

# CARRBILL

The Carr Center Gallery • 15 E. Kirby Street • Detroit

## Austen Brantley MUSÉ

*a solo exhibition*

*January 18 –  
February 25*

*sponsored by Tito's  
Handmade Vodka*

Prominence

# ARTIST STATEMENT

## *Austen Brantley*



**I often create the women** in clay that I wish were in my everyday life. That might inspire me and still me away from mundane experiences. My pieces become a metaphor for sirens that steal me as an escape from modern reality into a world with endless possibilities and fantastical dreamscapes.

**My new series of work** rebels and accentuates these nymph fantasies with sculptures of women seducing the viewer to escape as well.



# MEET *Austen Brantley*



**Austen Brantley** (Detroit, United States) makes sculptures and installations. With Plato's allegory of the cave in mind, Brantley creates work through labour-intensive processes which can be seen explicitly as a personal exorcism ritual. They are inspired by a nineteenth-century tradition of works, in which an ideal of 'Fulfilled Absence' was seen as the pinnacle.

**His sculptures** are based on formal associations which open a unique poetic vein. Multilayered images arise in which the fragility and instability of our seemingly certain reality is questioned. By choosing mainly formal solutions, he tries to develop forms that do not follow logical criteria, but are

based only on subjective associations and formal parallels, which incite the viewer to make new personal associations.

**His works are** an investigation into representations of (seemingly) concrete ages and situations as well as depictions and ideas that can only be realized in sculpture. By referencing romanticism, grand-guignolesque black humour and symbolism, he makes work that deals with the documentation of events and the question of how they can be presented. The work tries to express this with the help of physics and technology, but not by telling a story or creating a metaphor.

**His works are** often classified as part of the new romantic movement because of the desire for the local in the unfolding globalized world. However, this reference is not intentional, as this kind of art is part of the collective memory.

# GALLERY *Statement*



**LINA C. STEPHENS**  
**Visual Arts Coordinator**

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**Here we are** at the beginning of the new year, 2023. We have some exciting exhibits scheduled this year. We are pleased and proud to start the year with the magnificent work of sculptor Austen Brantley, a self-taught genius. His journey to becoming a sculptor is an interesting story, we are doing an artist talk on February 24th. His sculpture just speaks to me, it's sensual and strong. I would gladly house one of his works in my home.

**Our next offering** is an open call show, Artist Under 30, As I See Me, and exhibition of self portraiture. This show is the first of a series of three shows asking the artist to present self portraits. We are dividing the exhibition into age ranges.

**We are having several** art shows coming this year along with the Detroit Art Teachers Association show. We have special projects with Carrie Mae Weems and Mickalene Thomas. It promises to be an exciting year at the Carr Center Gallery.



# MEET *The Curator*



**TIA NICHOLS**

**Brantley glorifies women** throughout his work demonstrated in MUSÉ. He considers his pieces to be “a metaphor for sirens that steal him as an escape from modern reality” and brings him to a world with “endless possibilities and fantastical dreamscapes.” Many have come to know his work involves shared strands empowering the beauty within Black hair; where interwoven locks of braids and intertwined limbs of figures are emerging from the crown of a grander figure. He is contemporizing the classical, naturalistic, and romantic in a way that brings virtue to Greek and African antiquities and feminine beauty- past and present alike.

**Brantley molds materiality** into a reality where all can spectate. His sculptures are fragments or moments of a whole, where he often focuses on the bust, head, or crown. An outsider can look in on each figure, though many of the figures’ eyes are shut, and discover details that require movement and dissection. Viewers truly have to revolve around Brantley’s work to gain insight on the full picture. With eyes closed, his figures appear as though they are in a state of meditation, contemplation, rest, prayer, or solace. They are graceful and would certainly grace any collection.

**MUSÉ**, featuring a solo exhibition of work by Austen Brantley curated by Tia Nichols, involves a whimsical and fantastical body of work involving bronze patina, ceramic stained, and terracotta sculptures. On this rare occasion, he also displays wall acrylic, gestural paintings and a larger painting on canvas from acrylic and spray paint, involving portraiture. Brantley’s work captures women in clay that he “wishes were in his everyday life.” These women emerge from the two dimensional into three dimensional forms that command the room and take viewers on a journey not often traversed.

# MUSÉ *The Work*



## **Nubian Bust**

My Nubian bust series are unique pieces of art that offer a beautiful view of the human body. Each bust is handcrafted from high-quality, original ceramic clay and features a naturalistic depiction of the human head. What makes these busts unique is the fact that every design in the series features a distinct African-inspired aesthetic that beautifully captures the ancient beauty of the African continent. The busts also depict facial features that are typical of the region as well as traditional hairstyles. This unique combination of modern and ancient design elements gives the bust sculptures a unique style that truly sets them apart from other works of art. The intricate details of each bust are the result of countless hours of painstaking craftsmanship and are a reflection of my passion for creating beautiful works of art.

## **Mami Wata**

We all know Mami Wata as the gentle, nurturing water goddess who watches over us. Now, she's come to life in a beautiful sculpture bust! This bust is a beautiful tribute to the goddess and her many blessings, including plentiful water supply. I created this sculpture from my own imagination as well as taking inspiration from other artworks found throughout art history. From my clay sculpture of her expressive face to the flowing figures centered around her graceful form, I created a perfect representation of her grace and power. This is the perfect piece to add to your office, home, or altar and pay homage to the ever-powerful Mami Wata.



# MUSÉ *The Work*

## **Tribe**

I created this sculpture as a tribute to collective woman hood. Women have always been a powerful force in society and their artistry is unmatched. These sculptures are meant to bring honor and glory to these women and to highlight the important role they play in our society. Each figure has a story to tell, and each story is powerful and unique in its own way. I think that these sculptures will serve as a reminder of the role that women have played throughout our history and inspire the next generation of women to follow in their footsteps and make a lasting impact on the world.

## **Crown I-IV**

The Crown series sculpture busts are a stunning work of art that perfectly represents the majesty and power in relation to black hair. These sculptures are made of ceramic clay and various stains at a height of nearly two feet, making it an imposing figure that will grace any collection. The faces of this statue are lifelike and feature such details of people in Detroit. With so much detail in this piece, it truly stands out from the crowd and creates a memorable impression.

A riveting image capturing power and wealth are the defining characteristics of the crown bust sculpture. A beautiful piece of fine art, made of ceramic clay of various colours, the crown bust depicts an imposing figure in a powerful pose. Crowns are a symbol of royal power and hold great symbolic value in any society. Therefore the depiction of one in the artwork is sure to leave a lasting impression on those who view it.

## **Condesa**

The Condesa ceramic sculpture bust depicting emergence is an excellent addition to this exhibition. This bust features an exquisite rendering of a beautiful woman emerging from the earth, her hair spilling over her shoulders and eyes focused on the horizon. The woman's face is beautifully rendered, with a slender nose and high cheekbones lending her an ethereal quality. This piece is an excellent example of Black for the sake of black art at it's finest, and it would make the perfect addition to any collection. I created this piece of functional art as a tribute to the original African queens that taught the Europeans about fertility rites and well being. The figure shows the influence of ancient African goddess worshipers who preceded modern day western ideals on women. The ritual forces of nature are all around us constantly bombarding us with their messages yet very few notice them. This piece exemplifies those primitive forces that the ancient tribes of Africa recognized centuries ago..... and it also symbolizes the power of our natural human essence to triumph over obstacles and create beauty out of the ashes of chaos.

# THANK YOU

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the third year of our partnership.  
Thanks Tito's!!

