

Down Home

PORTRAITS OF RESILIENCE

CURATED BY
FABIYINO GERMAIN-BAJOWA

CURATORIAL MENTORSHIP / 2023-24

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FOREWORD

Dalhousie Art Gallery is committed to advancing inclusive curatorial practices that reflect the diversity and complexity of our local communities. As part of our broader institutional priorities, we have placed mentorship and professional development at the heart of our programming, recognizing the essential role these experiences play in fostering a new generation of curators whose voices are vital to the future of the arts in Canada.

In 2023–2024, the Gallery was pleased to support a year-long curatorial mentorship with Fabiyino Germain Bajowa, generously funded by the Canada Council for the Arts. This initiative offered a space for growth, experimentation, and collaboration, ultimately culminating in *Down Home: Portraits of Resilience*, Fabiyino's first major curated exhibition in Halifax. The mentorship provided hands-on experience in curatorial research, public programming, and writing, while also engaging in broader conversations around representation, institutional change, and cultural memory.

Thoughtfully conceived and deeply community-rooted, *Down Home* brought together a powerful selection of works that explored themes of identity, place, intergenerational care, and African Nova Scotian resilience. Fabiyino's curatorial vision was further realized through important institutional partnerships, including the inclusion of artworks on loan from the permanent collections of Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery and the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia. We are grateful to both institutions for their generous support and collaboration, which enriched the exhibition's historical and conceptual depth.

A significant extension of the exhibition was *Family Dinner*, a participatory gathering that brought together artists, collaborators, and community members to share food and conversation. The performance honoured the traditions of storytelling, kinship, and collective remembrance, embodying the spirit of Fabiyino's curatorial ethos and the values at the core of the mentorship.

As part of the program's public engagement, a well-attended artist panel was hosted at the Halifax Central Library, co-sponsored by the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia and Dalhousie's African Nova Scotian Strategy. We thank Jalana Lewis, Director of African Nova Scotian Community Engagement at Dalhousie University, for her partnership and support in making this event possible.

The success of this mentorship affirms the transformative power of curatorial training programs that center equity, collaboration, and care. We are proud of Fabiyino's accomplishments and grateful for the opportunity to support her growth as a curator, thinker, and cultural worker. This publication documents *Down Home* and the broader context of this mentorship, celebrating the emergence of a thoughtful and committed curatorial voice.

We also extend sincere thanks to the mentors, artists, and Dalhousie Art Gallery staff who contributed to this project. We look forward to building on this model in the years to come as part of our ongoing commitment to equity-driven curatorial mentorship and institutional change.

Pamela Edmonds
Director/Curator, Dalhousie Art Gallery



*North is freedom—
Uptown, down-home:
Each book a drum;
Each life a poem.*

- George Elliot Clarke

Down Home and Family Dinner: Archiving Acts of Care and Community

Down Home and *Family Dinner* are two intertwined gestures – exhibition and gathering – that together form a living archive of Black life in the Maritimes. At their core, these projects responded to the persistent marginalization of Black voices in cultural institutions by making space: space for memory, space for connection, and space for care. They built on the longstanding traditions of storytelling, communal gathering, and creative resilience that have sustained Black communities in Canada across generations.

Down Home: Portraits of Resilience, an exhibition at Dalhousie Art Gallery on view from 6 February 2025 till 4 May 2025, brought together nine contemporary artists of African Nova Scotian and African Canadian descent whose portraits and mixed media works reflected on family, faith, and legacy. Presenting stories that were deeply personal but also profoundly collective, the works on view offered not a single narrative of Black identity, but a chorus of perspectives – grounded in history and oriented toward possibility. The exhibition title, drawn from the poem “North is Freedom” by George Elliott Clarke, makes reference to a common phrase in African Nova Scotian vernacular: “down home” is not just a location, but a feeling, a return, a tether to something ancestral. In this way, the exhibition became more than a display of artworks – it became a space to gather, to remember, and to witness.

