

# *BOMB*

## On the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre

*A project organized by Kalup Linzy, featuring contributions by Sarah Ahmad, Lex Brown, Crystal Z Campbell, Adam Carnes, Joy Harjo, Tina Henley, Quraysh Ali Lansana, Phetote Mshairi.*

May 31, 2021



Kalup Linzy, *Little Africa In Ruins—1921 Tulsa Race Massacre*, 2021, mixed media, 48 × 36 inches.

On the graves of the genocide and on the backs of the enslaved—Tulsa, Oklahoma never lets me forget how this country was built.

Before I relocated to Tulsa in 2019 to participate in the Tulsa Artist Fellowship, I was aware of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre that decimated a thriving Black neighborhood but completely unaware of how it would haunt me. After landing in the city and getting oriented, I found myself unable to sleep for the first week. I understand this is an experience most people have when they relocate to a new place permanently. However, my intention at the time was to engage with the city for two or three years and then move on. Considering I have partaken in over a dozen artist residencies, I understood my restlessness was not anchored in the life or place I had left behind but by the fact that I was now residing on ground zero: My apartment was and still is located on Detroit Avenue and Archer Street, where the Greenwood District and Tulsa Arts District meet, and my thoughts were with those ancestors who had lost their lives or their livelihood there.

*The Tulsa Race Massacre took place on May 31 and June 1, 1921, when mobs of white residents, many of them deputized and armed by city officials, attacked Black residents and businesses of the Greenwood District in Tulsa, Oklahoma. It has been called “the single worst incident of racial violence in American history.”*

*The attack, carried out on the ground and from private aircraft, destroyed more than 35 square blocks of the district—at that time the wealthiest Black community in the United States, known as “Black Wall Street.”*

*More than 800 people were admitted to hospitals, and as many as 6,000 Black residents were interned in large facilities, many of them for several days. The Oklahoma Bureau of Vital Statistics officially recorded 36 dead. A 2001 state commission examination of events was able to confirm 39 dead, 26 Black and 13 white, based on contemporary autopsy reports, death certificates, and other records. The commission gave several estimates ranging from 75 to 300 dead.*



Kalup Linzy, *Dreamland—1921 Tulsa Race Massacre*, 2021, mixed media, 16 x 20 inches.

*The massacre began during Memorial Day weekend, after 19-year-old Dick Rowland, a Black shoeshiner, was accused of assaulting Sarah Page, the 17-year-old white elevator operator of the Drexel Building. He was taken into custody. After the arrest, rumors spread through the city that Rowland was to be lynched. Upon hearing reports that a mob of hundreds of white men had gathered around the jail where Rowland was being kept, a group of 75 Black men, some of whom were armed, arrived at the jail to ensure that Rowland would not be lynched. The sheriff persuaded the group to leave the jail, assuring them that he had the situation under control. As the group was leaving the premises, complying with the sheriff's request, a member of the mob of white men allegedly attempted to disarm one of the Black men. A shot was fired, and then, according to the reports of the sheriff, "all hell broke loose." At the end of the firefight, 12 people had been killed: 10 white and 2 Black.*

*As news of these deaths spread throughout the city, mob violence exploded. White rioters rampaged through the Black neighborhood that night and [into the] morning, killing men and burning and looting stores and homes. Around noon on June 1, the Oklahoma National Guard imposed martial law, effectively ending the massacre.*

*About 10,000 Black people were left homeless, and property damage amounted to more than \$1.5 million in real estate and \$750,000 in personal property (equivalent to \$32.25 million in 2019). Many survivors left Tulsa, while Black and white residents who stayed in the city kept silent about the terror, violence, and resulting losses for decades. The massacre was largely omitted from local, state, and national histories.*



Kalup Linzy, *Sunny Side of Black Wall Street—1921 Tulsa Race Massacre*, 2021, mixed media, 48 x 36 inches.



