

CHARMAINE SPENCER

Sculptor

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BIOGRAPHY

I am a Cleveland-based sculptor whose practice is defined by monumental architectural interventions and an inquiry into the perceived value of materials. My work is currently featured in the global touring exhibition Project a Black Planet: The Art and Culture of Panafrica, commissioned by the **Art Institute of Chicago**, with international presentations at **MACBA Barcelona**, **The Barbican Centre London**, and **KANAL–Centre Pompidou Brussels**.

This international presence is anchored by over twenty years of institutional partnership and social practice, including a long-term residency with **Cleveland Public Theatre** and ecological initiatives with the **Famicos Foundation**. My sculptures are held in the permanent collections of the **DuSable Black History Museum**, the **Putnam Collection** at Case Western Reserve University, and the **Hilton Collection**.

Recent projects include the exhibition Ohio Now: State of Nature at **moCa Cleveland** and a forthcoming scholarly feature in the International Journal of Education & the Arts. A finalist for the **Joan Mitchell Fellowship** and a multi-year **Ohio Arts Council** grant recipient, my work Air (2022) served as the signature visual identity for the Panafrica symposium in Brussels. In recognition of my contributions to the permanent collections of the DuSable and the Art Institute of Chicago, I hold a **Lifetime Membership at both institutions**.

STATEMENT OF PRACTICE

My practice is a lifelong inquiry into the social architecture of perceived value and the endurance of legacy. Since my earliest explorations, I have been fascinated by the irony of ‘non-value’—the way society dismisses the foundational materials and the cultural histories that act as our essential yet unacknowledged vessels of our collective identity.

In my early work, I critiqued the elusive conventions of class and birthright, challenging how society confers worth onto objects while ignoring, or even erasing, their origins. This foundational curiosity has since matured into a monumental practice defined by a complex negotiation of weight and permanence. Using a juxtaposition of organic and repurposed materials, from salvaged wall lath and reed grass to clay, compost, and shredded letters to the ancestors, I construct symbolic architectures that bridge pre-colonial traditions with the resilience of contemporary, multicultural societies.

My work serves as a sanctuary for introspection, reclaiming fragments of identity that have been discarded and molding them into renewed, master-scale forms. By redefining the relationship between the inherent and the extrinsic, I seek to forge a pathway toward shared accountability and a more profound, collective restoration.

COMMISSIONS & EXHIBITIONS

Museums Features and International Exhibitions

2024–2027 | **Project a Black Planet: The Art and Culture of Panafrica**

The Art Institute of Chicago, IL

Project a Black Planet is a landmark exhibition expressly devoted to modern and contemporary cultural activity through a pan-Africanist lens. As a core commission for this ambitious survey, *Air 2024* explores the intersection of materials and identity on a global stage. Following its debut at the **Art Institute of Chicago**, the work travels internationally to:

Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), Spain

The Barbican Centre, London, UK

KANAL–Centre Pompidou, Brussels, Belgium

2025–2026 | **Ohio Now: State of Nature**

moCa Cleveland, OH | Contemporary Arts Center (CAC), Cincinnati, OH

Following its critically acclaimed run at the **Contemporary Arts Center**, Ohio Now: State of Nature arrives at **moCa Cleveland**, where it remains on view through May 2026. The work featured in this survey addresses toxic post-industrial spaces through nutrient-rich "guerrilla sculpture gardening." These pieces continue an inquiry into how we nourish both the soil and social equality.

2025 | **The Fifth Vessel, Transformer Station | Cleveland Museum of Art, OH**

A monumental solo exhibition commissioned as the capstone for the **FRONT International: Art Futures Fellowship**. This prestigious multi-year fellowship supports the expansion of sculptural practice and long-term institutional engagement. As the sole artist featured in the Crane Gallery, the installation utilizes raw geological matter to create a symbolic architecture for human accountability. The work functions as a reliquary for discernment, exploring the physical form as a vessel for historical memory and social ethics.

