

THREADED MEMORIES

through the African Diaspora

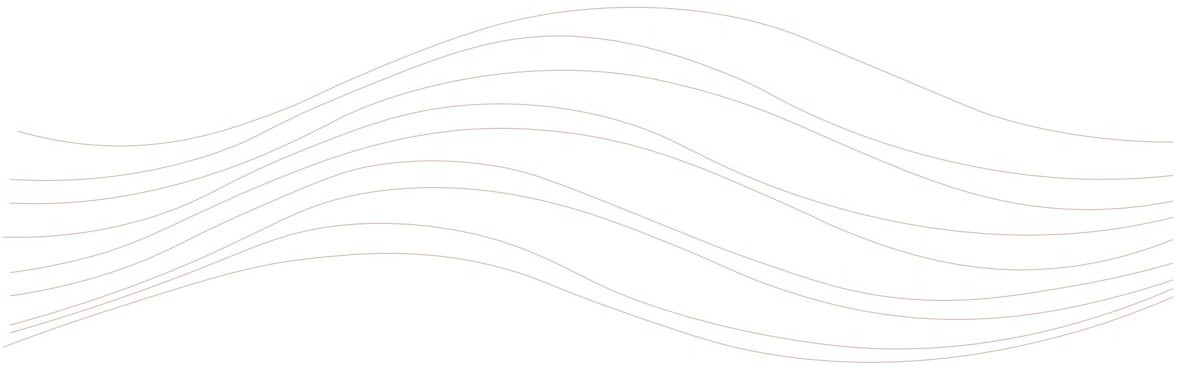


WILLIAM RHODES
LONDON / UK AFRICA CENTRE



THREADED MEMORIES

through the African Diaspora





William Rhodes is a mixed media artist whose work reflects over three decades of exploration into iconography, hidden knowledge, and the transformative power of cultural context. Originally from Baltimore, Maryland, Rhodes relocated to San Francisco more than 20 years ago. He holds a B.A. in Furniture Design from the University of the Arts in Philadelphia and an M.F.A. from the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth.

Deeply influenced by his travels throughout Africa, Asia, and the Americas, Rhodes draws from non-Western traditions to inform his approaches to sculpture, furniture, and visual art. His work often bridges traditional craft and contemporary narratives, engaging with the tension between ancestral memory and modern life.

Rhodes's work has been exhibited internationally and is held in the permanent collections of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture and the Casa de Africa Museum in Havana, Cuba. In addition to his studio practice, he is committed to arts education and has led workshops and residencies across San Francisco, Cuba, South Africa, Italy, and Egypt. He is also a co-founder of the 3.9 Art Collective, formed in 2011 to highlight and preserve Black artistic presence in San Francisco.

Reflections on

Community, Collaboration, Curating.

By Melorra Green



IT is an honor to write about the layered brilliance in the work of William Rhodes—a creative force whose quilts are portals to truth, memory, and community healing. I’ve witnessed firsthand how William’s artistry does more than adorn space—it listens and invites others to see themselves reflected in the fabric of history.

At the African American Art and Culture Complex, I’ve had the pleasure of working closely with William through exhibitions that reflect the power and legacy of global Black creatives.

William Rhodes is a world-renowned treasure of the San Francisco Bay Area arts scene. His work transcends borders—not only held in private collections but honored by institutions like the Smithsonian, and shown internationally from Cuba to Italy. His intergenerational approach to quilting—particularly his work with elders—is a sacred act. For seniors, quilting is more than a craft; it is remembrance, it is warmth, it is artistry born of necessity. William uses this medium to stitch together stories, amplify names often forgotten, and bring forward portraits of people who deserve to be seen. His commitment to returning again and again—to sit, to listen, to witness—is what makes his work a living archive. And equally, he makes space for young people to find themselves in the creative process.

His collaboration with Emory Douglas—former Minister of Culture of the Black Panther Party—was a continuation of reverence, allowing Douglas to remain honored and engaged by artists who truly understand how to carry on legacy.

William’s work is grounded in the wisdom passed to him by his father, William Rhodes Jr., creator of *The Black Times*—a publication that dared to name the brilliance of Black leaders at a time when their stories were ignored.

My work as a curator—whether with William, with Emory Douglas, or with institutions like the de Young Museum—has always been to ensure that those often left out are called forward.