*Within ten years after the massacre, surviving residents who chose to remain in Tulsa rebuilt much of the district. They accomplished this despite the opposition of many white Tulsa political and business leaders and punitive rezoning laws enacted to prevent reconstruction. [The Greenwood district] continued as a vital Black community until segregation was overturned by the federal government during the 1950s and 1960s. Desegregation encouraged Black citizens to live and shop elsewhere in the city, causing Greenwood to lose much of its original vitality. Since then, city leaders have attempted to encourage other economic development nearby. "*

During my first year and a half in the city, preceding the pandemic, I spent time getting acquainted with artists and residents who were from Tulsa or had been residing here for a while. One thing became evident: the city's politics were neither monolithic nor black and white. Some people welcomed the new direction the city was moving in and others opposed it. My goal was to negotiate where I would fit and whether or not I should stay. I was all too familiar with the story of white women inciting violence after crying rape or claiming they were attacked by Black men, usually when they were caught having an affair. Or of white supremacists orchestrating terror attacks when they feel threatened by Blacks' economic and political power. I was raised in Florida and schooled on the Ocoee Massacre (November 2, 1920), the Rosewood Massacre (January 1–7, 1923), and the Groveland Four (July 16, 1949).

*Before the Rosewood Massacre, the town of Rosewood had been a quiet, primarily Black, self-sufficient whistle stop on the Seaboard Air Line Railway. Trouble began when white men from several nearby towns lynched a Black Rosewood resident because of accusations that a white woman in nearby Sumner had been assaulted by a Black drifter. A mob of several hundred whites combed the countryside hunting for Black people and burned almost every structure in Rosewood. Survivors from the town hid for several days in nearby swamps until they were evacuated by train and car to larger towns. No arrests were made for what happened in*

*Rosewood. The town was abandoned by its former Black and white residents; none ever moved back, none were ever compensated for their land, and the town ceased to exist. "*



Kalup Linzy, *Sunny Side of Black Wall Street, The Sequel—1921 Tulsa Race Massacre*, 2021, mixed media, 48 x 36 inches.

John Singleton's 1997 historical film *Rosewood* was based on these events.

*The Ocoee massacre was a white mob attack on African American residents in northern Ocoee [a town in Orange County, near Orlando], which occurred on November 2, 1920, the day of the US presidential election. Most estimates total 30 to 35 Black people killed. Most African American-owned buildings and residences in northern Ocoee were burned to the ground. Other African Americans living in southern Ocoee were later killed or driven out on threat of more violence. Ocoee*

*essentially became an all-white town. The massacre has been described as the “single bloodiest day in modern American political history.”*

*The attack was intended to prevent Black citizens from voting. In Ocoee and across the state, various Black organizations had been conducting voter registration drives for a year. Black people had essentially been disfranchised in Florida since the beginning of the 20th century. Mose Norman, a prosperous African American farmer, tried to vote but was turned away twice on Election Day. Norman was among those working on the voter drive. A white mob surrounded the home of Julius “July” Perry, where Norman was thought to have taken refuge. After Perry drove away the white mob with gunshots, killing two men and wounding one who tried to break into his house, the mob called for reinforcements from Orlando and Orange County. The whites laid waste to the African American community in northern Ocoee and eventually killed Perry. They took his body to Orlando and hanged it from a light post to intimidate other Black people. Norman escaped, never to be found. Hundreds of other African Americans fled the town, leaving behind their homes and possessions. “*



Kalup Linzy, *I'm Coming Up—1921 Tulsa Race Massacre*, 2021, mixed media, 48 × 36 inches.

find YouTube clips of my great-uncle, the late Rev. Fred Maxwell, retelling his firsthand experience witnessing Mose Norman visit my great-grandparents Benjamin and Alzada Maxwell in Stuckey, Florida, my hometown, before heading to New York City where he lived out the rest of his life until his death in 1949.