2022–2023 | **Oh, Gods of Dust and Rainbows, FRONT International Triennial**

Akron Art Museum | Transformer Station | Quaker Square, OH

A major multi-venue commission for the second edition of the **FRONT International: Cleveland Triennial for Contemporary Art**. Selected to participate across two museums and three distinct sites, the work utilized monumental form to explore the intersection of regional ecology and communal restoration. This site-specific inquiry functioned as a symbolic architecture for collective healing and regenerative growth.

2021 | **Still We Rise: Crossroads**

Woodland Cemetery | The Sculpture Center, Cleveland, OH

A dual-site commission featuring an interactive sculptural vessel and a corresponding Augmented Reality (AR) installation. The physical work at **The Sculpture Center** functioned as a communal sanctuary for letters to ancestors, incorporating global AR technology to set organic reed grass elements into symbolic motion. Simultaneously, a site-specific AR iteration was permanently accessible at the gates of the historic **Woodland Cemetery**, bridging unmarked history with a contemporary digital presence.

COMMISSIONS & EXHIBITIONS (Continued)

Public Features & Site-Specific Installations

2003–2022 | Resident Artist: Sculptural Scenography, Cleveland Public Theatre, Cleveland, OH

A multi-decade institutional partnership focused on monumental architectural interventions designed to interface with the theatre's historic footprint. These site-specific commissions functioned as active visual landscapes for professional performance, ranging from the environmental installations of Candlelight Hypothesis, 2022, to the large-scale transformation of the former Romanian Orthodox Church, 2014. This residency further includes the lath-wood environments of Pandemonium, 2007, and the foundational Cleveland Institute of Art collaboration for the multi-disciplinary dance production SAFMOD, 2003.

2018 | CAN Triennial Exhibition Prize, Collective Arts Network, Cleveland, OH

A site-specific commission awarded for the inaugural CAN Triennial. This sculptural earthworks project utilized nutrient-rich, biodegradable materials to address post-industrial urban spaces. The work served as a catalyst for environmental restoration, preparing toxic soil for community use while exploring the connections between ecological health and daily life.

2016 | Harmonic, Hilton Downtown Cleveland, OH

Commissioned by **Kalisher** and the **Cuyahoga County Board of Commissioners** for the hotel's four-story atrium. This 18' x 18' sculpture binds organic reed grass with industrial steel to bridge the city's urban architecture with the natural expanse of the lake and sky. The work serves as a monumental statement on the intersection of verdant beauty and urban innovation.

2012 | Shade Tree, Carl and Louis Stokes Central Academy, Cleveland, OH

A site-specific public commission serving as a central architectural anchor for the academy's community space.

2010 | Ingenuity Festival of Arts and Technology, Cleveland, OH

A solo installation commissioned for the subterranean industrial architecture of the Veterans Memorial Bridge.

2004 | Portals to Everywhere, The Sculpture Center, Cleveland, OH

A public commission permanently sited at the David E. Davis Sculpture Park within the historic landscape of University Circle.

CURATORIAL PROJECTS

2004–2009 | Independent Curator: Hodge School Art Series

St. Clair Superior Development Corp. | Hodge Elementary School, Cleveland, OH

Initiated and curated a multi-year series of community-based exhibitions within a converted historical elementary school. Successfully secured community-building grant funding to transform non-traditional spaces into viable platforms for contemporary art. This project served as a foundational element of the St. Clair Superior artist live-work movement, focusing on the reclamation of urban architecture for neighborhood cultural enrichment.

