

**Nsenga Knight**  
***Close to Home***

*05.19.24 – 01.19.25*

*Accessible exhibition wall text and labels*

**QUEENS MUSEUM**

## **Nsenga Knight**

### ***Close to Home***

*Close to Home* is an installation that honors the domestic space as a custodian of cultural and spiritual traditions by providing support and comfort to forge appreciation for heritage and their continuity. Modeled after Nsenga Knight's family residences from their past six years living in Cairo, Egypt, the installation's eclectic atmosphere reflects the historic and cosmopolitan. While furnished in various materials and styles, old and new, this family home is also adorned with artifacts from the 1964 – 1965 New York World's Fair as well as artworks by Knight, including paintings, prints, videos, and wallpaper.

A Brooklyn-born Afro-Caribbean American Muslim artist, Knight researched the Queens Museum's 1964 – 1965 New York World's Fair Archives with a focus on the representations of the then-newly postcolonial Islamic African and Caribbean nations.

The historical trajectory of these nations and their influence on Black Americans has emerged as the central focus of her exhibition.

Knight presents this exhibition as both a home and a forum for “Peace Through Understanding,” echoing the theme of the 1964 – 1965 New York World’s Fair. She extends this concept into the exterior section of the installation. Hovering above are words initially spoken by martial arts masters at the SWAM Academy of Modern Martial Arts in South Jamaica, Queens. Transcribed by Knight word-by-word, these “poems” encapsulate their wisdom about self defense, spirituality, and ethical integrity imparted at the renowned Black Muslim-owned dojo. The act of safe-keeping and hope for peace extends to the toy paragliders in the exhibition. These airborne devices carry complex yet arbitrary layers of symbolism related to the Museum’s building history. The New York City Building housed the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1947 when they passed Resolution 181

to partition Palestine into Arab and Jewish states. By juxtaposing SWAM poetry with paragliders and parachutes, Knight considers how to position peace and safety amidst conflict and oppression.

Food culture also played a pivotal role in the World's Fair. *Close to Home* will host a scheduled series of social gatherings by serving tea and coffee in this installation. With this act of hospitality, Knight calls on viewers to consider the power of sensorial and experiential engagement to foster understanding, connection, and appreciation among people from various corners of the world.

*Nsenga Knight: Close to Home* was organized by Hitomi Iwasaki, Director of Exhibitions / Curator.

Audio descriptions narrated by Sarah Cho, Assistant Curator, can be found on the Queens Museum Digital Guide, available for free on the Bloomberg Connects App.

This exhibition was produced in cooperation with the Queens Museum team: Massimo Avanzato, Lindsey Berfond, Hayley Blackstone, Sarah Cho, Gianina Enriquez, Catherine Grau, Mayisha Hassan, Lauren Haynes, Adrienne Koteen, Lynn Maliszewski, Gabriela Peralta, Aaron Strauss, Heryte T. Tequame, and Tiffany Tong; Queens Museum fabricators and preparators: Keith O. Anderson, Max Bell, Noemi Bilger, Jackson Denahy, Brittany Hayden, Magnus Gitt Henderson, Natalya Kornblum Laudi, Clare Koury, Martin Kramer, Samantha Lasko, Juyon Lee, and Mallie Sanford; and EcoManagement LLC: Dilan Cheavacchi, Nolan Dolaher, Mark Power, and Chad Stayrook.

Nsenga Knight wishes to thank Allah, Shaykh Tijani, Shaykh Mahi, her parents Madonna and Yusuf, her husband Maurice, and three children, her sisters, her studio assistant Rawan, her community and friends - especially those in Cairo.

*Nsenga Knight: Close to Home* is made possible in part by lead support from the Mellon Foundation, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and the Ford Foundation. Additional support is provided by the Queens Museum Exhibitions Circle.

## **Nsenga Knight**

*b. Brooklyn, NY, 1981*

---

*Fitra Paintings, 2024*

Oil on canvas

Courtesy the artist

“Fitra” is a foundational concept in Islam referring to the innately good spiritual nature possessed by humankind. In this series of paintings, Knight imbues her concept of “home” in an amber-hued abstraction of sensuously fluid brushwork that is teeming with feelings of warmth and comfort. By situating these works in a domestic setting, the artist addresses home as not only a physical, but also a psychological space.



Bloomberg Connects Number:  
501

<https://links.bloombergconnects.org/6Ggw/wfexpw>  
[hr](#)

## **Nsenga Knight**

*b. Brooklyn, NY, 1981*

---

*To Know One Another, 2024*

Installation of domestic environment including: dining area with custom-made plate set; living room with Majlis (Arabic style floor seating with low table and tea set); TV monitor; rug; floor lamp; ceiling lamp; artificial indoor plants; custom-made wood partition; french doors; and selections of 1964–1965 New York World's Fair memorabilia

Courtesy the artist

Modeled after Knight's and her family's apartments in Cairo, this installation boasts eclectic furnishings that span from Western to traditional Egyptian styles. It reflects the global economy in the cosmopolitan Afro-Arab city nicknamed um al-Dunya (mother of the world), where imported items have become more readily accessible than locally traditional goods. Inspired by the New York



World's Fair Archive at the Queens Museum, Knight built her own mini-archive of artifacts bearing the Fair's theme "Peace through Understanding." Restaged, the expatriate artist's residence in Egypt, reenacts the Fair's ethos in its convergence of cultures — Afro-Arab, Caribbean, and American.