*The Groveland Four (or the Groveland Boys) were four young African American men—Ernest Thomas, Charles Greenlee, Samuel Shepherd, and Walter Irvin—who in 1949 were falsely accused of raping 17-year-old Norma Padgett and assaulting her husband on July 16, 1949, in Lake County, Florida. Thomas fled and was killed on July 26, 1949, by a sheriff's posse of 1,000 white men, who shot Thomas over 400 times while he was asleep under a tree in the southern part of Madison County. Greenlee, Shepherd, and Irvin were arrested. They were beaten to coerce*



*confessions, but Irvin refused to confess. The three survivors were convicted at trial by an all-white jury. Greenlee was sentenced to life because he was only 16 at the time of the alleged crime; the other two were sentenced to death."*



Kalup Linzy, *Press On—1921 Tulsa Race Massacre*, 2021, mixed media, 20 × 20 inches.

During the weeklong raid, the Ku Klux Klan descended upon Stuckey. My aunts and uncles have retold their experiences, outlining the terror. The furor that erupted sent families scattering for safety, some to never return. White men in

trucks and cars sat near both entrances of our town and watched who came and went. Mob members shot into the homes of Matthew Maxwell and Joseph Maxwell, who were my great-uncles, the brothers of my grandmother who raised me. The mob shot into the home of my great-uncle Joe, who had recently returned to Stuckey from World War II, simply because they were angry that Black veterans had gone out with white women during the war. My great-uncle Fred recounted to a local newspaper that my great-grandmother Alzada was so disturbed by the incident she died with it on her mind. She could never understand why the white men would do that to them when they never bothered anybody.

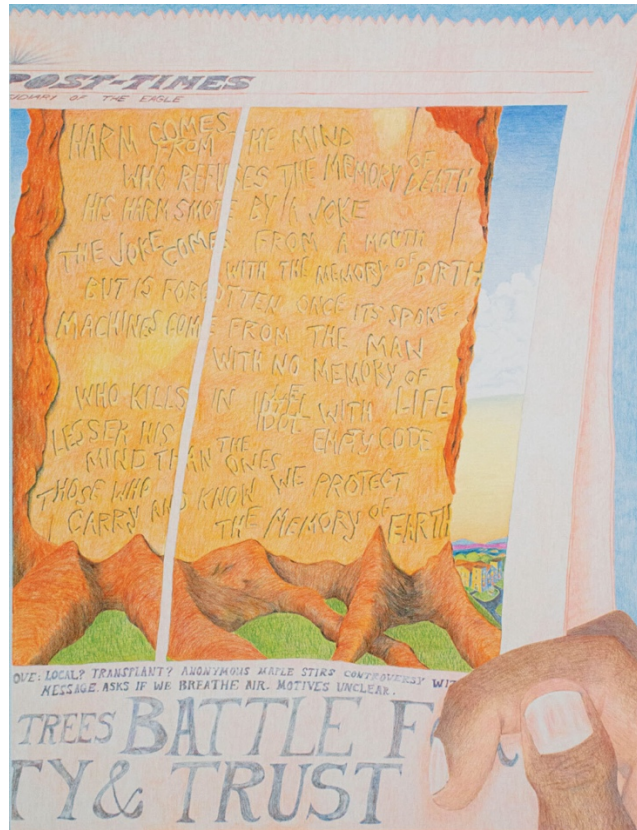
After much consideration, I decided to stay in Tulsa for two years, completing my fellowship and applying for the Tulsa Artist Fellowship Arts Integration Award. This past fall, I was awarded the grant, which will support the launch of the Queen Rose Art House, an artist residency and social space that will host three to four out-of-town artists each year. The project will commence this summer, one hundred years after the Tulsa Race Massacre.

I could not allow this moment in history to pass without commemorating and honoring those who lost their lives or livelihood as a result of white supremacists' pursuit of dominance.

I invited eight artists I admire to contribute works in response to the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre: Sarah Ahmad, Lex Brown, Crystal Z Campbell, Adam Carnes, Joy Harjo, Tina Henley, Quraysh Ali Lansana, and Phetote Mshairi. They are all currently based in or have deep family connections tying them to Tulsa.

