

EVIDENCE OF FAITH

The Art of Maya Imani Watson

On View February 3- March 26, 2010

4th Floor Art Gallery
John B. Coleman Library
Prairie View A & M University
Gallery Hours
Monday- Friday 12- 5p.m.

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Instrument of Change, Acrylic on canvas 2008

For me art has been a journey of faith. In the bible it talks about your gift will make room. As I look back over my life, the decisions leading up till this point have been ones of faith; trusting that God has given me these artistic gifts for a reason. **Evidence of Faith** examines this journey. The paintings exhibited have been selected to extend the conversation of faith that looms in our midst. As I sought out such evidence I began to see it was more about the presence of God in our lives, in my life. Pastor Marcus Cosby of Wheeler preached recently about how the God we serve is a personal God, meaning He will be to us what we need and then some. We experience the presence of God by the relationship that we cultivate with God, by being in His word. I have been learning about the power in God's word to move in our lives, to bring about change. The paintings of President Obama speak to such change that is occurring in our lifetime.

The circus paintings echo the conversation of faith. Many years ago I had the pleasure of seeing the Universoul Circus with my whole family. Both my parents and my grandmother were still alive at that time. I was so impressed by the message of the circus and the delivery of its Ringmaster, Casual Cal, that I wrote a poem and later illustrated it as a children's book, **My Soulfull Circus**. Casual Cal was urban contemporary cool, talking about God and did all these amazing things in the platform of the circus. I see the circus as a metaphor for life, in its wonder and delight, in its unexpected surprises, as a party that has a beginning and an end. At some point I realized that my paintings were in these rainbow variations, from the early painting, **The Choice**, to the **Dreamer & Her Dream** children's book illustrations. Psalm 104 talks about God being on the wings of the wind, Psalm 18 refers to turning darkness to light. The expression of color in my work speaks to this light from heaven that shines down upon us, as well as emanates from the depths of our spirits as we seek God's presence, as we meditate in His temple. It is my hope that through my paintings, poetry, and children's books that people will be inspired to experience tremendous light in their own lives. Shoot the sun!



The Dreamer & Her Dream, children's book and prints, including *The Choice* are available on my website.

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Maya Imani Watson

The World's Coolest Traveling Art Museum

The artistic expression of Maya Imani Watson combines spiritual exploration with technical expertise. According to her father, *Sam Watson, Sr.*, Watson was drawing on the walls as a child! Born in Boston, Massachusetts, raised in Houston, Texas, Watson was accepted to *Mount Holyoke College* on scholarship after sustaining both the academic and creative responsibilities of *The High School for Performing and Visual Arts*. While at *MHC* she studied with *UMASS* professor, *Nelson Stevens*, an original *Africobra* member, and researched African American female artists. These events lead to a *Ford Mellon Research Grant*. She recalls the void of information about Black artists and the irony of finding a book written by *Texas Southern University* art department founder, *John T. Biggers* who lived in her neighborhood. Meeting Dr. Biggers at a conference at North Eastern affirmed her desire to succeed as an artist. Her artwork and poetry were featured on the graduation program at *MHC*.

Watson was awarded the *Frances Harriet Williams Award* and sighted for "having a dream and the passion to pursue it.." She says that it sent chills up her spine to hear *MHC President Elizabeth Kennan*, read her award letter, because although her contributions to the college were unique in stature, it was like someone had been watching her all the time. Pursing her studies in the graduate business program at *SUNY Binghamton* in upstate, NY, as a *Clark Fellows recipient* Watson commenced learning the art of doing business. In one of the country's exclusive *MBA/Arts Administration programs*, Watson focused on the use of business partnerships that create opportunities for young people to see how they can prosper artfully as well as spiritually.

During her time at *SUNY* butterflies became a key part of her artistic expression. She describes being in the graduate program at *SUNY* as being an isolated environment. Watson says she told her mother that she felt like she was in a cocoon and when she graduated from *Binghamton*, she wanted to turn into something beautiful... turn into a butterfly. As the mother of four year old *Samaya Iman*, she acknowledges children are a blessing from God and looks forward to showing her daughter how beautiful the world can be. One of her dreams has been to write and illustrate children's books. Watson is currently illustrating her *Soulfull Book Series* complete with 15 titles.

According to Watson, butterflies are symbolic of the change and transformation that are inevitable in our lives. *Quiet Storm, The Elegant Coretta Scott King* was commissioned by Reverend Bill Claire. Watson was honored to have an opportunity to immortalize such a dynamic woman. Her paintings have been featured in the annual (5A) African American Advisory Art Association exhibitions at the Museum of Fine Arts Houston. Watson's *Grazefull Cow* was one of the whimsical cows featured in a national phenomenon, the *Cow Parade*. Over 200 paintings filled the University Museum during Watson's her one woman exhibition: *On the Wings of the Wind: The Art of Maya Imani Watson*, dedicated to the memories of her mother and father. Watson has had a love affair with the African American Circus. Her illustrations and story *My Soulfull Circus* were featured in her exhibition, *On the Wings of the Wind* and moved the ringmaster, *Casual Cal* (from *UniverSoul Circus*), so much that he flew from Atlanta to attend the closing celebration. Watson developed *Casual Cal's Circus Gallery* which features her circus paintings; the installation was exhibited first in *Greenbriar Mall* in Atlanta, Georgia.

Currently Watson teaches full time in the art department at *Texas Southern University*. During her ten years at the university she has served in many capacities. She initially came to work at the University Museum at *Texas Southern University* with art historian, *Dr. Alvia J. Wardlaw*. She served as registrar, graphics specialist and education coordinator, maintaining dual teaching responsibilities. Watson now teaches drawing and computer design in the *John Biggers Art Center*. She feels her purpose is to inspire people with art and words. Working within a cultural institution curating exhibitions as the *Angels Among Us* and *the Rainbow Art Show* (a children's art installation) has honed her creative and technical skills. Developing core museum programs such as the *Tiger Tidings* holiday celebration, *Juneteenth Celebration* and other education initiatives to complement exhibitions gives her an opportunity to impact her community through art. *EVIDENCE OF FAITH The Art of Maya Imani Watson* will be on view in *Prairie View University's Fourth Floor Gallery* from February 3- March 26, 2010. The exhibition was curated by *PV's Curator of Collections, Lauren Kelley*.

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