

Artist Profile – Betty Blayton-Taylor

b. 1937 Williamsburg, VA; d. 2016 Bronx, NY

Blayton-Taylor received her BFA in 1959 from Syracuse University and continued her education at the Arts Student League and the Brooklyn Museum School. At the time, Virginia did not allow African Americans to attend its segregated universities because of its Jim Crow laws and no public black college offered a degree in her chosen major, so the state of Virginia had to pay her full tuition throughout the four years in order to comply with the federally mandated "separate but equal" requirements for education. This allowed her to attend Syracuse University tuition-free.

Blayton-Taylor's work is typically characterized by semi-organic abstract forms, sometimes exclusively done in either warm or cool tones. Blayton-Taylor commonly used a circle in her work because of her interest in wholeness and the relationship between man and nature. Her works are described as spiritual, metaphysical, and self-reflective, her goal was to produce work that allowed her to meditate on herself and on life's mysteries as well as letting the viewer do the same thing. Blayton-Taylor described her work as being about "being a black soul searching in a material world, trying to find balance".

Common themes Blayton-Taylor used in her works are religion, mythology, metaphysical principles, and thoughts and feelings of the subconscious; the science of the mind. She didn't exclusively use one medium, and instead was known to work with painting, printmaking, illustrations, and sculpture. Blayton-Taylor used these different mediums because the exploration of the techniques allowed for the creation of mood and mind-set changes which, in turn, let viewers reflect on themselves. Blayton-Taylor was also interested in activism, but didn't often let it coincide with her work, and if she did, the style was typically different with the inclusion of vivid colors.

Blayton-Taylor helped establish the Children's Art Carnival, an education program for New York City youth, and also served as Executive Director at the Museum of Modern Art from 1969 to 1998. Blayton-Taylor also founded Harlem Textile Works, which offered fabric-design workshops and other services, but is most well-known for co-founding the Studio Museum in 1968. Along with her accomplishments in starting organizations, Blayton-Taylor has also won a number of awards including the National Council of Negro Women of New York Achievement Award in 1980 and the Woman's Caucus for the Arts "Life Time Achievement Award" in 2005.

A few examples of Blayton-Taylor's works include *Ancestors Bearing Light (1)* and *Forced Center Right (2)*, which are paintings done in exclusively (1) cool tones (2) warm tones and enclosed in circular forms, *Speaking Nature's Way (3)*, an example of a monoprint that is primarily cool tones, and *Three Forms in One (4)* which is a bronze sculpture Blayton-Taylor created. Blayton-Taylor created many works that spanned over different types of medium but all were connected by the idea behind them and the organic forms and shapes that she included in each piece.



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