

# New Orleans artist John T. Scott's story lives on at new center

By Kelly Harris DeBerry  
Contributing Writer

(Special from Verite News) — The legacy of the late New Orleans visual artist John T. Scott will be passed on for generations to come at the new Helis Foundation John Scott Center at the Louisiana Endowment for Humanities' historic Turner Hall building at 938 Lafayette Street. The work of the Xavier University professor, who won a MacArthur Fellows "Genius Grant" in 1992, is displayed in a stunning 6,000-square-foot interactive space funded by The Helis Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities and the State of Louisiana. It will open to the public on Saturday (Sept. 10).

Visitors will see a vast collection of Scott's work including sculptures, prints, multimedia paintings, and woodcuts. The Louisiana Endowment for Humanities also plans to publish a book about Scott's life called, "Passing It On: The Art of John Scott," co-authored by his wife, Ana Rita

'I remember [at Xavier University's Art Department] somebody handing somebody something and they said, 'Thank you.' But the response was not 'You're welcome,' the response was 'Pass it on.' I have never forgotten that. [And] the reason is that the philosophy there was the only way you can thank me for giving you something is you have to give it to somebody else.'

— John T. Scott



courtesy of Helis Foundation John T. Scott Center

Scott, and local historian Freddy Williams Evans.

"The John Scott Center is a

remarkable display of Scott's brilliance," Evans said. "It showcases his mastery of multiple

genres demonstrating that he was more than just a sculptor or just a printmaker. Scott defied efforts that would have restricted his ways of creating art. He resisted critics who tried to label and categorize him, which would have altered how writers described his work and talent. The gallery is stunning. It's a fitting tribute to Scott as well as to the New Orleans community."

A son of the 9th Ward, Scott began his formal pursuit of being an artist at Xavier University. He would eventually become an esteemed professor there for more than 40 years. His art spans the city and can be seen at the gates of the New Orleans Museum of Art's courtyard. "Spirit House," which he collaborated with his former student Martin Payton, can be seen at the intersection of St. Bernard Avenue, Gentilly Boulevard and DeSaix Boulevard. "Street Windows" can be seen inside New Orleans City Park and "Ocean

Song" can be viewed in Woldenberg Park.

Visitors can explore the John Scott Center's installations and exhibitions and engage in community learning and programming based on Scott's artistic themes through the lens of humanities.

New Orleans native and artist Asante Salaam, the John Scott Center's director, sees the facility as a place of inspiration for future artists.

"Having the center means that the next generation of New Orleans artists — especially Black and BIPOC and native New Orleans artists and culture makers — have a place where they can experience, co-create and witness reflections of themselves and our truths in a center of possibilities," she said.

Salaam, a former interim director for the City of New Orleans' Office of Cultural Economy is a multidisciplinary artist and a sea-

soned arts director. She has been a strategic arts leader in the city and beyond including the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival Foundation, the Louisiana State Museum, Ashé Cultural Arts Center, KIDsmART, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Salaam, daughter of celebrated New Orleans writer Kalamu ya Salaam, sees her position at the center as legacy work that helps preserve authentic New Orleans culture and community wisdom. "Upon learning about the center and the position, I was immediately and deeply inspired to do this legacy work and make my ancestors proud," Salaam said.

Because her father and Scott, who died in 2007, were friends and contemporaries, Salaam grew up intimately knowing the importance of Scott's art in New Orleans and is uniquely positioned to curate the center's ambitious mission.

"Our elders and ancestors prayed and pray that our lives are beyond their bold, expansive, blessed imaginings. I represent so many who stand on the shoulders of greatness, conjuring visions, faith and courage," Salaam said.

Scott's legacy was also passed to his son, Ayo Scott. Like his father, some of the younger Scott's work occupies public spaces in New Orleans. His mural of the late Leah Chase in her kitchen is prominently featured in the restaurant's airport location. He also painted "Lessons," a mural on the side of the Louisiana Endowment for Humanities' building that serves as a visual ode to his father. Ayo Scott also co-curates an open mic poetry series in New Orleans, fittingly called, Pass It On.

But it was the late Scott's work that helped pave the way for public art opportunities from which marginalized artists reap benefits today. His visual commentary on life through the lens of a New Orleansian makes the center a must-see experience and a necessary homage to Scott's creative lifetime.

The abundance of work Scott produced to pass on is remarkable and is worthy of scholarship and celebration. Themes in Scott's art, such as honoring ancestors, displacement of people, jazz and civil rights, and urban life are the foundation for the Center and provide an opportunity for everyone to pass it on.

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## Ruby Bridges, desegregation trailblazer, writes kids book

By Jay Reeves  
AP Writer

(AP) — Ruby Bridges was a 6-year-old first-grader when she walked past jeering crowds of white people to become one of the first Black students at racially segregated schools in New Orleans more than six decades ago. Now, with teaching about race in America more complicated than it's ever been, she's authored a picture book about her experience for the youngest of readers.

Bridges, along with three other Black students at a different school, were the first to integrate what had been all-white schools in New Orleans in 1960.

"I Am Ruby Bridges," featuring illustrations by Nikkolas Smith, goes on sale Tuesday. Published by Orchard Books, an imprint of Scholastic Inc., it's aimed at readers as young as 4.

