



African American

Craft Summit

October 6-8, 2020

SMITHSONIAN
CENTER FOR
FOLKLIFE
& CULTURAL
HERITAGE

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Summit Report • Fall 2020

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Cover image: Puppeteer Schroeder Cherry performs with one of his handcrafted puppets. Photo courtesy of artist



Sweetgrass basket weaver Henrietta Snype poses with one of her creations. Photo by Donovan J. Snype

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From October 6-8, 2020, sixty-eight craft artists, scholars, organizers, and activists gathered virtually in summit format to discuss the state of African American Craft. Participants in the Summit assessed the needs of the African American craft community, discussed practical next steps that can be taken to sustain and amplify African American crafts, and developed a list of issues to bring to the attention of partnering support organizations and stakeholders. This set of five, two-hour meetings was the first major activity of the African American Craft Initiative, developed within the Cultural Industries framework of the Smithsonian's Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage with the support and participation of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

The African American Crafts Initiative endeavors to support the efforts of African American artists and makers to augment the visibility and understanding of their work and to expand opportunities for connection and exchange between makers in the United States, Africa, and the diaspora through improving and increasing research and documentation of African American makers and their craft; facilitating new and renewed networks linking African American makers to support organizations; and increasing public awareness of and exposure to the voices and work of African American makers.

In preparation for the Summit and the broader work of the Initiative, the Initiative team identified interested stakeholders and collected initial research into a database of African American makers, curators, scholars, and educators. The team then sent a survey of areas of interest to potential participants. Based on the survey analysis, the Summit covered the heritage and definition of African American craft in the twenty-first century; how makers are responding to current social issues; and reimagining a more equitable

craft society with recommendations for recognition, visibility, and sustainability.

Key takeaways from the discussions included that African American craft is best characterized by its nuance and plurality and that craft making is an important avenue to cultural sustainability and healing in African American communities. Legacy, storytelling, and generational knowledge all contribute to African American craft as a living cultural document, including its interconnectedness to systemic racism, sexism, environmental injustice, and current events. A major concern of many makers is how to pass their skills and heritage to the next generation, particularly when there are widespread feelings of isolation and a lack of access to teaching and resources. There was also significant interest in using the power of the internet and social media to regain ownership of Black stories and to use those stories to instill pride in African American youth.

Recommendations emerging from the Summit are categorized into institutional and organization recognition and support; community build-



Interdisciplinary artist Carolyn Crump sews a design onto a handmade facemask. Photo courtesy of the artist

ing, networking, and social media; and markets, resources, and entrepreneurship. Institutional support begins with the craft sector critically assessing what barriers to African Americans surround institutions and how to increase the representation of African American makers in these institutions, including representation on grantmaking panels and boards and increased access to funding opportunities. Networking and the use of social media are critical to community building among African American makers. Further, makers noted they need those connections to share already acquired resources, build intergenerational knowledge, and create paths for the sustainability and growth of their crafts.

It is also important that institutions foster and expand their networks to provide additional opportunities for African American makers to participate in and benefit from public programming initiatives. Makers indicated their interest in attending workshops on entrepreneurship to build their brand and learn sales and marketing strategies. Additionally, institutions should provide expanded opportunities for makers to exhibit

and sell their work, whether in-person or digitally, to increase market access.

Moving forward, the Initiative will work with partners and stakeholders to develop clear modes of communication around funding sources and opportunities, create a directory for African American makers to connect with others, support institutions to create opportunities for collaboration and public programming, and facilitate opportunities to improve entrepreneurial strategy and skills.

Utilizing the information gathered during the Summit, the Initiative will host a digital stakeholder meeting in early 2021 to bring together craft schools, national organizations, HBCUs and universities with art and design programs, and others to discuss how to better serve the African American craft community. Further, the meeting will help to bridge the divide between support organizations and African American makers by building relationships, understanding needs, and creating opportunities.



Furniture maker Jerome Bias works in his studio to recreate nineteenth-century wood furniture. Photo courtesy of artist

BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION

African American Craft Initiative

African Americans have played an important role as makers since the dawn of the American experiment, but the participation of African American artists in the wider crafts community today is under-counted. The voices of individual creators have historically been hidden or muted.

This is due in part to a lack of documentation of contemporary African American makers and their production. Relatively few art historians, folklorists, and other cultural researchers have focused on African American crafts. When they have done so, attention has been typically restricted to genres such as quilts, basketry, blacksmithing, and other heritage crafts. The resulting lack of understanding of culture-based aesthetics leads to fewer opportunities and access to resources for African American makers. Because of these dynamics, opportunities to hear contemporary makers' voices and to see the work in context have been rare.