***Kalup Linzy*** is an interdisciplinary artist and a Tulsa Artist Fellowship Arts Integration Grantee.

# Lex Brown



Lex Brown, *A Page from the Post-Times*, 2021, colored pencil on panel 48 × 62 × 2 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

The reproduction of a drawing of a photograph in a newspaper.

A great-great-great-granddaughter.

A dark-skinned hand<sup>1</sup> holds the right leaf of a newspaper, its words cut off at mid-page.

Across the top it reads: **[THE] POST-TIMES [A SUB] SIDIARY OF THE EAGLE<sup>2</sup>**

Below, a photograph of a tree, into whose wide, smooth trunk is carved the poem:

**HARM COMES FROM THE MIND**

**WHO REFUSES THE MEMORY OF DEATH<sup>3</sup>**

**HIS HARM SMOTE BY A JOKE  
THE JOKE COMES FROM A MOUTH  
WITH THE MEMORY OF BIRTH  
BUT IS FORGOTTEN ONCE IT'S SPOKE.  
MACHINES COME FROM THE MAN  
WITH NO MEMORY OF LIFE  
WHO KILLS IN ID(LE)(YLL)(DOL) WITH EMPTY CODE  
LESSER HIS MINDS THAN THE ONES WE PROTECT  
THOSE WHO CARRY AND KNOW  
THE MEMORY OF EARTH.**

The tree's roots are prominent. The fingers of the hand appear to be of comparable scale. Beyond the tree, and farther off in the distance, is the Mt. Zion Baptist Church. Below the photograph is a caption:

**--OVE: LOCAL? TRANSPLANT? ANONYMOUS MAPLE STIRS CONTROVERSY  
WITH [ITS] MESSAGE. ASKS IF WE BREATHE AIR. MOTIVES UNCLEAR.<sup>4</sup>**

***"TREES BATTLE FOR -----TY & TRUST"***

<sup>1</sup> This hand was modeled after my father's hand. My grandfather, and great-grandfather were born in Tulsa, OK in 1927 and 1904. His parents, my great-great-grandparents Reverend Alexander Ellis Brown, and Georgie Brown, were founding members of the Mt. Zion baptist Church. Mt. Zion was organized in 1909, just 2 years after Oklahoma was incorporated into the United States. It was



pulverized to dust in the race massacre, and then built again from the ashes by congregation.

My grandfather, Archie, grew up adjacent to the Greenwood Archer Pine Area. He became a delivery boy for the Oklahoma Eagle at a young age, where he earned his nickname Zip for his fast deliveries. He would bring this name with him to California.

<sup>2</sup> The Oklahoma Eagle is the 10th oldest black newspaper in the country. It is owned and operated by the Goodwins, our cousin's on my mom's side of the family. Jim Goodwin, is a lifelong Tulsan and decorated attorney who has won cases in the Supreme Court, been honored by the historical society, and is one of the great keepers of Tulsa history. His son is a professor of Journalism at Tulsa Community College and his niece Regina Goodwin, is an Oklahoma State representative who implements legislature to improve public education, health care, rights of incarcerated women, and economic development.

<sup>3</sup> A theory: the same people who spend so much energy denying the history and impact of violence are the same people who do not really understand that we breathe air.

<sup>4</sup> Lol. can you imagine.

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The next time you see a person somewhere, before coming to any conclusion about their value, you could see them as the latest emergence in an endless chain of life extended from the sheath of a woman's body. And the next time you feel terrible, you could remember that you're equally as much a part of life as everything else that's living.

# Phetote Mshairi

## *ILLUMINATING GREENWOOD*

Let your righteous deeds reflect the virtues that you value and cast an  
incandescence of truth  
that illuminates the quagmire of lies and dire circumstances  
that have overwhelmed this realm.

Let your Soul glow!

Let the World know that your bright mind was designed to shine  
and shadows of prejudice and ignorance  
must yield to your brilliance.

You are the shiner of light and enlightenment!

Let every utterance you speak be a bright beacon that screams  
VISION  
to the hard of hearing, hard of adhering, and insightless.

