could Fly*, an exhibition that will run from March 31 through May 1. The exhibition will feature new works by artist Lavett Ballard, with an artist's reception and gallery talk scheduled for April 3 from 5:00 PM to 7:00 PM.

In this evocative body of work, Ballard offers a visual narrative that draws deeply from African folklore, history, and cultural traditions. The exhibition explores the stories and experiences of people of African descent, with a particular focus on their resilience, strength, and legacy.

Ballard's art seeks to amplify tribal stories and African American history, presenting these as a way to honor the rich and diverse cultural heritage of African diasporic communities.

Drawing from themes of flight, freedom, and ancestral connection, *The People Who Could Fly* references the African American folklore of the same name, which tells the story of enslaved individuals who were believed to have the ability to fly, symbolizing a deep spiritual connection to freedom and transcendence. Through her work, Ballard re-imagines these powerful

narratives, creating a visual language that honors both the past and the ongoing struggles for liberation.

This exhibition also digs into the importance of storytelling in African cultures, where oral traditions and art have long played an essential role in preserving heritage and communicating across generations. Ballard's works invite viewers to consider the ways in which these stories and symbols shape identity, resistance, and belonging in both historical and contemporary contexts.

Artist's Statement:

This body of work is inspired by cherished Storytime moments with my granddaughter, particularly our shared love for *The People Could Fly* by Virginia Hamilton. This powerful tale, rooted in an African American folktale, has also influenced one of my favorite authors, Toni Morrison, in *Song of Solomon*. These works serve as the foundation for my exploration of resilience, hope, and freedom throughout African American history.

The Visual narrative I seek to convey traces a journey from Africa, through the harrowing Middle Passage, to enslavement, and ultimately to liberation and resilience. My goal is to guide viewers through this story, forging connections between the past and the present.

To bring this vision to life, I am creating art that intertwines folktale, history, and culture, incorporating reclaimed wood fencing and wooden substrates to craft wall-hung pieces and sculptural works. My techniques will include mixed-media approaches designed to engage viewers in a dynamic interpretation of this bittersweet folktale—extending its meaning beyond enslavement to celebrate resilience and identity by blending both the past and the present day.

Through this exhibition, I hope to honor the enduring spirit of the African American experience and inspire reflection on the collective journey from oppression to empowerment.

Artist's bio:

Lavett Ballard is a Mixed Media Visual Artist, Art historian, Curator, and Author. She holds a dual Bachelor's in Studio Art and Art History with a minor in Museum Studies from Rutgers University, and an MFA in Studio Art from the University of the Arts in Philadelphia.

Ballard's art has been commissioned as a cover twice for Time Magazine first in March 2020 for their special multi cover edition for the 100th anniversary of Women's Suffrage and in February 2023 for a cover and interior art for Pulitzer Prize winner Isabel Wilkerson's essay about her book *CASTE: Origins of our Discontent*. In 2024 her art was featured in the NAACP Image Award winning Non-Fiction book 'The New Brownies' Book: A Love Letter to Black Families by Karida L. Brown & Charly Palmer.'

Her work has been included in both literary & film productions and collected both nationally and internationally. Acquisitions include the Petrucci Family Foundation, Abena Busia the Ghanian Ambassador to Brazil's private Collection, Grant & Tamia Hill collection, the Francis M. Maguire

Museum, the African American Museum of Philadelphia, the U.S. Art in the Embassies, St Joseph's University, Syracuse Universities- Community Folk Arts Center, & Jule Collins Smith Fine Art Museum at Auburn University Collections among many others.

Ballards portfolio can be viewed via www.LavettBeArt.com

Rowan University Art Gallery & Museum serves as a dynamic cultural destination for South Jersey, the Rowan community, and the surrounding region. We are committed to cultivating an inclusive, accessible, and just environment that encourages dialogue and collaboration between exhibiting artists, students, faculty, the general public, and other cultural institutions through the presentation of interdisciplinary art exhibitions, artist talks, and other public programming. We present diverse forms of contemporary art by professional artists with content that is thought-provoking, relevant, and timely. Our mission is to engender curiosity and a passion for contemporary art, enrich the quality of life for area residents, create a welcoming and inclusive cultural destination at Rowan University, and function as a resource for contemporary art throughout the region. For more information, visit: rowan.edu/artgallery/

Location

301 High St W, Glassboro, NJ 08028

Gallery Hours

Monday - Friday, 10 am - 5 pm

Saturday, 11 am - 5 pm

This exhibition is made possible through support from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts and the Edna Andrade Foundation

Image top:

Promises, 2025, 32 x 46 "

Mixed Media/Collage on reclaimed wood fencing

Mixed media collage with themes of resilience during Jim Crow period of history on a reclaimed Fence panel.



HomeLand, 2025, 48 x 72 x 3 "

Collage/Mixed Media on aged Birchwood Panel

Mixed Media/ collage on Birchwood Panel with Textile, Acrylic paint and hand carved detail and pyrography elements Inspired by the beauty of those from Africa



Beautiful & the Damned, 2022, 68 x 48 "

Mixed Media/Collage on reclaimed wood fencing

This is a Mixed Media/collage Art on a stained reclaimed Fence piece. Artwork is to be displayed as a 2D wall hung work.