Camilla Williams Exhibition
January 12 to May 24, 2020

Due to the COVID-19 quarantine the Museum and Camilla Exhibition was closed on March 20, 2020 and will reopen to the public on the recommendation of the Virginia State Governor.

The Danville Museum of Fine Arts and History (DMFAH) would like to announce the Camilla Williams Exhibition, made possible through a generous Make More Happen grant from the Danville Regional Foundation; a Helen S. and Charles G. Patterson grant from SunTrust and a seed grant from Virginia Humanities. The exhibition can be viewed in the DMFAH’s Schoolfield and Jennings galleries. Through the exhibition of Camilla Williams, the DMFAH promotes history and art in the Dan River Region and integrates awareness of history, culture, and community. The Camilla Williams Exhibition highlights the relationship of the famed New York opera diva and her hometown, Danville, while exploring the difficult path to fame in a racially divided South during the civil rights movement. The Danville Museum of Fine Arts and History believes conversations on diversity and inclusion lie at the heart of Danville Museum exhibition experience. This exhibition aims to not only reveal Camilla Williams’ life and time in a historical context, but also to inspire neighborhoods and community residents to dream big, pursue excellence, and cultivate positive creative change. The museum also aspires to build strong community relationships around the narratives of Camilla Williams’ life in Danville, and her professional engagement as an opera singer on the international stage. Her compassionate mentorship of her students at Indiana University and her inspirational life as an African American opera singer during the civil rights era will also be celebrated. The Danville Museum of Fine Arts and History serves as a center for cultural activities in the Danville and Pittsylvania County region while drawing visitors from the entire Dan River Region and beyond. The Museum is a 501(c)(3) organization.
About Camilla Williams: Born in Danville, Virginia, in 1919, Camilla Williams became the first African American soprano to appear with a major American opera company, the New York City Center Opera, with her 1946 debut in the title role of Madame Butterfly. Camilla Williams gifted the Danville Museum with her personal effects, knowing that they could have the potential to impact our community. The Danville Museum of Fine Arts & History plans to offer an exhibit featuring Camilla Williams’ relationship with her hometown, with the New York opera world and with her students at Indiana University. The exhibition will be on view from January 12 – May 24, 2020, and narrates the story of a girl born in Danville whose voice was heard around the world. This vibrant, bold exhibit holds participatory and community engagement features that draw the audience into the life and times of Camilla Williams, when the doors around her held “Whites Only” signs. Not only was Camilla Williams able to overcome the racial barriers that held her opportunities in check, but she also became a hope for others through the Civil Rights movement. The exhibition also is a celebration of Camilla Williams’ 100th birthday and includes a variety of programs and performances starting in June of 2019 at the Museum and in off-site locations throughout the community.

Camilla Williams Collection Curator and Exhibition Manager: Kate McDannold

University of North Carolina at Greensboro Museum Studies Fellow 2019-2020

Kate McDannold is excited to work with the Danville Museum of Fine Arts and History for the Camilla Williams project, especially since it furthers her interest in celebrating overlooked or underrepresented historical perspectives. McDannold received her BA in History and Public History Certificate from Western Carolina University, and she is currently in her second year of UNC-Greensboro’s Museum Studies MA program.

McDannold is passionate about creating inclusive and interactive museum exhibits with unique sensory components. After her work with UNCG’s installation of Patient No More, an exhibit exploring disability activism in the United States, she is aware of the importance of accessibility and inclusion for people of all abilities. She hopes to bring this perspective to the creation of the Camilla Williams exhibit. McDannold looks forward to showcasing Williams’ life and achievements to the public at the DMFAH.

Camilla Williams Curatorial Catalogue essay: Michelle Talibah will be contributing the curatorial statement - available in the gallery and the exhibition catalogue.

Michelle Talibah brings a unique perspective to the Camilla Williams exhibition. As a painter, public artist, educator and curator she is able to investigate the many facets of Camilla Williams’ life as professional singer, wife of a civil rights activist, and mentor as well as teacher at Indiana University.
As founding director and curator of *New Door Creative Gallery* in 2004, now located in Baltimore’s Station North Arts District in 2006 in Baltimore, Maryland, Michelle Talibah offers space to professional and emerging visual artists who explore an aesthetic informed by culture, community engagement and equity.