THREADED PORTRAITS



Billy Rhodes

*Pencil, ink and red thread on paper;
8 in x 6 in x 1 in.*



Who's Johnny

*Pencil, pen, found object, thread on paper;
6.5 in x 8.5 in x 1 in.*



Finding Home

*Pencil, ink and red thread on paper;
8 in x 6 in x 1 in.*



Enslaved African Woman and Child

*Pencil, pen, found object, thread on paper;
6.5 in x 8.5 in x 1 in.*



Aleese Baker Pride

*Pencil, pen, and thread on paper;
6.5in x 8.5in.*



Carnival Day

*Pencil, pen, found object, thread on paper;
6.5 in x 8.5 in x 1 in.*



Brother with the Conkline Hair

*Pencil, pen, found object, thread on paper;
6.5in x 8.5in x 1in.*



Daddy Rhodes

*Pencil, pen, and thread on paper;
6.5in x 8.5in.*

QUILTS

AS vessels of story, resilience, and resistance, my textile works serve as powerful images and calls to solidarity. They speak to the pain and grief caused by poverty, desperation, and injustice, while preserving the collective will to confront those forces. Four of the quilts featured here were created in collaboration with Emory Douglas, the former Minister of Culture for the Black Panther Party. Two others draw inspiration from *The Black Times*, a magazine published by my father, William Rhodes Jr., from 1968 to 1978, which highlighted Civil Rights activists and Black cultural figures.

Encircling each central quilt panel are hand-painted portraits of community members—people I know, serve, and uplift as the Intergenerational Community Arts Program Director at Bayview Senior Services in San Francisco. By weaving contemporary faces into these historical narratives, I aim to affirm the inherent worth of every individual, regardless of social standing.

My father's work with *The Black Times* lives at the heart of these pieces. He believed deeply in the power of representation. I remember his excitement about interviewing Angela Davis. The magazine's motto still echoes in my mind: "Everyone in the community has an important voice, no matter how rich or poor you may be."

Quilt Collaborative project with Emory Douglas and honoring my Father and community.



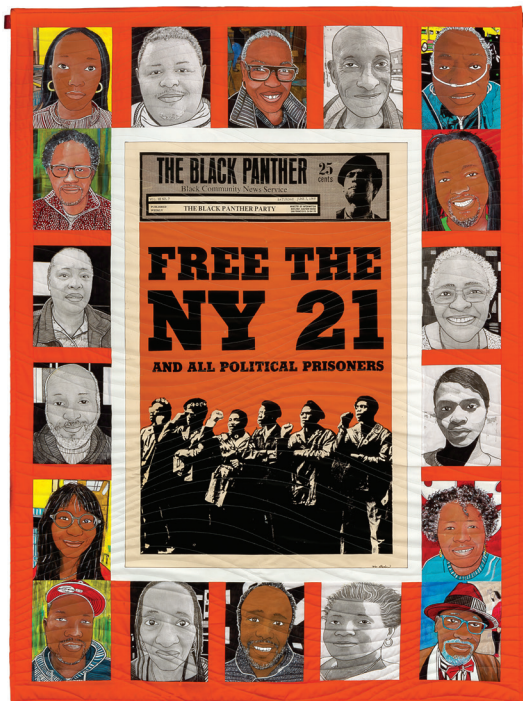
Revolution in Our LifeTime

Paint, pencil, pen and fabric; 60in x 72in.

*Collaboration by William Rhodes and Minister of Culture for the Black Panther Party,
Emory Douglas.*



Black Times- Angela Davis
 Paint, ink and thread on fabric, 60 in x 72 in x .5 in.
 By William Rhodes



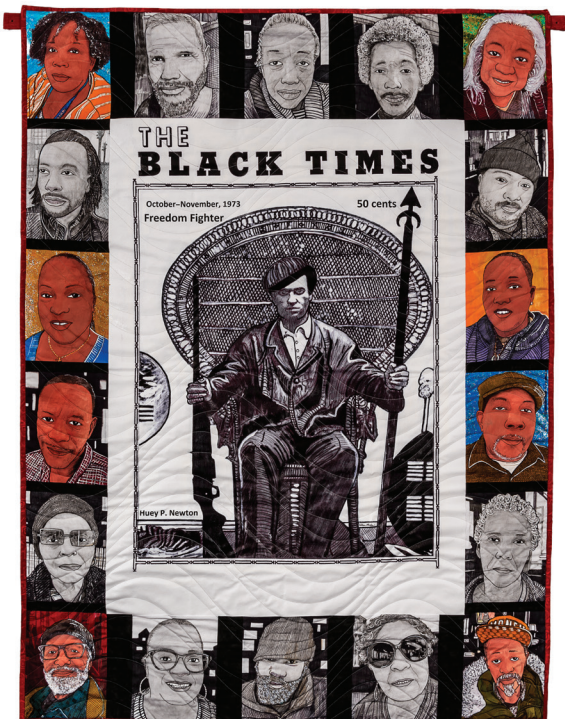
Free the NY 21
 Paint, pencil, pen and fabric; 60in x 72in.
 Collaboration by William Rhodes and Minister of Culture
 for the Black Panther Party, Emory Douglas.