Let the World hear the Life in you, that you may animate enlightenment  
within the Lifeless.

You are the antithesis of listlessness!

Let us read your radiant decrees of redemption,  
word by splendid epic volume.

Let every little tittle that you write be a twinkle of inspiration, wisdom, and  
information  
that sparks a movement that moves people to realize their potential  
Our potential

*Shooting stars are either fleeing or flying,  
depending on your perspective*

So, let your thoughts soar from the highest altitude of a positive attitude-  
to the deepest depths of esoteric Wisdom,  
as you humbly dazzle onlookers with your inner and outer beauty, style, and  
dapper demeanor  
that complement your lionlike confidence.

Make history fondly remember your unique name!

Let the Universe create a constellation that will illuminate the pathway to  
Greenwood,  
so that the Spirits of Black Wall Street can find their way back home.

Shine on Sweet Spirits,  
I implore thee  
shine on...

***Phetote Mshairi*** is a poet and a Tulsa Artist Fellow.

# Sarah Ahmad



Sarah Ahmad, *The American Dream*, 2021, fresh flowers, hand-crafted fabric flowers, printed fabric & canvas tent. Courtesy of the artist, Greenwood Art Project, and the Tulsa Artist Fellowship. Photo by Marlon F. Hall.



Sarah Ahmad, *The American Dream*, 2021, fresh flowers, hand-crafted fabric flowers, printed fabric & canvas tent. Courtesy of the artist, Greenwood Art Project, and the Tulsa Artist Fellowship. Photo by Marlon F. Hall.



*The American Dream* (open May 31 at the Oxley Nature Center in Tulsa) is built around the form of a refugee tent, such as the ones used by families rendered homeless during the Tulsa Race Massacre. It will be placed in a wooded setting and covered with orange and yellow marigold flowers, which recall the fiery destruction of people's homes. Yet even as they memorialize an act of violence, the marigolds suggest renewal and rebirth.

***Sarah Ahmad*** is a visual artist and Tulsa Artist Fellow.

# Joy Harjo

## ***STRANGE FRUIT***

I was out in the early evening, taking a walk in the fields to think about this poem I was writing, or walking to the store for a pack of cigarettes, a pound of bacon. How quickly I smelled evil, then saw the hooded sheets ride up in the not yet darkness, in the dusk carrying the moon, in the dust behind my tracks. Last night there were crosses burning in my dreams, and the day before a black cat stood in the middle of the road with a ghost riding its back. Something knocked on the window at midnight. My lover told me:

*Shush, we have too many stories to carry on our backs like houses, we have struggled too long to let the monsters steal our sleep, sleep, go to sleep.*

But I never woke up. Dogs have been nipping at my heels since I learned to walk. I was taught to not dance for a rotten supper on the plates of my enemies. My mother taught me well.

I have not been unkind to the dead, nor have I been stingy with the living. I have not been with anyone else's husband, or anyone else's wife. I need a song. I need a cigarette. I want to squeeze my baby's legs, see her turn into a woman just like me. I want to dance under the full moon, or in the early morning on my lover's lap.

See this scar under my arm. It's from tripping over a rope when I was small; I was always a little clumsy. And my long, lean feet like my mother's have known where to take me, to where the sweet things grow. Some grow on trees, and some grow in other places.

But not this tree.

I didn't do anything wrong. I did not steal from your mother. My brother did not take your wife. I did not break into your home, tell you how to live or die. Please.

Go away, hooded ghosts from hell on earth. I only want heaven in my baby's arms, my baby's arms. Down the road through the trees I see the kitchen light on and my lover fixing supper, the baby fussing for her milk, waiting for me to come home. The moon hangs from the sky like a swollen fruit.

My feet betray me, dance anyway from this killing tree.

