

# Women of Power– Spirit Mask Series: 12 Faces of a North American African Woman

## Mulheres de Poder– Série Máscaras Espirituais: 12 Faces de uma Mulher Norte-Americana Africana

## Mujeres de Poder– Serie de Máscaras Espirituales: 12 Faces de una Mujer Norteamericana Africana

ADRIENNE WALKER HOARD<sup>1</sup>

I am writing about my first series of painted photographs, *The Women of Power-Spirit Mask series*. There are twelve works in this series, and all works are oil pastel and acrylic paint on my photographs, which are printed on archival inkjet paper.

Living peacefully as racially diverse or ‘different’ in American terminology is a performance piece. There are public performances and private performances as a manner of expressing oneself. Often public performances require a Mask to shield the Wearer as well as to enhance the aesthetic theatrical display of express yourself, living life. The outward appearance of each Mask in this series is a tribute to all the Woman Warrior Wearers know and have experienced. Ancestral themes along with ritual purpose unfolding in a timely manner, contribute to the formation of the Wearer’s monthly Game Face.

In creating these masked expressions, I feel to simultaneously, both em-

---

<sup>1</sup> Doutorado em Psicologia da Percepção Visual pela University of Illinois e Mestrado em Belas Artes pela University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, Estados Unidos. Diretora do Programa de Estudos Negros da University of Missouri–Kansas City (UMKC) e do Departamento de Arte Educação da Louisiana State University. Suas pesquisas sobre a percepção visual e as relações entre as estéticas negras e indígenas marcam sua produção artística. hoarda@umkc.edu - <http://www.homegirlinc.com/women-warriors.html> - <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0357-3483>

power this woman, and to reflect the power she exudes. Her masking attire, gives tribute to my internal image bases, conceived through my lived experiences as a visiting member of the *community* among commanding women creators in South Korea, South Africa, Peru, Brazil, Dominican Republic, Panama, Tunisia, Italy, Puerto Rico and Cuba. From these powerful dedicated women, I have learned this one thing, provocative masking is both protective of who you are, promoting of your purpose and expressive of whom you know yourself to be among the valued mores of your own diverse cultural group.

My discovery process of applying pigments to the photographic surface developed through creating this Women of Power-Spirit Mask Series in 2014. Initiating the Series was my 2013 photograph, “American Gothic Too: Homage to 1942.” As the photograph title infers, my aim was to create a contemporary interpretation of the historic photograph by Gordon Parks taken of the US Farm Security Administration charwoman, Ella Watson in 1942, at the Library of Congress, where she worked. Prior to this, I always considered my photography to be documentary, that I am there to document this moment in this place. I had never before staged a photograph, but what I saw in my mind, I wanted to re-create.

The custodian in my art building had always reminded me of the woman in that Parks photograph, because her countenance displayed a similar calm resolve in her daily dutiful manner. Both women displayed faces of confidence in their own abilities. Our custodian, Artis and I had worked together in the same building for thirteen years. I remember many conversations during her lunch break, when she would be sitting in the corridor near my office. I was coming to work and she had already been there for five hours. One day, I finally got up the courage to ask Artis to pose for me. I showed her a print of the original Gordon Parks photograph. She held it, just looking for several moments. Finally, she said, “We don’t use mops like that anymore, but I can find one, and I’ll bring my broom.” I shouted in joy, “I take that as a Yes! Thank you very kindly.”

As Artis handed the Gordon Parks photograph back to me, she acknowledged, “some things change, some things don’t.” I nodded in sincere understanding and agreement. Two days later, I came with the flag from my father’s coffin, and a Poro Judge African mask from my own collection. We set up and shot photographs during her lunch break, in the last week of our working together. Near the end of our hour together her eyes kept closing because she was hungry without lunch on time. That photograph with her closing eyes, that one particular shot spoke to me, that it needed to become more than it began. Thus, my Women of Power-Spirit Mask Series of painted photographs was inaugurated and continues.

In addition to the Mask, each woman Wearer is enhanced and empowered by the Feathered Cloak she displays as part of her public adornment. This mantle

is inspired by the Peruvian Feathered Cloak ceremonially worn only by the Emperor in Inca society. A similar cloak is adornment for royal men in Maya and Aztec societies. With this hand-sewn, feathered adornment, the woman Wearer expands roles and is viewed as highly spiritual, almost a deity.

Given guidance from my Ancestors, I created this series of art work as listed in order:

## 1. Feathered Friend



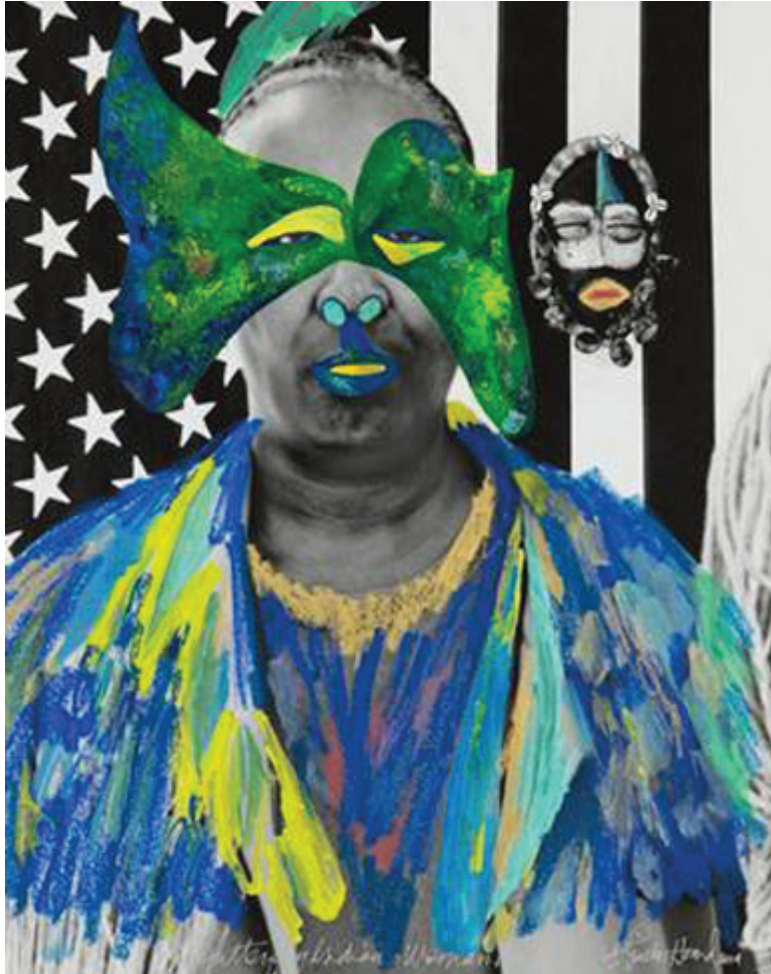
This is how we come into this World, gifted, friendly, curious, tender, soft and feathered. We are created ready to love, to learn and to share our Divine attributes.

## 2. Bi-Partisan:



Born into US American society, colored children and adults soon come to recognize that all in America, in addition to being hyper-racial are hyper-political, too. Colors are predominantly Red and Blue, but all groups are in pursuit of the Gold.

### 3. Butterfly Indian Woman:



Growing up to take on the young woman's point of view on Self and relationships among natural systems, one comes to realize individual personal place, group spaces and personal purpose granted by the Universe. The Native American Indian and the Butterfly co-habit and play together, because they understand that they are both freely owned by the land. This translates to the security of knowing that the Universe which greatly and wonderfully made you is maintaining you as well.

#### 4. Brown Eyes Blue:



Encountering societal warfare and its devaluing process, while mentally overthrowing it, can make a woman of color sad, and physically tired from time to time. Thus, the desire to mask, to rejuvenate with happy sounds coming in, and deflect the rest. This mask is a response to the 1982 Sonia Sanchez play, *I'm Black When I'm Singing, I'm Blue When I Ain't*.

## 5. Rose-Colored Glasses:



Self-search through art aids in the recovery of a displaced sense of Self and is expressively healing. Peace and security are evoked when viewing the world from one's own positive rosy perspective daily or as often as possible.

## 6. Two Waters Woman:



During my initial visit to Brazil in 1998, I was given the opportunity to have a reading and a translator on sight to express in English, the information being given. Influences to pursue an adult woman's viewpoint came from my mother. She advised, to capture of all facets of yourself and enjoy the flow of your growth through life pursuits. The reader said, I was a Woman of Two Waters. My path is guided by two Orisas of water, Yememja, the goddess of the Oceans and Osun, the goddess of the Rivers. Any water issues coming in to my life might be the result of my priorities being out of alignment. We must recognize there can be Divine hierarchies, and understand that all Rivers run to and are tributaries of Mother Ocean.

## 7. Nigerian Queen Mother Mouthpiece:



Women role models are imperative for the deeper journey into self, adult woman knowledge. The desire to take this deep inner dive brings role models into my path. Sometimes brief encounters, and some enduring encounters usher in deeper self-love and self-respect. Families in diverse world cultures recognize the status of the voice of the Senior Woman of their clan. Even the King must listen when his own Queen Mother speaks. The inspiration for this mask reflects the importance of the Queen Mother in Nigerian culture. One section of her Mask corresponds to the shape of the upswept hairdo worn only by the Yoruba Queen Mother. Her Mask comes with its own adorning mouthpiece.

## 8. She Who Must Be Pleased:



Growing into more adult woman responsibilities requires focused discipline to stay connected and listening for all Ancestral signs and sources. On this planet, as a servant to these sources, daily life is gracefully lived in peaceful, abundant service. In response, the Captain of our Sunship, is she who must be pleased and receives only homage and thanksgiving.

## 9. Speak to My Heart:



As a Star Child among a host of hearers, I listen as my Ancestors speak to my heart. I promise my head, my heart, my hands and feet will follow instructions I intuit and hum, at most times. I know there must be powerful musical utterance used, when no words can convey the feelings received from voiceless loving sources.

## 10. Speak No Evil:



First Instruction from my Ancestors was immediate and resolute. There is much evil to be seen and heard in today's world. To overpower it, one must not speak of it and give it any longer life. Avoid temptation, and keep expressing only peace and truth. My mother often said, if you can say nothing nice about someone, say nothing at all.

## 11. Listening and Speaking:



Second Ancestral Instruction given was to continue living as a compassionate human being. Use your heart knowledge to listen more closely to fellow humans. As a co-habitant on the planet, speak gently and in respectful truth. Expressive and powerful communications arise from listening intently before speaking. Ndzundza Ndebele women's 'dzilla' or neck-ware is added to the adornment of this Mask Wearer.

## 12. Future Face:



This is the new Mask, a face which I have yet to wear. I feel that to embrace the unknown Future requires faith, courage, energy from my Ancestors, fellowship with my planet sojourners and an empowering use of bold new colors and designs.

### 13. American Gothic Too:



Homage to 1942, B & W Photograph. I trust you will bring to these images your own experiences with Women of Power. Perhaps you have been able to see and understand their masks, as you create and model your own, powerful woman. Provocative Masking, as a good thing, is protective of who you are, promoting of your purpose and expressive of whom you know yourself to be among the values and mores of your own group. Continue to be, continue to empower those in the nation to come. Ashé, Aché, Asé.