The first—and most recent and comprehensive—National African American Crafts Conference and Jubilee took place at Shelby State Community College in Memphis, Tennessee, in May 1979. Led by Bennetta Nelson West, an arts activist, administrator, and potter, the event convened African American makers and scholars to consider the history, significance, and contemporary expression of crafts by African Americans.

Building on the legacy of the 1979 Conference and Jubilee, the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage launched the African American Craft Initiative in 2020 to expand the visibility of African American artists and makers by highlighting their practices, which forty years later are still essential to their economic and so-

cial health. The Initiative articulates three main goals: 1) *Improved and increased research and documentation of African American makers and their craft*; 2) *New and renewed networks linking African American makers to support organizations*; and 3) *Increased public awareness of African American craft*. Through collaborative research, documentation, and programming, the Initiative will create and nurture new models for a cultural ecology of craft production and learning. The Initiative will bolster the efforts of African American makers who have made significant progress in increasing the visibility and understanding of their work. Additionally, while many organizations supporting craft in the United States have historically excluded African American makers, the Initiative invites organizations with established commitments toward inclusive practices to be partners and to support the goals of the Initiative.

The Initiative also aims to increase opportunities for connection and exchange between makers in the United States, Africa, and the diaspora. These relationships provide an important source of inspiration and motivation for continued practice while building a bridge between the efforts of the African American Craft Initiative and the Center's Will to Adorn and Crafts of African Fashion Initiatives, which launched in 2010 and 2018 respectively.

SUMMIT METHODOLOGY

The Initiative's first collaborative activity was the [Craft Summit](#), which took place on October 6-8, 2020. The Summit aimed to assess the needs of the African American craft community, discuss practical next steps that can be taken to sustain and amplify African American crafts, and develop a list of issues to bring to the attention of partnering support organizations and stakeholders.

In preparation for the Summit and the broader work of the Initiative, the Center identified interested stakeholders and collected initial research into a database of African American makers, curators, scholars, and educators. The database includes contact information, medium, biographies, and their professional location. Besides being a planning tool for the Summit, the database will be made available to stakeholders and partner organizations to foster opportunities for commissions, virtual markets, maker spotlights, and more. The database is scheduled to be launched this winter on the new African American Craft Initiative section of the [Center website](#).

In order to hear the interests of the craft community, better understand the field, and collaboratively build the Summit, the team developed an online [Summit Planning Survey](#). The survey gauged interest in discussing the current state of African American crafts and to [identify key topics they wanted to discuss and see reflected in the Summit](#). The responses formed the foundation for the identified Summit discussion themes described below.

The Summit consisted of five, two-hour Zoom sessions, divided over three days, each with approximately thirteen participants. By grouping the participants into five smaller groups, the Center team ensured more intimate dialogue that is often lost in online fora. Each group varied in gender, age, geographic location, craft medium, themes addressed through their work, and self-identification as scholar, practitioner, and/

or activist, though textile arts and scholars were more heavily represented due to the established network of Dr. Diana Baird N'Diaye, lead curator of the Initiative, who is both a textile maker and a scholar herself. Before the Summit, all sixty-eight confirmed participants received each other's bios, contact information, and head shots to support further connection and networking. The package also contained a [short bibliography](#) to introduce the participants to some core concepts around African American crafts.

Dr. N'Diaye hosted the five sessions and five African American scholars acted as moderators. Participants gave brief introductions with the rest of the time spent on open-ended discussions, following a prepared agenda of topics and questions. [The agenda was split into three sections, each lasting roughly thirty minutes](#). At the end of each session, we asked all participants and moderators to take a [short feedback survey](#) to understand to what degree they made meaningful connections to each other, and if they considered the Summit a valuable way to exchange ideas.

The Center's team convened shortly after the conclusion of the Summit to [debrief, review lessons learned, and outline best practices for internal as well as external learning](#), should anyone else wish to implement a similar summit. This report is part of that evaluative process, along with the development of a package of project management forms and templates, which can be shared by reaching out to the [Initiative's team](#).



A mixed-media sculpture of an upright bassist by interdisciplinary artist Carolyn Crump. Photo courtesy of artist

DISCUSSION THEMES

The agenda for each discussion session of the Summit was divided into three themes: Foundations, Mapping the Present, and Envisioning Change. While each group followed the same agenda, they all developed their dialogues in different directions, providing a diversity of ideas for the greater African American Craft Initiative.

THEME ONE

Foundations: African American craft in the twenty-first century

Across all five groups, makers had difficulty forming a single definition for African American craft in the twenty-first century. Rather, all makers placed an importance on recognizing African American craft for its nuance and plurality. In one maker's words, Blackness and Black craft are a "symphony" of interconnected elements, which are often constrained by the categories assigned by those outside the Black community. While there was little consensus on definition, many makers brought up the relevance of craft to cultural sustainability and healing.

