

DESTINATION CRENSHAW

Commissioned Artist Bios



Charles Dickson

Car Culture, Sankofa Park

Charles Dickson was born in Los Angeles in 1947, lives and works in Compton, is an Artist in Residence at the Watts Towers Art Center and has been an important figure in the Black L.A. art scene for decades. His intricate carvings in wood and metal reflect the African diaspora through direct references to traditional motifs, languages and styles of well-documented African ritual objects and languages, including Ghanaian Adinkra symbols. His many public artworks include the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. memorial in Watts, *Wishing on a Star* at the California African American Museum, *Spirit Tree* at the Watts Towers Art Center, *Divine Order: The Manifestation of the Soaring Spirit* for the Metro C (Green) Line Mariposa Station (El Segundo) and *The Beacon* at Crenshaw Plaza, as well as a series of award medals and sculptures commissioned by Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science. Over the course of his career, he has taught both formally (including at Otis College of Art and Design) and informally and has participated in more than one hundred exhibitions, including shows at the National Black Arts Festival, Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, California African American Museum, Japanese American National Museum, Los Angeles Arboretum, Korean Cultural Center and Watts Towers Art Center.



Melvin Edwards

Column, 54th Street

Melvin Edwards was born in 1937, attended Dorsey High School in Los Angeles and trained at USC (where he played football) and at Otis College of Art and Design. In 1963 he established his studio in the Crenshaw neighborhood at Van Ness and Vernon. His first solo exhibition was presented at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art in 1965 and showcased his *Lynch Fragments*, which have become a signature body of his work. For more than 50 years, he has created public art for communities around the world, reimagining monumental civic sculpture by uniting abstract forms with personal symbols to address issues of race, labor and the African diaspora. Often created from welded steel, barbed wire, chain and machine parts, his work was exhibited in New York City at the Studio Museum in Harlem soon after its founding, and in 1970 he became the first Black sculptor to have a solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art. His work is in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, LACMA, and the Smithsonian American Art Museum, among many others, and has been in exhibitions including a 50-year retrospective at the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas. He has been honored with a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship, a Fulbright Fellowship to

Zimbabwe, the Joan Mitchell Foundation Award, the Artist Award of the Studio Museum in Harlem, the Phillis Wheatley Award for Life's Work in Sculpture and a United States Artists Fellowship.



Maren Hassinger

An Object of Curiosity, Radiating Love, Sankofa Park

Maren Hassinger was born in Los Angeles in 1947, grew up in Leimert Park, attended Los Angeles High School and earned her master's degree from UCLA. Trained as a dancer, she experimented with sculpture, performance and installation early in her career alongside other Black L.A. artists, including Senga Nengudi, Ulysses Jenkins, Houston Conwill and David Hammons. A powerful voice for women and artists of color, she creates work that balances the durability of sculptural materials with graceful forms that suggest movement as well as women's work. Throughout her career, she has worked with unconventional materials such as metal rope, tree limbs, leaves and pink plastic bags, inviting viewers to engage their own narratives and emotions within the stories she tells through material and form. Her work is in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Hammer and the Whitney Museum of American Art, among others, and has been exhibited at institutions including LACMA, the Hammer and the Studio Museum in Harlem. She served for twenty years as the director of the Rinehart School of Sculpture at the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore. Among the many honors she has received is a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Women's Caucus for the Arts.



Artis Lane

Emerging First Man, Sankofa Park

Artis Lane was born in 1927 in North Buxton, Ontario, in a community largely descended from formerly enslaved persons who had escaped to Canada on the Underground Railroad. After beginning her artistic career in Detroit, she lived and worked in South L.A. for more than 35 years. Her bronze bust of Sojourner Truth, commissioned by the National Congress of Black Women, is displayed at the Capitol Visitor Center in Washington, where it was unveiled in 2009 by First Lady Michelle Obama, and her sculpture of Rosa Parks is in the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery. She also designed the Congressional Medal of Honor presented to Rosa Parks and was commissioned to produce a series of bronze portraits for the Soul Train Awards. In her monumental "Emerging into Spirit" series—works from which have been shown throughout the United States, including on long-term exhibition at the California African American Museum—she leaves the materials of the foundry process on the surface of the bronze sculpture to symbolize humanity "emerging out of material thinking into spiritual consciousness." She has been honored by the City of Los Angeles with the Dream of Los Angeles Award and is the recipient of Lifetime Achievement Awards from the California African American Museum and the Women's Caucus for Art.



