

Artist/Activist/Educator

The Multiple Roles of Elizabeth Catlett, May Stevens, and Doris Derby



Presented by Cara Del Gaudio
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RUTGERS

Institute for Women's Leadership

The Leadership Scholars Certificate Program is a two-year selective, interdisciplinary certificate program that prepares Rutgers undergraduate women to be informed, innovative, and socially responsible leaders.

Leadership Scholars design and implement social action projects to expand their understanding of issues and problems and to develop leadership skills.

This project gives Scholars the opportunity to apply the theoretical knowledge they have gained about leadership, advocacy, and social change with the practical and experiential knowledge they have developed about a particular policy issue or problem through the field site placement. It also further develops leadership skills by giving undergraduates the opportunity to practice leadership through action.

To find out more please visit the Institute for Women's Leadership's website at <http://iwl.rutgers.edu>.

Project Description & Mission

- Website
 - Explanation of historical context
 - Biographical information
 - Artwork analyses
 - Learning Resources
 - Questions, general and specific
 - Activities: research and writing

Mission:

To create an accessible, engaging digital project that illuminates the unique positions of women in the fields of art, education, and activism in the twentieth century.

Research Foundations

- bell hooks, *Art on My Mind*, 1995
 - Brooklyn Museum, *Witness: Art and Civil Rights in the Sixties*, 2014
 - Corbett and Miller, "A Shared Inquiry into Shared Inquiry" in *The Public Historian*, Winter 2006
 - Lyon, Nix, and Shrum, *Introduction to Public History*, 2017
 - Oral histories & interviews
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The Process

Fall 2019:
Research for
history honors
thesis

Fall 2020:
Design, testing,
applying
feedback

Spring, Summer,
Fall 2020:
Begin writing
content for site,
continue through
summer and fall

Spring 2021:
Remaining
dissemination
through social
media & teacher
contacts

ARTIST / ACTIVIST / EDUCATOR

The Multiple Roles of Maudsley Carter, Lily Wheeler, and Della Barber

2022 Maudsley Carter Lily Wheeler Della Barber Learning Resources



Project Structure: Overview

- Title and tabs at heading
- Scrollable image gallery
- Project description
 - Acknowledges IWL
 - Thesis connection
 - Why these artists?
- Project mission



About This Project

Social Action Project by Della Barber, Leadership Scholar
made possible by the Institute for Women's Leadership at Rutgers University

The site is created as a Social Action Project for the Leadership Scholars Program. The Leadership Scholars Program is a two-year selective, interdisciplinary certificate program of the Institute for Women's Leadership (IWL) that prepares Rutgers undergraduate students to be informed, innovative, and socially responsible leaders. The Leadership Scholars examine how different institutions inform our understanding and practice of leadership and how they encourage — or inhibit — civic innovation.

In conjunction with my history classes, I will research and act as a professor for women activists during the American Civil Rights movement. I plan to create a social action project, an audio-visual presentation, and a media art project. I will create a social action project, an audio-visual presentation, and a media art project. I will create a social action project, an audio-visual presentation, and a media art project. I will create a social action project, an audio-visual presentation, and a media art project.

I want to increase public knowledge of the experiences of women artists who worked in activist circles in the United States in the twentieth century. I hope to raise awareness of the unique challenges prohibited by being a woman artist, a woman activist, and a woman leader in the mid-twentieth-century United States. By disseminating the art of three women artists to a general audience, I will raise public awareness of their experiences in the context of their gender and racial identities.

Structure:

Biography

- "In her own words"
- Portrait from era of focus, with artwork
- Description of contributions and legacy

"I have always wanted my art to service my people. To reflect us, to relate to us, to stimulate us, to make us aware of our potential... we have to create an art for liberation and for life."