Legacy, storytelling, and generational knowledge all contribute to African American craft's nature as a living cultural document. As we look to the future, a concern of many makers—especially ones from long traditions like sweetgrass basketry and quilting—is how to pass their skills to the next generation. Many makers encountered craft in childhood through their family members,

apprenticeships, or simply craft's ubiquity in the home. As artist Barbara Earl Thomas put it, "it's just what you do." With fewer young people interested in craft as a career, there is heightened concern about legacy and a need to showcase craft as a profitable career by "showing up" and "owning your story [as an African American maker]." Lisa Woolfork of Black Women Stitch powerfully stated, "legacy is a noun and a verb." We are all responsible for uplifting stories of cultural expression especially among young audiences.



A display of basket maker Henrietta Snype's baskets, each varying in size and design. Photo by Donovan J. Snype

THEME TWO

Mapping the Present: How are makers responding to current social issues?

Defining African American craft came up again in discussions of systemic racism, sexism, environmental injustice, and other current events. The issues identified above—feelings of isolation, lack of access to avenues for teaching, homogenization of identities—are intensified by the fact that "craft," as a topic of study and as a field, is very narrow. Often it leaves BIPOC makers to choose between being isolated outside the definition or to adapt to the existing system at great personal cost. Not only does the contemporary "craft" establishment frequently exclude African Americans, but when African Americans are included in the craft community, makers are given a "monolithic avenue" with which to express Blackness. Dollmakers are unable to enter "fine art" shows. Furniture makers and historical interpreters are told their work is "too white." Jewelry makers confront shock at a man doing a "woman's craft." All makers encounter these labels, but African American makers feel especially isolated by them.

In short, there is very little space for African American makers to exist unabashedly within the "craft market," as defined by white institutions and audiences. This Summit, however, gave younger makers a chance to hear from elders who have built legacies that allow them to work outside other peoples' categories. These legacies were built on strong relational networks and unflinching acceptance of their own personal craft identity. Puppeteer Schroeder Cherry said, "creative people are first responders," in the very immediate sense of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, but also in the broader act of imagining a new, more equitable, more expressive world. Makers are often on the front lines in the fight against white supremacy, environmental injustice, and economic and systemic racism. As such, they are the first to offer ideas for dismantling these systems and, most importantly, spreading Black joy.





Doll maker Cinnamon Willis paints one of her handcrafted dolls. Photo by Ignacio Soltero

THEME THREE

Envisioning Change: How can we reimagine a more equitable craft society?

Because one goal of the Summit was to draw out ideas for institutional support, the makers discussed the potential role of craft organizations and museums in expanding visibility and access. Makers acknowledged that while museums are not the only avenue for representation, they do offer invaluable funding, teaching, and general exposure. However, these resources are less valuable when institutions call on African American makers only in the month of February, for example, or pull from only a small pool of well-known faces. Thinking broadly about what self-sustaining visibility looks like, makers expressed a desire to create their own spaces where Blackness is embraced, and their craft practices valued. Jerome Bias, a furniture maker, gave the analogy of a dinner table where makers and institutions can be fed and feed others, sharing their resources and opportunities so that the whole craft community can thrive.

Makers also saw a need for documentation, apprenticeship, and access to information, which would benefit their own practices and, hopefully, the practices of young makers to come. There was significant interest in using the power of the internet and social media to regain ownership of Black stories and use those stories to instill pride in African American youth. All the makers acknowledged that their skills or success absolutely must be shared with the next generation and that craft's evolutionary nature leaves plenty of room for bigger visions and creativity from young Black makers who will thrive if they are nurtured by a strong community.



Career Goals, a sculpture by dollmaker Cinnamon Willis, depicts the glass ceiling. Photo courtesy of artist

MAKERS' RECOMMENDATIONS

In response to the Summit, the Initiative team compiled a list of recommendations based on makers' suggestions during the Summit meetings. The needs of the African American craft community are diverse, but many had overlapping concerns and solutions. The Initiative will work with partner organizations to develop action plans and accountability frameworks to address the makers' recommendations. Below, we highlight some direct suggestions that makers would like the Initiative to address, organized by theme.

Institutional and Organizational Recognition and Support

Many participants agreed more African American makers need to be included on grantmaking panels, boards, and review committees. The funding provided by various opportunities needs to be shared with African American communities. The craft sector needs to assess and critically consider what barriers to African Americans surround institutions and how to increase the representation of African American makers in these institutions.

