

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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“STANDING IN THE SACRED OF SELF: A SANCTIFIED SISTAH SPACE”
Celebrating the Rainbowed Radiance of Women Artists of Color

New York, New York. **Blick Art Materials** in association with **Spirit in Sunset Productions** presents during the month of August and Harlem Week 2021, ***“Standing in the Sacred of Self: A Sanctified Sistah Space”*** – an art exhibition and iconic photo shoot, as Visual PraiseSong in Celebration of the Rainbowed Radiance of Women Artists of Color. The exhibit, a selection of artwork and poetry by award-winning photographer and writer, Nikki Williams, will be on display from **August 1st through August 31st** at **Blick Art Materials** located at **261 West 125th Street in Harlem**. *“Standing in the Sacred of Self: A Sanctified Sistah Space,”* will be on the display in the front window as part of Blick Harlem’s *“12 Art Beats”* exhibition series. **On Monday, August 16, 2021, at 4pm**, representatives on behalf of **Assembly Member Inez E. Dickens** and **Assembly Member Al Taylor**, will present Spirit in Sunset Productions with Proclamations that speak of and speak to the important contributions of Women Artists of Color. The presentation will take place along with an Artist Talk by the Artist. **On Friday, August 27, 2021, from 4:00 – 7:00 p.m.**, Spirit in Sunset Productions will conclude the month-long celebration with an iconic, *“EYE/Conic”* photo shoot entitled, ***“Mama Movers/Sistah Shakers – A Celebration of World Dreamin’ Wimmin.”*** The photo shoot and program will honor long-established, practicing Women Artists of Color whose artistic practices span at least four decades. Women whose works and contributions have added greatly to the economy of arts and culture in the United States and beyond have been invited to participate. The photo shoot is slated to be held at **Riverbank State Park** located at **679 West 145th Street and Riverside Drive**. **The Honorable, U.S. Representative Adriano Espaillat** who proudly represents **New York’s Thirteenth Congressional District** will be in attendance to address the Guests of Honor and audience. **Congressman Espaillat** will also present a Proclamation acknowledging the vital contributions and importance of Women Artists of Color following the photo shoot. Other invited elected officials to attend the event include **State Senator Robert Jackson, Council Member Robert E. Cornegy, Jr., Assembly Member Inez E. Dickens, and Assembly Member Al Taylor.**

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Thus far, Williams has also extended an invitation to **Mr. Bill Aguado, Executive Director of En Foco, Mr. Andrew P. Jackson (Molefi Sekou) Professor Queens College and former Executive Director of the Langston Hughes Library and Cultural Center,** and **Ms. Lisa Gold, Executive Director, Asian American Alliance Arts Alliance,** Arts Administrators who have also made giant contributions to the field of Arts and Culture to participate in the event. They have been invited because they are not only well-established, but they are male Artists who have also served as Administrators in their respective fields of dance, theater, music, and literature. Williams states that the photo shoot is intended to be the first of its kind as it will visually capture the collective elder genius that she what Williams hopes will number over one hundred creative women in one place. Williams is excited about the event as it will be a visual gathering of brilliant and resilient Herstories. These Narratives that get so easily overlooked and are important to today's artistic scene because most of the Artists participating in the photo shoot have careers that span four decades and beyond. The photo shoot is inspired by "*A Great Day in Harlem,*" the now famous black and white photo taken by photographer Art Kane, captured fifty-seven Jazz Musicians as they sat on a Harlem Brownstone in the summer of 1958. The last photo shoot that Williams put together was back in 2014, when she celebrated Artists of Color and the life of Dr. Maya Angelou. "Looking back at the photo is bittersweet," said Williams. "In the seven short years since the *Mayathon*, several Artists who participated have passed away. They are deeply missed."

Williams describes "*Standing in a Sanctified of Self: A Sistah Space,*" as a Visual PraiseSong and Sermon testifying to the power and incredible beauty that Black Women possess when Love of Self is embraced. She believes that "There is no greater radiance that one can possess than when one chooses to answer their Calling, share their Creative Light, and live Authentically." She goes on to state that "Women Artists of Color demonstrate the power and sanctity of Self-Love by standing boldly in their Truth: Self-Love is a sacred Sistah Sanctuary. *'There's No Place Like Me, There's No Place Like Me, There's No Place Like Me.'* An Artist cannot create Art that is real and true from a place outside of themselves. In a culture that still holds western beauty as its standard of femininity and attractiveness, Women Artists of Color must construct images of themselves and their lives in all its diverse realities and identities." Williams contends that when a Black Woman loves herself, the world feels the effects and becomes affected by that Self-Love.