Solidarity

Paint, pencil, pen and fabric; 60in x 72in.
 Collaboration by William Rhodes and
 Minister of Culture for the Black Panther Party,
 Emory Douglas

Courtesy of:
 The San Francisco Arts Commission



Black Times- Huey P. Newton

Paint, ink and thread on fabric, 60 in x 72 in x .5 in
 By William Rhodes



All Power to the People

Paint, pencil, pen and fabric; 60in x 72in. Collaboration by William Rhodes and Minister of Culture for the Black Panther Party, Emory Douglas

Courtesy of Tatiana Bryant and Jonathan Cain, private collection.

IN addition to my traditional sewn quilts, I am developing a Community Knotted Quilt. This collaborative project brings together participants from the Intergenerational Program at Bayview Senior Services, and Western Addition neighborhoods, as well as individuals from London and the United Kingdom. Through quilt workshops held at The Africa Centre in London, participants design and create their own fabric squares. These squares are then knotted together, forming a unified piece that reflects shared experiences, cultural dialogue, and collective memory.

Intergenerational Program Bayview Senior Services



The Battle Cry

Culture is a Weapon

THE battle cry “Culture Is A Weapon” is a powerful tool in all of its expressions and forms it has the power to transform the Colonization Of The Imagination. It is a reflection of our history of resistance and a product of that history. Like the flower is a product of the seed.

“Culture Is A Weapon” at this time in history is the manifestation of the extreme reactionary times in the world we are living in today. As a definition it is not absolute but a continuation of expressions and interpretations, compassion, love, beauty, pain and suffering that one feels and observes that penetrate the souls of the resistance via the resisters (We The People) against all forms of cruel and unjust authority.

“Culture Is A Weapon” as a concept it is the creative vehicle to communicate genuine truths about social concerns, truths you will never hear expressed by any reactionary or bureaucrat. It is our duty as the makers of The Arts Of Resistance to always recognize the oppression of others.

The goal should be to make the message clear so that even a child can understand it.

Don't be fooled by deception.
Know the rules before you break them.
Don't lose sight of what the goal is.

ALL POWER TO THE PEOPLE!

EMORY DOUGLAS



Curatorial Statement

It is my honour to curate *Threaded Memories Through the African Diaspora*, the first UK exhibition of San Francisco-based artist William Rhodes, presented at the Africa Centre in London.

This exhibition offers an opportunity to explore a practice grounded in African diasporic experience through material exploration, cultural continuity, and the transmission of lived histories. Rhodes engages with intergenerational narratives and draws on longstanding traditions within African and African American visual culture.

My connection with his work began in 2019 during a visit to his San Francisco studio. I was struck by the breadth and integrity of his artistic language. His fluency across sculpture, wood carving, collage, appliqué, textiles, neon, paint, and print reflects a deep commitment to both craft and meaning.

In late 2024, we collaborated internationally at *Shared Horizons*, part of the 15th Havana Biennial, where we exhibited alongside a cohort of African American artists at Casa de Africa in La Havana, Cuba.

We were introduced by the artist Ben Jones, with whom I've had a longstanding curatorial relationship, including the exhibitions *In the Spirit* (1994) and *The Bigger Picture* (2022) at 198 Gallery in London. Through this connection, I came to know Rhodes not only as a versatile artist but also as someone deeply engaged with history, community, and collective memory.

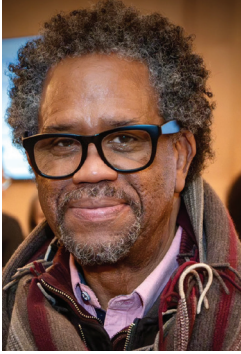
Threaded Memories Through the African Diaspora follows in the lineage of landmark exhibitions such as *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power* (Tate Modern, 2017), engaging themes of empowerment, spirituality, resistance, and cultural reclamation.

A central focus of this presentation is his quilt-making and oral history work. Pieces such as the *Angela Davis Quilt*, and collaborations with artist Emory Douglas, use fabric as both material and metaphor.

