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DAYTON ICON CURTIS BARNES, SR. RETURNS TO THE SPOTLIGHT IN LANDMARK EXHIBITION AT THE DAYTON ART INSTITUTE

Dayton Art Institute Honors Beloved Artist and Educator Curtis Barnes, Sr. with Major Retrospective Exhibition Showcasing Decades of Bold, Expressive Work and Deep Community Impact

(DAYTON, OHIO) – July 8, 2025 – On view through Sept. 14, 2025, at the [Dayton Art Institute](https://www.daytonart.org) (DAI), *Curtis Barnes, Sr., Dayton Icon* celebrates the life, work and legacy of one of Dayton’s most influential artists and educators. The exhibition brings together more than 100 works from the 1960s to the 2010s, generously loaned by the Barnes’ family.

“This exhibition offers an intimate look into Curtis Barnes’ artistic journey and his impact as a community leader,” said DAI Director and President Michael R. Roediger. “It’s an honor to present this retrospective in what would have been his 90th year.”

An artist, educator and mentor, Curtis Barnes, Sr. (1935–2019) was a vital figure in Dayton’s creative community. Known for his bold use of color and experimental style, Barnes developed a distinctive blend of naturalism and abstraction. His paintings often feature family, friends and self-portraits that reflect different moods and moments in his life.

The exhibition explores major themes in Barnes’ work, including his use of African masks and visual references to African heritage and spirituality. In several non-objective paintings, the movement of dancers and the rhythm of jazz—one of Barnes’ passions—visually emerge through curving, spontaneous shapes.

“Curtis Barnes’ work embodies a remarkable range of emotional depth and brilliant color sense,” said DAI Head Curator and Curatorial Affairs Director Jerry N. Smith. “This exhibition is both a celebration of his artistic vision and a reflection of the community that helped shape it. In Barnes’ hands, color and shape become deeply personal tools moving comfortably between artistic styles—realism, abstraction, symbolism—often within the same canvas. His work invites us to see the world through his eyes: layered with history, rooted in identity and always open to experimentation and interpretation.”

Born in North Carolina, Barnes moved to Dayton in 1962 after serving in the U.S. Air Force. He earned a degree from Wright State University and spent decades teaching art in Dayton Public Schools and at Sinclair Community College, where he retired as professor emeritus. He continued to paint throughout his life and taught Sunday art classes at the DAI during his retirement.

Barnes was recognized for his contributions to the arts with the Paul Laurence Dunbar Humanitarian Award in 1994 and a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Ohio Arts Council in 2008. In 1992, he co-founded the African American Visual Artists Guild with artist Willis “Bing” Davis to promote and empower Black artists throughout the Dayton region.

Barnes exhibited his work locally and nationally, with previous retrospectives at the Cannery Art & Design Center in 2006 and the University of Dayton in 2009. More recently, The Contemporary Dayton featured a show of his portraits in 2021. Currently, the Black Palette Gallery, 1139 W. 3rd Street, is hosting an exhibition of Barnes’ art and life.

“Curtis Barnes was a beacon for so many, and his influence is still felt today,” said Roediger. “He helped shape the arts in Dayton, not only through his paintings, but through his teaching, mentorship and advocacy for Black artists. We are incredibly grateful to the Barnes family for their help in arranging this celebration of Barnes’ legacy and story, which is woven into the story of Dayton itself.”

Several related educational programs will be offered in conjunction with the ***Curtis Barnes, Sr., Dayton Icon*** exhibition. These programs are sponsored by AES Ohio Foundation. They include:

