

L E T T I T I A  
H U C K A B Y



B E A U T I F U L  
B L A C K N E S S

**Dixon Correctional Institute**

(cover image)

Pigment Print on Fabric with Vintage Embroidery Hoop  
18 1/2" x 27 1/2"

LETITIA  
HUCKABY  
BEAUTIFUL  
BLACKNESS

"Beautiful Blackness" is a visual pilgrimage following the path of Exodusters, African Americans who migrated from states along the Mississippi River to Kansas and Oklahoma in the late nineteenth century, and an exploration of the remains of Freeman's towns across the south. It is an elegy for a lost promised land.

— Letitia Huckaby

# LETITIA HUCKABY'S BEAUTIFUL BLACKNESS

## COMMENTARY BY GEOFFREY KOSLOV

Letitia Huckaby creates unique objects using photography printed onto non-traditional material. "Beautiful Blackness" includes several components that follow the tradition of visual storytelling. The work is a combination of people, land, and tradition. Huckaby is a deeply religious and thoughtful person. The materials on which she prints—flour sacks, sugar sacks, cotton fabric that is either sewn to create quilts or framed with vintage wood embroidery hoops, as well traditional prints—carry a history that connects past to present. Huckaby's visual expression is a fine balance of who she is—a documentary photographer and artist.

Letitia Huckaby grew up with cherished family roots in the deep southern United States. In an interview with Hamidah Glasgow for Strange Fire Collective (May 30, 2019), Huckaby spoke about her past: "After studying and gaining degrees in both journalism and photography, some of my first works were naturally photojournalistic. A voyeur documenting the lives of others, but with the loss of my father, I became interested in doing more personal work. For the first time, I turned the camera on myself and my family. ... There is always a history built into the pieces, whether through process or actual materials. ... I love pushing the boundaries of photography, by using a traditional practice in a non-traditional way and hopefully creating a new visual language."

Her portraits speak to family and friends, devotion, compassion, and her sense of heritage as an African American with a shared history of slavery and deep religious belief. That personal history links back to the freed slaves after the civil war, which ended April 9, 1865, and who migrated away from the deep south around 1879. The people of this exodus were called "Exodusters," as a reference to a search for something better, like the Hebrews in Egypt leaving the oppression of the Pharaohs for the promised land lead by Moses. Huckaby describes "Beautiful Blackness" as "a visual pilgrimage following the path of Exodusters, African Americans who migrated from states along the Mississippi River to Kansas and Oklahoma in the late nineteenth century, and an exploration of the remains of Freeman's towns across the south. It is an elegy for a lost promised land. Landscapes and figurative works combine to depict an exodus, a people and what remains of their hopes and dreams." Much of the

migration came out of Louisiana, where Huckaby has her family roots. In a nod to this major episode in African American history, Huckaby created the portfolio "40 Acres and a mule." The genesis for this was "Special Field Order No. 15 (1/16/65)" issued by Union General William Tecumseh Sherman that freed slaves should be allowed the use of 40 acres of land (although mules are not mentioned) in the South Carolina, Georgia and Florida areas, yet the order was later reversed by President Andrew Johnson. A two hundred fifty year legacy of slavery remained and would continue to shape American history for much longer.

Huckaby's landscapes and portraits in "Beautiful Blackness" are more than captured images; these are objects of art which speak to legacy. Going beyond recording in a documentary fashion, she has made the object a tool for communication, expression, and statement. Her degrees in journalism and photography provide a background for her unique craftsmanship and the methods with which she builds her stories on fact, composition, and material. While it is beneficial to know that the landscape images are taken in Louisiana, Mississippi, Kansas, and Texas, what is more relevant is the open agricultural and rural environment that sets a stage for her expression. We know it is not an urban or suburban setting. It is the country, not complicated in the same ways as the city, but with its own nuances. Printing on cotton cloth framed in symbolic wooden embroidery hoops, on quilted cloth, or, as in Huckaby's previous series of work, flour sacks and sugar sacks, is an act which literally embeds a deeper visual message as the product of land and labor. The material on which these images are printed is from the earth. This is a hint of the heritage which Huckaby is referencing. The single composition or combination of images on a quilt are the visual storyline from a past to the present fixed to this land. The use of silhouettes in "Beautiful Blackness" is about age, context, and place more than who the individual people are in these obscured portraits. The use of both landscape and silhouette allow the viewer to imagine themselves floating through this shared personal history. For Huckaby, her work "is a time capsule for the African American experience."