FELLOWSHIPS & AWARDS

- 2025** | **Finalist**, Joan Mitchell Fellowship, Joan Mitchell Foundation, New York, NY
2022 | **FRONT Art Futures Fellowship**, FRONT International Triennial, Cleveland, OH
2020 | **Individual Artist Grant, Ohio Arts Council**, Columbus OH
2009 | **Creative Workforce Fellowship**, CPAC, OH
2005 | **William McVey Award for Excellence in Sculpture**, Cleveland Institute of Art, OH

PERMANENT COLLECTIONS & AFFILIATIONS

- Art Institute of Chicago & DuSable Black History Museum and Education Center**, Chicago IL
Lifetime membership awarded from both institutions, in recognition of the permanent acquisition of *Air 2024*, Acquisition via the Art Institute of Chicago.
- The Putnam Collection**, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, OH
- The Hilton Collection**, Downtown Cleveland, OH

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY & PRESS

- 2026** Forthcoming | Academic Feature, *International Journal of Education & the Arts (IJEA)*.
Research by Ahmad Waleed, University of Houston.
- 2025** | Chakerian, Peter. “FRONT Art Fellows take center stage at Transformer Station,”
The Cleveland Plain Dealer.
- 2024** | Project a Black Planet: The Art and Culture of Panafrica,
The Art Institute of Chicago. (Distributed by Yale University Press).
- 2023** | Signature Visual Identity *Panafrica: Image, Sound, Text Symposium*,
KANAL–Centre Pompidou, Brussels. The sculpture *Air 2022* was selected as the symbolic identity for the international symposium launch of Project a Black Planet.
- 2022** | Oh, Gods of Dust and Rainbows, **FRONT International: Cleveland Triennial for Contemporary Art**.
- 2022** | Featured Work: *Fire*, **View Magazine, Akron Art Museum**.
- 2021** | Gill, Michael. “The Fifth Element: Charmaine Spencer at The Sculpture Center,”
CAN Journal, Winter Issue.
- 2021** | CrossRoads, Augmented Reality Exhibition Catalogue,
The Sculpture Center, Cleveland, OH.
- 2020** | Wise, Carrie. “Equity In Art: Sculpting Joy and Making Statements,”
Ideastream Public Media.
- 2017** | von Schneider, Dott. “Playing In The Mud,” **Cleveland Scene Magazine**.
- 2014** | Seen/Unseen, **The Artists Archives of the Western Reserve**, Cleveland, OH.
- 2010** | One Story, Many Voices, **Creative Workforce Fellowship Catalogue**.

SELECTED PRESENTATIONS

- 2026** Forthcoming | *Art in the Open: Nature Walk & Artist Talk*,
Feature Speaker, **moCa Cleveland & Cleveland Metroparks**, OH
- 2025** | *Voices Unbound*, **Mandel School, Case Western Reserve University**, OH
- 2024** | *Artist in the Atrium*, **Cleveland Museum of Art**, Cleveland, OH
- 2024** | Featured Speaker, **Cleveland Society for Contemporary Art**, Cleveland, OH

SELECTED EXHIBITION HISTORY

- 2024** | **PRIZM Art Fair**, Miami, FL (exhibited in conjunction with Art Basel Miami Beach week)
- 2022 Solo** | *From: Seed To: Root*, **The Sculpture Center**, Cleveland, OH
- 2022 Solo** | *New Growth*, **Cleveland Botanical Gardens**, OH
- 2015** | *The Female Perspective*, The Gallery at Lakeland, OH
- 2008 Solo** | *A Place To Dwell*, **The Sculpture Center**, Cleveland, OH
- 2006** | *AfroFuturism*, **Spaces Gallery**, Cleveland, OH

SELECTED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & SOCIAL PRACTICE

2016 | **Creative Strategy for Clinical Practice**

LEAP (Linking Employment, Abilities and Potential), Cleveland, OH

Developed and led a specialized curriculum designed to integrate creative methodologies within state-mandated counseling guidelines. This professional development program empowered counselors to utilize artistic inquiry to enhance client support and therapeutic outcomes.

2008 | **Creative Activism: Tents of Hope**

Building Bridges | National Mall, Washington, D.C.

Lead Instructor for a global advocacy project supporting refugees in Darfur, Sudan. Designed and constructed a functional canvas tent for exhibition on the National Mall before it was shipped to the region for use as a shelter and classroom.

EDUCATION

Bachelor of Fine Arts, Cleveland Institute of Art, Cleveland, OH