Markets, Resources, and Entrepreneurship

A recurring topic was the issue of pricing one's craft and how this varies with the locations where they are selling. Makers indicated that it would be helpful to attend workshops on how to expand and market their craft practice with the aim of making it profitable. The Smithsonian and other institutions need to offer more consistent opportunities and welcoming spaces for African American makers to sell and exhibit their work. One participant suggested that the Smithsonian could host Zoom webinars for African American makers to teach and demonstrate their crafts to the public.

Community Building, Networking, and Social Media Platforms

Makers discovered ways they can help one another through sharing already acquired resources, documenting one's craft through film or written records, and promoting one another through their social media platforms. Additionally, makers also discussed the benefits of communal live-work spaces, databases and directories of African American makers and museums, and the importance of staying in touch with one another. Institutions like the Smithsonian can bring makers together and foster engagement and support among makers through various programming and workshops. In building community and sharing knowledge, makers noted the importance of sharing intergenerational knowledge and learning about the paths and processes of their predecessors.



African-inspired mask made by interdisciplinary maker Chris Malone. Photo courtesy of artist

CONCLUSIONS & NEXT STEPS

As the initial activity of the Initiative, the Summit addressed two crucial goals. First, the Summit contributed to improved and increased research and documentation of African American makers and their craft. The development of the African American makers’ database and the continued expansion of the bibliography are valuable resources that will be made available to the public on the Initiative web page later this year. Second, the wealth of knowledge, sharing, and connection that came from the Summit took an important first step towards building new and renewed networks linking African American makers to support organizations. The Summit facilitated deep and necessary dialogues among a variety of African American makers and laid the groundwork for meaningful community building. The conversations centered makers’ voices with the aim of amplifying their stories, thoughts, and concerns.

The feedback survey found that participants were overwhelmingly satisfied with both the format of the Summit to exchange ideas and to build a sense of community. There was encouragement and support among the groups, as well as advice and wisdom about how to thrive in hard times. Malene Barnett, an artist, activist, and founder of the Black Artist and Designers Guild, encouraged others to “[not] be afraid to be as Black as you can be, show your work and share your story with the community. I think the more we come together as a collective, the greater the impact we will be. I believe in us and what we do.”

The needs and ideas expressed during the Summit will not sit idly in the meeting transcriptions. Moving forward, the Initiative will bring these needs to the forefront of discussions with members of the craft community and support organizations, coordinate opportunities for networking and collaboration, and implement programming that builds on makers’ strengths and showcases the importance and richness of African American craft across the country.

A first step is to indentify and implement actionable steps to address key topics from the Summit. The following steps will allow for a clearer path forward to promote equity and opportunity within the craft community.

- Develop clear modes of communication around funding sources and opportunities
- Create a directory for African American makers to connect with others in their geographic area or when traveling
- Facilitate opportunities to improve entrepreneurial strategy and skills

In response to the Summit and in preparation for continued Initiative activities, the Initiative took a number of initial steps to ensure cohesiveness and transparency. The team created a resource email to maintain a steady stream of communication with the Center’s stakeholders and partners. Additionally, the team developed a resource



Kibibi Ajanku, textile artist, works with hand-dyed indigo fabric in her studio. Photo courtesy of artist

reference list and compiled all the Summit materials into an accessible folder for participants and for those who wish to be part of the Initiative moving forward.

The next cornerstone activity of the Initiative will be a digital stakeholder meeting in early 2021. The meeting will bring together craft schools, national organizations, HBCUs and universities with art and design programs, and others to



Kibibi Ajanku hand-dyes textiles with indigo in a West African village. Photo courtesy of artist

discuss how to better serve the African American craft community. The stakeholder meeting will focus on the issues discussed at the Summit and how to best address those concerns through institutional support and public programming. Further, the meeting will help to bridge the divide between support organizations and African American makers by building relationships, understanding needs, and creating opportunities.

