



Muscatine Art Center
1314 Mulberry Avenue
Muscatine, Iowa 52761
Phone: 563-263-8282 Fax: 563- 263-4702
Melanie Alexander, Director



PRESS RELEASE

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Melanie Alexander
Director, Muscatine Art Center
1413 Mulberry Avenue
Muscatine, Iowa 52761
563-263-8282
malexander@muscatineiowa.gov

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NEW EXHIBITS OPENING AT ART CENTER IN FEBRUARY

Spotlight is on real people and how they experienced their world

MUSCATINE, Iowa - Two new exhibitions opening at the Muscatine Art Center in February will focus on people. In the ultra-realistic work of Marc Sijan, the spotlight is on the individual facial characteristics that make human beings so similar, yet so unique. In the second exhibition, photographic portraits by Bob Campagna are joined with stories to capture the experiences of the first residents and staff members of Clark House as they built a community in the 1970s.

“Both exhibitions present real people and provide an opportunity for visitors to consider how these people experienced their world,” Muscatine Art Center Director, Melanie Alexander said. “Work by Marc Sijan has been presented twice before at the Muscatine Art Center, and people are always blown away by the level of detail from the pores to the veins.



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“Bob Campagna is also familiar to many in Muscatine,” Alexander said. “He was the City’s first Low Income Housing Director in the 1970s, but many know him through his photography and his work with Muscatine students to create the windows and doors of Muscatine posters.”

Marc Sijan is one America’s leading hyper-realist sculptors. Sijan has received international recognition and has presented over 50 one-man museum exhibitions. His exhibitions often set attendance records whenever his work is exhibited. The exhibition in Muscatine features eight life-size figurative sculptures and opens on February 9.

Bob Campagna’s “Faces of Hope: The Original Residents of the Clark House” will open February 16 on the middle floor of the Stanley Gallery at the Muscatine Art Center. “Faces of Hope” includes portraits of most of the original residents of the Clark House, and it also explores the stories as remembered by those involved in managing aspects of the building project, selecting the first residents, assisting those first residents with move in, and establishing an environment that created a sense of community. In addition, the exhibition details some of the efforts to preserve the historic Alexander Clark house.

“The move of the historic Alexander Clark house was a dramatic moment,” Alexander said. “Beyond the logistics of moving and preserving the Alexander Clark house, there are a series of displays highlighting the story of Alexander Clark and sharing what makes Alexander Clark significant on a national level.”

Alexander Clark was Iowa’s most prominent Black citizen of the 19th century and a national leader in the cause of equal rights. His career culminated with service as U.S. ambassador to Liberia. Born free in Pennsylvania in 1826, he settled in Muscatine at age 16. He worked as a barber and acquired timberland along the Mississippi River and sold firewood for steamboats. He invested in real estate and amassed considerable wealth, becoming one of the town’s most accomplished residents.



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Clark emerged as a civil-rights leader while in his early 20's. He was a delegate to the National Convention of the Free People of Color in 1853, connecting with national leaders such as Frederick Douglass in the fight for equal rights. During the Civil War, he played a major role in the formation of Iowa's only Black regiment. The Iowa Supreme Courts' ruling in Clark's lawsuit against segregated schools in 1868 affirmed the right of all Iowa children to attend public school regardless of race, religion, nationality, or appearance. Clark was also active in Republican politics and won acclaim as "the Colored Orator of the West" for his speeches on suffrage and universal rights.

Clark became the second Black graduate of the University of Iowa School of Law in 1884 at the age of 58. His son, Alexander, Jr., was the first Black graduate of the law school in 1879. Clark's access to Black audiences swelled when, in 1882, along with his son Alexander, Jr., and fellow attorney Ferdinand L. Barnett, he purchased *The Conservator*, Chicago's first Black newspaper. He served as the editor and became the sole owner in 1884. In 1887, he chaired the executive committee of the National Colored Press Association, connecting him to prominent journalist and activist Ida B. Wells.

A series of programs connected to the "Faces of Hope" exhibition will be presented in February and March. At 5:30 p.m. on February 16, local historian Dan Clark, who serves on the Alexander Clark Foundation, will join author Rachelle Chase for a discussion on efforts to reach school children, scholars, and the general public with the story of Alexander Clark. Chase is currently completing the middle school book, *The Time I Was Susan Clark*.

The Alexander Clark Foundation is working with a consultant and scholars to attain national significance through the National Register of Historic Places for the Alexander Clark house.



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At 5:30 p.m. on February 23,, the Darwin Turner Action Theatre will perform at the Muscatine Art Center. The event is presented in partnership with Global Education at Stanley Center and the University of Iowa Arts Share program. The group was originally established in 1968 as Black Action Theatre.

The series concludes at 5:30 p.m. on March 23 with Bob Campagna discussing his memories of the Clark House and 1970s Muscatine.

All programs are offered free of charge and take place at the Muscatine Art Center. Reservations are not necessary.

Both “Faces of Hope” and “Marc Sijan: Ultra-Realistic Sculptures” will be on view through April 9, 2023.

The Muscatine Art Center is located at 1314 Mulberry Avenue in Muscatine, Iowa. Hours are Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Thursday evenings until 7:00 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. Admission is free of charge. Donations are appreciated. Visit www.muscatineartcenter.org for more information about programs and events.

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