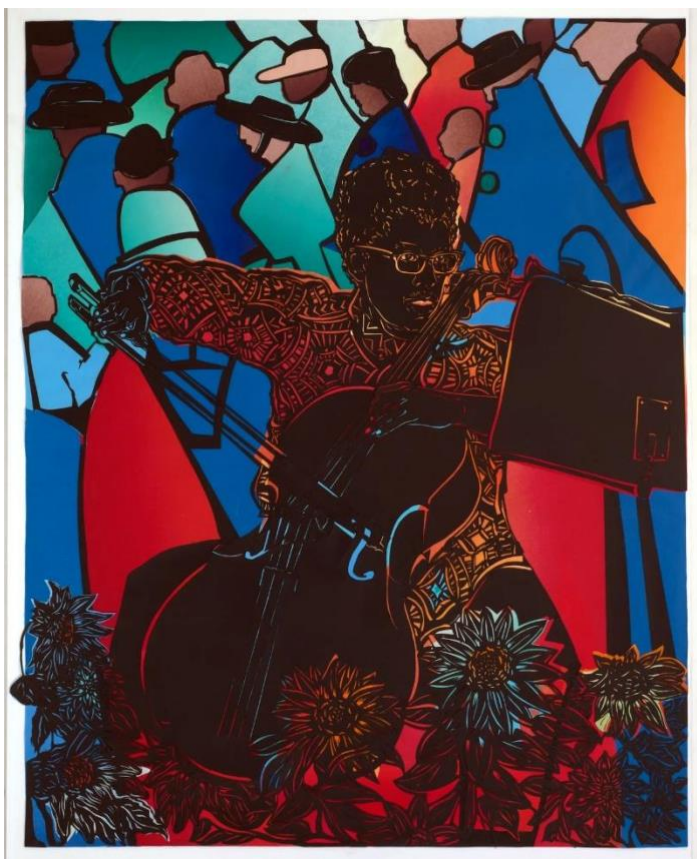




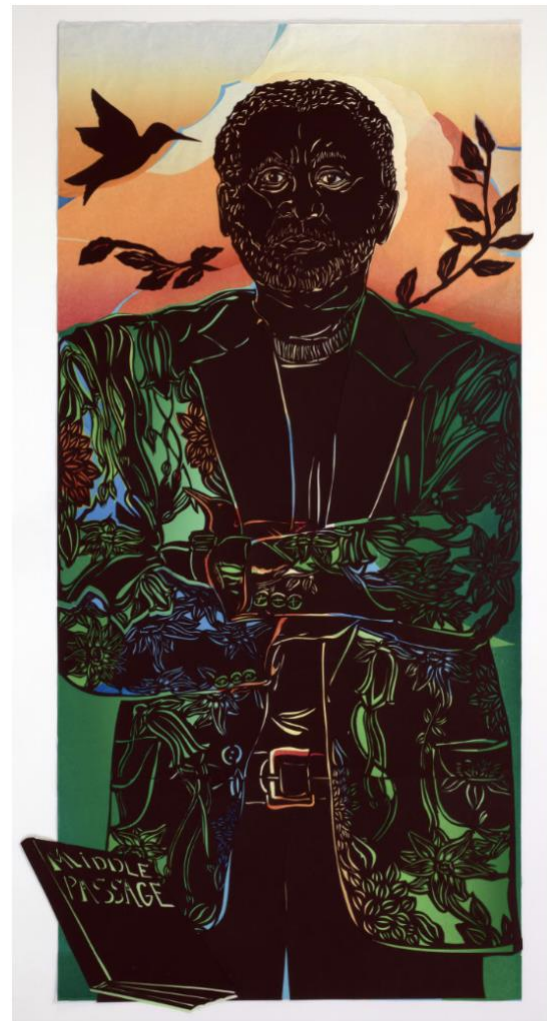
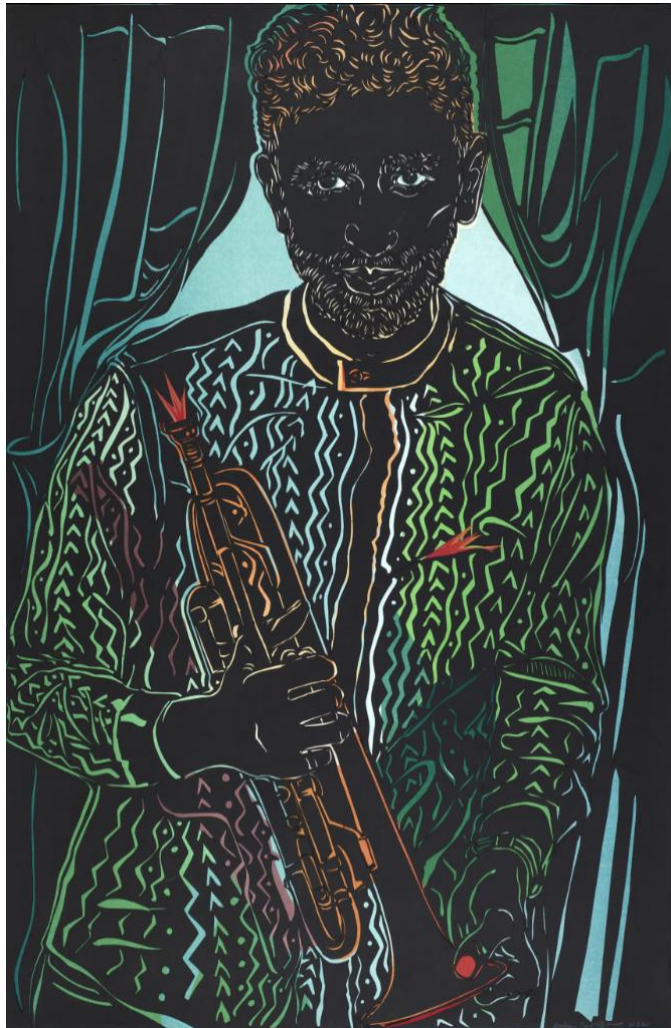
CLAIRE OLIVER GALLERY PRESENTS *MAKE A JOYFUL NOISE*,  
A SOLO EXHIBITION BY ARTIST BARBARA EARL THOMAS

ON VIEW IN HARLEM NOVEMBER 11, 2022 – JANUARY 7, 2023



**HARLEM, NEW YORK, November 1, 2022,** | [Claire Oliver Gallery](#) is pleased to announce *Make a Joyful Noise*, a solo exhibition by artist Barbara Earl Thomas, featuring nine large-scale paper cut portraits. Thomas' portraiture is created through intricate cut black paper, reminiscent of historical silhouettes, but her subjects are fully rendered and employ backgrounds in vibrant coloration. In this series, Thomas explores the impulse towards human creativity, specifically music, as a means of survival as a universal experience. *Make a Joyful Noise* features portraits of characters playing music as an act of joy in the face of suffering and upheaval due to war, the pandemic and structural racism. The exhibition will be on view at Claire Oliver's central gallery space November 11, 2022 - January 7, 2023.

“Through music we can transcend the challenges that we all face on this earth,” states Thomas. “I was very drawn to this idea while creating this series, how we as humans uplift our spirits through song throughout history. From the pandemic to the chain gang, music is uniquely powerful and I aimed to represent this visually for this series.”



The Seattle-based multi-media artist’s work is narrative driven, often drawing from literature, popular culture, history, and music. In *Make A Joyful Noise* Thomas takes up the narrative of characters using music as a form of resistance and expression in the face of war, the pandemic and social oppression. A cello player appears in the midst of a war-torn Bosnian landscape to play his instrument, plague-worn Italians take to balconies singing; and freedom singers raise their voices outside an Alabama jail, and men bound together in a chain gang sing in syncopation to the metronome of cracking hard rock. Influenced by rhythm and musicality as her narrative focus, Thomas also references sequences of dialogue by authors August Wilson and Charles Johnson who navigate the post-Jim Crow generation. For example, in *Trumpet Offering*, Thomas references the 1985 play *Fences*’ character Gabriel Maxon who plays a trumpet in order to open heaven’s gate on judgment day – an example from literature of a character driven to music to achieve a loftier, although tragic, goal. Her visual drama incorporates clues and subtext embedded in clothing, objects, and the instruments she includes.

