



CLAIRE OLIVER GALLERY PRESENTS  
*A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE FUTURE*

A SPECIAL GROUP EXHIBITION  
WORKS BY ARTISTS BK ADAMS, BARBARA EARL THOMAS,  
STAN SQUIREWELL, LANIA ROBERTS, AND CAROLYN MAZLOOMI

ON VIEW MAY 31 THROUGH AUGUST 3, 2024



New York, NY | May 17, 2024—Claire Oliver Gallery is pleased to present *A Brief History of the Future*, a special group exhibition of works by artists BK Adams, Barbara Earl Thomas, Stan Squirewell, LaNia Roberts, and Carolyn Mazloomi. Expressing themselves through painting, paper cuts, glasswork, found photography, and quilting, the artists in this presentation are time benders—wielding their practices in order to explore the interdependent and evolving dimensions of past, present, and future. With their unique

variations on the choreography of reflection and anticipation, these artists prove that chronological systems of time are insufficient to address the compounding complexities of and ever-shifting revelations about identity, race, gender, family, nature, culture, and politics. Calling on ancestral, generational, and societal wisdom, this show gives equal importance to those histories we bring into focus and those futures we attempt to influence. As Octavia Butler expressed in her 1993 novel *Parable of the Sower*, “All that you touch / You Change / All that you change / Changes You / The only lasting truth / Is Change...” *A Brief History of the Future* will be on view at Claire Oliver Gallery, May 31 - August 3, 2024.

### **Carolyn Mazloomi**

Carolyn Mazloomi is a textile artist working in West Chester, Ohio. Mazloomi makes quilts that honor Black lives in American history and women’s lives in world history, drawing particular attention to those individuals—both well-known and unrecognized—who made significant contributions to civil rights, women’s liberation, and social justice. For Mazloomi, the image is the most essential part of her fiber work; working in only bold, black-and-white to keep the focus on the content, the artist creates panoramic, textured narratives of the hardship and endurance faced by any person invested in a fight for freedom and equality. Secure in her knowledge that her documentation of these events will hold sway forever in the annals of the historic canon, Mazloomi reminds us that those who hold the pen, or in this case the needle, can affect the generations to come with the knowledge of events they document now. Each textile is surrounded by a patchwork border, paying homage to the community of quilters who taught her this craft and for whom she has been a community leader throughout her life.

In *Stolen Comfort*, Mazloomi recounts the history of those women from Korea and the Philippines who were captured and sex trafficked by Japan’s army during World War II. Known as “comfort women,” these prisoners of war were forced into sex slavery for Japanese soldiers. After decades of fighting for acknowledgment of these atrocities from the Japanese government, survivors only recently received recognition. For Mazloomi, these images are seminal to holding space for the histories of her race and gender—lives that are under threat of being omitted from history by the far-right politicians threatening democracy. She hopes these quilts, as objects of familiarity, warmth, and comfort, become meaningful learning tools for future generations—tapestries that ensure retrospection, retribution, and resilience.



## **BK Adams**

BK Adams is a mixed-media artist living and working in Washington, D.C. With vibrant acrylic palettes and found biomorphic materials—from artificial bees to dried flowers—each of Adams’ canvases is a portal into his whimsical, autobiographical world. Depicting himself in the image of a lion, his paintings illustrate a series of open-ended parables. Unlike the formulaic trajectory of folklore, these scenes stray from the familiar and embrace a limitless wandering; the lion assumes both mythological and quotidian gestures like guiding a cub, climbing a ladder, riding a horse, and crossing a path with a relaxed, curious gait.

Foregoing set destinations and languages of logic, he paints landscapes composed of jumbled numbers, alphabets, clocks, and shapes; in his realm, symbologies are scattered like stars in the sky. As the father of two sons, Adams’ work is an exploration of his role as a protector, teacher, and guide. These paintings offer a view into his ways of observing and absorbing the natural and built world—vivid scenes that will inspire his kin to embrace expansive, optimistic, and fluid encounters with all life. Always in dialogue with legacy, Adams places himself between his own existence and the transference of his experiences to the next generation, for whom these symbols and stories will continue to undergo metamorphosis.