- Elizabeth Catlett, 2003

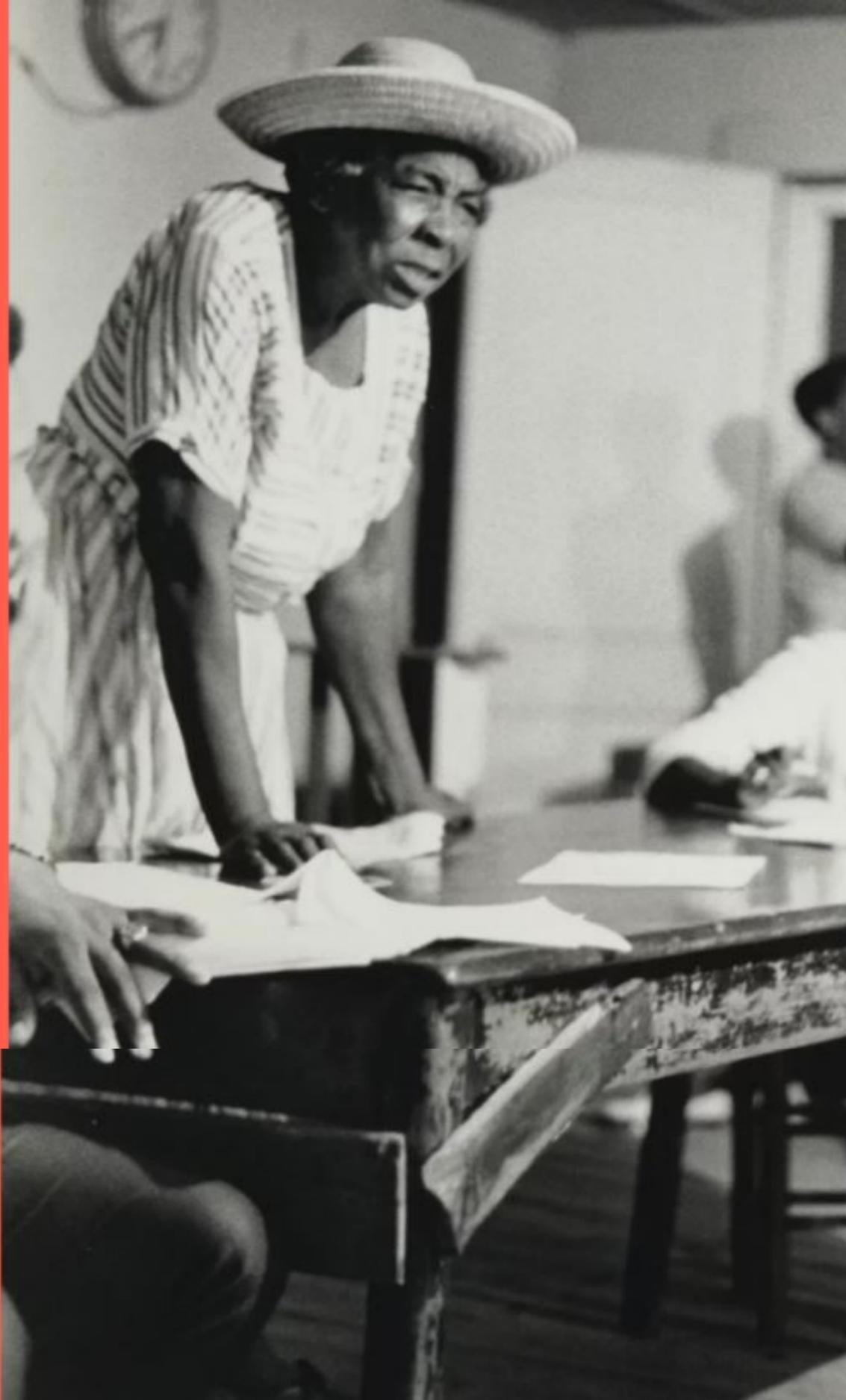


Elizabeth Catlett

1915-2012

Elizabeth Catlett was a sculptor, printmaker, and activist who placed inclusion at the center of her artwork and career. She was committed to celebrating her communities by depicting them in her art and encouraging their opportunities in the arts. Her dedication to empowering women and communities of Black and Indigenous people of color through her artwork was shaped by her own experiences as a Black woman in the United States. Like many artists, Catlett saw teaching as a valuable career path aligned with her desire to uplift others.