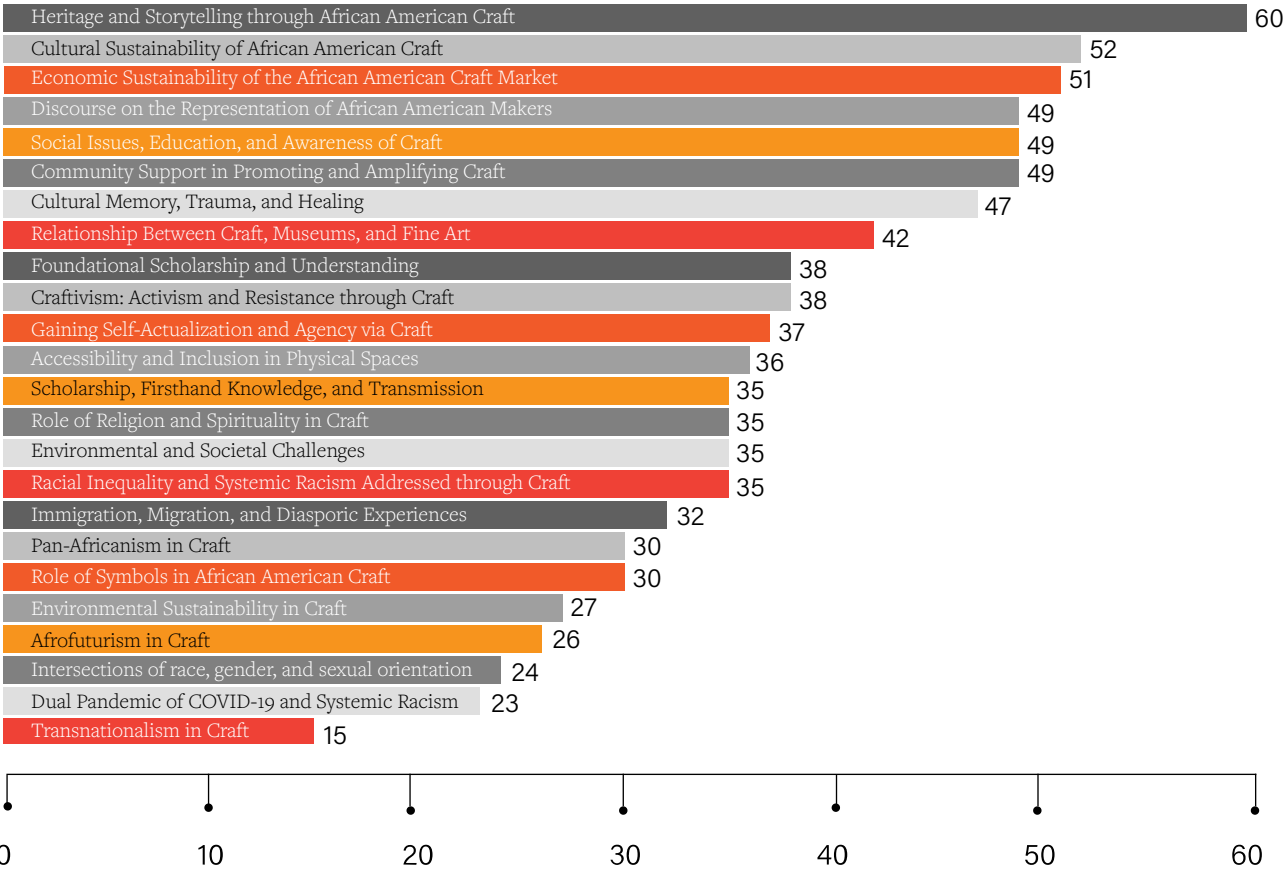
APPENDICES

Appendix A: Summit Planning Survey Results

The survey went to 249 stakeholders identified through the Smithsonian network, internet research, and snowball sampling, representing over eighteen different crafts and academic fields, across twenty U.S. states, with 102 responses received.

In the survey, stakeholders rated each topic on a scale of 1 to 5. One indicated the topics that were least important to them, while five indicated the topics that were most important.

The bar graph below shows the popularity of each predetermined topic. The horizontal axis refers to the number of individuals who selected fives for each respective topic. The predetermined topics suggested by the curatorial team are listed on the vertical axis.



Appendix B: Summit Agenda

Introductions: Meet the Makers (15 minutes)

Foundations: African American Craft in the Twenty-First Century (30 minutes)

- How does African American craft in the 21st century reflect heritage, background, ancestry, or upbringing?
Is there something that makes contemporary African American craft different/special in terms of aesthetics?
- How does craft address and express the cultural memory and trauma experienced by your ancestors as well as African Americans today?

Mapping the Present: How Are You as Makers Responding to Current Social Issues? (30 minutes)

- What challenges have you faced as an African American maker faced regarding Opportunities to learn from others, to pass on your skills, knowledge, and aesthetics, and for appreciation, preservation, visibility, and cultural sustainability of African American craft in general?
- What challenges do African American makers face as they grow their business/brand/practice? What difficulties have you encountered in promoting yourself and your craft in the spheres you find yourself in? Who are the people with whom you currently interact in your practice (eg. Clients, sponsors, teachers, students, mentors, mentees, collaborating partners, government funders, museums, galleries, schools, patrons, press and media, artist collective, etc.)
- What are some of the ways that African American makers are responding to current social issues? (What is the role of craft in addressing issues such as systemic racism/sexism/economic inequality/environmental issues/health disparities, etc.?)

Envisioning Change: How Can We Reimagine a More Equitable Craft Society?