The works on view drew from varied materials and vocabularies. Textiles were used not only as medium but metaphor; portraits became acts of preservation and reclamation, recalling the sanctuary of the Black church or the intimacy of home. The artists, Justin Augustine, Saba Blyden-Taylor, Chrystal Clements,



view of quilted backing of Preston Pavlis's *Christa, Trystin and James*, 2025. Photo: Nick Pierce

Kayza DeGraff-Ford, Rebecca Fisk, Letitia Fraser, Chantal Gibson, Preston Pavlis, and Vanessa Thomas, invited us to see Blackness as layered, complex, and embodied. Their works were acts of care and resistance, grounded in place yet resonant across time and geography.

If *Down Home* was an archive of Black visibility, *Family Dinner* was an archive of Black presence. Conceived as a closed, intimate gathering of artists, elders, cultural workers, and storytellers, the event took place on April 24th 2025 at Field Guide Restaurant in the North end of Halifax with the intention of transforming a meal into a form of social practice where food, performance, and storytelling converged as living archival forms. It was not about spectacle, but about inward community reflection, continuity, and celebration. With Chef Roger Mooking at its heart, readings by Andre Fenton, Dáminí Awóyigà, and Sylvia Hamilton, as well as performance by two generations of Bernard women including sisters Kimberly and Delvina Bernard accompanied by their daughters Amariah Bernard Washington and Zamani Bernard Millar, the dinner became its own form of storytelling, evoking memory through taste, ancestry through

song, history through presence. The conversations shared that night, across generations and disciplines, cannot be fully captured on paper. And that is partly the point. *Family Dinner* embraced the ephemeral and the embodied as valid and vital forms of knowledge. In a world that often demands documentation and legibility, the dinner affirmed the value of what cannot always be archived in traditional ways: laughter between bites, the rhythm of a shared story, the warmth of recognition. These are the moments that sustain us.

Together, *Down Home* and *Family Dinner* ask what it means to archive not only the image, but the experience of Black life. They offered visual art and shared meals as forms of resistance to erasure – acts of remembering that are rooted in both joy and struggle. Importantly, they did so from a place of love and intention: by and for Black communities, in dialogue with their histories and in vision of their futures.

This publication, then, does not aim to contain these experiences, but to extend them. It is a record, yes – but also an offering, an invitation to listen more closely to the stories embedded in fabric, flavour, and form. In a time when Black cultural production is often extracted or flattened, this project insists on nuance, depth, and care. It reflects the many hands, hearts, and voices that made it possible, from the mentorship of Pamela Edmonds, to the support of Dalhousie Art Gallery staff members Frankie Macauley, Geoffrey Webster, Sofia Cardone, Sym Corrigan, and Michele Gallant, the advice of elders Sylvia Hamilton, David Woods, and Shelley Fashan, and the creative talents of Vanessa Thomas and Wayn Hamilton, and the many artists and community members who generously shared their time and talents.

Down Home and *Family Dinner* are rooted in Halifax, but they are also part of a broader conversation – one about how we gather, remember, and create with intention. I am deeply grateful to have been part of this journey.

Welcome to the table. Welcome down home.