In 2009, New Door Creative presented *Divas*, by the late artist Morgan Monceaux. His character series devoted to cultural, social and political luminaries; meticulously researched and explored, investigate topics such as: “*The Presidents*”, a portrait of every United States president (from George Washington to Barack Obama, and their First Ladies); “*The Royals*”, a portrait series of international royalty; “*Jazz Innovators*”, a series depicting musicians from the tradition of Jazz and Blues, and *Divas*. *Divas*, is a portrait series comprising over 30 African-American opera vocalists, many obscured within the history of opera and theater. The Diva series began with the depiction of renowned soprano Camilla Williams performing Puccini’s *Madame Butterfly*. *Divas* was also exhibited at Baltimore’s Creative Alliance (Amalie Rothschild Gallery) in 2010.

**Fred Motley: Danville Community Engagement Exhibition Formats for Camilla Williams.**

Teaming up with Cedric Hairston, the Supervisor of Specialty Curricula Areas for Pittsylvania County Schools in Virginia, to navigate the local Danville public school community, the local church communities, as well as Averett and Danville Community College, Fred Motley draws on an audience that needs to become connected to their own stories. Motley is no stranger to speaking, singing and dancing at festivals, boasting a resume of 30 years’ experience as a "modern day griot."

Fred Motley has “talked” to his local community through stories, theatrical and musical performances for a long time. Reporter Vicky Morrison writes in an article for the *Register and Bee* in 2015 about the annual Storytelling Festival hosted by the Danville Museum of Fine Arts and History every first weekend of February. She states that Fred Motley keeps the Storytelling event sustainable through the quality and accessibility of the programming for all - while also preserving stories and traditions in the hearts and minds of an audience. The rich history of the Dan River Region is alive and well through the community engagement programming Fred Motley has constructed for the Camilla Williams exhibition since June of 2019 to the opening of the exhibition in January of 2020. He also conducts the Storytelling Festival at the Danville Museum of Art in February of 2020.

“Everything that you hear, see, touch, and taste, reveals a story. It introduces those observing, to the anatomy of the story and the message in the stories and then translates that message from the page to the stage using acting techniques” (Fred Motley)
2019-2020 Programming dates for Camilla Williams Exhibition

The community engagement programming leading up to the exhibition installation dates in January are included (Programming facilitated by Fred Motley, the CCECC, Danville Concert Association and Cedric Hairston. All venues are located in the city of Danville VA):

- **Sunday, June 30, 2019**: “Let’s talk About Camilla Williams and Danville”, 3pm until 4:30pm. Special guest Jean Vernon – East New Hope Baptist Church Praise Dance Team.
- **Wednesday, July 17, 2019**: Film Screening – “Aida’s Brothers and Sisters: Black Voices in Opera and Concert.” 11:30 am, Danville Museum Of Fine Art and History.
- **Saturday, August 3, 2019**: “Art and Music” chaotic Pop Up. 2pm until 6pm. Crema & Vine/ 1009 Main Street.
- **Thursday, August 15, 2019**: “Let’s talk about Camilla Williams and Danville.” Mix and Mingle – 6pm until 7:30pm. AKA Sorority House/ 320 Holbrook St.
- **Saturday, August 24th & Sunday, August 25th**: “Camilla Williams and Her Danville Roots” - History & Art Pop Up. 11 am – 2pm and 1:30pm – 3:30pm. Calvary Baptist Church/ 218 Holbrook Street.
- **Tuesday, September 10, 2019**: Film Screening – “Aida’s Brothers and Sisters: Black Voices in Opera and Concert.” 5:30pm until 7:30pm. Blount Chapel/ Averett University/ 420 West Main Street
- **Sunday September 29, 2019**: “A Program of Spirituals and Hymns” Clarissa Feat Knight, Voight Hairston, Daryl McLean, GWH Chorus. 2pm- 3:30 pm. High Street Baptist Church / 630 High Street
- **Thursday, October 10, 2019**: Film Screening: “ Aida’s Brothers and Sisters: Black Voices in Opera and Concert.” 11:00am screening and a 5:00pm screening. Ruby B Archie Public Library / 511 Patton Street
- **Thursday, October 17, 2019**: “An evening of Concert Music Featuring Soprano Dr. Louise Toppin” (7pm -9pm). High Street Baptist Church/ 630 High Street.
- **Friday, October 18, 2019**: Mix and Mingle, 5:30pm – 7:00pm. The Historic North Theater/ 629 North Main Street
- **Saturday October 19, 2019**: Mix and Mingle, 1:00pm – 4:00pm. Camilla Williams Biography Book reading by Chelsea Hillas (Averett Intern) The Historic North Theater/ 629 North Main Street
- **Saturday, November 9, 2019**: Gospel, Concert, Broadway and R&B. John M. Langston Auditorium/ 228 Cleveland Street
- **Installation Week**: Monday, January 6 – 12, 2020.
- **Opening Reception**: Sunday, January 12, 2020. 2:00-4:30pm
- Storytelling Festival, February, 2020 (Fred Motley, Monica Motley and Karen Williamson)
- January 16th 2020 from 6-7pm at the Ruby B Archie Library: A Virtual Conversation with Dr. Stephanie Shonekan and Fred Motley. Most of the Narrative that runs through the DMFAH exhibition *Camilla Williams* is derived from a biography written by Camilla Williams and Dr. Stephanie Shonekan. The Book is currently out of print. [https://www.amazon.com/Camilla-Williams-African-American-Classical/dp/0773414835](https://www.amazon.com/Camilla-Williams-African-American-Classical/dp/0773414835)

