

Artist Sheds Light on Past through Paintings

An Exhibition of Select Works by Cora Marshall

Dark Matter is an exhibition of paintings by Cora Marshall opening September 4, 2008 at the Downtown Gallery in New Britain. The exhibition is about finding what is missing. For artist Cora Marshall, two of the things that have gone missing are the stories from her family who were enslaved and the particulars of her African ancestry. To find these missing pieces, she uses paint and other materials, to adopt, adapt, and bring to life lost stories from the dark history of slavery as she fuses connections to her ancestry one stroke of the brush at a time.

Marshall's mixed media painting series, *Runaway: Going, Going, Gone* is inspired by her discovery of "Wanted" advertisements from the early 1700s and 1800s. The title of this series refers both to the auction block on which her ancestors were sold and to the dangerous flight from slavery to freedom. These ads describe runaway enslaved people in, sometimes, minute details. Descriptions of hair color and styles, clothes, complexion, scars, size, and demeanor conjure vivid images in a real and tangible ways. Many of the ads Marshall uses as inspiration for her paintings are from the Hartford Courant (formerly the Connecticut Courant) but she also uses other historical newspapers as well. In 1792, for instance, the Courant ran an advertisement for the return of Sall who ran with a large bundle of cloths and her infant male child of about eight months of age. In Marshall's interpretation, Sall's story is layered in paint, handmade papers, and words from the advertisement. The final work is veiled in wax to preserve the story while suspending the viewer in time and place.

Another thing that has gone missing for Marshall is cultural grounding in a particular African heritage because, like many African Americans, she does not know from which country her people originated. To fill this void, she looks for connections to African spiritual traditions and images in a variety of cultures. Once found, she absorbs and interprets them to make them her own. The paintings for this exhibition are inspired by art from Benin, Samburu, and Bamileke, and other African cultures. Marshall explores symbolism, icons, affects and effects that resonate within. By doing so, she seeks a bond with those cultures as she tries to demystify her past.

The exhibition's title is taken from the term scientists use to describe one of the most mysterious things in the universe—dark matter. Most of our universe is missing, that is, we cannot see or touch it. This missing mass is referred to as dark matter. Its existence is only implied by the effect it has on stars around it. Like dark matter, though the particulars of the artist's past cannot be seen or touch in the usually way, through her paintings, she knows it is there by the effect it has on who she is and will become. We know of its existence by the effect her paintings have on those of us who see and experience her work.

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September 4 – October 23, 2008

Opening Reception September 4, 4:30 PM – 7:00 PM

Downtown Gallery, 117 West Main Street, New Britain, CT
Located in the New Britain Downtown District Visitors' Center

Open Monday through Friday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and by appointment

[Contact GNBAA](#) for further information: (860) 832-8299

A program of the New Britain Downtown District and the Greater New Britain Arts Alliance