- **Community Tour:** Select Thursdays: July 31 and August 28, from 6-7 p.m. and select Saturdays: July 19, August 9 and September 13, from 1-2 p.m. Discover the life and legacy of a local artist, advocate, community builder and innovator. Join the DAI education team for a tour of the special exhibition with the family of Curtis Barnes Sr. as they share stories, giving guests a more personal glimpse of who Barnes was, not only as an artist, but as a family man.
Cost: Members: Free, Non-members: Included with the Price of Admission
- **Special Exhibition Workshop Series: Everything is Everything:** Thursdays, July 24 and 31, from 5:30–8:30 p.m. In this two-session workshop, participants will explore the complexity and expressive power of color, inspired by works on view in the special exhibition. Each guest will select a single color to study, using close observation to interpret and convey its visual and emotional impact. Guided by local artist and educator Erin M. Smith Glenn, the workshop will incorporate mixed media techniques and encourage personal expression through color, symbolism, and representation.
Cost: \$100 for museum members; \$125 for non-members

This exhibition was made possible by the generous support of Benefactor Sponsor ELM Foundation; Patron Sponsor Susanne Scherette King; Supporting Sponsors Norman & Mary Rita Weissman; Promoting Sponsors Dr. Gary LeRoy, Karen & Dale Medford, Sinclair Community College and University of Dayton; Additional Support Audrey & Bing Davis, Bricker Grayden, JYG Innovations, and the Dayton Chapter of the Links, Inc., Community Partners African American Visual Artists Guild, Diana Barnes Cary and Maurice Cary and Charles & Rosiland Harper; and Ongoing Sponsors Ohio Arts Council, Montgomery County and Culture Works. The Media Sponsor is Discover Classical. Special thanks to Ed Smith's Flowers & Gifts and Rich Taste Catering.

Admission to ***Curtis Barnes, Sr., Dayton Icon*** is included in the museum's general admission, which includes access to all Special and Focus Exhibitions currently on view, as well as the museum collection galleries. General admission is \$15 adults; \$10 seniors (60+), active military and groups (10 or more); \$5 students (18+ w/ID) and youth (ages 7–17); and free for children (ages 6 & younger). Admission is free for museum members. Membership information can be found online at www.daytonartinstitute.org/membership.

Other current Exhibitions at the museum include *Cats in Art* (on view until September 14, 2025); *Dogs in Art* (on view until September 14, 2025); *Wonders in Color: Art by Alexander Calder & Others* (on view until October 26, 2025); and *Contemporary Japanese Ceramics from the Horvitz Collection* (on view until September 2025).

For more information about planning a visit, including current museum hours and updates, go to www.daytonartinstitute.org/visit or call 937-223-4ART (4278). Connect with the Dayton Art Institute on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#) for additional information, behind-the-scenes photos and videos, and exclusive offers.

ABOUT DAYTON ART INSTITUTE

MISSION: *Through art, we create transformative and diverse experiences, strengthen community connections and inspire imagination.*

VISION: *Through art, we will be a community leader recognized as a welcoming, thought-provoking and collaborative place that nurtures inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility.*

The Dayton Art Institute (DAI) is one of the Miami Valley's premier fine art museums, offering a full range of programming in addition to exhibiting its collection. The museum is currently open Wednesdays, 11 a.m.–5 p.m., Thursdays, 11 a.m.–8 p.m., Fridays & Saturdays, 11 a.m.–5 p.m. and Sundays, noon–5 p.m. Go to www.daytonartinstitute.org/visit for the latest museum information and updates. Museum admission is \$15 adults, \$10 seniors (60+), active military and groups (10 or more), \$5 students (18+ w/ID) and youth (ages 7–17), free for children (ages 6 & younger) and free for museum members. Admission includes access to all Special Exhibitions, Focus Exhibitions, The Lange Family Experientcenter and the museum's collection galleries. Some events and programs may carry an additional charge and include museum admission as part of that price. Free parking is available at the museum, and the facility is fully accessible. The DAI's Museum Store and Leo are open during regular museum hours, offering unique shopping, as well as drinks and tasty treats. The Museum Store also offers online shopping at www.daytonartinstitute.org/shop. For more information about the DAI, visit daytonartinstitute.org or call 937-223-4ART (4278). The Ohio Arts Council helps fund this organization with state tax dollars to encourage economic growth, educational excellence and cultural enrichment for all Ohioans. The DAI also receives support from Culture Works and the Montgomery County Arts and Cultural District.

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