Reflecting the presentation of the culinary cultures in the Fair, the artist will host a series of conversations with museum visitors over tea and coffee from Egypt, Morocco, and Senegal.



Bloomberg Connects Number:  
502

<https://links.bloombergconnects.org/6Ggw/wfexpw>  
[hr](#)

## **Nsenga Knight**

*b. Brooklyn, NY, 1981*

---

*Metem, 2024*

Multi-channel video on tablet

Courtesy the artist

Knight gathered her family members at this table to have dinner with Guyanese food, to celebrate her mother's first return to her home country Guyana after 53 years since she left in 1960. This trip also marked Knight's first visit to Guyana. In this familial story-telling gathering, Knight and her mother led a conversation with family members about their homecoming trip. The footage captures the traditional Guyanese food, conversation, and photo sharing, with their extended, New York-based Guyanese family members.



Bloomberg Connects Number:  
503

<https://links.bloombergconnects.org/6Ggw/wfexpw>  
[hr](#)

## **Nsenga Knight**

*b. Brooklyn, NY, 1981*

---

*Qari (meanwhile back in Cairo...Abdul Basit, 1965),  
2024*

Found footage with sound

37 min 25 sec

Courtesy the artist

While living in Cairo, Knight studied Arabic and Tajweed (the set of rules governing the way in which the words of the Quran, the holy book of Islam, should be pronounced during its recitation). The sound of Quranic recitation permeates the entire city, offering spiritual comfort to its largely Muslim population. This 1965 video recorded at Hussein Mosque in Cairo captures Abdul Basit Abdus Samad (1927–1988), one of Egypt’s most famous Qari reciters of Quran. Abdul Basit was one of the first Qari to make commercial recordings of his recitations. Even today, his Quran recitations are the most commonly played in Cairo.



Bloomberg Connects Number:  
504

<https://links.bloombergconnects.org/6Ggw/wfexpw>  
[hr](#)

## Nsenga Knight

b. Brooklyn, NY, 1981

---

*Purity, Enlightenment and Rebirth, 2024*

Wallpaper generated through artificial intelligence in collaboration with GenAI by iStock.com

Courtesy the artist



Bloomberg Connects Number:  
506

<https://links.bloombergconnects.org/6Ggw/wfexpw>  
[hr](#)

Knight resituates the archival in the domestic space. For her, the family dwelling is where history is shaped through a way of life, and the notion of community and nationhood is nurtured. Fashioned as a family wall, this installation interweaves the artist's own family photos with historical images. The familial photographs include Knight's recent trip to Guyana, marking her mother's first return since immigrating to the United States in the 1960s, and the artist's first visit.

Interspersed between are found images that build a visual history of 1960s Black-Arab-Muslim nationhood, including portraits of Malcolm X in his Queens home and Muhammad Ali's Muslim family life from Ebony and Jet Magazine. Knight sourced plates that bear images of the 1964–1965 World's Fair's African Pavilions and the Fair's theme "Peace Through Understanding." Images depicting Egyptian and Sudanese life and culture were taken from the Fair's publications. The artist notes that the majority of the African and Caribbean nations at the Fair

were newly liberated from colonialism and represented their own free nation – a homecoming worthy of celebration. The custom-made wallpaper’s lotus flowers reference the popular plant motif in ancient Egyptian and Islamic art, a symbol of creation and rebirth. From the intimately personal to the historic and iconic public domain, Knight celebrates the 1960s independence of African and Caribbean nations, and the re-emergence of Islamic identity in the global African diaspora.



Bloomberg Connects Number:  
505

<https://links.bloombergconnects.org/6Ggw/wfexpw>  
[hr](#)



## **Nsenga Knight**

b. Brooklyn, NY, 1981

---

*The Clinic*, 2024

Hand-painted poems on transparent material

Courtesy the artist

Suspended in the air, these painted words are phrases spoken by martial arts instructors at the SWAM Academy of Modern Martial Arts in South Jamaica, Queens. Transcribed by Knight word-by-word, these “poems” encapsulate the wisdom imparted by this renowned Black Muslim-owned dojo’s founder Sijo Abdul Mutakabbir. The words guide, encourage, and reinforce various physical movements that the martial arts pupils are collectively engaged in. While concise and pedagogical, they are often philosophical and spiritual. Founded in 1977, the Academy has protected its communities from various forms of oppression and terror. The golden hue is a nod to the Academy’s guardian role during

the 1990s drug epidemic and gang violence, when it painted its front pavement in gold to claim the neighborhood as a sanctuary.