Complete with a glossary that includes the words "Supreme Court" and "law," the book is an uplifting story about opportunities and kids being able to make a difference, Bridges said in an interview with *The Associated Press*.

"It's a true reflection of what happened through my own eyes," she said.

But books by or about Bridges have been challenged by conservatives in several school districts amid complaints over race-related teaching. Bridges said she hopes

the new book winds up in elementary school libraries.

"I've been very, very fortunate because of the way I tell my story that my babies come in all shapes and colors, and my books are bestsellers, and maybe banned in schools," she said. "But I think parents really want to get past our racial differences. They're going to seek out those books."

Bridges was born in 1954, the same year the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation of public schools was unconstitutional. Southern school districts, including New Orleans, continued resisting integration for years.

But on Nov. 14, 1960, Bridges — carrying a plaid book satchel and wearing a white sweater — was escorted by four federal marshals past a taunting white crowd into segregated William Frantz Elementary School. The scene was made famous in the Norman Rockwell painting "The Problem We All Live With," which hung in the White House near the Oval Office during the tenure of former President Barack Obama.

The book's theme plays off the author's name: "Ruby" is a pre-

vious stone,

and "Bridges"

are meant to bring people

together.

Told with a touch of

humor from the vantage

point of a first-grader,

the book captures the wonder

of Bridges' experience —

rather than just the scariness of

that raucous first day at the school.

"It really looks like Mardi Gras

to me, but they aren't throwing

any beads. What's Mardi Gras

without beads?" Bridges writes.

The only parade that day was

out of the school. White parents

immediately began withdrawing

their children, so Bridges spent

the entire year by herself with

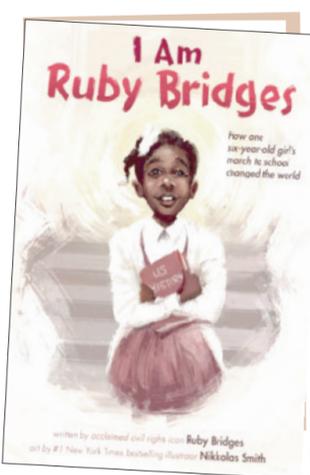
white teacher Barbara Henry,

who is still alive and a "very best

friend," Bridges said. Henry's

acceptance and kindness during

a fraught time taught her an



important lesson,

she said.

"That shaped me into a person

that is not prejudiced at

all. And I feel like that little

girl is still inside of me,

and that's it's my calling to

make sure kids understand that

you can't look at someone and

judge them," Bridges said.

Elsewhere in New Orleans on

the same day Bridges went to

school, Gail Etienne, Leona Tate

and Tessie Prevost entered the

previously all-white McDonogh

No. 19 elementary school. Last

year, New Orleans held a weekend

of events to remember Bridges

and other women.

Bridges, a Mississippi native,

still lives in metro New Orleans

and has authored or co-authored

five books. Two years she published

"This Is Your Time," which is

intended for older children

than her new book.◊

## HBCU grad crowned Mrs. Universe 2022

By Leah Clark  
Contributing Writer

After 15 years in the beauty competition arena, the Ms. World Corporation crowned Juanita Ingram as its first-ever Black winner of the Mrs. Universe title on Wednesday, Aug. 24, in Miami, Fla. Ingram, a Tennessee native, competed against more than 75 contestants representing countries from all over the world. The pageant distinguishes itself from other beauty competitions because it includes married contestants.

"I am honored to win this title and grateful to my husband, children, family, friends, and pageant coach Kyle Ean Haggerty for believing in me and supporting me," Ingram said in a statement.

While Ingram's Mrs. Universe 2022 win is historic, she is not new to the pageant world. In 2007, she became the first Black woman to compete and win the title of Mrs. Indiana United States. She also competed in Ms. World International 2012, Mrs. UK Universe 2013, Mrs. Great Britain 2011, and placed in the top three at Mrs. UK International 2014.

Ingram was also selected by the online magazine *MadameNoire* as one of the "Top 7 Black Women in Pageantry to turn Beauty into Business." Following her win, Ingram said she plans to spend the next year promoting Dress for Success, a global charity whose goal is to empower women to become economically independent by providing them with free interview attire, training and ongoing support. The charity has locations in 144 cities and 23 countries, including New Orleans on 1700 Josephine Street. Ingram is the founder and board president of two affiliates of Dress for Success in London and Chattanooga, Tenn.

Ingram's work in women empowerment stems from her own



JUANITA INGRAM  
Mrs. Universe 2022

life experiences. She received her bachelor's degree in accounting from Tennessee State University, a historically Black university in Nashville. She also received an MBA and Juris Doctorate from the University of Memphis. Ingram also is a licensed attorney and a former adjunct professor of Business Law.

In 2018, Ingram founded Purpose Productions Inc., a women-led production company whose aim is to create content celebrating narratives about BIPOC. In 2021, she launched Purpose Streaming, a streaming platform dedicated to inspirational, informational, and empowering BIPOC content.

Ingram has won awards for international TV production as well for her family-friendly docu-series "The Expats: International Ingrams," currently streaming on Amazon Prime and Roku. The show follows Ingram, her husband, and their two children as they travel abroad and learn about new cultures while navigating life as a Black family.◊

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