A student of art history, Thomas' portraits document, commemorate, and celebrate individuals within the context of symbolic objects that tell a broader story of the current social political moment.

## **IMAGE CAPTIONS (L-R)**

### **TOP**

*A Joyful Noise, 2022*

Paper cut with hand printed color

50 x 40 in

*A Girl in the Library, 2022*

Paper cut with hand printed color

61 X 32 in

### **BOTTOM**

*Trumpet Offering, 2022*

Paper cut with hand printed color

40 X 26

*Middle Passage, 2022*

Paper cut with hand printed color

55 x 26 in

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## **ABOUT CLAIRE OLIVER GALLERY**

Claire Oliver Gallery is located in Central Harlem in a four-story brownstone. For nearly 25 years, Claire Oliver Gallery has showcased and celebrated artwork, with a focus on work by women and people of color, which transcends and challenges the traditional art historical canon. Our forward-thinking program and exclusive commitment to the primary market allows for an intensive focus that has nurtured and grown the careers of our artists. Many of the gallery's artists have been included in The Venice Biennale, The Whitney Biennial, and biennales in Sydney, Pittsburgh, and Lyon and have exhibited works in major international museums including the Smithsonian American Art Museum, The Art Institute of Chicago, Center Georges Pompidou, The Philadelphia Museum of Art, and The Los Angeles County Museum of Art amongst others. Claire Oliver Gallery artists are included in the permanent collections of many important museums worldwide including The Smithsonian American Art Museum, The Art Institute of Chicago, The Tate Britain, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The State Hermitage Museum, MoMA, and the Museum of Arts and Design amongst many others. Claire Oliver Gallery held the first American exhibition for the Russian collaborative AES+F, whose work went on to twice represent Russia in the Russian pavilion of the Venice Biennale. Gallery artists have received prestigious fellowships including Fulbright, Guggenheim, USArtist and National Endowment for the Arts.

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### **ABOUT BARBARA EARL THOMAS**

Barbara Earl Thomas is a Seattle-based visual artist with numerous national exhibits to her credit and an active art-making career that spans more than 30 years. A skilled painter who now builds tension-filled narratives through papercuts and prints, placing silhouetted figures in social and political landscapes, she pulls from mythology and history to create a contemporary visual narrative that challenges the stories we tell as Americans about who we are. Thomas is also known for her large-scale installations that use light as the animating force and invites her viewers to step inside her world of illuminated scenography. Thomas's works are included in the collections of the Seattle, Tacoma and Portland Art Museums, Chrysler Museum of Art, Minneapolis Institute of Art, Microsoft, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and Washington State and Seattle City public collections. Thomas recently completed commissioned work at Yale University's Hopper College as well as two major exhibitions, *Geography of Innocence*, Seattle Art Museum (November 2020 - November 2021), and *Packaged Black*, a collaboration with New York based artist Derrick Adams at the Henry Art Gallery at the University of Washington (October 2021 - May 2022). Upcoming solo exhibits include Claire Oliver Gallery (November 2022), and Chrysler Museum of Art (February 2023).

In 2022 Thomas was appointed as an Associate Fellow at Yale University. In 2016, she received the Seattle Mayor's Arts Award and the Washington State Governor's Arts award, the Artist Trust Irving and Yvonne Twining Humber Award and the Seattle Stranger Genius Award for excellence in the arts. She was also nationally noted for her exhibition "Heaven On Fire," a major career survey with The Bainbridge Island Art Museum. Her work has been widely featured nationally; with the John Braseth Gallery at the Seattle Art Fair (2016), and at EXPO Chicago (2017, 2018) and Pulse Contemporary Art Fair (2018-21) with Claire Oliver Gallery (New York)

Thomas is a graduate of the School of Art, University of Washington, where she received her Master of Arts in 1977. She counts herself most fortunate to have had mentorships with Michael Spafford and Jacob Lawrence who have both influenced her work. She will tell you that these two men were not only supportive but crucial friends in her life.