



Celebrating Black History Month
Gullah/Geechee Basketry

“My ancestors inspire me to weave...I sew to continue my heritage.”

Andrea “Annie” Cayetano-Jefferson

Celebrating Black History Month

Gullah/Geechee Basketry

Like the baskets by Native American artists exhibited nearby, these baskets speak to the transmission of knowledge, skills, and artistry across centuries and generations. They come from the ‘Lowcountry’ Sea Islands region around Charleston, South Carolina and are the work of Gullah/Geechee basket “sewers” and artists. They bear a complex history: of slavery and exploitation and of the work to preserve ancestral knowledge and build and strengthen communities in the face of violent loss and struggle.

The Gullah/Geechee people descend from enslaved Africans transported to the Lowcountry from West Africa’s “Rice Coast” in the seventeenth century. Their sophisticated knowledge of rice agriculture and associated technologies was exploited by slave holders to create the plantation economy that grew rice for the global market. The making of coiled baskets was among the technologies enslaved peoples carried from their homelands. Basket makers used available bulrush and palmetto palms to create baskets for winnowing, storage, and household use.



After the Civil War, basket making became a source of income for Gullah/Geechee families. Demand for baskets grew dramatically after 1929 when the main coastal road was paved. Tourists driving along Highway 17 through the Gullah community of Mount Pleasant, South Carolina were eager to acquire souvenir baskets from roadside stands. To meet expanding tourist and art markets, sewers such as Mary Jane Manigault, whose work is exhibited here, created “show baskets,” using new materials (sweetgrass and pine needles) and forming them into elaborate shapes.



Gullah/Geechee basket making continues to thrive today. Climate change and economic development have threatened access and availability of sweetgrass. Grassroots organization such as the *Mount Pleasant Sweetgrass Basketmakers' Association* and the *Sweetgrass Cultural Arts Festival Association* (SCAFA) have worked to advocate for basket makers and protect and restore plant habitats. In 2006, the U.S. Congress established the *Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor* to recognize the historic and cultural contributions of the Gullah/Geechee people.

On Exhibit

Basket 1

“In and Out” basket

Gullah/Geechee

Maker: Previously known

Materials: Sweetgrass, pine needles, and palmetto fiber

Mount Pleasant, Charleston County, South Carolina, 1977

Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, donated by Deneb Teleki in memory of Gloria Roth Teleki, 2009.8.49

Basket 2

Hanging planter basket

Gullah/Geechee

Maker: Mary Jane Manigault (1913-2010)

Materials: Sweetgrass, pine needles, and palmetto fiber

Mount Pleasant, Charleston County, South Carolina, 1977

Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, donated by Deneb Teleki in memory of Gloria Roth Teleki, 2009.8.59





Basket 1



Basket 2

Other Baskets

Basket 3

Coiled basket with lid

Gullah/Geechee

Maker: Previously known

Materials: Sweetgrass, pine needles, and palmetto fiber

Mount Pleasant, Charleston County, South Carolina, 1974

*Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, donated by Deneb Teleki
in memory of Gloria Roth Teleki, 2009.8.46*

Basket 3



Basket 4

“Missionary” basket

Gullah/Geechee

Maker: Previously known

Materials: Sweetgrass, pine needles, and palmetto fiber

Mount Pleasant, Charleston County, South Carolina, 1977

*Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, donated by Deneb Teleki in
memory of Gloria Roth Teleki, 2009.8.47*

Basket 4



Basket 5

Coiled basket

Gullah/Geechee

Maker: Previously known

Materials: Sweetgrass, palmetto fiber

Mount Pleasant, Charleston County, South Carolina, 1974

*Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, donated by Deneb Teleki
in memory of Gloria Roth Teleki, 2009.8.48*



Basket 5

Basket 6

Coiled basket with lid and strap handle

Gullah/Geechee

Maker: Previously known

Materials: Wild grass, pine needles, palmetto fiber

Mount Pleasant, Charleston County, South Carolina, 1977

*Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, donated by Deneb Teleki
in memory of Gloria Roth Teleki, 2009.8.50*



Basket 6

Sweetgrass

Other Baskets

Basket 7

Coiled basket

Gullah/Geechee

Maker: Previously known

Materials: Sweetgrass, pine needles, and palmetto fiber

Mount Pleasant, Charleston County, South Carolina, 1974

*Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, donated by Deneb Teleki
in memory of Gloria Roth Teleki, 2009.8.51*

Basket 7



Basket 8

Shopping basket

Gullah/Geechee

Maker: Previously known

Materials: Sweetgrass, pine needles, and palmetto fiber

Mount Pleasant, Charleston County, South Carolina, 1977

*Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, donated by Deneb Teleki in
memory of Gloria Roth Teleki, 2009.8.52*

Basket 8



Basket 9

Coiled basket

Gullah/Geechee

Maker: Previously known

Materials: Sweetgrass, pine needles, palmetto fiber

Mount Pleasant, Charleston County, South Carolina, 1974

*Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, donated by Deneb Teleki
in memory of Gloria Roth Teleki, 2009.8.53*



Basket 9

Basket 10

Cornucopia style basket

Gullah/Geechee

Maker: Previously known

Materials: Sweetgrass, pine needles, palmetto fiber

Mount Pleasant, Charleston County, South Carolina, 1977

*Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, donated by Deneb Teleki
in memory of Gloria Roth Teleki, 2009.8.54*



Basket 10

Other Baskets

Basket 11

Coiled basket with lid

Gullah/Geechee

Maker: Previously known

Materials: Sweetgrass, pine needles, and palmetto fiber

Mount Pleasant, Charleston County, South Carolina, 1977

*Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, donated by Deneb Teleki
in memory of Gloria Roth Teleki, 2009.8.55*

Basket 11



Basket 12

Fanner (winnowing) basket

Gullah/Geechee

Maker: Previously known

Materials: Sweetgrass, pine needles, and palmetto fiber

Mount Pleasant, Charleston County, South Carolina, 1977

*Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, donated by Deneb Teleki in
memory of Gloria Roth Teleki, 2009.8.56*

Basket 12



Basket 13

Pedestaled basket used for flowers or fruit

Gullah/Geechee

Maker: Previously known

Materials: Sweetgrass, pine needles, palmetto fiber

Mount Pleasant, Charleston County, South Carolina, 1977

*Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, donated by Deneb Teleki
in memory of Gloria Roth Teleki, 2009.8.57*



Basket 13

Basket 14

Hanging planter basket

Gullah/Geechee

Maker: Albertha Lewis

Materials: Sweetgrass, pine needles, palmetto fiber

Mount Pleasant, Charleston County, South Carolina, 1977

*Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, donated by Deneb Teleki
in memory of Gloria Roth Teleki, 2009.8.58*



Basket 14

Other Baskets

Basket 15

Coiled tray

Gullah/Geechee

Maker: Albertha Lewis

Materials: Sweetgrass, pine needles, bulrush, palmetto fiber

Mount Pleasant, Charleston County, South Carolina, 1974

Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, donated by Deneb Teleki

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Basket 15



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(see <https://www.etsy.com/blog/article/gullah-basket-weavers-share-their-stories>)