**Beautiful Blackness**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoops  
17 1/2" x 16"



**Black is Blue**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
19 1/2" x 27 3/4"



**Black Nature**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
19 1/2" x 27 3/4"





**Cattle on a Thousand Hills**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
19 1/2" x 27 3/4"



**Those of Our Land**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
27 3/4" x 19 1/2"



**#One Family**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
14 3/4" x 14 1/2"



**A Black and Living Thing**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
19 1/2" x 27 3/4"



**A True Story**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
19 1/2" x 27 3/4"



**American Light**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
24 1/4" x 24"



**And God Said**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
27 3/4" x 19 1/2"



**Becoming**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
6 1/4" x 3 1/8"





**Called Delineation**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
24 1/4" x 24"



**Eclogue at Twilight**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
27 3/4" x 19 1/2"



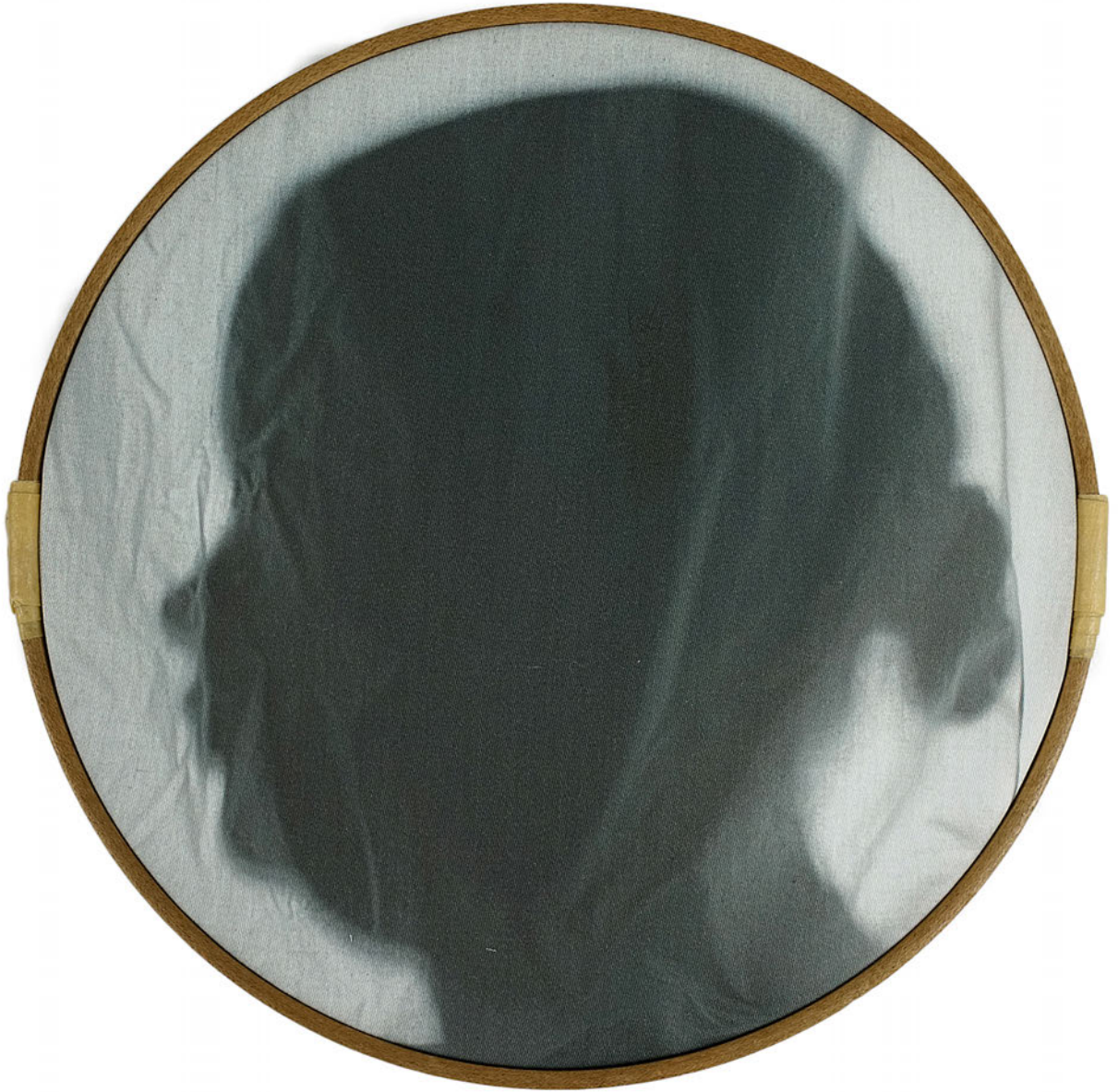
**Harvest Song**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
27 3/4" x 19 1/2"