With gratitude,

Fabiyino Germain-Bajowa (she/her)
Curator and Artist



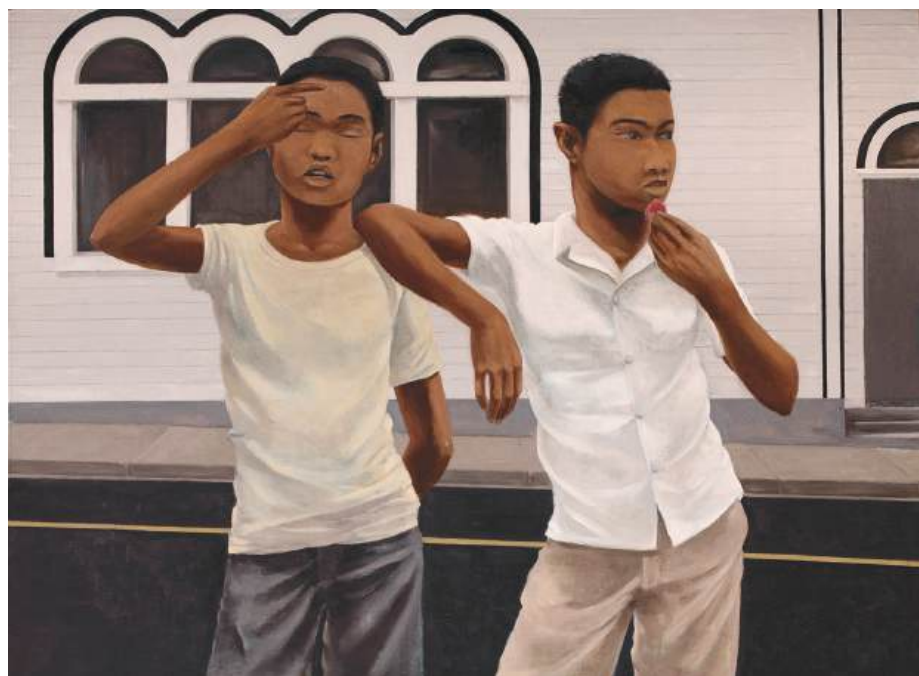


JUSTIN AUGUSTINE

***The Faith Catchers* 2001**

Seeking to preserve emotional ties to locations that dominate his memory, Justin Augustine's work explores those places that have influenced his identity, presenting imagined Black figures in childhood landscapes inspired by Dominica, where Augustine was born, and Nova Scotia, where he immigrated in his youth. These composite figures, often bathed in warm tropical light, evoke dream-like scenes rooted in Augustine's childhood memories. In *The Faith Catchers*, Augustine positions two young Black men in front of the New Horizons Baptist Church in Halifax's North End. Their stoic expressions invite viewers to place themselves within the scene and reflect on the deep historical and cultural connections of African Nova Scotian communities to the Baptist faith as a site for constructing identity and community.

Justin Augustine graduated from NSCAD University's BFA program in 1999. He established himself as a standout painter in the early 2000s, exhibiting widely across Nova Scotia and internationally, including a solo exhibition at the Dalhousie Art Gallery in 2001.





SABA BLYDEN-TAYLOR

my sun 2023

In *my sun*, warm swathes of colour form shapes reminiscent of nuclear fission, sunsets, and anatomical hearts. Layering references to the body and the sun, the work parallels the life-giving energy of familial relationships with that of our solar system. By offering a space to reflect on the interdependence of ecological systems, including those found within a family, Blyden-Taylor celebrates the vital role of connection – familial, communal, and natural – in ensuring survival and shaping identity.

Saba Blyden-Taylor is a queer mixed media artist from Toronto. Through playful imagery and text, their work celebrates community connections, emerging from a desire to create accessible, inclusive artwork. Based in Kijipuktuk (Halifax), Blyden-Taylor is completing their BFA at NSCAD University after graduating from the Yukon School of Visual Arts in 2021.



