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Curator brings together 'bold and unapologetic' women in new Mesa art exhibit

By [Mark Brodie](#)

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Curator Antoinette Cauley with her exhibit Future Matriarchs.

Mesa Community College

An exhibit at the Mesa Community College gallery explores the future matriarchs of the Black community. Titled "Future Matriarchs," it includes 10 artists, all of whom are women.

Antoinette Cauley curated the exhibit. She's a fine artist born and raised in Phoenix; she's also the first ever artist-in-residence at Mesa Community College.

The show is paired with another exhibit, called "[Matriarchs of Washington Park](#)," which looks into women who lived in a segregated part of Mesa. Both run through April 1.

Cauley joined The Show to talk about the exhibit.



Antoinette Cauley in KJZZ's studio.

Amber Victoria Singer/KJZZ

Interview highlights

ANTOINETTE CAULEY: I wanted it to be bold and unapologetic. I think oftentimes as women, we're taught growing up to make other people comfortable, even if it's at the expense of our own comfort. And I wanted the opposite of that. I wanted women to come in and use their voice and not be afraid and to be OK if other people are uncomfortable with our truths.

MARK BRODIE: So how do you try to do that in the art? Because I would think if you want to be bold, there's a lot of different ways you could go with that, right?

CAULEY: Totally. Totally. I think the way that I went about that was being very specific about which artists I was choosing. So the majority of these artists I have relationships with, I've shown with, I've mentored, I've worked with, and so I have an understanding of their artistic voice and how it translates. So I chose women who I knew would come in and say what they had to say and not dim their own light.

BRODIE: What are some of the messages that you're hoping get across through these works?

CAULEY: You know, I'm hoping that there are some different political and social issues that people will start talking about after they view this exhibition like women's reproductive rights. But also how that changes when you are a Black or brown woman because it's different for us. I'm hoping that police brutality continues to be an issue that's talked about and then more like social things like our hair. Sort of like the fetishization of our hair or the culture around our hair because there's a rich and also painful history just with our hair in this country. So these are just a few of the issues I hope people talk about, but I

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BRODIE: Do you find that there are different media that are better suited for some of those topics? Like your exhibit has fashion, it has painting, it has installation. Do some of those lend themselves to different messages better or does that not really matter?

CAULEY: You know, I haven't really thought too much about that, but kind of in just running it through my head now, I think that, you know, the first thing that pops into my head are a few installation pieces we have from Mia B. Adams. And I think her piece specifically about police brutality illustrates it in a way where it cannot be misinterpreted. It is bold, it's in your face and it's a little uncomfortable for people. So I do think works like that, where it's very literal, can help the general public understand what's being said. It's less abstract and there's not a lot of room for your mind to imagine, I guess.



"Fallen Pins of America," 2024, by Mia B. Adams. Yarn, pins, United States map, cork board.

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BRODIE: And with that piece, it's a map of the United States with some red string coming down, representing each, each

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CAULEY: Each person that's been killed by a police officer since 2014. It's super powerful to watch. It gives me goosebumps or to see, it gives me goosebumps, it makes me tear up. But the visual visualization and the way she used the red string, you know, it just is so powerful.

BRODIE: So the title of this exhibit is called "Future Matriarchs." So what are you looking for in the future? Like how do you use this exhibit to maybe get the conversation started about what to look for and maybe what the future might look like?

CAULEY: Yeah, you know, that's like a really tough question to ask because I think, you know, when I look at the foundation of the country we live in and I think about where we're at now, the future, in my opinion, doesn't look so hopeful. But the way that I view myself is a leader within the community, within the arts community, within the Black community. And my role is simply to empower and inspire and plant seeds so that when I'm gone, the good fight continues. So I'm hoping, you know, through exhibitions like this, it's giving women a platform, it's opening up conversation, hopefully, it's opening up people's minds and it can just contribute to the climate of our nation getting better, hopefully in the future.

BRODIE: How do you see the arts playing into that goal?

CAULEY: Oh, man, art shapes culture, right? If we look at history, so much of what we know happened comes from the art we're viewing, you know, you think about the hieroglyphs in Egypt or during the Renaissance Baroque Rococo era. All of those paintings were depicting stories, they didn't have the internet or social media or whatever, this is how they communicated the times. And so because art shapes culture, because art tells stories, it's important that we tell our stories now for future generations to look back at and see.

BRODIE: How do you try to balance some of the really difficult and troubling issues that these works bring up? But also as you pointed out, want to make sure that people appreciate the beauty of the actual work, like almost maybe irrespective or maybe because of what it's depicting, like some of the pieces talk about some really difficult things, but they're also quite beautiful.

CAULEY: I think that that's the really great thing about artwork, is you can enjoy it just visually for what it is when it's a strong piece of work, but it can also challenge you. And I believe that two things can be true at once. And so with this specific exhibition I brought in women who make really strong, visually beautiful work, but they're still able to talk about something. And so I think there's a really good balance in this show of the power and the beauty and the pain and the detriment of what we're experiencing.

BRODIE: So your exhibit is kind of paired with another exhibit in the same space. How do you feel like the two of those kind of work together?

CAULEY: Oh, I think they dance with each other beautifully. The other exhibition is called "Matriarchs of Washington Park." And it celebrates Black women who lived in a segregated neighborhood in Mesa years and years and years ago when segregation was still on paper, a thing. So with that being about past the past of these Black women, my exhibition is about the present and the future. And one day these women in this show will be those women, you know, in Washington Park just in their respective communities. So I think it's really beautiful to honor our past and look towards maybe a more hopeful future in both exhibitions.



Mesa Community College
"Flight of the Monarch," 2023 by Camryn Simone. Oil on canvas.

BRODIE: Do you get hope from looking at the history of the women from the past and looking at the work of women now?

CAULEY: That's a tough question to ask, but to be honest, I'm not filled with the most hope for us right now, but I think maybe in the future, there's a place for hope. But when I look back at those women, you know, in the past and I look at where we're at now. Not much has changed. I think that things are the same. They're just in different form now. So I feel like it's the same, but not, and so it's hard to feel hopeful a lot of times, but that doesn't mean I'm going to stop or give up, you know. That doesn't mean that things won't change because that's how I feel a lot of the times.

talk about afterwards?

CAULEY: I hope they become more aware of some of the struggles that Black women face and ultimately the Black community. And I hope that there are conversations about the roles that they play in sort of combating those struggles because a lot of those struggles stem from white supremacy. So, you know, we all play a part in combating it. And I think it's important to have conversations about what our respective roles are. So I'm hoping that this exhibition can open up people's minds to maybe some things they just didn't know. And that's fair if you don't know. But once you know, you got to do something about it. So that would be my hope.

BRODIE: All right. That is Antoinette Cauley, the first ever artist in residence at Mesa Community College, curator of the exhibit "Future Matriarchs." Antoinette, thank you so much for the conversation. I appreciate it.

CAULEY: Thank you for having me.

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