Catlett was a dedicated student for much of her life. In addition to her formal degrees, she learned about art and life from her students and peers. On the importance of art education, Catlett said, "It's the difference between offering our beautiful people art and offering them ineptitude. They deserve the very best and we have to equip ourselves to give them our very best. You can't make a statement if you don't speak the language". Catlett's application of activist principles in her art and teaching make her a valuable study in social justice art and pedagogy.



Grassroots Organizer, Mississippi

Doris Derby, 1968. Gelatin silver print.

First Look:

1. What does grassroots mean?
2. What do you first notice about the standing woman?

Grassroots Organizer is a photograph from Doris Derby's time working alongside SNCC to increase literacy among rural Black adults in Mississippi, with the long-term goal of helping them register to vote. In a 2020 interview, Derby remembered the need to build new types of institutions because the existing ones upheld racist principles. With little assistance from the government, organization needed to come from the ground up. *Grassroots Organizer* shows the subject's dedication to her work. Despite her age, she continues leading others to make the future more fair. Her standing position and passionate facial expression suggest she is leading the discussion. Derby's close-cropped composition obscures most of the room, but shows at least four other figures in the room. There is a sense of narrative based on the women's seemingly active conversation and directed gazes. The presence of two side-by-side discussions suggests a bustling meeting with productive results.

Image courtesy of the High Museum of Art

Visual Analysis

- Large image
- Title, artist, date, medium
- "First Look" questions
- Description
- Link to the image at the High Museum of Art's website

Project Structure: Learning Resources

How did Catlett, Stevens, and Derby apply activist ideas to their teaching practices?

How did the region each artist worked in influence her life?

What are some of the ways in which Catlett, Stevens, and Derby rejected the status quo?

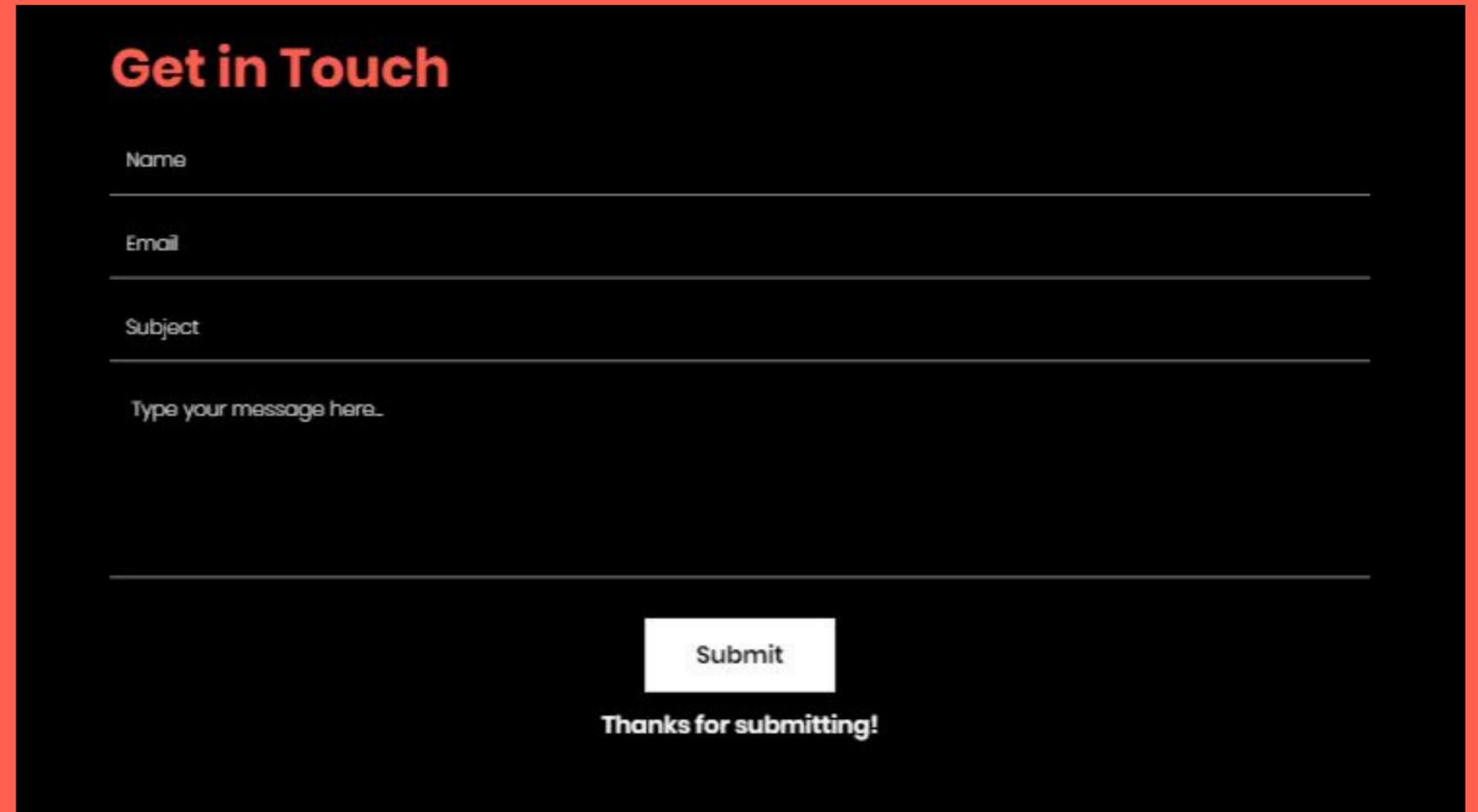
Pick one artist and explain how her art style developed throughout her life.