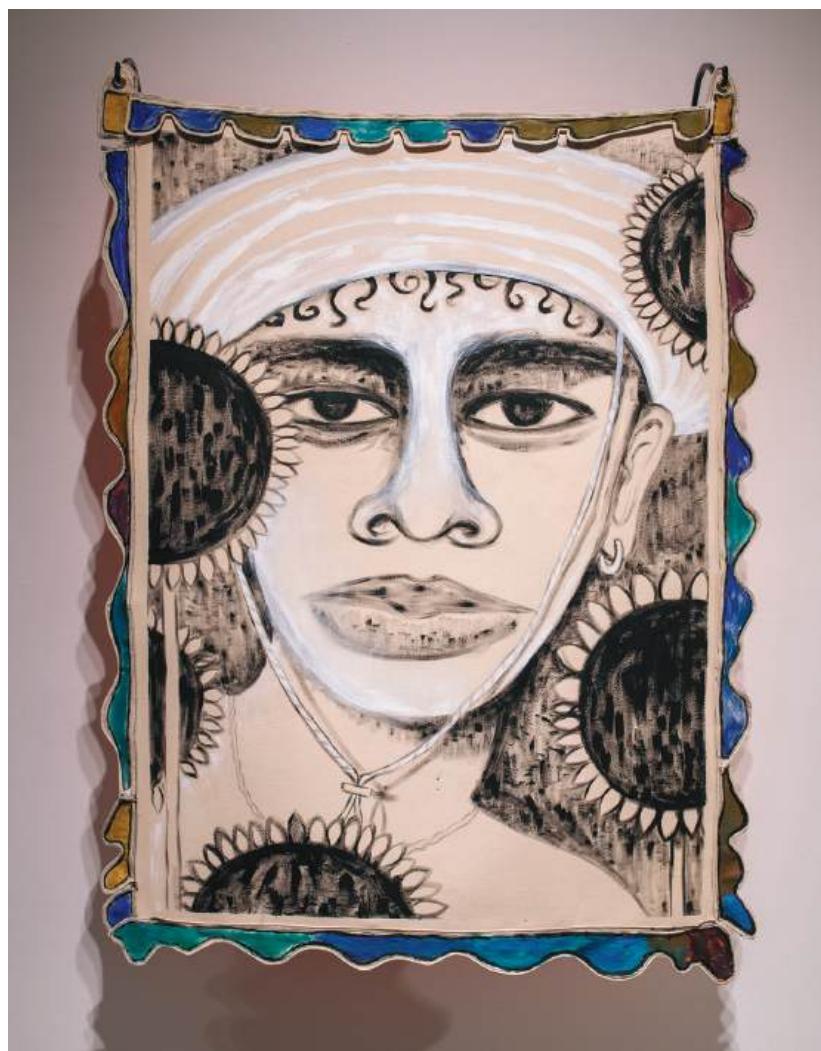
CHRYSTAL CLEMENTS

***American Beauty Made for Me* 2000**

In *American Beauty Made for Me*, Chrystal Clements offers a powerful commentary on race, beauty, and identity through a poignant use of mixed media. Featuring twelve repeated line drawings of a Black woman, each portrait is subtly transformed by the application of cosmetic “foundation”. The repetitive grid and imperfect placement of makeup reveal beauty as a constructed and exclusionary concept, reflecting Western standards of femininity and the systemic racism and damaging pressure to conform. *American Beauty Made for Me* invites viewers to reconsider who gets to be considered beautiful in a world shaped by historical and ongoing racialized ideals.

Chrystal Clements is a mixed media artist based in Dundas, Ontario. Through the lens of personal experience, Clements's work reflects her upbringing in the small Black community of Gibson Woods in rural Nova Scotia, exploring themes of the traditional role of Mother and the tension between cultural ritual and societal expectations. She holds a BFA from NSCAD University and has exhibited in Nova Scotia and Toronto.

KAYZA DEGRAFF-FORD





Ritual 1 - 3 2024 (above)

Gardener 2024 (opposite)

Kayza DeGraff-Ford's work celebrates the mysticism and joy of exploring their own identity through vibrant colours, folkloric references, and surreal tableaux. In the *Ritual* series, DeGraff-Ford blends references to Baz Luhrmann's film *Romeo + Juliet* with religious imagery and textile traditions, reflecting on how aspects of their own memory have intertwined with cultural pillars of Black communities in Atlantic Canada. By placing their unnamed characters in dialogue with histories of faith, quilting, and film, they celebrate the layered intersections of Black identity.

Kayza DeGraff-Ford is a painter and textile artist based in Halifax. Originally from Lacombe, AB, they hold a BFA from NSCAD University and their work is in the collection of the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia.

REBECCA FISK

***Confessions of an Invisible Sister* 2001**

Featuring twelve identical images of the artist taken from an early school photo, *Confessions of an Invisible Sister* confronts the complexities of race, identity, and colourism within the Black community. Fisk uses nylons in shades from eggshell to deep ebony to symbolize the arbitrary and damaging prejudices experienced by many Afro-diasporic people. Fisk explores the tension between outward perception and personal reality, repeating her childhood portrait to confront viewers with the absurdity of racial biases. Through this work, Fisk invites reflection on the pressures of conforming to societal expectations and the emotional toll of discrimination.

Rebecca Fisk is an African Nova Scotian artist and teacher raised in Hemford, Lunenburg County, and is now based in Mahone Bay. Her work stems from her experience as one of few Black children in her area, centering notions of memory, identity, and representation. Fisk holds a BFA from NSCAD University and an MEA from the University of Saskatchewan (1997).