Bloomberg Connects Number:

507

<https://links.bloombergconnects.org/6Ggw/wfexpw>

[hr](https://links.bloombergconnects.org/6Ggw/wfexpw)

## **Nsenga Knight**

b. Brooklyn, NY, 1981

---

*Conveyor*, 2024

Toy paragliders

Courtesy the artist

The Queens Museum is housed in the New York City Building, originally built for 1939–1940 New York World’s Fair and served again for the 1964–1965 Fair. Between the two events, it housed the United Nations General Assembly between 1946–1950. Among the many historically significant decisions made in this building is Resolution 181, the partition of Palestine into Jewish and Arab states. Knight acknowledges the history of this building to the ongoing conflict and tragedy in Gaza with the presence of miniature paragliders in the gallery. These airborne devices have been used in warfare, both as a military vehicle and humanitarian aid carrier. While Knight addresses the complexity and arbitrariness of the symbolism, the artist

acknowledges their potential as conveyors of both terror and hope.



Bloomberg Connects Number:  
508

<https://links.bloomberconnects.org/6Ggw/wfexpw>  
[hr](#)

## **Nsenga Knight**

b. Brooklyn, NY, 1981

---

*Irregular Black People: Regardless of where,  
Muslims pray at right time, 2024*

Collage (screen print on paper and papyrus paper  
mounted on canvas board)

Courtesy the artist



Bloomberg Connects Number:  
509

[https://links.bloombergconnects.org/6Ggw/wfexpw  
hr](https://links.bloombergconnects.org/6Ggw/wfexpw<br/>hr)

## **Nsenga Knight**

b. Brooklyn, NY, 1981

---

All works are courtesy Nsenga Knight unless otherwise specified.

From Left to Right:

*1. World's Fair Collector Plate: Africa Pavilion, 1964/2024,*  
Porcelain

*2. Irregular Black People: Warm & Simple, 2024,*  
Acrylic and screen print on paper mounted on  
canvas board

*3. Sudanese School Girls Classroom, 2024,*  
Dye-sublimation print on aluminum plate.  
Image from The Republic of Sudan, booklet  
published by the Sudan Pavilion at the 1964–1965  
New York World's Fair, Queens Museum World's  
Fair Collection

4. *Picnic at Drummer's Grove (1 of 3)*, 2006,  
Silver gelatin print

5. *Arab by Origin, Muslim by Religion, Black, and Sudanese*, 2024

Dye-sublimation print on aluminum plate.

Image from *The Republic of Sudan* booklet published by the Sudan Pavilion at the 1964–1965 New York World's Fair, Queens Museum World's Fair Collection

6. *World's Fair Collector Plate: Peace through Understanding (Sudan pavilion)*, 1964/2024  
Porcelain

7. *Malcolm X in Turban*, 2024

Dye-sublimation print on aluminum plate.

Image from the Henry Hampton Collection

8. *World's Fair Collector Plate: Peace through Understanding (Unisphere and eight pavilions)*, 1964/2024

Porcelain

9. *Picnic at Drummer's Grove (2 of 3)*, 2006

Silver gelatin print

10. *Irregular Black People: Reading Arabic at Night, Philadelphia*, 2024

Collage

11. *Profile of a Typical Nubian*, 2024

Dye-sublimation print on aluminum plate.

Image from *Faces of Egypt*, pamphlet published by the United Arab Republic Pavilion at the 1964–1965 New York World's Fair, Queens Museum World's Fair Collection



*12. World's Fair Collector Plate: Free Africa,*  
1964/2024

Porcelain

Courtesy Queens Museum World's Fair Collection

*13. Picnic at Drummer's Grove (3 of 3),* 2006

Silver gelatin print

*14. Muhammad University School Boys,* 2024

Dye-sublimation print on aluminum plate.

Image from *Muhammad University of Islam*, Chicago  
Illinois, Volume IV, 1973, Lester Muhammad  
Collection

*15. World's Fair Collector Plate: Peace through  
Understanding (Statue of Liberty),* 1964/2024

Porcelain

*16. World's Fair Collector Tray: Peace Through  
Understanding (black),* 1964/2024

Tin

17. *World's Fair Collector Tray: Peace Through Understanding (white)*, 1964/2024

Tin

18. *Upper Egypt Play Fight*, 2024

Dye-sublimation print on aluminum plate

Image from *Encyclopedia Americana*, “Egusquiza-Falsetto,” published on the occasion of the

1964–1965 New York World’s Fair, Queens Museum  
World’s Fair Collection



Bloomberg Connects Number:  
510

<https://links.bloombergconnects.org/6Ggw/wfexpw>  
[hr](#)