

# ROOTS RUN DEEP

A Contemporary  
Survey of  
African  
American Hair  
Culture

Brew House  
Gallery

January 22 —  
March 06, 2021

# A Contemporary Survey of African American Hair Culture

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**JANUARY 22 —  
MARCH 06, 2021**

**Brew House Association (BHA)** is a non-profit art center located in the former Duquesne Brewing Company facility in Pittsburgh's South Side.

Founded in the 1990s, BHA works today to help artists to grow professionally and creatively by connecting them to audiences, professional resources, and other arts organizations throughout the region and beyond. Throughout its facility, BHA has elements to support the imaginative work of a wide spectrum of creatives including a gallery, artist studios, and more.

Prospectus is a program for emerging curators that recognizes the vital role of curators in the field and provides gallery space, mentorship, professional development and the financial support necessary to present new exhibitions in the Brew House Gallery.

To learn more about Prospectus, visit [brewhousearts.org/prospectus](http://brewhousearts.org/prospectus).

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This guide was designed and edited by Point Line Projects. Design: Antonio Tharp



**CURATOR**

Tara Fay Coleman

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**ARTISTS**

Nakeya Brown  
Jordan Coyne  
Kenyatta Crisp  
Nick Drain  
Quinn Hunter  
Mia Marshall  
Dom McDuffie  
Evangeline Mensah-  
Agyekum  
Brianna Mims  
Steven Montinar  
Ayanna Nayo  
Sharon Norwood  
Mathias Rushin  
Sharrell Rushin  
Dominique Scaife  
Shori Sims

# ROOTS RUN DEEP





ESSAY  
BY

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TARA  
FAY  
COLEMAN

# roots run deep

**B**lack hairstyling is a practice rooted in heritage, tradition, and community. Although there have been shifts in the ways we care for hair, styling remains an assertion of Black identity and its freedom and values. As a result of social oppression, discrimination, and Anti-Black hair sentiment, styling has also become a civil rights issue. American culture continues to uphold Eurocentric norms as the standard of both beauty and professionalism, resulting in unequal treatment towards Black people. In contrast, the trend of culturally appropriating Black hairstyles serves as a reminder of the inequities that exist in society.

JORDAN COYNE

*Untitled (Javier in profile), 2019*  
Digital photograph



**DOM McDUFFIE**

*Untitled (Obey Beauty Salon), 2020*  
Archival film print

*Roots Run Deep* looks at the ways in which Black hairstyles are tied to tradition and examines the influence of the past on contemporary styling.

**Featuring the work of 16 Black artists, stylists, and cultural producers, this exhibition seeks to connect the past to the present, and frame Black artists as their own storytellers.**

Through photography, sculpture, and mixed media works, these artists demonstrate how hair is used as a medium to articulate creativity across the diaspora by highlighting the natural hair movement, ritual and intimacy, sacred spaces, intergenerational connectedness, Afrofuturism, and history.

The natural hair movement, and the communities built around embracing our roots, served as a reawakening for many. Early waves of this movement, helmed by figures like Black Nationalist leader Marcus Garvey, influenced countless Black Americans to embrace their natural features and reclaim African aesthetics. Garvey's influence spread widely and his ideologies helped inform Rastafarianism, from which the dreadlock movement did not originate, but with which it has become synonymous. Through their portraiture, Jordan Coyne captures contemporary loc styles, presenting their subjects as the focal point of the images. In *Untitled (Javier in profile)*, Coyne frames the subject's individualistic approaches to locs as an example of a traditional style that has been modernized. Images like this are important because they highlight Black subjects as autonomous figures who do not exist as a monolith.



**MIA MARSHALL**

*Synergy*, 2019.

Photograph by Joe Lowery, Art Direction by Bradley Hill  
Digital photograph



**YANNA NAYO**

*Secure*, 2018  
Oil on Canvas

There has recently been a resurgence of paying tribute to the complexities and stories of empowerment in hair. Present-day leaders such as Tamiah Bridgett, organizer of It's a Natural Thang, a Pittsburgh-based natural hair meetup group, encourage Black women to love their natural hair while promoting wellness and education. Her events provide a unique social function and sanctuary for Black people to connect and discuss the nuances of Black hair culture. In his photographs, artist Dom McDuffie highlights similar places of gathering with his documentation of barber and beauty shops. These environments exist as sacred and communal spaces, allowing for restoration and intimacy. He is intentional about preserving and honoring these spaces in an authentic way and regards these sites as places where you can feel seen and heard. Style guides, a ubiquitous staple in every shop, influenced the work of artist *Shori Sims*, who was inspired by the time she spent as a child in her father's barbershop. In *Untitled Salon Poster #1*, she uses figuration, a consistent theme in her work, as both a study on how to draw a range of Black hairstyles, as well as a way to make the images seen in the guides her own. Sentimentality and nostalgia are also reflected in the work of Steven Montinar, with *Hopscotch*, *Kriss Kross*, *Double Dutch* the *Gunshots*. His ball hair ties, often referred to by the colloquialism "ballies," serve as a symbolic parallel of Black youth and a shared memory of Black



