



VIEW*S* & VISIONS

A publication of Bowles Rice LLP

Summer 2019



Celebrating the Beauty of Diversity in West Virginia

Parween Mascari, Owner
WV Market Gallery

A native of Parkersburg, West Virginia, Parween Mascari is an entrepreneur, attorney, adjunct professor and administrative law judge. Through her own entrepreneurial efforts supporting West Virginia artisans, craftspeople and food producers; her community involvement as a member of the Public Policy Committee for Philanthropy West Virginia and as a Trustee of the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation; and as a founding member of both Generation Morgantown and Generation West Virginia, Mascari is guided by her mission of supporting the arts, economic development, hospitality and tourism, and the attraction, retention and recruitment of talent in the Mountain State.

It has been said that how we are alike brings us together, but how we are different makes us stronger. There is a richness that comes with diversity that is palpable in the welcoming and supportive community we call home. Generations of people have come to the mountains of West Virginia, representing all religions, ethnicities, colors, creeds and orientations. The coal mining industry brought many, while others came to find freedom or opportunity or to get “back to the land.” West Virginia’s people are as diverse as the colors found in an artist’s palette, or those found in our majestic West Virginia hills.

From the Black Heritage Festival in Clarksburg to Fairmont’s Feast of the Seven Fishes Festival, celebrating the Italian holiday meal tradition, people from all over the world have made their way to our beautiful Mountain State and brought with them a rich tapestry of cultures and communities. In the remote mountain community of Helvetia, you feel as if you have been transported to a Swiss village. Places like Helvetia retain their cultural identity and heritage through arts and crafts, music and dance, food and drink, fairs and festivals, religious customs, and family traditions. Conversely, native West Virginians, like legendary singer-songwriter Bill Withers, contemporary African-American artist John Holyfield and author, literary critic, teacher, historian, filmmaker and public intellectual Henry Louis “Skip” Gates, Jr., have taken their musical, artistic and literary masterpieces, inspired in part by their West Virginia upbringings, to the rest of the world, all to well-deserved international acclaim.

In “Hippie Homesteaders,” Carter Taylor Seaton describes how, during the 1960s, West Virginia became a haven for thousands of “back-to-the-landers,” many of whom were



artisans and craftspeople, including basket makers whose work is featured in the Smithsonian, a draft-dodger who became a world-class furniture maker, a Boston-born VISTA worker who started a quilting cooperative and an immigrant Chinese potter who lived in a commune.

Part of the magic of this diverse group of artisans and craftspeople was born out of necessity. According to Renee Margocee, Executive Director of the Tamarack Foundation for the Arts, our unique topography in West Virginia demanded resilience and resourcefulness and stimulated our artists’ creative processes: “creativity . . . has always been a part of West Virginia’s heritage. When the United States was first being settled, the people living on the eastern coast had the luxury of importing goods from all over the globe. . . . But while you might be able to get a grand piano shipped into the harbor of Baltimore, you couldn’t with ease get



From the art exhibition “30 Americans” that showed at the Clay Center for the Arts and Sciences in Charleston, WV



Paintings by John Holyfield, a contemporary African American artist from West Virginia. Clockwise from left: *Courtin'*, *Melancholy Blues*, and *In Our Solitude*.

it over a mountain. The people who were settling in what is now West Virginia had to tap into their own ingenuity and their own creativity.... West Virginians tend not to self-identify as artists. Our creativity was often spurred out of necessity. People from outside of the state may come and say, 'Your baskets are beautiful. Your pottery is exceptional. Your glassmaking is awesome,' but we still sometimes shy away from identifying in that way...."

We must discover and recognize the talent, creativity and diversity in our communities and celebrate our history and our tradition of talented artisans and craftspeople. We must continue to tell their stories and support the artists directly by purchasing West Virginia-made art and products like glassware, wood work, baskets, furnishings, pottery, hand-made jewelry, metal work, quilts and textiles, home décor, candles and food products and by attending live shows by West Virginia musicians like *America's Got*

Talent winner Landau Eugene Murphy, Jr., or West Virginia Music Hall of Fame and Mountain Stage pianist Bob Thompson. Our support will help our artists, producers, artisans and craftspeople carry on traditions and preserve our history for generations.

Another way to encourage and inspire our artistic community is to support art exhibits that bring diversity into West Virginia from other places. A recent exhibit at the Clay Center for the Arts and Sciences, called *30 Americans*, highlighted the work of many of the most important African-American artists of the past three decades. The Clay Center's mission is to inspire creativity, learning and wonder through experiences in the Arts and Sciences for all people of West Virginia and the region. According to Al Najjar, its President and CEO, "[t]he Clay Center is one of the most unique facilities in the country. We work diligently to utilize our venue to showcase diverse

exhibitions, artists and experience to our audiences. Bringing in exhibitions like *30 Americans*... allow[s] us the privilege to highlight important works that have never before been seen in West Virginia."

West Virginia's greatest natural resource has always been its people, and West Virginia has a strong tradition of diversity within its community of artisans, craftspeople, musicians and storytellers. The presence of places like Helvetia and Tamarack celebrate our diversity, creativity and Appalachian culture, and are one reason that West Virginia is "Almost Heaven." It is our responsibility as West Virginians of all backgrounds – whether we are native to the state or couldn't get here soon enough – to explore, take pride in and pass along this great tradition of diversity and creativity to the next generation of West Virginians who choose to call this beautiful place home. ▽