His work opens space for reflection, connection, and cultural dialogue.

Dr. Hassan Aliyu FRSA, is a London-based artist and curator. He is the current president of the Nigeria Art Society UK, a member of the Guild of Professional Artists of Nigeria, and a trustee of 198 Contemporary Art & Learning in London.





Since 1971, Bayview Senior Services has been at the forefront of providing culturally relevant services for African American seniors and persons with disabilities. In 2019, our agency established an Intergenerational Program to build community partnerships with schools and youth-serving organizations, to foster learning across generations.

Because we were fortunate enough to hire renowned artist William Rhodes as our program lead, we have fostered intergenerational community-building while engaging in a variety of art projects, such as quilt making, visual media, music, and storytelling. This has been an especially powerful way to promote continued growth, regardless of age.

One project, “Senior Heroes,” worked with high school music students to celebrate the accomplishments of African American seniors involved in the arts and activism. Another ongoing project involves elders working directly with elementary school students to learn things like drawing, gardening, and African drumming.

We are living through unprecedented times. Our world is exploding with innovations in technology and communication, yet we are experiencing a rise in loneliness and isolation among elders in our communities. Through creativity and art amongst all age groups, we see collaborations that can serve as best practices for future generations. —*Neal Hatten*



Over the past few years I've been privileged to work as a curator and gallery manager with artist, William Rhodes, whose career encompasses more than 30 years of art making coupled with a strong commitment to community engagement. In examining the trajectory of his work, recurring themes are readily recognized: the legacies of African culture, the lasting effects of enforced migration, the significance of generational experience and the value of fostering community in the face of adversity, all while reaching toward a hopeful future. In addition to making his own artworks, his persistent, consistent dedication to supporting disenfranchised populations through art workshops and projects is a powerful statement of engagement and leadership. Rather than bemoan the difficulties of what separates and divides us, he simply steps up to connect people across generations, economies and culture. Through collaborative efforts, such as creating large community quilts, participants can see themselves quite literally tied together through their artwork to something larger and more meaningful than any one individual can achieve alone.

TaVee Lee - Curator and Gallery Manager
Transmission Gallery Oakland



William Rhodes art is a wonderful example of “master artist”. It doesn’t matter if it’s his drawings, quilts, or multimedia works dealing with African American or American history or family heritage. His works are masterful in concept, form, and treatment. This to me is an example of a committed artist; being totally committed and expecting the best from himself and, doing whatever it takes to get the most out of his materials.

Good art should make us think, engaging our minds and senses. This is what William’s art does for me. Lastly, he is an artist who is strongly committed to community, family, and humanity. We so need that in the world in which we live; sending good vibes to the world and the universe. — *Ben F. Jones*

This project was made possible by the incredible support of so many. I’m deeply grateful to the organizations and individuals whose generosity, encouragement, and belief in this work helped bring it to life.

Thank you all for your invaluable contributions.

Africa Centre in London- London, UK
African American Art and Culture Complex- San Francisco, CA
Bayview Senior Services- San Francisco, CA
Shipyards Trust for the Arts- San Francisco, CA
Transmission Gallery- Oakland, CA
Artist, Activist and Educator Ben F. Jones
Artist and Activist Dr. Hassan Aliyu
Greg Roberts Gallery - San Francisco + Oakland, CA

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**Bayview
Senior Services**



SAN FRANCISCO HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY
**Department of Disability
and Aging Services**

STAR | **SHIPYARD
TRUST
FOR THE
ARTS**



AFRICAN AMERICAN
**ART & CULTURE
COMPLEX**

The Africa Centre- London, United Kingdom

The Africa Centre is a UK registered charity that celebrates the diversity of Africa and its diaspora. It promotes social cohesion, education, thought leadership, and innovation in art, culture, and entrepreneurship. The Centre first opened its doors to the public in 1964 and has a rich and vibrant history of bringing Africa's cultural diversity to the fore and promoting greater awareness about political and socio-economic developments affecting the continent and its diaspora.

With an original remit to foster non-governmental relations between newly independent Africa and Britain, The Africa Centre's mission today is to educate, connect, and advocate for Africa and its global diaspora, creating a home away from home for Africans in the UK and a warm and welcoming space for anyone with an interest in Africa. The Africa Centre opened its new headquarters in Southwark, London in June 2022. The new HQ is a beautifully transformed former 1960s office block that now serves a new hub for contemporary African culture and heritage in London.

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