How did the concept of community play a role in Catlett, Stevens, and Derby's careers?

Research similar artists from the mid-20th century. What connects them? Consider their art, politics, and careers.

Testing and Dissemination

- Feedback
 - Undergraduate students
 - High School Teachers:
History and English
 - College: Art History,
History, and WGSS
 - Zimmerli Art Museum



Get in Touch

Name

Email

Subject

Type your message here...

Submit

Thanks for submitting!

Dissemination and Impact

- **Dissemination**

- Departmental listservs
- Campus organizations
 - Both academic and extracurricular
- Social media
- Classroom application

- **Impact**

- Accessible
- Raising awareness of the individuals
- Diversifying social studies and art history curricula
 - Demographics
 - Teaching methods

Lessons & Insights

- Managing multiple upper-level projects
 - Practicing accessible, professional writing
 - Website design and implementation of content
 - Long-term planning
 - Asking for guidance
 - Creating materials for classroom use
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Feminist Leadership

- Leadership that uplifts, rather than asserts dominance
- Applying feminist principles to their fields



Elizabeth Catlett teaching printmaking
(International Review of African American Art)

Selected Sources

- Corbett, Katherine T., and Howard S. Miller. "A Shared Inquiry into Shared Inquiry." *The Public Historian*, vol. 28, no. 1, Winter 2006.
 - Derby, Doris Adelaide. Interview. Conducted by Joseph Mosnier, 2006. Library of Congress.
 - "Elizabeth Catlett: My Childhood." YouTube, uploaded by Visionary Project, www.youtube.com/watch?v=KT3lr6kfIKM.
 - Hills, Patricia. *May Stevens*. Pomegranate, 2005.
 - hooks, bell. *Art on My Mind*. New Press, 1995.
 - Lyon, Cherstin M., et al. *Introduction to Public History: Interpreting the Past, Engaging Audiences*. Lanham, MD, Rowman & Littlefield, 2017.
 - Stevens, May. "Oral History Interview with May Stevens, 2009 August 10-11." Interview conducted by Judith Olch Richards. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Aug. 2009, www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-may-stevens-15709.
 - *Witness: Art and Civil Rights in the Sixties*. Brooklyn Museum, 2014.
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