

“We Say What Black That is” is now open at Spelman College Museum of Fine Art

BY NOAH WASHINGTON

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Spelman College Museum of Fine Art Executive Director Liz Andrews with MacArthur Fellowship Award-winning artist Amanda Williams (right) during the opening night of the “We Say What Black This Is” exhibit on Feb. 6, 2025. Photo by Noah Washington/The Atlanta Voice

On Thursday, February 6, the Spelman College Museum of Fine Art held its opening night for its newest exhibit, *We Say What Black This Is*. The exhibit marks the Atlanta debut of MacArthur Fellowship-winning artist Amanda Williams. Running through May 24, the exhibition challenges and redefines the meaning of Blackness, inviting viewers to engage with Williams’ mixed media and watercolor works.

Williams’ series, *What Black Is This, You Say?*, was born out of the social media phenomenon known as “Blackout Tuesday” during the summer of 2020. Initially, sharing humorous and poignant captions on Instagram, sparking a conversation about the complexities and nuances of Black identity; Williams explained how the series evolved into paintings.

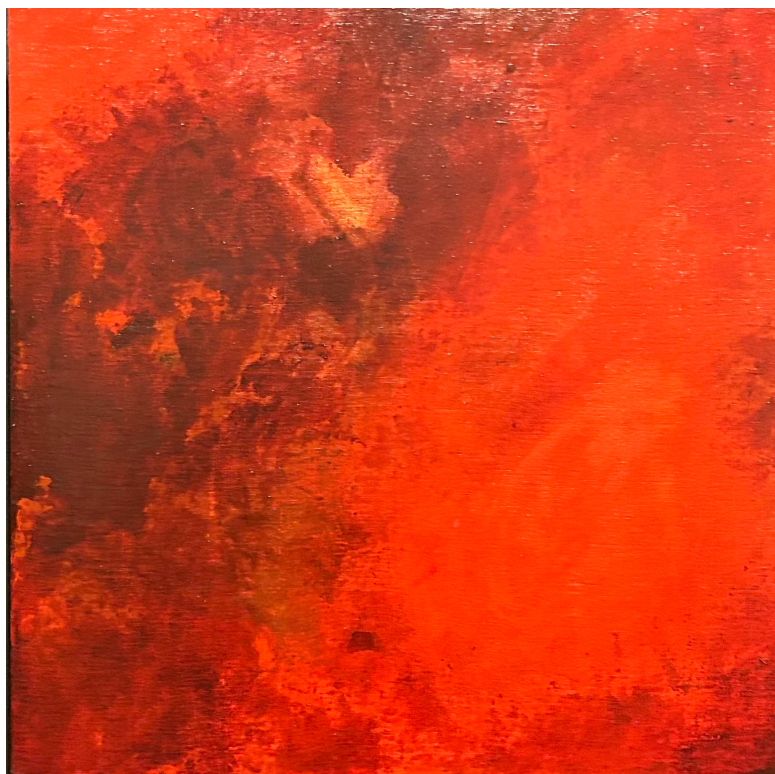


Photo by Noah Washington/The Atlanta Voice

“Midway through, somebody said, I’d love to see these as paintings,” Williams said. “Every day, the question was, ‘What Black is this? You say?’ It was a bit of an interrogation, a poke at the sudden rise of ‘Black Lives Matter’—but what did that really mean? Whose Black lives? I know many different kinds of Black people. So how do we embrace our diversity while still being seen as valuable,” she continued.

Curated by Karen Comer Lowe, *We Say What Black This Is* features student-written didactic labels, contributing to a dynamic conversation between historical and contemporary interpretations of Blackness. During opening night several Spelman students testified to their experience working with the department and Williams. This included Robyn Simpson, a senior and art history major at Spelman College.

“As someone who never fully got abstract art, thank you for bringing your art to the AUC. You allowed me, through all of your guidance with the class, to really explore my own practice, to interpret art,” Simpson told *The Atlanta Voice*.

Williams views the exhibition as both a reflection of the past and a response to present social and political realities. When asked about the importance of defining Blackness today, she said.



Photo by Noah Washington/The Atlanta Voice

“It’s actually sad but powerful that we have something to lean on, that this went from being something that was so present to something that maybe was going to feel a little bit past tense and really mark a moment, to being very important again. We’ve sadly been here before—not just 2020, but emancipation, reconstruction, redemption. We’ve been here before, so we know there’s a way out. We have to be reminded. We got a little comfortable, and now it’s time to tighten up again and get to it”.

This sense of urgency is woven into the exhibition’s narrative. As visitors move through the gallery, they encounter not only Williams’ work but also pieces by other influential artists such as Beverly Buchanan, Deborah Roberts, Sheila Pree Bright, and Ming Washington.

At its core, *We Say What Black This Is* challenges preconceived notions of Black identity and empowers students to claim their own definitions. Williams hopes that students who visit the exhibition will leave with a sense of self-affirmation.

“Even students that are not curatorial, students that are not fine art students, just the general student, can come in here and get enveloped in the beauty of some of these abstractions, but then also get a second message, or get something that may be speaking directly to them,” Williams said.