LETITIA FRASER

Lighthouses and Lobsters 2023 (opposite)

Covered Path 2023

Auntie's Boy 2023

Blending her family's quilting traditions, passed on by her grandmother Rosella "Mommay" Fraser, with portraiture, Letitia Fraser's works tell deeply personal stories and celebrate collective experiences. By painting on quilted backgrounds—often utilizing fabric that has been gifted to her or thrifted—Fraser connects her work to the intimate, labour-intensive traditions of her community. Her portraits offer powerful meditations on the intersection of personal memory and collective history, sharing the overlooked narratives of African Nova Scotian communities and celebrating the skill, care, and history embedded in the fabric. These portraits of family and community serve as both a tribute to her family's resilience and a testament to the strength and beauty of Black communities—an invitation for viewers to see these stories from a perspective of dignity, joy, and pride.

Letitia Fraser is an African Nova Scotian painter, raised in North Preston and currently based in Halifax. Exploring her identity, community, and heritage, Letitia Fraser's work draws on her upbringing to celebrate the beauty of Black communities in Atlantic Canada.



CHANTAL GIBSON



Souvenir 2017

A collection of 2000 souvenir spoons from various countries, *Souvenir* challenges the reductive positioning of Afro-diasporic peoples in literary, historical, and institutional canons. The defining details of each spoon – symbols, colours, and nuances – are covered by spray paint, re-enacting the erasure of the unique stories of Black individuals in favour of narratives of display and displacement. This multi-media installation offers an intimate and personal reflection on a collective historical experience of Blackness.

Chantal Gibson is a writer, artist, and educator with ancestral roots in Nova Scotia, currently based in Vancouver. Working in the overlap between literary and visual art, her work confronts colonialism head on, imagining the BIPOC voices silenced in the spaces and omissions left by cultural and institutional erasure. She has published two poetry collections, and her artwork has been exhibited widely across Canada.

PRESTON PAVLIS





Carolina 2025

Christa, Trystin and James 2025 (opposite)

Fatou 2025 (above)

Part of a new body of work, this piece depicts community members whose gazes confront, avoid, and inquire in the same moment. The works in this series are based on portraits of strangers taken while the artist walked around Point Pleasant Park. On the reverse of the painting is a patchwork quilt of recycled textiles gathered locally. An artwork unto itself, the textile side grounds the portrait in long held traditions of quilting in African Nova Scotian communities. Pavlis's portraits situate the past and present as two sides of a single coin, inviting reflection on the interwoven relationship of identity, community, and memory.

Preston Pavlis (b. 1999, Loma Linda, California) is a Halifax-based artist. His practice blends painting and textiles to explore metaphor and poetic association through portraiture. He holds a BFA from the NSCAD University and has exhibited widely across Canada and internationally.

VANESSA THOMAS



Florcy (Memories from Up Home and Out Home) 2025 (above)

Family Dinner Graphics 2025 (pages 30-31)

Commissioned for *Down Home* by the Dalhousie Art Gallery, this mural depicting Thomas's grandmother Florence "Florcy" Simmonds celebrates a vibrant matriarch in Thomas's family and community. Surrounded by the blueberries Thomas recalls picking throughout her childhood, this portrait of Florcy reflects a worldview shaped by the artist's cultural, familial, and social surroundings, honouring the enduring influence of matriarchs and the knowledge they pass on through generations.

Vanessa Thomas is a Halifax-based African Nova Scotian digital and mixed-media artist. Her work, inspired by her family and community, moves fluidly between realism, abstraction, and diverse media to share her experiences as an African Nova Scotian artist.

LIST OF WORKS

All works collection of the artist unless otherwise indicated.

Measurements in centimeters; height precedes width.

