# 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 3

#### Coiled basket with lid

Gullah/Geechee

Maker: Previously known

Materials: Sweetgrass, pine needles, and palmetto fiber

Mount Pleasant, Charleston County, South Carolina, 1974

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in memory of Gloria Roth Teleki, 2009.8.46

#### 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 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

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#### 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

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# Basket 7 Coiled basket

Gullah/Geechee

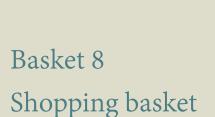
Maker: Previously known

Materials: Sweetgrass, pine needles, and palmetto fiber

Mount Pleasant, Charleston County, South Carolina, 1974

Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, donated by Deneb Teleki

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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 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 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

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Basket 9

Basket 10

#### 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 12

#### Fanner (winnowing) basket

#### Gullah/Geechee

Maker: Previously known

Materials: Sweetgrass, pine needles, and palmetto fiber

Mount Pleasant, Charleston County, South Carolina, 1977

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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 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 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 in memory of Gloria Roth Teleki, 2009.8.60



#### Acknowledgements

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Andrea "Annie" Cayetano-Jefferson, Gullah Basket Maker (see https://www.etsy.com/blog/article/gullah-basket-weavers-share-their-stories)