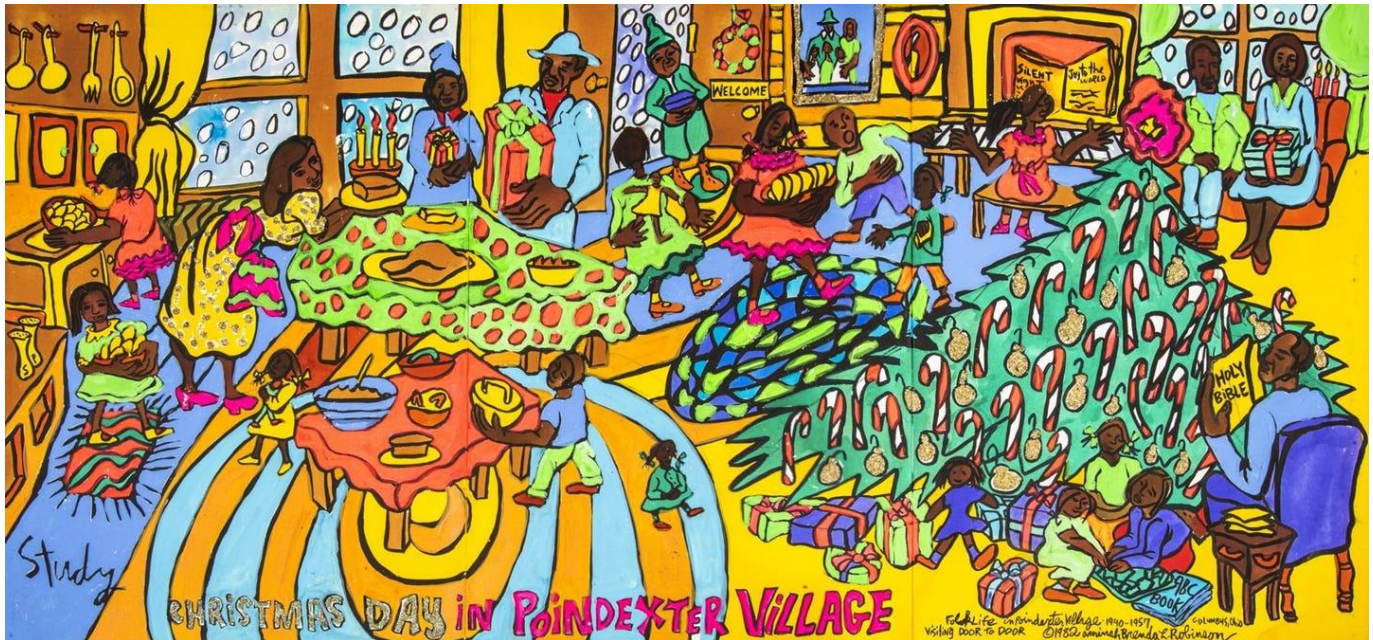


# FORT GANSEVOORT

## Forbes

### National Touring Exhibition Of Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson Artwork Commences

Chadd Scott – Feb 8, 2025



Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson, 'Christmas Day in Poindexter Village,' 1982. Watercolor on paper and string. Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio: Gift of the Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson Trust. 2024.018.010Columbus Museum of Art

Through 60 of Robinson's drawings, prints, paintings, textiles, collages, "hogmawg" sculptures, and monumental "RagGonNon" tapestries, the exhibition takes viewers on a journey through Robinson's life.

The old saying goes, "never meet your heroes."

Unless your hero was Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson (1940–2015).

"I've never met a queen, a real queen, but I would think that if this were another time, and she were in another place, she would certainly be royalty or a queen, because that's how she carried herself," Deidre Hamlar, Director of the Aminah Robinson Legacy Project at the Columbus Museum of Art, told Forbes.com. "She was very tall and held herself almost like a dancer. She had a wonderful presence that was equally warm and equally austere. There was a beautiful elegance about her. But once you talked with her, all of that perception of what you might consider untouchableness disappears because she's so warm."

Upon her death in 2015, Robinson bequeathed all her art, writing, and personal effects—including her pet dog—as well as her home studio in Columbus, to the Columbus Museum of Art, reflecting the close relationship she maintained with her hometown museum.

# FORT GANSEVOORT

And the homefolks. Including Hamlar.

The future director of the Aminah Robinson Legacy Project met its namesake in 2015, the year Robinson passed, at a 75th birthday party for the artist hosted by her Columbus gallery.

“I went to the gallery as an onlooker (and) revered her as this sort of untouchable person. I waited till the end. I was there the whole time, for two hours, and I was so afraid to go up and speak to her,” Hamlar remembers. “Finally, the room thinned out and everybody was sort of sitting around. I inched my way towards her, and I sort of bowed as I spoke, and I said, ‘Hi, Aminah, I don’t know if you remember me,’ and she cut me off, ‘Oh, honey, I remember you. I know you. I’ve known you since you were a little girl!’”

In an extraordinary coincidence that could make even a skeptic believe in fate, Robinson’s best friend babysat Hamlar as a toddler in Columbus. Hamlar is sure Robinson participated in her care. The families were friends and neighbors.

Hamlar had heard the stories, but the 75th birthday party meeting with Robinson as an adult took place 50 years later. After Robinson had traveled the world. After she’d met thousands of other people. After she’d won a MacArthur “genius” grant and earned wide notoriety for her artwork.

“She did have a photographic memory as well as recall for others; it’s almost as if, once she met you, you were merged with her,” Hamlar said. “Aminah knew my family, it’s a small Black town. We live in Columbus, Ohio, segregated Near East Side.”

