

# Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art



1400 First Avenue North  
Great Falls, MT 59401  
www.the-square.org  
Phone: (406) 727-8255

## Immediate PRESS RELEASE

**Dr. Charles Smith**

**Black History Lessons**

July 8, 2020 through September 18, 2020

Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art

**Great Falls, MT., July 20, 2020**—Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art presents

*Dr. Charles Smith: Black History Lessons* an exhibition drawn from Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art's Permanent Collection of work by Outsider Artists.

The exhibition's intent is to address current events and longstanding issues with racism in the United States by inviting visitors into a gallery space that re-imagines Dr. Charles Smith's art environment. To do this the work is showcased alongside words, and images of his actual artist environment called the African-American Heritage Museum and Black American Archive which he began in 1986 in Aurora, IL and later moved to Hammond, LA in 2002.

Works on display were gifted to Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art in 2004 via the auspices of the Kohler Foundation in support of Dr. Charles Smith's dream to use his art as a means to teach

about the significant contributions that Black Americans have made to the formation of the United States of America.

Visitors to the exhibition are invited to respond to the installation through a video response. The response is meant to stimulate conversation through observation and questioning, key to Dr. Charles Smith's work.

The exhibition can only attempt to imitate the actual experience of walking into Dr. Charles Smith's ever-changing art environment, also known as the African American Heritage Museum and Black Veteran's Archive. Dr. Smith utilizes the term African American to reflect on the origins of Black people in the African continent and their history on the American continent. The images that run the periphery of the gallery wall alongside his words and sculptures help us to honor his vision and come closer to the experience of being present within his artistic space.



**Cultural Mix-White Father and Black Mother.** circa 1985-1999. Cement, industrial paints, mixed media. 35 ¼ x 12 x 11 inches. Gift of Dr. Charles Smith and the Kohler Foundation. 2008.3.9



**Figure with outstretched arms and chains.** circa 1985-1999. Cement, industrial paints, mixed media. 62 x 47 x 13 inches. Gift of Dr. Charles Smith and the Kohler Foundation. 2008.3.8



*Faces-(Seven different heads)*  
circa 1985-1999. Cement, industrial paints,  
mixed media. Various sizes. Gift of Dr. Charles  
Smith and the Kohler Foundation. 2008.3.6.1-7

Dr. Charles Smith is an artist, historian, narrator of his own art environment, and self-appointed PhD. He earned his degree through life-experience as a veteran of the Vietnam War, a college graduate, a father who died in a racially motivated murder, an ordained minister, a maker of art, and Director of his museum for over 15 years. Most importantly pure dedication to his lessons about Black history and the need for racial equity.

There is of course an important missing factor to the exhibition and that is Dr. Charles Smith himself. Even now at 80 years of age, he openly welcomes and gives tours through his property to curious passersby such as children and road trippers, as well as the serious lot of art historians, collectors, and educators. Today, due to COVID-19 social distancing recommendations he has to restrain himself from meeting people on his property which has been quite concerning to him as his main purpose in life is to inform the public on a daily basis about Black history. He

is moved to have his work exhibited at The Square and shown to the people of Montana. He would be here to meet you today if he could.

Special thank you to Dr. Smith for his conversation, input, and enthusiasm about the exhibition. Thank you as well to the Spaces Archives-Kohler Foundation and RoadsideAmerica.com for sending images of Dr. Charles Smith's African-American Heritage Museum and Black American Archive, as well as granting us permission to use the images to create the mural of images in the gallery space.

This exhibition is curated by Nicole Maria Evans, Curator of Art at Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art. Exhibitions presented by Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art are supported in part by the Montana Arts Council a state agency funded by the State of Montana, Humanities Montana, National Endowment for the Humanities: Exploring the human endeavor, and National Endowment for the Arts. Additional funding is provided by museum members and the citizens of Cascade County, and generous support from Montana Federal Credit Union and D.A. Davidson.

### About Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art

The Square is north central Montana's only contemporary art museum. Located in Great Falls, MT and resides in the original building of the historic Paris Gibson High School. The museum is known for exhibitions that feature intriguing outsider and contemporary living artists, in conjunction with offering hands on arts programs to the community and is a proud recipient of the VSA Kennedy Grant.

### General Information

Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art is located at 1400 1st Avenue North, Great Falls, MT. Visitor hours are Monday through Friday, from 10 am to 5 pm, and Saturday from 10 am to 5 pm, Closed on Sunday. Closed on select holidays. **Admission is FREE** to the public, ask about Membership. Visit [www.the-square.org](http://www.the-square.org), or call 406.727.8255 for further information.

###