*(For Jacqueline Peters, a vital writer, activist in her early thirties, who was lynched in Lafayette, California, in June 1986. She had been working to start a local NAACP chapter, in response to the lynching of a twenty-three-year-old Black man, Timothy Lee, in November 1985, when she was hanged in an olive tree by the Ku Klux Klan.)*

*"Strange Fruit" from In Mad Love and War © 1990 by Joy Harjo. Reprinted by permission of Wesleyan University Press.*

**Joy Harjo** (Mvskoke) is a poet, musician, the 23rd US Poet Laureate, and a Tulsa Artist Fellowship Arts Integration Grantee.

# Crystal Z Campbell



Crystal Z Campbell, *Notes from Black Wall Street (I've Stayed in the Front Yard All My Life, I Want a Peek at the Back)*, 2019, mixed-media on wood, 30 × 24 inches. Courtesy of the artist.



Crystal Z Campbell, *Notes from Black Wall Street (A Bird in the Hand)*, 2019, mixed-media on wood, 20 × 30 inches. Courtesy of the artist.



*Notes from Black Street* is an ongoing series by Oklahoma-based artist Crystal Z Campbell. Culled from institutional archives, these highly textured painted collages abstract and fabulate Black life in Greenwood (Tulsa, Oklahoma) before, during, and after the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. Riffing on the role of Black portraiture in photography and representation, the use of these images foreground the desire for self-fashioning and self-determination precisely one hundred years after the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. The narrative is always at stake: will justice enter the frame upon a century?

***Crystal Z Campbell*** is a visual artist, writer and current Harvard Radcliffe Film Study Center & David and Roberta Logie Fellow (2020–2021), living and working in Oklahoma.

# Quraysh Ali Lansana

## *greenwood ptsd: 1921-2021*

if i'm a good nigga massa won't sell  
me to poverty we steady grinding  
in constant reminder why we don't  
sleep guns pointed at our lives  
five hundred years and again bent

in prayer or question a murdering  
of sacred a deeper deeper death  
born in the undoing under a vault  
that harbors & feeds same sun  
singes skin daylight helps us find

lost things our humanity how  
to uncry tears truth ain't so clear  
no more drunk on black pain this  
rejoiceful hollow brooding arson  
muted light back alley shadows

we call home we are distant answer  
near shine yesterday now our trauma  
our excellence our transcendence  
on whose shoulders do we stand  
how long is memory when we are

all we have blood & melanin & history

***Quraysh Ali Lansana** is author of twenty books in poetry, nonfiction, and children's literature.*

*Lansana is currently a Tulsa Artist Fellow and serves as Acting Director of the Center for Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation at Oklahoma State University, Tulsa, where he is also Writer in Residence for the Center for Poets & Writers and Adjunct Professor in Africana Studies and English.*

# Tina Henley



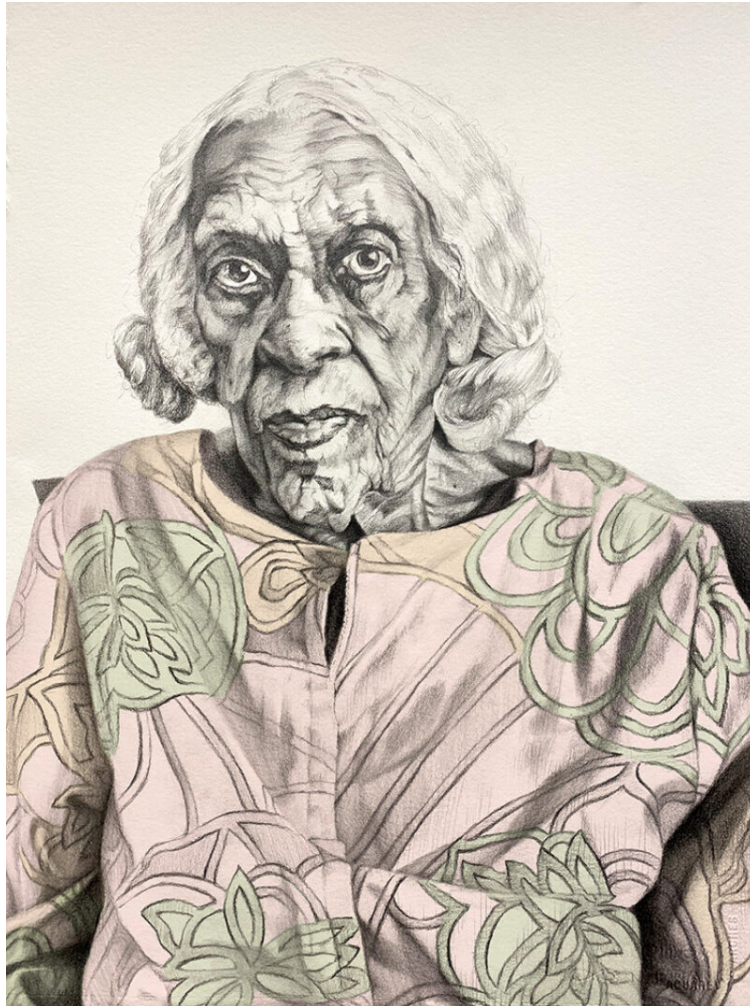
Tina Henley, *Fragments*, 2021, colored pencil on black canvas, 18 × 24 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