Steps for Recognition, Visibility, and Sustainability (35 minutes)

- What needs to happen to ensure the continuity and vitality of African American craft? What would you like to see on each level of engagement with craft (your own practice, local community, larger craft community)?
- How can craft be better recognized within the arts and museum world? What are some ways that institutions /organizations/ markets can help increase the visibility and representation of African American crafts?
- How can we build a larger network of makers? What other things do you envision being important to address?

Wrap-up & Next Steps (15 minutes)

Appendix C: Summit Moderators, Participants, and Staff

Moderators

Aaron Bryant, Curator of photography, visual culture, social justice, and contemporary history, Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture

Makalé Cullen, Writer, researcher, current Anthropocene Fellow with the Urban Soils Institute

Deborah Macanic, Jewelry design, project director at the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (retired)

Phyllis May-Machunda, Folklorist, professor emerita at Minnesota State University Moorhead

Michelle Wilkinson, Curator specializing in architecture and design, Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture

Participants

Kibibi Ajanku, Indigo dyeing and fiber

Akeema-Zane, Researcher, writer, sound artist

Kathleen DeQuence Anderson, Polymer clay and jewelry making

Alicia Appleton, Leather and jewelry making

Kwasi Asare, Kente cloth and textile arts

Xenobia Bailey, Fiber arts

Malene Barnett, Textile/rug design and clay sculpture

Jerome Bias, Furniture making and hearth cooking

Ericka Boone, Jewelry design

Shenequa Brooks, Hair and textile arts

Camila Bryce-LaPorte, Dollmaker, community scholar

Jordan Carey, Textiles and fashion

Emily Carris-Duncan, Fiber arts, photography, founder of public studio space, the Art Dept

Schroeder Cherry, Puppeteering, museum studies educator at Morgan State University

David Harper Clemons, Metalsmithing and jewelry

Pearline Cooke, Textiles, rag dollmaking

Alison Croney-Moses, Woodworking, art administrator at the Eliot School of Fine Arts, Boston

Carolyn Crump, Fiber arts

Dominick Davis, Sustainable fashion design

Mary DeBoise-Morgan, Multi-crafter, founder of Black Girls Craft

Adrienne DeVine, Mixed-media painting and sculptural arts

Antwon Ford, Sweetgrass basketry

Tanda Francis, Large-scale public art

Anthony Gaskins, Millinery

LaMar Gayles, Mixed-media jewelry, historian of craft and design of the Black diaspora

Tamra Gentry, Metalsmithing and jewelry

Valerie Gladstone, Dollmaking

Mellanee Goodman, Researcher, graduate student at Warren Wilson College’s Critical Craft Studies program

Joanne Graham, Fused glass and textile arts

Participants

Deborah Grayson, Painter, printmaker, sewist

Myrah Brown Green, Artist, author, curator, professor of art history

Karen Hampton, Textiles and fibers, quilting

Napoleon Jones Henderson, Mixed-media and textile arts, member of AfriCOBRA

Joselia Hughes, Multi-disciplinary artist, writer

Michelle Lanier, Afro-Carolinian folklorist, director of North Carolina’s twenty-five state-owned historic sites

Arvid Lee, Stained glass

Melba Lee, Cut paper arts

Ronke Luke, Textile arts, author

Chris Malone, Ceramics, mosaics, and polymer clay

Carolyn Mazloomi, Quiltmaking

Dindga McCannon, Fiber arts, needlework, quilting

Barbara McCormick, Sweetgrass basketry

Lisa McFadden, Millinery

Brianna McIntyre, Artist and furniture making

Malyia McNaughton, Jewelry design

Holly Anne Mitchell, Mixed-media jewelry

Tiffany Momon, Professor at Sewanee, University of the South, founder of the Black Craftspeople Digital Archive

Sehar Peerzada, Fashion design, hand-block printing

Joanne Petit-Frère, Textiles, hair, and braiding arts

Evetta Petty, Millinery

Staff

Dr. Diana Baird N'Diaye, Lead curator, project director

Sloane Keller, Project coordinator

Anne Sandager Pedersen, Impact evaluation specialist

Dubonnet Porter, Functional arts

Mia Wright Ross, Leather sculpting, professor of shoe design, Parsons School of Design

Risha Rox, Interdisciplinary visual arts

Soumana Saley, Leather arts

Cynthia Sands, Dollmaking and fabric design

Bo Shepherd, Found objects, reclaimed wood, interior design

Henrietta Snype, Sweetgrass basketry

Sylvia Stephens, Quilting

Cassandra Sturges, Dollmaking

Barbara Earl Thomas, Visual mixed-media, paper and craft arts

Kendria Thompson, Metalsmithing, founder of Metalsmiths for Change

Michael Twitty, Food writer, culinary historian, and historic interpreter

Bennetta Nelson West, Ceramics, community organizer of the first National African American Crafts Conference and Jubilee (1979)