**Partner and Sponsor organizations:** Key partners already involved in small associated community events at the Danville Museum (live music/film screenings/ theater/ book readings/refreshments/panel discussions and other aspects involved): Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Calvary Baptist Church, Langston High Alumni Group, High Street Baptist Church, and Opera Ebony. DMFAH partners include Danville Art League, Little Theater of Danville, Smokestack Theatre Company, Danville and Pittsylvania County public school systems, private and parochial schools, home school groups, Head Start, Danville Ruby B Archie Public Library, Danville Community College, Averett University, Danville Historical Society, the Langhorne House, History United, City of Danville Public Works, Garden Club of Danville, and Old West End Association. The Museum thanks the Virginia Humanities for awarding a Discretionary Grant to support the early planning process, and the Danville Regional Foundation’s “Make More Happen” grant for covering the expenses of the project development and installation costs for the Camilla Williams Exhibition. We would like to thank Ben Rippe for restoration of the Camilla Williams fur garments and for providing additional fashion accessories and mannequins. Thank you to Indiana University for facilitating the Camilla Williams Collection transfer to DMFAH. The Museum would like to thank all DMFAH volunteers and all sponsors for their support.

**Sponsors**

- The Helen S. and Charles G. Patterson, Jr. Charitable Foundation Trust
- Ben Rippe, Rippe’s Apparel Furs and Shoes, Danville, VA
- The Schoolfield Museum, Danville, VA
- Kelly Cunningham, Best Of My Ability (B.O.M.A), Danville Fashion Week, Danville, VA
- DRF, Make More Happen Community Grant, Danville, VA
- Averett University, Intern Chelsea Hillas, Danville VA + CCECC programming
- Center for Community Engagement and Career Competitiveness (CCECC)
- University of North Carolina at UNCG, Greensboro, NC. Museum Studies Fellow Kate McDannold
- Danville Concert Association (Louise Toppin Performance: Mrs. Camilla Williams 100th Commemoration Committee)
• Historic High Street Baptist Church

Loans
Indiana University, African American Arts Institute, Office of the Vice president for Diversity, Equity and Multicultural Affairs, 275 N Jordan Ave, Bloomington, IN, Virginia Museum of Natural History, 21 Starling Ave, Martinsville, VA.

Design, Repairs and Conservation
• Louise Martling, Graphic Designer and Exhibition Support, Eleventh Hour Design
• Hollis Stauber, Conservation work on Camilla Williams bust, Water based Burned Umber on plaster, October 2019.
• Sonya Wolen, Last interview with Camilla Williams
• Patsi Compton, Sonya Wolen, Sherry Gott, Chelsea Hillas, Fred Motley, C.B. Maddox, Wenn Harold (Exhibition Team)
• LaToya Williams, Repairs to Kimonos, Costume preparation and Dressing Mannequins
• Ben Rippe, Conditioning of Camilla Williams FURRS.

Community Engagement
• Fred Motley: Director Storytelling Festival (February 2020) as well as director of community engagement events that led up to the exhibition.
• Monica Motley: Director of the Motley Consulting Group (TMCG), a consulting firm that uses practice-based research and inclusion, equity and diversity methods to help community activists, organizations and academic institutions more strategically address community disparities and health inequities.
• Cedric Hairston, facilitated programming in public schools, churches and community centers.
• Kelly Cunningham, community engagement through B.O.M.A. Director of Danville Fashion Week.

For more information call: 434-793-5644
Or e-mail: info@danvillemuseum.org
www.danvillemuseum.org

The Camilla Williams exhibition is on view in the DMFAH’s Jennings and Schoolfield Galleries and is wheelchair accessible