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## Art Exhibits Explore Afrofuturism, Celebrate Black Identity

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# Art Exhibits Explore Afrofuturism, Celebrate Black Identity

January 13, 2022

BLOOMINGTON, ILL – Works by Black artists will be showcased and celebrated at upcoming art exhibits at Merwin and Wakeley Galleries at Illinois Wesleyan University.

“Future Spaces in Community Places,” an exhibit centered around the ideas of practical Afrofuturism, will be displayed at Merwin Gallery. “Celebrating Blackness” will be the exhibit featured at Wakeley Gallery, which includes works that reflect on Black identity and how Blackness has shaped social, cultural and political experiences around the world. Both exhibits will be on display from Jan. 17 – March 3.

These exhibitions are part of a joint project between the School of Art and the School of Theatre Arts, spearheaded by Director of Merwin and Wakeley Galleries Carmen Lozar, and Assistant Professor of Theatre Arts Michelle Gibbs.

“Art can be a powerful visual mechanism and, all too often, Black artists go unrecognized and uncelebrated,” said Lozar. “Being part of a healthy community means representing the whole, and I believe IWU is seeking to do that with these exhibits.”

Works in the “Future Spaces in Community Places” exhibit showcase a wide range of graphic work and collaborations between graphic designer and illustrator Stacey Robinson and four other artists. Robinson’s art focuses on Afrofuturism, a term that describes many lines of thinking regarding the future of Black individuals and their contributions to society.

Lozar and Gibbs describe “Celebrating Blackness” as a community-driven exhibit. Wesleyan students and the surrounding community are encouraged to submit pieces that reflect on Black identity. The submissions include a wide range of performance art, paintings, drawings, glass and sculpture.

“It is exciting to see our campus community gather to experience and acknowledge the profound and the complicated ways that varying perspectives of Blackness resonate with folx,” said Gibbs. “‘Celebrating Blackness’ is not about perpetuating white-centric narratives and tropes about ‘The Tragic Negro.’ This art show is about experiencing the fullness of Black lives.”

Lozar and Gibbs agree that the exhibit’s intention is to “uplift the myriad of ways we experience and revere phenomenal Blackness.” Their goal with this joint project is to “embrace art as a medium which inspires our communities, our families and ourselves to celebrate Blackness.”

The Illinois Wesleyan University’s Wakeley Gallery invited both the IWU campus and the Bloomington-Normal community to create and submit art that honors and celebrates African, African Americans and/or Black peoples of the African diaspora.

A reception is planned from 6-9 p.m. on Feb. 24 at the respective galleries. The reception is free and open to the public, and will include a lecture, student performances, a poetry reading and music. For more information about the exhibits, [visit the Merwin and Wakeley Galleries website](#).



Artist: BLACKMAU  
Title: Guilt Trip  
Medium: Digital Collage  
Year: 2019

By Julia Perez