**Like a Familiar**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
19 1/2" x 27 3/4"



**Likeness**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
7 1/4" x 7 1/4"



**Nobody Knows**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
9 1/4" x 5 13/16"



5" x 9"



Loving Touch  
Elizabeth, N. J. 07207

**Not for Sale**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
9 1/4" x 5 7/8"



**○ Believer**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
27 3/4" x 19 1/2"





**Postcard to an Ecologist**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
24 1/4" x 24"



**Rest in Heaven, She Said**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
14 3/4" x 14 1/2"



**Southern Song**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoops  
20 1/4" x 19 1/2"



**Study for Black is Blue**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
6 13/16" x 9 1/4"



**Study for What the Land Remembers**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
6 1/8" x 6 1/8"



**Study for Where the Light Lingers**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
6 15/16" x 6 1/4"



**Testifies**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
27 3/4" x 19 1/2"



**The Breath of God**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
6 15/16" x 6 1/4"





**The Rising Sun**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
14 3/4" x 14 1/2"



**Through Black Dirt**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
24 1/4" x 24"



**To a Certain Lady**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
8 3/4" x 8 3/8"



**Where the Light Lingers**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
27 3/4" x 19 1/2"



**What There Was**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
25 1/4" x 15 1/2"



**What the Land Remembers**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
27 3/4" x 19 1/2"



**A Cloister of Blackbirds**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
20" x 12"



**By the Same Cry & Song**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
20" x 12"





**Dunlap Colored Cemetery**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
12" x 20"



**Forsaken of the Earth**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
20" x 12"



**Just Looking**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
12" x 20"



**No Trespassing**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
12" x 20"



**Rhythmic Gleams**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
20" x 12"



**Silence**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
20" x 12"



**Sweet Enough**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
20" x 12"



**Blues Aubade First Stanza**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric  
48" x 64"





**Blues Aubade Second Stanza**  
Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric  
48" x 64"



**Blues Aubade Third Stanza**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric  
48" x 64"



**What Remains**

Pigment Print on Cotton Fabric with Embroidery Hoop  
12" x 20"



**11381 Grant Street**  
Pigment Print on Silk  
36" x 39 1/2"



**At the Gravesite**  
Pigment Print on Silk  
13 1/2" x 17 1/2"



**Quilt #4 (Untitled)**

Pigment Print on Fabric sewn into a Patchwork Quilt  
80" x 64"



**Quilt - Cotton Pests & Diabetes**

Pigment Prints on Fabric sewn into a Patchwork Quilt  
46" x 54"



**Bayou Baroque**

Pigment Print on Fabric  
110" x 80"



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## THE ARTIST

Letitia Huckaby has a degree in Journalism from the University of Oklahoma, a BFA from the Art Institute of Boston in photography and her Master's degree from the University of North Texas in Denton. Huckaby has exhibited as an emerging artist at Phillips New York, the Tyler Museum of Art, The Studio School of Harlem, Renaissance Fine Art in Harlem curated by Deborah Willis, PhD, The McKenna Museum in New Orleans, the Camden Palace Hotel in Cork City, Ireland, and the Texas Biennial at Blue Star Contemporary Art Museum. Her work is included in several prestigious collections; the Library of Congress, the Art Museum of Southeast Texas, the Brandywine Workshop in Philadelphia, and the Samella Lewis Contemporary Art Collection at Scripps College in Claremont, California. Huckaby is a featured artist in MAP2020: The Further We Roll, The More We Gain at the Amon Carter Museum and State of the Art 2020 at The Momentary and Crystal Bridges Museum, both opening in the spring of 2020.

# FOTO RELEVANCE

Since 2016, Foto Relevance cofounders Geoffrey C. Koslov and Bryn Larsen have focused on the exhibition and acquisition of museum quality contemporary fine art photography and photography-based work. Foto Relevance is dedicated to providing a platform for an innovative selection of American and international photographic artists pushing the boundaries of photography. The gallery has mounted monographic exhibitions as well as group shows to investigate current trends and themes in contemporary art, showcasing a broad range of both darkroom and digital photographic techniques. In addition to promoting the work of artists, Foto Relevance provides guidance, educating individual collectors and corporations in the acquisition and sale of art. Foto Relevance is a member of the Houston Art Gallery Association (HAGA). The gallery is located in the historic Museum District of Houston, Texas.



**FOTO RELEVANCE**

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