**STEVEN MONTINAR**

*Hopscotch, Kniss Kross, Double Dutch  
the Gunshots, 2020. (See Works Exhibited)*

childhood. In Ayanna Nayo's *Secure* and *Revive and Protect*, the iconographic significance of everyday objects that embody Black culture is reflected in her large scale paintings of a barrette and a bottle of Luster's Pink Hair Lotion. Combining color theory with her lived sensibility as a Black woman, Nayo's work highlights the ways we explore our own identity and experiences and speaks to the aesthetic resilience of Black culture.

The ritual and intimacy of hair care is explored through the work of Kenyatta Crisp, whose *Into Womanhood* images highlight tradition and care. As he writes, "When a Black woman is born, she is born into a culture where her hair is her treasure. A mother nurtures her daughter by caring for her hair." Establishing generational bonds is a treasured facet of Black hair culture and remains a way for skills and lessons to be passed down. Intergenerational ritual is also an important component of Nakeya Brown's work. She frames her photographs around memories of Black women, which often include hair care and beauty practices that have sustained through generations of Black womanhood. Through her staging of hair care products in *Facade Objects*, she considers the representation of Black women in product packaging. By obscuring the women's faces, Brown offers a critique of the hair industry, specifically the practice of straightening hair through perming and chemical

treatments to meet and maintain Eurocentric expectations and standards of beauty. Brianna Mims further analyzes these standards as well as the ways that, from a young age, Black children are socialized into the idea that their features are not attractive. Both *Consum(h)er Culture* and *Pressure* reference her own lived experiences and the pervasiveness of the idea that straight hair is closer to whiteness, and therefore more acceptable.

As anthropologist Karin Barber writes of the complexities of time, history, and culture, “the past is reactivated to the present, and the past is evoked in the midst of the activity of the present generation.” Braided styles that originated in post-colonial Africa, and spread across the diaspora at large, have evolved from being an important part of society that often communicated status to a continuously innovative and ritualistic process that connects us to our ancestors. Stylist Mia Marshall applies contemporary elements such as color, accessories, and dramatic length to braided styles with origins as early as the 1600s, modernizing them and signifying their enduring relevance. Evangeline Mensah-Agyekum explores the connectedness and bonds that hair represents with her piece *An Extension of Us*, wherein she creates two braids that respond to sound and touch, allowing wearers to communicate with one another using a system of digital inputs and outputs. As an engineer with a particular interest in technology, her work demonstrates a strong Afrofuturistic aesthetic and serves to align those from the Black diaspora not only to one another, but to their forgotten African ancestry.

Nick Drain also incorporates Afrofuturistic elements into his photography, which functions as a survey of autonomy in the age of Artificial Intelligence. His tongue-in-cheek images, which challenge the limitations and traditional understanding of portraiture, force the viewer to focus on the hair as the only information offered about the unseen subject. This limited access through the image gives power to his Black subjects by allowing them to remain unknown. Hair that is not attached to the body is also a focal point in Sharon Norwood's *Split Ends* series, where she uses her “curly lines” to communicate issues of race, gender, beauty, class, and labor, while seeking to disrupt the white gaze. Her work functions as both “drawings, and signifiers of the Black body,” allowing for the viewer to interpret the work as either a statement or a decorative and ornate mark, thus creating a shift from political to non-political.





These artists have been brought together to demonstrate the timeliness and urgency of these beautiful traditions of past and present. In *Tangled: The Tangled History of Black Hair Culture*, writer Emma Dabiri relates hair to the Yoruba oral tradition of Oriki, where past and present are connected. She speaks to the temporality, consistency, and adaptability of Black hair styling that allows for centuries-old practices to appear modern and futuristic. Through this collection of contemporary works, *Roots Run Deep* tells a story about the vastness, nuance, and expansiveness of Blackness, and explores the ways in which we are linked to our history.

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## SHORI SIMS

*Untitled Salon Poster #1, 2018*  
Graphite on paper



“Ball hair ties are a shared memory of black childhood. Whether or not you wore them, you knew of someone who did. The bright colored plastic clacked together while the band was swallowed by a bush of black hair. The hair ties have become a symbolic parallel of black youth, often swapped for more formal accessories when reaching adulthood. A forgotten monument of a remembered time.”

