LIBERATION DAY AND FATHER'S DAY ARE PERFECT FOR CELEBRATING BLACK ARTISTS

By P. Andrews-Keenan

Happy Liberation Day! It's Father's Day and Juneteenth! How amazing that we get to celebrate resiliency, tenacity, fortitude, and a lot of other adjectives that apply to the Black experience and get to celebrate Black fathers too. I think that's fair; my son **Richard** is an amazing dad and I salute him today. And today I think of the amazing artist dads I know like **Ted Ellis Kevin Williams** and **Thomas Williams, Paul Branton** to name a few. I've watched the car and love they show as dads and find it inspiring.

As we commemorate shedding our enslaved past, lets pick up a few forward looking adjectives for our future like joyful, vibrant, thriving. Because that's what the Black experience should be hence forth and forever.

Today, in honor of both holidays, I'd like you to meet some of our Black artistic forefathers. And no I'm not talking about Bearden, Lawrence and Ernie Barnes, whose iconic 1970's Sugar Shack just sold for $15.3M. I'm talking about 19th and early 20th century masters. Look closely and you'll see the systemic thread of racism that impeded their growth and left them prey to mental illness.

Young Black artists across the globe who are tackling mental health issues head on seeking to build joyfulness and vibrancy into all our lives through art. **Dwight White**, **Eddie 'Edo' Santana White**, dad of two **Barrett Keithley,** and other artists Pigment International has been fortunate to work with are vocalizing what they've always put in their art. Kudos!

Robert Seldon Duncanson

By 1860, Cincinnati artist **Robert Seldon Duncanson**, was hailed by the American press as the "best landscape painter in the West," while London newspapers hailed him as the equal of his British contemporaries. Both then and now he rivaled the achievements of American landscape painters such as Thomas Cole, Asher Brown Durand, and John Frederick Kensett, who shaped the country's early landscape tradition in the Hudson River Valley style. A Duncanson landscape hangs in the Biden White House today, chosen by First Lady Jill Biden.

Tragically, mental illness ended the artist's career and life. He fell victim to the health disparities still challenging us to this day. In his case lead poisoning and racism exacerbated by being multi-racial. But the photographer, muralist, and painter made a mark that can never be erased.

Henry Ossawa Tanner

Philadelphian Henry Ossawa Tanner, whose middle name came from abolitionist John Brown hometown of Osawatomie, Kansas, He attended the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, where he studied and exhibited. He also showed his work at the Philadelphia Society of Artists. In 1889 he opened a photography studio in Atlanta and later taught drawing at Clark University. In 1890, an exhibition of Tanner's work was mounted in Cincinnati, and when none of the paintings sold his benefactor Bishop Joseph Crane Hartzell purchased them, which

partially financed Tanner's studies in Europe. He was concerned with creating dignified and sympathetic portrayals of Black people as exemplified by one of his most famous pieces *The Banjo Lesson* (1893, Hampton University Museum, Virginia).

Known for being an expat, he remained concerned about the African American struggle for equality. during a trip to the United States in 1893 he delivered a paper entitled "The American Negro in Art" at the World's Congress on Africa in Chicago. Booker T. Washington visited him in Paris, and Tanner painted his portrait. He was a regular contributor to the NAACP. In 1909 he was made an associate member of the National Academy of Design and became a full member in 1927. Severely depressed during World War I, Tanner curtailed his artistic activity and worked for the American Red Cross although her returned to art later.

Aaron Douglas

Aaron Douglas, left his native Kansas, arriving in Harlem shortly after the publication 1925's , "Harlem: Mecca for the New Negro." This special issue included an introductory essay by Alain Locke, intellectual founder of the New Negro movement. He studied painting with German émigré artist Fritz Winold Reiss, and worked in the mailroom of W.E.B. Dubois' The Crisis Encouraged by Locke, to study African art, Douglas also absorbed the lessons of European modernism forging his own visual language.

James Weldon Johnson asked the young artist to illustrate his forthcoming collection of poems, *God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse*, after which he was invited to create a mural for the new campus library at Fisk University. He went to Paris in 1931 for more formal training and there met expat Henry Ossawa Tanner. He became chairman of the art department at Fisk, where he mentored several generations of students before retiring in 1966 yet maintained close ties to Harlem. A retrospective of his work was shown in his hometown in 1970 at the Mulvane Art Center.

Finally, who better to speak to us about liberation and justice than artist **Arvie Smith**, who at 84, has his work exhibited with **Galerie Myrtis** during the 59th edition of the Venice Biennale for the **European Culture Centre**. Galerie Myrtis' exhibition titled ***The Afro-Futurist Manifesto: Blackness Reimagined*** on display through November 27, 2022. It has been included *in "Eight of the Best Collateral Events - 59th Venice Biennale,"*