## Barbara Earl Thomas

Barbara Earl Thomas is a visual artist living and working in Seattle, Washington. This selection of work illustrates Thomas' interpretation of the silhouette—a Western, colonial mode of portraiture in which subjects were portrayed through a flattened outline of their profile. For Thomas, this one-dimensional perspective correlated to structural racism and reductive bias used to suppress the profound dimension and extraordinary depth of Black people in America. Reclaiming this visual tradition to serve her own expression, Thomas creates silhouettes by carving into black paper and sandblasting glass vessels.

Unlike their stark forebears, these portraits are intricate and textured—individuals depicted with attention to their unique features, posture, and animation. Depicting musicians, relatives, wildlife, and animals, these works emphasize life for its inherent joy, expression, verve, and verdancy. The paperworks are backed with vibrant, hand-printed colors and the vessels are incised from saturated, dual-tone glass, compositionally and conceptually refusing to be reduced to the rigid constraints of “black and white.” Thomas instead welcomes the nuance of shadows, celebrating those luminous, elastic silhouettes that reflect dynamism, pulse, and transcendence into real life.



## **Stan Squirewell**

Stan Squirewell is a painter, photographer, installation, and performance artist living and working in Louisville, Kentucky. Squirewell's muses are the unidentified subjects of found photographs from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—anonymous figures whose individuality and dignity the artist seeks to restore through his work. Focusing on portraits of Black and Brown communities, Squirewell challenges the assumptions that audiences may project onto unattributed photographs, distorted by bias, prejudice, and racism. Bringing these archival prints into a contemporary context, he encourages his viewers to question, rather than assume, the narratives that shape the lives of those communities who have gone unacknowledged in the historical record.

Invoking his own identity as a Black man with Indigenous roots, he seeks to offer each of these sitters a retrospective justice and recognize the implied socioeconomic status of being photographed in past centuries. Collaging directly onto the portrait—as if sampling a track on a turntable—Squirewell adorns his revisited subjects with ornate textiles and rich pigments, furnishing them with the luxuries that they deserved to enjoy during their lifetimes. Each work is encased in a handmade wood frame that Squirewell treats with the *Shou Sugi Ban* technique, a Japanese method for conserving wood by burning a plank's surface. Like phoenixes from the ashes, these historical figures are restored to their youthful bodies—preserved, perpetually, with the flush of life.

## **LaNia Roberts**

LaNia Roberts is a visual artist based in Louisville, Kentucky. She has a rigorous studio practice that focuses on figurative painting and collage, utilizing her own photographs from time spent with friends and family. Inspired by the Fauvist movement “liberating color,” Roberts employs a vibrant color palette in the skin tones of her models to explore liberation and to disrupt the historical use of skin color as a gauge of racial identity and worth. Her work aims to challenge singular, limiting perspectives by collaging multiple points of view of each model to coexist within a single painting.

As a Black female artist from the American South, Roberts' work explores personal and collective memory. A focal point for her in the works on view is her late Great Grandmother's kitchen, a central localization of identity, familial bonds and cultural lineage. In *Living Water* and *Maxine's Recipe*, Roberts explores her family's connection to food, from fast food to Thanksgiving dinner as a paradigm for physically nourishing our bodies is parallel with nourishing our souls. *Living Water* draws from biblical narratives, turning

ordinary experiences into spiritual reflections, while *Maxine's Recipe* honors the tradition of passing down recipes as cultural heirlooms. This ongoing series examines the physical space and the body to explore diverse perspectives and the multifaceted nature of identity.

**IMAGE CAPTIONS:**

Barbara Earl Thomas, *Man and Daughter; Ticket to the World*, Paper cut with hand-printed color, 2022

Carolyn Mazloomi, *Stolen Comfort*, fabric and thread, 2015

BK Adams, *The Thinker*, acrylic paint and mixed media on canvas, 2024

Stan Squirewell, *She Saw Far and Wide*, mixed media, photo collage, acrylic paint, and glitter mounted on canvas in a hand-carved frame, 2023

Lania Roberts, *Living Water*, Acrylic and paper collage on canvas, 2024

###

**MEDIA CONTACT**

**DEPARTMENT PR**

Sarah Brown McLeod

[sarah@department-pr.com](mailto:sarah@department-pr.com)

Roberta Zertuche

[roberta@department-pr.com](mailto:roberta@department-pr.com)

**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. The gallery's 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, Centre 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.

2288 Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard  
New York, NY 10030  
[www.claireoliver.com](http://www.claireoliver.com)