Justin Augustine

The Faith Catchers 2001

oil on canvas

109.2 x 147.3

Dalhousie Art Gallery permanent collection,
purchased with funds donated by Dr. John A.
Scrymgeour, 2001

Saba Blyden-Taylor

my sun 2023

oil on canvas

152.4 x 91.4

courtesy of the Artist

Chrystal Clements

American Beauty Made for Me 2000

ink, pencil, and makeup on paper

57 x 76

Collection of Mount Saint Vincent University

Kayza DeGraff-Ford

Gardener 2024

oil and acrylic on sewn canvas

121.9 x 167.6

Ritual 1 – 3 2024

oil on sewn canvas

109.2 x 81.3 (each)

Rebecca Fisk

Confessions of an Invisible Sister 2001

mixed media on 12 canvases

35.5 x 28.2 (each)

Collection of the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia,
purchased with funds provided by the Cana-
da Council for the Arts Acquisition Assis-
tance program, and private donors, 2002

Letitia Fraser

Lighthouses and Lobsters 2023

acrylic on quilt

121.9 x 91.4

Covered Path 2023

acrylic on quilt

91.4 x 121.9

Auntie's Boy 2023

acrylic on quilt

91.4 x 121.9

Chantal Gibson

Souvenir 2017

multi-media installation including

souvenir spoons, spoon racks,

video monitors, book

dimensions variable

Collection of the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia,
purchased with funds donated by the
Charles Anthony Law and Jane Shaw Law
Charitable Trust, 2021

Preston Pavlis

Carolina 2025

oil on canvas with leather frame quilted onto
fabric backing

182.9 x 121.9

Christa, Trystin and James 2025

oil on canvas quilted onto fabric backing

218.4 x 205.7

Fatou 2025

oil on linen with leather frame quilted onto
fabric backing

154.9 x 154.9

Vanessa Thomas

*Florcy (Memories from Up Home and
Out Home)* 2025

wall mural with acrylic paint

274.3 x 426.7



Family
Dinner





ORGANIZED BY
PAMELA EDMONDS & FABIYINO GERMAIN-BA
MENU BY
CHEF ROGER MOOKING
THURSDAY 24 APRIL 2025

Family
Dinner

Reserved

Reserved

Family
Dinner

THURSDAY 24 APRIL 2025

MENU BY
CHEF ROGER MOOKING

ORGANIZED BY
PAMELA EDMONDS & FABIYINO GERMAIN-BA

Family
Dinner

THURSDAY 24

MENU
BY
CHEF ROGER

ORGANIZED BY
PAMELA EDMONDS & FABIYINO GERMAIN-BA

MENU BY CHEF ROGER MOOKING

SORREL & SCOTIAN RUM

DOUBLE CHILI CORNBREAD

FRIED SMASH POTATOES & LEEK CHOW CHOW

COD CAKES & CRISPY DOUBLE SMOKED BACON

CHOPPED CABBAGE & LOBSTER SLAW

OXTAIL & DUMPLINGS

BLUEBERRY TRIFLE

Taking the form of a shared meal, *Family Dinner* was a social practice event that sought to archive and celebrate Black creativity through food, art, and storytelling. Presented by Dalhousie Art Gallery in collaboration with Nigerian-French Canadian curator Fabiyino Germain-Bajowa, the event took place in late April 2025, and centred on African diasporic culinary traditions, emphasizing food as a powerful medium for cultural expression and community building.

This intimate gathering brought together thirty influential African Nova Scotian and African Canadian artists, poets, and cultural leaders for an evening of shared food, stories, and performances. Highlights included a libation ceremony led by Wayn Hamilton, readings by poet Dáminí Awóyígà, author Andre Fenton, and filmmaker Sylvia Hamilton, and a multigenerational performance by Delvina Bernard, her sister Kimberley Bernard, and their daughters Zamani and Amariah. The menu, created by renowned chef Roger Mooking, blended African Nova Scotian cuisine with broader Afro-diasporic influences, honouring Black Canadian heritage through culinary histories.

Family Dinner marked the culmination of Germain-Bajowa's year-long curatorial mentorship at the Dalhousie Art Gallery and coincided with the conclusion of her group exhibition *Down Home*, which ran from February to May 2025. By transforming the communal table into a living artwork, *Family Dinner* invited participants to actively engage in creating cultural memory, celebrating heritage, and strengthening social connection – honoring the essential role of African Nova Scotian artists in shaping Nova Scotia's cultural landscape and narrative surrounding Black Canadian identity nationwide.

opposite and following pages: images from *Family Dinner*, 2025. Photos: Fabiyino Germain-Bajowa.





