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**Autumn T. Thomas**  
***Virtue is Near Thee, and***  
***With Gentle Hand***

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August 1 – December 31, 2024

On view at the Tallyn's Reach Library  
23911 E Arapahoe Rd, Aurora, CO 80016

**BMoCA**



***“O my soul, sink not into despair,  
Virtue is near thee, and with gentle hand  
Would now embrace thee, hovers o’er thine head”  
-excerpt from On Virtue, by poet Phillis Wheatley***

The Chi Wara headdresses by the Bamana people of West Africa are carved to honor the mythical being *Chi Wara*. Under *Chi Wara*’s guidance, humans first learned to cultivate the land and became prosperous and knowledgeable farmers. The headdresses often take the form and features of the graceful antelope, the sturdy aardvark, and other significant animals within Bamana culture that represent agriculture and growth. As agricultural practices continue to evolve, these headdresses stand as a bridge connecting past traditions to the present. In a world where the rapid pace of technological advancement often overshadows ancient customs, the *Chi Wara* headdresses remind us of the intrinsic value of our roots and our futures simultaneously.

At the heart of this exhibition, artist Autumn T. Thomas recognizes the *Chi Wara* headdresses as a source of inspiration for her own interpretive forms. Much like traditional Bamana artisanship, Thomas meticulously carves her sculptures with intricate details. She references the flowing lines and dynamic postures of the antelope and aardvark to exemplify her reverence for the natural world, the sustenance that agriculture provides, and the importance of connecting the past with our growth toward the future. Thomas presents sculptures made from African mahogany wood, Padauk wood, concrete, copper, resin, and digital print on oiled paper. The combination of materials illuminates the push and pull of our past, present, and future and how our histories continue to sustain us as we grow and change as a society.

## **Artist Biography**

Autumn T. Thomas (b. 1978) is an interdisciplinary artist working in wood sculpture. Her work challenges the boundaries of visual literacy: hundreds of cuts placed into the wood transforms it into soft, twisting forms, mimicking the endurance required to thrive amidst the oppression and marginalization of women of color; each cut represents a time in which Thomas felt cut down by society. Minimal in design, Thomas’ work personifies analogous, brown bodies as whispering forms of subversion, affecting prejudice by way of perception and visual literacy.

Thomas is sponsored by National Performance Network and Diaspora Vibe Cultural Arts Incubator, and is a current artist in residence at Redline Contemporary Art Center in Denver, CO, where she lives and works. She serves on the board of Tilt West, is a former board member of Platte Forum, and mentors young artists in her spare time. Thomas, who is a self-trained woodworker, received her MFA in Book Arts and Printmaking from The University of the Arts, Philadelphia in 2017 and her BFA in Visual Communication from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2015.



Above Image: Autumn T. Thomas, *Chi Wara headdress (detail)*, 2023, wood and oiled paper. Image courtesy of the artist.

## Exhibition Programming

Join us at our other SCFD partner branches to view the work of Lares Feliciano, and Olive Moya and enjoy programming associated with their projects! Artist and community-led workshop information can be found on BMoCA's website, or at the Belmar, Lakewood, Standley Lake, Tallyn's Reach, and Aurora Central libraries.

## Our Community Partners

*The Virtue is Near Thee, and With Gentle Hand installation is part of a series of exhibitions and programming that are a collaboration between Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art (BMoCA) and the Aurora Public Library branches Aurora Central and Tallyn's Reach. Through this initiative, BMoCA presents free, museum-quality exhibitions by regional artists at library branches and complementary programs at the libraries and neighboring schools. The collaboration works to expand accessible educational and cultural opportunities for Arapahoe County residents of all ages and backgrounds. Thank you to our generous sponsors: The BMoCA and Arapahoe County collaboration is funded in part by the Scientific & Cultural Facilities District and the Kemper Family Foundations, UMB Bank, n.a., Trustee.*



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# BMoCA

Boulder Museum of  
Contemporary Art

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