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Book review | Aminah's World: Book keeps artist's hopes for children at forefront.

Nancy Gilson - February 2, 2018



More than two years after her death, artist Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson is the subject of a book that she no doubt would have appreciated: a picture book about her life and art with a charge to those who read it to turn their own life stories into art. "Aminah's World," to be celebrated as part of a family event Saturday at the Columbus Museum of Art, is colorful and attractive and includes numerous samples of Robinson's multimedia works. The book, underway before Robinson died in May 2015, was written by Carole Miller Genshaft, curator at large at the museum. Genshaft, who helped prepare exhibits of the artist's work and traveled with her, considered Robinson a close friend.

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"I worked with Aminah for so many years, and her mantra over and over was that each of us has a history and a story to tell," Genshaft said. "She did that all her life and inspired others to do the same thing. "Aminah's World," suitable for ages 7 and older, gives a brief biography of Robinson. She grew up on the East Side and documented her beloved Poindexter Village neighborhood with vibrant painted murals, including found objects such as fabric, strings, buttons, bottle caps and music boxes. Through questions and examples, the book encourages children to research their own stories with family members and create art. Several pages are meant to be cut out and used to construct accordion and pop-up books.

After Robinson's death at 75 on May 22, 2015, the museum acquired her estate, including her small home in Columbus where she regularly drew, painted and wrote into the wee hours of the night. An advisory committee has recommended to the museum board that the house eventually be turned into an artist's residence. Meanwhile, the museum is planning an exhibit, tentatively titled "Aminah's House and Writings," to open in 2020.

Recently, the museum showcased Robinson's "Presidential Suite," works celebrating the election and presidency of Barack Obama. Currently, original art from the picture book "Michael's Angel," illustrated by Robinson, is on view in Gallery 3. On display through March 4 at Hammond Harkins Galleries, 641 N. High St., is the exhibit "Storybooks & Other Narratives: Aminah Robinson and Faith Ringgold," featuring works by both artists that served as illustrations for books and storytelling. (On Feb. 17, Genshaft will appear at a book signing from 10 a.m. to noon at Hammond Harkins.)

The museum book launch will include readings from "Aminah's World," family activities and snacks. "Aminah was always very interested in children," Genshaft said. "One year, we did visits to 17 schools. ... She'd get down on the floor with the kids and create. "Her work is so important and needs to be out there and understood by as many people as possible — including young people."