Namita Gupta Wiggers, Writer, curator, educator at Warren Wilson College’s Critical Craft Studies program

Cinnamon Willis, Dollmaking

Shanelle Wilson, Jewelry making

Lisa Woolfork, Sewing, founder of Black Women Stitch, and associate professor of African American literature and culture at the University of Virginia

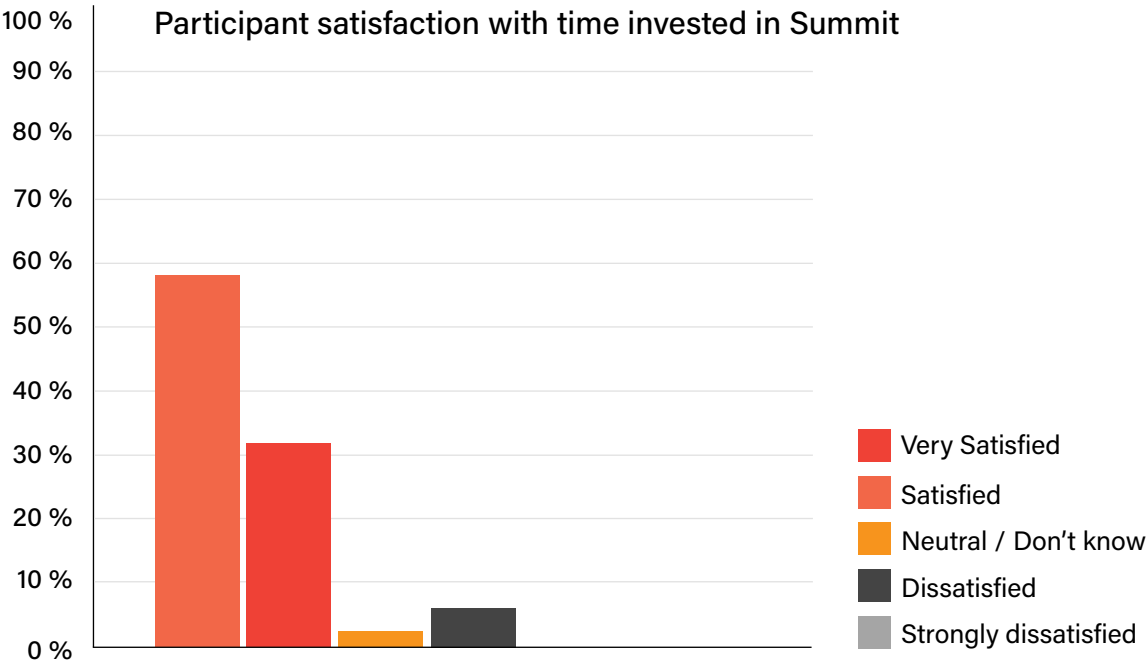
Cecelia Halle, Strategic communications assistant

Emma Efke, Intern, project management

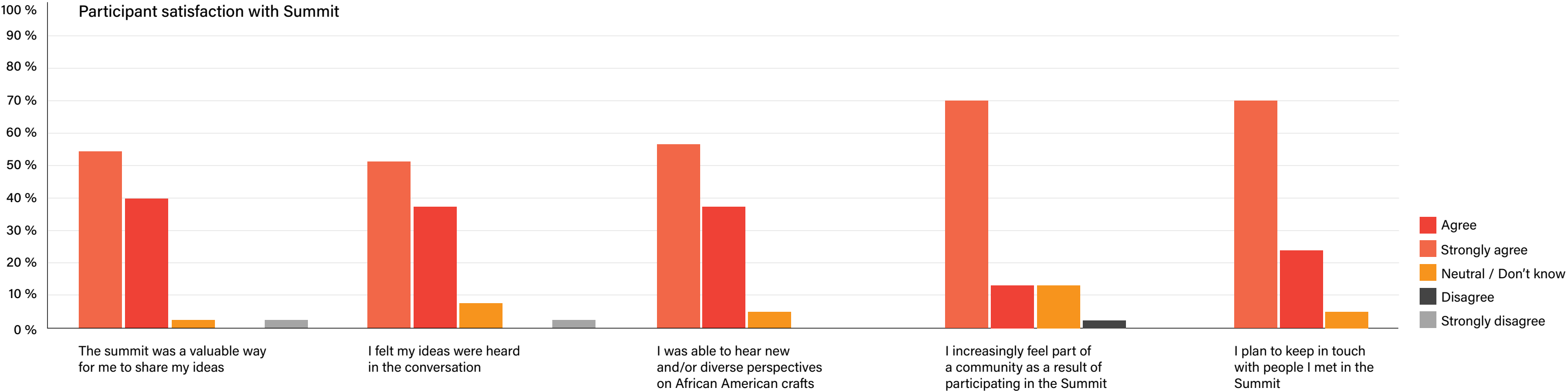
Julia Hirsch, Intern, resources list

Mya Lewis, Intern, artist data base

Appendix D: Summit Participant Survey Results



“It was wonderful to connect to so many fellow African American makers—who share many of the same thoughts that I do about existing in this space.”