Hamlar left Columbus for college at UCLA and law school at Howard University. She practiced law for the National Labor Relations Board in Boston and Washington, D.C. She worked and lived all over the country before returning home.

The opportunity she missed to know Robinson in life, she has made up for since as director of the Legacy Project, digging through Robinson’s voluminous archives and possessions piece by piece. Robinson didn’t throw anything away. No matter how seemingly insignificant.

“As I was going through her house to archive her artwork and the materials in her home and the papers, on the very last day we were there, I went up to a bedroom and opened up a box that was just full of paper. I start pouring through it because we had to look at every single item to make a determination what it was,” Hamlar said. “I’m flipping through paper and I see my father’s letterhead in this box! It was a bill because he was a dentist. It’s incredible. It was an estimate, a pre-determination they called it from an insurance company. I knew all about it because I used to work for my father. Her whole family went to him.”

Twilight Zone.

## Artist and Writer

Growing up in a segregated midwestern city during the latter part of Jim Crow and the early stages of the Civil Rights Era as a Black female artist and single mother, Aminah’s portrayals of neighborhood figures, childhood memories, and her challenges became her means to preserve memory, uplift community, and give voice to the past.

She participated in 1963’s March on Washington. She researched her ancestors who were taken from Angola and enslaved on Sapelo Island, GA. She traveled widely around the world—Africa, Europe, South America, the Middle

# FORT GANSEVOORT

East—seeing for herself how other countries and cultures treated Black people. It was on a 1979 trip to Egypt where she received the name “Aminah” from a holy man.

“Hers is a story of the Great Migration. Hers is a story of surviving enslavement. It's a story of survival. It's a story of healing and thriving. It's universal, though,” Hamlar said. “It's not just one Black girl's story in Columbus, Ohio. She represents, as she would say—not even just relegated to the African American experience—it's a message of surviving and thriving through circumstances that would have probably taken you down and that some people escape.”

Her multifaceted artworks “celebrat(ing) the everyday lives of Black people and their endurance through centuries of injustice”—as she described them—are joyful, colorful, vibrant, jazzy, proud, bordering on euphoric.

“My works are the missing pages of American history,” she said.

She was a historian. In her artwork and prodigious writing. She was also a poet, genealogist, illustrator, author, archivist.

“We know Aminah as a visual artist, and we revere her as such, and we know she works in multimedia, in diverse forms, everything from drawing on a scrap piece of cardboard torn off from a cereal box to napkins to papyrus to deer skin and creating sculpture out of clay that she makes herself. We know that part of her, attaching bubbles and beads and buttons to everything from leaves to cloth. However, what was surprising for me, and dumbfounding, was the amount of writing that she did, the research that she accomplished,” Hamlar said of going through Robinson's possessions. “The number of books. There were 1,000 books (in her home), and I don't mean just decorating a shelf, I mean dog eared, underlined, noted, annotated books that she read and she researched and she used over and over again.”

Hamlar discovered over 200 illustrated journals in Robinson's home, meticulously dated and inventoried. Notes on the music she listened to throughout her life, again, dated. Notes taken during conversations with family members. Grocery bills, appointment calendars—estimates from dentists.

All in addition to an art practice that began before she was 10 years old and continued through her final days.

“It's hard to believe that one person did as much as she did,” Hamlar said. “She dedicated her life to her art, 24-7, and it shows.”

## **Journeys Home**

The Columbus Museum of Art established the Aminah Robinson Legacy Project following receipt of the artist's estate after her death. Having catalogued all of her writing and possessions, staged a retrospective in Columbus, and established an artists' residency in her home, the Legacy Project's work to amplify Robinson's stature continues with a nationally touring exhibition celebrating her prolific life and work.

Debuting at the Springfield Museum of Art in Ohio on February 1, 2025, “Aminah Robinson: Journeys Home, a Visual Memoir” brings together a selection of artworks and writing from Robinson's staggering seven-decade practice in a visual memoir of the artist's life and a compelling tableau of the African American experience. Through 60 of Robinson's drawings, prints, paintings, textiles, collages, “hogmawg” sculptures, and monumental “RagGonNon” tapestries, the exhibition takes viewers on a journey through Robinson's life, her deep historical research, and the communities she called home.

# FORT GANSEVOORT

Her “RagGonNon’s” are fantastical, mural-sized textile pieces with all manner of “flair” attached to them. Handsewn. A skill she learned from her mother. The “hogmawg” sculptures, the epitome of making do. ‘Hogmawg’ is a homemade clay Robinson learned to make from her father, who was also an artist.

“Her father taught her how to make materials because they were poor. She was poor growing up, she lived in subsidized housing, she didn't know she was poor, necessarily, because she saw the richness around her, but the richness was in the natural resources around her that she found and gathered,” Hamlar explained. “Her father taught her how to make dyes from plants and also how to make clay from the earth. She would gather mud, sticks, break up sticks, grind down rocks, get what they call pig grease and glue and other items from the earth. They would grind them like a mortar and pestle and then put that on the stove and cook it. Once it started cooling, they could form the clay to make figures.”

The “hogmawg” sculptures and mixed media “RagGonOn’s” have a distinct folk art feel, but “Journeys Home” also displays her exquisitely proficient portraits and drawings as well, particularly one featuring Malcolm X.

After closing in Springfield, OH on July 13, 2025, the exhibition then travels to the Newark Museum of Art in New Jersey from October 16, 2025 through March 1, 2026, and the Mobile Museum of Art in Alabama from March 26, 2026 through January 9, 2027, with two remaining venues to be announced later this year.