In choosing to add a photo shoot to her month-long program, Williams honors her Creative Colleagues, Women Artists of Color whom she describes as *Wise Women Who Stand Firmly Planted in their Certainty of Age.*" Williams has had the privilege throughout her professional career to work with many of these Women. Williams is using this exhibit to visually acknowledge that she is in good Sistah Company. That these long-established Women of Color Creatives are still creating art: singing, composing, dancing, playing music, choreographing, painting, designing, writing, acting, directing, sculpting, producing, and much more, makes Williams extraordinarily proud. "We tend, as Artists, to be so overlooked in this youth-obsessed, western informed, narrow lensed culture." So much value, so many brilliant contributions are currently untapped and under-resourced because we have been so over-shadowed by the spotlight that society shines on a much younger generation of Artists. Our society has deprived itself of such a wealth of talent and Williams, in whatever way

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that she is able intends to celebrate her colleagues as long as she has a platform. Williams is very appreciative of being given the opportunity to be part of Blick Art Materials Harlem location's "12 Art Beats" month-long series of exhibits. Each month an opportunity is provided an Artist to display their work in Blick Harlem's window. Her decision to visually celebrate Women Artists of Color during Harlem Week was also very much inspired after Williams witnessed the polished, poised, and professional staff of young Black Women Artists, who managed and ran the Blick Harlem store while she was a customer last year. "I was so proud of these young, assured of Self, Sistahs," Williams recalls. "When I was a young woman, I never experienced Black Women overseeing the day-to-day operations of running a business unless it was a business that they owned. There was always a white male or female who made the decisions and gave directives – in front or behind the scenes." The General Manager of Blick Art Material's Harlem location is a Black Woman Artist and the staff that Williams was so impressed with that day were young women Artists by the names of Ethel, Aliyah, Ricki, and Julia. Since then, Nicole and Lucy have joined this incredible staff of young women and men. When Williams witnessed the skillfulness and confidence of the young women, she was put to mind of the words of Dr. Maya Angelou. "*Does my sassiness upset you? Why are you beset with gloom? 'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells pumping in my living room.*" Like her colleagues, these young Women of Color Artists, are also who Dr. Angelou referred to when she when she penned the words, "*I am the dream and the hope of the slave. I rise, I rise, I rise,*" in her famous poem, "*And Still I Rise.*"

Williams is extremely proud to have been called a Renaissance Woman and a Visionary. She is an award-winning photographer and poet as well as an accomplished painter, playwright, performance artists and producer of cultural arts programs. Always seeking opportunities to be part of a series of firsts, Williams was the first artist to have a solo show at Blick Art Materials in Harlem. In 2019, a selection of her photographs was on display inside the store in celebration of the 50th year of the African American Day Parade. She was also Ryan Health's first Artist in Residence. A retrospective of select artwork from Williams' professional career entitled, "*And a PraiseSong Shall Rise Over A Cappella Skies,*" was on display at both Ryan Health's Harlem locations from December 2020 until April 2021. During National Poetry Month in April and Harlem Week in August of 2014, Williams conceived and directed what she termed a "*Mayathon.*" Williams invited over thirty-five Artists of Color from a wide variety of arts genres to participate in a marathon, non-stop, reading of the poetry of Dr. Maya Angelou. In 1990, Williams conceived and produced the first live, weekly arts radio show "*Artbeat of Harlem,*" for WHCR, Harlem Community Radio broadcast from City College in Harlem. Artists of Color were interviewed and were given the opportunity to present live music, poetry readings, and theatrical presentations. The show was broadcast on the air on Sunday nights for eight years.

For her continuing commitment in supporting the endeavors and achievements of Artists of Color, Williams has received Proclamations from former Elected Officials such as the Honorable Charles B. Rangel,

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Manhattan Borough Presidents Virginia C. Fields and Ruth W. Messinger, Assembly Member Keith L.T. Wright, and current Council Member Inez E. Dickens. In 2020, Williams received her third grant from the Puffin Foundation for her photography. In 2021, Williams also received a grant from the New York Foundation for the Arts.

Both Blick Art Materials and the Plaza outside of the Harlem State Office Building can be reached by subway by taking the A, B, C, D, Numbers #2 and #3 trains to 125th Street. There are several buses that also go to both locations. Both the Plaza and Harlem State Office Building are wheelchair accessible. **For more information, please call Spirit in Sunset Productions at (212) 368-3571 or Blick Art Materials at (212) 222-7000.**

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