

What's on your mantel?

Come home to art with trip to FAMU gallery

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Council on Culture & Arts

One year ago, when the world was locked down, everyone got very familiar with the great indoors. Aja Roache, director of FAMU's Foster-Tanner Fine Arts Gallery, appreciated the "creature comforts" in her surroundings.

Whether it was photographs on a mantle piece, framed artworks or posters, these at-home trappings got Roache thinking about what exactly constitutes an art collection. Her curation for the "Home is Where the Art Is" exhibition at the Foster-Tanner Fine Arts Gallery posits the very same question.

"Often there is an elitism around art collecting and I think people think of it as something only a certain kind of person can do," says Roache. "I was really wanting specifically to address that it doesn't matter if you bought it in an art gallery or at an art festival. An art collection can be any sort of creative material in your home that makes your home special."

Roache emphasizes that this philosophy of art collection was even more vital to her as an educator at an historically Black university, especially when communicating the value of collecting and preserving art to her students.

"I think a lot of times we feel like we're on the outside of the art world or what is considered valuable art," says Roache. "Part of my goal was also to frame that as a Black student and a Black artist, your work is valuable."

The exhibit, which runs through April 24, features the collections of FAMU faculty, including Dr. Valencia Matthews, the Dean of FAMU's College of Social Sciences, Arts, and Humanities, theatre professor Evelyn Tyler, art professor Harris Wiltsher and TCC behavioral science professor Joshua Johnson.



Upper level gallery of "Home Is Where The Art Is" exhibition at Foster-Tanner Fine Arts Complex, 1630 Pinder St., on display through April 24. PROVIDED BY AJA ROACHE



Aja Roache, director of FAMU's Foster-Tanner Fine Arts Gallery.

"Home is Where the Art Is" exclusively features works by Black artists as a way of "underlining the value of seeking and supporting Black artists by learning more about and acquiring their work."

Roache graduated from FAMU

If you go

What: Home Is Where The Art Is Exhibition

When: 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Thursdays and Fridays, 12-4 p.m. Saturdays or by appointment through April 24

Where: Foster-Tanner Fine Arts Complex, 1630 Pinder St.

Cost: Free

Contact: For more information, call 850-599-8755 or visit <http://www.famu.edu/index.cfm?fineartsprogram&ArtGallery>

with an art degree before earning her master's degree in Interdisciplinary Studies, Humanities and Social Thought from New York University. She pioneered the Museum Studies track at FAMU and is a Ph.D. candidate in Florida State University's Museum Education program. Roache prides herself on collecting and purchasing works by both established and student

artists when she can.

"Artists are some of the most generous people," adds Roache. "They will sometimes gift you works of art out of appreciation, but I always like to buy the work when I can."

For her portion of the exhibit, she chose to highlight works

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created with a variety of mediums to showcase what exactly constitutes a home collection.

Roache included a collage by FAMU art professor emeritus Kenneth Falana, a wood carving by LaVon Van Williams Jr., and photograph by fine arts photographer and educator Jamie Robertson.

Roache says the proceeds from purchasing Robertson's work last year went towards a COVID relief fund, though she had been pining after the self-portrait ever since she saw it three years ago at a FAMU art exhibit.

"Her work is beautiful, fine art photography that touches on social and political themes," says Roache. "The series she

had here at FAMU was showing various representations of Black women in historical photography. The photo is a self-portrait of the back of her hair in a big afro puff."

Roache's purchase of the work by Williams also came about from a FAMU exhibition. Roache says that she enjoyed seeing Williams' interactions with students, as well as the public programs he hosted while showing work at the gallery. She purchased a woodcarving that Williams made of a jazz musician. The Falana work also occupies a special place in Roache's collection.

"Kenneth Falana was a professor of mine and I loved his work outside of that," says Roache. "My parents have some of his art, so I've grown up with his work. It was an artwork that was familiar, like home."

Roache sought to cre-

ate a similar atmosphere of home inside the gallery. While she didn't opt for rugs or lamps to adorn the space, she did include a miniature library where visitors can sit and peruse books on a wide range of art collecting topics.

Titles include "Collecting African American Art" by Halima Taha, "Black Futures" by Kimberly Drew and Jenna Wortham, and "The Kinsey African American Art & History Collection: Shared Treasures of Bernard and Shirley Kinsey – Whether Art and History Intersect" by Bernard and Shirley Kinsey.

The last book is a nod to the Kinseys as FAMU alumni and art collectors who own the largest collection of art and historical documents from Black history. Downstairs, the gallery has additional seating to view the HBO documentary

"Black Art: In the Absence of Light."

Throughout the pandemic, Roache has continually been motivated by local artists and students who continue to make artwork that reflects on and documents these challenging and traumatic times. She hopes the exhibit will provide a warm and welcoming space for the public to share in these collections and become inspired to start one of their own.

"It doesn't always have to be an investment," says Roache. "It can just be artwork that inspires you or brings you joy."

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).