—STEVEN MONTINAR



NAKEYA BROWN

PGU (*No Lye*), 2015  
Archival inkjet print





**BRIANNA MIMS**

*Pressure*, 2019  
Digital photograph



**KENYATTA CRISP**

*Tradition: Into Womanhood*,  
2020. Archival film print



**NICK DRAIN**

*Portrait of ND*, 2019  
Archival inkjet print



**MATHIAS RUSHIN**

*Come as You Are*, 2019  
Digital photograph

## NAKEYA BROWN

Facade Objects Series

*PCJ (No Lye)*

2015

Archival inkjet print  
19 x 19 in.

*Volume Plus*

2015

Archival inkjet print  
19 x 19 in.

*BB Pump It Up*

2015

Archival inkjet print  
19 x 19 in.

*Vitale*

2015

Archival inkjet print  
19 x 19 in.

## JORDAN COYNE

*Untitled (Javier in profile)*

2020

Digital photograph  
24 x 36 in.

*Untitled II (Javier in profile)*

2020

Digital photograph  
24 x 36 in.

## KENYATTA CRISP

*Tradition: Into Womanhood 1*

2020

Archival film print  
18 x 24 in.

*Tradition: Into Womanhood 2*

2020

Archival film print  
18 x 24 in.

## NICK DRAIN

*Portrait of ND*

2019

Archival inkjet print  
12 x 15 in.

*Portrait of HS*

2019

Archival inkjet print  
12 x 15 in.

*Portrait of TW*

2019

Archival inkjet print  
12 x 15 in.

## QUINN ALEXANDRIA HUNTER

*32 Hours of negotiation between the world and me*

2018

Artificial hair integrations, cotton  
42 x 31 x 1.5 in.

*Nottoway chandelier I*

2018

Artificial hair integrations, cotton  
36 x 22 x 22 in.

## MIA MARSHALL

*Medusa*

2019

Photograph by Joe Lowney  
Art Direction by Bradley Hill

*Synergy*

2019

Photograph by Joe Lowery  
Art Direction by Bradley Hill  
Digital photograph

## DOM McDUFFIE

*Untitled (Bat's Barber Shop)*

2020

Archival film print  
8 x 12 in.

*Untitled (Bats Barber Shop 2)*

2020

Archival film print  
8 x 12 in.

*Untitled (Aahmani African Braids)*

2020

Archival film print  
8 x 12 in.

*Untitled (Aahmani African Braids 2)*

2020

Archival film print  
8 x 12 in.

*Untitled (Obey Beauty Salon)*

2020

Archival film print  
8 x 12 in.

## EVANGELINE MENSAH-AGYEKUM

*An Extension of Us*

2019

Braiding hair, arduino, circuit board, wire, pressure sensor, vibration monitor, sound detector, tape, speaker, rubber bands, fabric  
Dimensions variable

**BRIANNA MIMS***Pressure*

2019

Digital photograph

18 x 24 in.

*Consum(h)er Culture*

2018

Digital photograph

18 x 24 in.

**STEVEN MONTINAR***Hopscotch, Kniss Kross, Double**Dutch the Gunshots*

2020

Playground balls, double dutch rope,  
hose connectors, cannoli tubes

35 x 10 x 12 in.

**AYANNA NAYO***Secure*

2018

Oil on canvas

38 x 49 in.

*Revive & Protect*

2018

Oil on canvas

6 x 3 ft.

**SHARON NORWOOD***Split Ends Series**Novel Idea*

2016-2018

Found ceramic, wood

13.5 in. diameter

*A Bit of Frederick's Magic*

2016-2018

Found ceramic, wood

13.5 in. diameter

*Gem of The Ocean*

2016-2018

Found ceramic, wood

13.5 in. diameter

*Jesus Help Me*

2016-2018

Found ceramic, wood

13.5 in. diameter

*juh1*

2016-2018

Found ceramic, wood

13.5 in. diameter

*Miss Ophelia*

2016-2018

Ink on paper drawing

24 x 18 in.

*Home Economics*

2016-2018

Ink on paper drawing

24 x 18 in.

**MATHIAS RUSHIN***Come as You Are*

2019

Digital photograph

31 x 19 in.

*Go*

2019

Digital photograph

31 x 31 in.

**SHARRELL RUSHIN***I can do all things via YouTube*  
*tutorial*

2020

Acrylic on canvas

34 x 48 in.

*Adorn*

2020

Oil on wood

16 x 16 in.

**DOMINIQUE SCAIFE***Motherhood*

2017

Polymer clay

21 x 11 x 14 in.

*Knot Today*

2017

Polymer clay

16 x 11 x 14 in.

*World Melanin Collection #8*

2019

Polymer clay

14 x 8 x 8 in.

*World Melanin Collection #17*

2019

Polymer clay

14 x 8 x 8 in.

**SHORI SIMS***Untitled Salon Poster #1*

2020

Graphite on paper

16 x 18 in.

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