This piece is about Tulsa's fragmented and problematic past in regard to Indigenous and Black people, and questions if Tulsa wants to move forward into the future progressively, that it would have to require healing due to these communities of people.

There are symbolic elements in the piece that represent Tulsa as a city and the state of Oklahoma. The Western Diamondback Rattlesnake: Snakes can symbolize both danger and healing. The Oklahoma Rose official state flower and mistletoe (the official floral emblem) each represent growth. Geometric cityscapes of Tulsa (currently) and Black Wall Street are loosely drawn to show an unstable and unfortunate past that directly reflects the future.

***Tina Henley*** is an artist based in Tulsa.

# Adam Carnes



Adam Carnes, *Griots: Veneice Dunn Sims*, 2021, graphite on paper, digital color tone. Drawing based on a photograph by Marty Branham from the Greenwood Cultural Center's *Survivor's Remembrances* exhibit.

“There had been rumblings on the night of May 31, 1921 that there was going to be trouble in Little Africa. But we hadn’t paid much attention to the rumors. In fact, my siblings and I were out in the front yard. We were just looking around to see if we could find out what all the commotion was about. All at once, bullets began dropping into our yard. I was just terrified. When bullets are falling all around a person, you just don’t know what to do. I didn’t know whether to drop down on the ground, or whether I should run. For a while, I just stood rooted to the ground. I was just paralyzed. My father had heard bullets hitting the roof and sides of our house and he ran out to find us children. He called us into the house.

Then he decided we had better run to safety. The mobsters were getting too close. We could see cars full of white men going down Greenwood Avenue, guns blazing and bullets flying at running Black people.”

—Veneice Dunn Sims, b. January 21, 1905



Adam Carnes, *Griots: Julius Warren Scott*, 2021, graphite on paper, digital color tone. Drawing is based on a photograph by Paula Olree from the Greenwood Cultural Center’s *Survivor’s Remembrances* exhibit.

“I don’t remember anything about the Tulsa riot, but I remember my mother telling me about it. Mother remembers running down the street, six months pregnant with me, dodging bullets that were dropping all around her. She said that it was a miracle that she escaped alive and that I was later allowed to come into this world. She always thanked God for our safety.”

—Julius Warren Scott, b. September 23, 1921



*Griots* honors the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre survivors for their contributions to Tulsa's Historic Greenwood District, dubbed "Black Wall Street" for its thriving concentration of Black entrepreneurs. The overarching narrative speaks to the triumph of the human spirit.

Griot is a "West African troubadour-historian. The griot profession is hereditary and has long been a part of West African culture. The griots' role has traditionally been to preserve the genealogies, historical narratives, and oral traditions of their people; praise songs are also part of the griot's répertoire....In addition to serving as the primary storytellers of their people, griots have also served as advisers and diplomats."

***Adam Carnes*** is a Tulsa based artist and a Tulsa Artist Fellowship alumni.