Alison Saar

Bearing Witness, 50th Street

Alison Saar was born in Los Angeles in 1956, educated at Scripps College and Otis College of Art and Design and currently lives and works in L.A. She works in a wide range of media but is best known for sculptures of female figures that often draw on African and Afro-Caribbean references, allude to mythological narratives or rituals and present the body as a site of history and identity. Though directly influenced by outstanding Los Angeles sculptors including assemblage artists John Outterbridge, Noah Purifoy and

her mother, artist Betye Saar, she has carved out her own space, working her chainsaw on rough-hewn figures that are sometimes covered in ceiling tin or cast in bronze, asserting the importance of the Black body in aesthetic discourse and community ontology. Her work is in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, among others, and has been exhibited at LACMA, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the White House and most recently in a two-part, 2021 survey at the Armory Center for the Arts in Pasadena and the Benton Museum of Art in Claremont. The honors she has received include a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship, the Joan Mitchell Foundation Award, a Los Angeles COLA Grant and the American Academy of Arts and Letters Award in Art.



Gerard Basil Stripling

Crenshaw Gateway Sculpture, Metro K Line Tunnel Lid

Gerard Basil Stripling was born and raised in Los Angeles and is now based in Laguna Beach. He is best known for creating award-winning public sculptures such as *Repose*, a five-piece functional sculpture on a point overlooking the ocean in Laguna Beach, which was recognized by the Architecture Foundation of Orange County. He sculpts mainly in corten steel, stainless steel, bronze and ceramics, and he has created numerous commissioned pieces. In May 2023, he was named Laguna Beach Arts Alliance Artist of the Year in recognition of his sculpture *Anastasis*, a piece symbolizing rebirth. That installation celebrated Black History Month and was showcased on the lawn

at Laguna Beach City Hall. His most recent sculptures were the subject of the solo exhibition *Work and Soul: Two Decades of Practice* at the Laguna Art Museum in 2022.



Kehinde Wiley

Female Warrior, Sankofa Park

Kehinde Wiley was born in Los Angeles in 1977, grew up in South Central—where he was steeped in the hip-hop and low-rider culture along Crenshaw Boulevard—and was selected at age 17 to participate in the Metro Young Artists program. Best known for his portraits that render people of color in the traditional settings of Old Master paintings, he works in the mediums of painting, sculpture and video to bring art history face-to-face with contemporary culture and celebrate Black

and brown people he has met throughout the world. In 2018, President Barack Obama selected Wiley to paint his official U.S. Presidential portrait for the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery, making him the first Black painter so honored. In 2019, Wiley founded Black Rock Senegal, a multidisciplinary artist-in-residence program that invites artists from around the world to live and create work in Dakar, Senegal. Wiley is the recipient of the U.S. Department of State’s Medal of Arts, Harvard University’s W. E. B. Du Bois Medal and France’s Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters. A graduate of the Los Angeles County High School for the Arts, he holds a BFA from San Francisco Art Institute, an MFA from Yale University and honorary doctorates from the Rhode Island School of Design and San Francisco Art Institute. He has had solo exhibitions throughout the United States and internationally, and his works are included in the collections of more than 50 public institutions around the world. He lives and works in Beijing, Dakar and New York.



Brenna Youngblood

I AM, I AM Park

Brenna Youngblood, born in Riverside in 1979, was educated at California State University, Long Beach and UCLA and lives and works in Los Angeles. Originally trained as a photographer, she borrows photomontage and collage techniques to address the aesthetics and politics of abstraction and the tradition of assemblage “to make something new out of something old.” Often grounded by architectural cues, her work frequently deals

with political subjects and social issues, as she explores Black American identity and representation and references moments in Black history. Emphasizing the relationship between material and meaning, her open-form sculptures, resembling large-scale children’s blocks or jungle gyms, investigate the experience of growing up within systems of oppression and how the body, engaging with the framework, fills in the negative space of loss, inequity and denial. Her works are in the collections of the Hammer, LACMA, the Museum of Contemporary Art LA, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Seattle Art Museum, Fundación/Colección Jumex in Mexico City and the Studio Museum in Harlem, among others, and have been exhibited at LACMA, the Hammer, the Studio Museum in Harlem, California African American Museum, The Underground Museum and MASS MoCA. She is the recipient of the LACMA Young Talent Award/AHAN Award (2012) and the Seattle Art Museum’s Gwendolyn Knight/Jacob Lawrence Prize (2015).