BIOGRAPHIES



Pamela Edmonds is a curator and writer with over two decades of experience in contemporary Canadian art. She is the Director/Curator of Dalhousie Art Gallery and has worked extensively across the country to advance decolonial and equity-based curatorial practices. Her work centers Black Canadian visual culture, institutional transformation, and mentorship.

FABIYINO Germain-Bajowa (she/her) is a Nigerian-French Canadian writer, curator, and interdisciplinary artist from Thadinadonnih (Guelph) now based in Kjiptuk (Halifax). Her work often explores Afro-diasporic archives of thought inherited through oral history, food traditions, and acts of care. By centering the lived experiences of Black artists, her community-based art practice engages land-based networks of knowledge to build cultural literacy and uplift contemporary Black artistic practices.

She earned her BFA in Criticism and Curatorial Practice from OCAD University and has curated exhibitions such as *Tell the Body* (Vtape, Toronto), *The Suppa Club* (with Temple Marucci-Campbell, Toronto), *Down Home* (Dalhousie Art Gallery, Halifax), and *Blacklight* at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia (Halifax). Currently, she is the TD Curatorial Fellow at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia.

Roger Mooking is an award-winning chef, restaurateur, television host, author, and recording artist celebrated for his vibrant fusion of food, culture, and creativity. Born in Trinidad, raised in Alberta, and based in Ontario, Mooking draws from his rich heritage and global culinary influences to create soulful, boundary-pushing cuisine. He is best known as the host of *Man Fire Food* on the Cooking Channel and Food Network Canada, and has also hosted *Everyday Exotic* and *Heat Seekers*, in addition to appearing as a guest judge on *Chopped Canada* and *Iron Chef America*. A graduate of George Brown College's Culinary Management program, he is also a Juno Award-nominated musician and author of *Everyday Exotic: The Cookbook*.

Mooking is also deeply committed to community building and food equity, and has partnered with organizations such as Second Harvest, FoodShare, and World Vision Canada, advocating for food justice and greater cultural representation in the culinary world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dalhousie Art Gallery gratefully acknowledges the many individuals and institutions who made *Down Home: Portraits of Resilience* and *Family Dinner* possible. We are grateful to the Canada Council for the Arts for their generous support of the year-long curatorial mentorship with Fabiyino Germain-Bajowa, and to Arts Nova Scotia for funding *Family Dinner*, our intergenerational gathering that extended the exhibition's themes of kinship, cultural memory, and storytelling.

We also thank Dalhousie University's African Nova Scotian Strategy and the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia for their collaborative support of the exhibition's public programming, including our artist panel at the Halifax Central Library.

Deep appreciation goes to the artists, elders, and cultural workers whose vision and wisdom shaped this project. Special thanks to Chef Roger Mooking for his culinary artistry, and to Wayn Hamilton, Sylvia Hamilton, Delvina and Kimberly Bernard, Zamani Bernard-Millar, Amariah Bernard-Washington, Dáminí Awóyigà, and Andre Fenton for their powerful contributions to *Family Dinner*.

At Dalhousie Art Gallery, this project was made possible by the dedication of our staff: Frankie Macaulay, Geoffrey Webster, Sofia Cardone, Sym Corrigan, Brigitta Zhao, and Michele Gallant.

Of course, gratitude and appreciation to Fabiyino Germain-Bajowa, whose care, insight, and curatorial vision have left a lasting impact on the gallery and our community. Her work embodies the values of equity, collaboration, and cultural care that guide our mentorship program and institutional priorities.

Finally, we thank our broader community in Kjiptuk/Halifax and beyond, whose presence and support continue to sustain our efforts to hold space for art, engagement and new stories.

Down Home: Portraits of Resilience

Curated by Fabiyino Germain-Bajowa

6 February - 4 May 2025, Dalhousie Art Gallery

Family Dinner

Organized by Pamela Edmonds and Fabiyino Germain-Bajowa

Menu by Chef Roger Mooking

24 April 2025, Field Guide, Halifax



A ROGERMOOKING
EXPERIENCE



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Photography: Steve Farmer, unless otherwise noted.

Texts: © Pamela Edmonds, Fabiyino Germain-Bajowa, 2025