Appendix E: Lessons Learned and Best Practices

Building Community

- Investing time in corresponding and building relationships with participants before the meetings made the groups and conversations more dynamic.
- Sharing participant bios beforehand helped moderators prepare for the conversation and it was useful for participants to refer to who was in their group and who else was involved in the Summit for potential further networking.
- The Summit showed participants that there is a community and that they are not islands in their field. It provided the much-needed space and platform to gather and communicate.
- There was a large degree of diversity among participants, varying levels of education, public-speaking experience, craft field, age, etc., and it was very enriching. There was a lot of respect for the elders from the younger participants and bringing together the well-established makers with others lesser known helped to show that there is a community that can grow, and it helped to dispel loneliness and feelings of being left out.
- The Smithsonian and the Center are not above the critique raised regarding issues of inclusion and systemic oppression in cultural institutions in recognizing artists of color in programming, events, communication, and research. The Initiative is actively working to address this.

Related Next Steps

- Follow up with specific individuals or arrange smaller, targeted meetings to help make connections across the groups for participants who were looking for specific things or had related ideas (e.g., people who were interested in doing documentaries/documenting oral histories).
- Follow up with makers who were unable to attend but expressed interest to keep lines of communication open. Make sure they get project materials and opportunities to give feedback.

Format and Planning

The Initiative team went online twenty to thirty minutes prior to each meeting to prep and discuss last-minute details. We asked moderators if they could join online twenty minutes early to discuss items from previous Summit meetings and what our expectations were for the current meeting they were moderating.

To prepare Summit participants for the discussion, the team compiled and sent an agenda, a selected bibliography, participant biographies, and contact information of one member of the Initiative team for assistance in technical difficulties.

Best practices for meetings:

- The Summit meeting length of two hours, with no recesses, and twelve to fourteen participants in each session with one moderator worked very well. It was enough to allow space and time for open conversations and for everyone to be able to participate, yet short enough to avoid burnout.
- Background and technical support (chat management, sharing information and communicating with participants and moderator, timekeeping, note-taking, troubleshooting) are necessary for things to run smoothly.
- A test run of the meetings may have improved meeting consistency and avoided some of the sections going over time, spilling into the next topic.

Considerations to enhance future meetings:

- Tighten up agenda and intro section. Focus more on the agenda and desired outcomes of the meeting and less on SI structure and background. Cover less-broad ideas and focus more on specifics to move towards action.
- Create a specific strategy for moderating conversations to make sessions more unified, including emphasizing desired outcomes for the meeting and participants, and tips on how to manage difficult situations. Prep moderators in one-on-one conversations before meetings to make sure they are familiar and comfortable with the strategy.
- Identify accessibility needs by asking participants if they require any accommodation when sending out invites. Also keep people’s capacities in mind during meeting—tech savvy, public speaking, accessibility, etc.
- Collaborate with an accessibility services provider to provide transcription services for the sessions to support accessibility needs and create a backup record of the discussions.
- Consider sending text reminders shortly before meeting is about to begin.
- The Center paid participants and moderators a modest honorarium for their participation and awarded them a certificate of appreciation.

Related Next Steps

- Prepare for the stakeholder meetings by re-confirming needs with Summit participants and create a half-page synopsis for each of the Summit sessions including outputs. Consult with African American organizations first and then with a broader group of organizations.
- Make project-planning materials and reports available to Center staff to support transparency, equity, and inclusion regarding work within the Center and make a presentation on the project at an all-staff meeting.
- Ensure all project materials are archived within the Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections and consider making a finding aid.

Appendix F: Selected Biography

What is Craft? General Resources on Art and Craft

Lovelace, Joyce. 2018. “Craft: Seriously, What Does the Word Mean?” *American Craft Council*.

Markowitz, Sally J. 1994. “Distinction Between Arts and Crafts.” *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 28(1), 55-70.

Vartanian, Hrag. 2020. “Why Craft Matters.” *American Craft Council*.

African American Craft through History

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Appendix G: Cultural Sustainability Program Information

The African American Craft Initiative is part of the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage’s Cultural Sustainability Program, which aims to support communities’ efforts to preserve and sustain their living cultural heritage. The program is funded by the generous support of Ferring Pharmaceuticals. Learn more about Cultural Sustainability and our other Smithsonian Artisan Initiative efforts [here](#).

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