Destination Crenshaw Muralists



Patrick Henry Johnson

Paul Revere Williams, The Pawn Who Became King

5870 Crenshaw Boulevard

Patrick Henry Johnson was born in Valdosta, Georgia, and attended the Art Institute of Fort Lauderdale before relocating to Los Angeles. In 1993, he undertook a five-year apprenticeship with an international mural company, learning techniques of mural making and honing his style. He became a full-time muralist and began painting in Italy, Finland, Germany and Great Britain. After Los Angeles lifted its ban on street murals, he became the first artist to paint a project funded by the City of Los Angeles. His works include a 72-foot by 14-foot mural, *Penta-Loom Ode to Soldiers*, at 51st Street and Central Avenue, depicting the cost of war, and the L.A. landmark *Elixir: The Rebirth* at Crenshaw Boulevard and Stocker Street. A 40 by 40-foot portrait of a Black woman with the universe swirling inside her, *Elixir* has featured in numerous television shows and movies as a clear visual marker for South Los Angeles. These include: Issa Rae's *Insecure* and *Creed III*. *Elixir* is also the cover for jazz great Kasumi Washington's album *The Epic*. His style, which he calls Heroic Surrealism, is influenced by comic book art and the work of Salvador Dali, Rene Magritte and MC Esher. A noted painter, his works on canvas have been exhibited in notable galleries and exhibits in Los Angeles and New York and at Art Basel, Miami.



Anthony "Toons One" Martin

Hey Young World

5700 Crenshaw Boulevard

Toons One was born in Los Angeles and in the early 1980s he became immersed in hip-hop culture, "writing" as a graffiti artist. His projects are eclectic, ranging from album cover illustration, automotive pinstriping/custom painting, graffiti and mural painting, skateboard graphics and sculpture, to furniture design and art direction. His style incorporates California street art, aesthetics from automobile customization, pop art and hip-hop. An in-demand teacher and mentor in the U.S. and abroad, he has worked with the Los Angeles Unified School District and the Sacramento Unified School District, and taught in Berlin, Stuttgart and Mexico City. As a member of "Earth Crew 2000" he helped pioneer the flourishing graffiti scene in Mexico. Toons One has participated in and curated art exhibitions in the United States and Germany and continues to organize and participate in hip-hop jams, workshops and live art events.



RTN Crew (Rocking the Nation/Rebuilding the Neighborhood)

The Saga Continues

Crenshaw Wall, 4911–5107 Crenshaw Boulevard

The RTN Crew was formed in 1989 as one of Los Angeles's few all-Black graffiti crews. The group is best known for the mural *Our Mighty Contribution*, the first painting to unify the 787-foot-long Crenshaw Wall, created in 2001 by 12 of its members. Artists in the Crew have been featured in projects commissioned by the Getty Research Institute and California African

American Museum. Several members of the Crew attended Crenshaw High School, about a block away from the Crenshaw Wall. Their philosophy of “each one, teach one” is exemplified through their teaching of “non-institutional art history” and specialized art techniques and by rendering their art concepts for the joy of others at venues throughout the nation.

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Image captions:

- *Photo of Charles Dickson by Leroy Hamilton, courtesy of Destination Crenshaw*
- *Photo of Melvin Edwards by Ross Collab, courtesy of Alexander Gray Associates, New York*
- *Photo of Maren Hassinger by Ava Hassinger, courtesy of the artist*
- *Photo of Artis Lane with her work Emerging First Man courtesy of the artist and the California African American Museum*
- *Alison Saar Self Portrait, 2020, courtesy of the artist*
- *Photo of Gerard Basil Stripling, courtesy of the artist*
- *Photo of Kehinde Wiley by Kylie Corwin, courtesy of the artist*
- *Photo of Brenna Youngblood by James Kelly, courtesy of the artist*
- *Photo of Patrick Henry Johnson, courtesy of the artist*
- *Photo of Anthony “Toons One” Martin, courtesy of the artist*
- *Photo of a few members of the RTN Crew at the Crenshaw Wall, August 29, 2023, by HRDWRKER Halline Overby, courtesy of Destination Crenshaw*