

***THE MEASURE OF THINGS:
I KNOW WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS***

August 21 – October 2, 2021



Toni Scott, *The Measure of Things: I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, work in progress, 2021.
Courtesy of Toni Scott. Image credit R. York.

The measurements of inequality are presented in the shape of a canoe and the chains of systemic racism are exposed, as bells ring the truth, and the fallen are memorialized.

July 22, 2021, San Francisco, CA – Minnesota Street Project Foundation is pleased to announce the opening of California Black Voices Project grantee Toni Scott's, *The Measure of Things: I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, on August 21, 2021. Presented at 1275 Minnesota

Street Project and on Adjacent, the Project's virtual space, *The Measure of Things: I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is the second of five exhibitions by the [California Black Voices Project](#) inaugural grantees. Upcoming exhibitions by California Black Voices Project grantees include Indira Allegra, Rashaad Newsome, and Leila Weefur.

Featured in the Atrium at Minnesota Street Project, *The Measure of Things: I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* memorializes Black and Brown lives lost unjustly and addresses systemic racism in the United States of America. Scott's artwork title and concept are inspired by Maya Angelou's, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, whose book title was inspired by the third stanza of Paul Laurence Dunbar's poem, *Sympathy*. Dunbar's poem implies that although the caged bird may never have experienced freedom, he still sings of it because he was created for freedom.

*I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,
When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore, —
When he beats his bars and he would be free;
It is not a carol of joy or glee,
But a prayer that he sends from his heart's deep core,
But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings—
I know why the caged bird sings!*

Scott's installation takes the form of a suspended canoe, created with measuring tapes hung at varying lengths, from each of which extends a chain and bell. Notes Scott, "The elevation of the chains and measuring tape represent the importance to elevate discussion and the immediate action needed to address racism in this country. The bells are rung in remembrance of each life lost, and to call to attention racial disparities and the importance of equality."

Scott moves the viewers aerial focus of the installation to the ground, where she has placed mounds of charred black bark wood shavings under the bells, illustrative of the collective, far too many to count, Black and Brown lives lost to racism. Building upon to the physical and visual experience of her installation, Scott has further demarcated the space around her artwork through the placement of dozens of free birds and caged birds and an auditory element to bring bird song and the reading of Angelou's inspirational work directly into her piece.

"Both Dunbar's and Angelou's writing," Scott states, "epitomize the intangible but impactful cages set upon the many who are oppressed, entrapped, and long for freedom."

"From the meditative sounds and Maya Angelou's vital work, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, to Scott's visually acute indictment of systematic racism, the installation provokes an important discussion about the immediate action needed to address racism in this country," states Deborah Rappaport, President, Minnesota Street Project Foundation.

The Measure of Things: I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings opens on August 21, 2021 and runs through October 2, 2021. The exhibition is free and open to the public at 1275 Minnesota Street

Project in the Atrium or online. For information on the Project's social distancing requirements and hours of operation visit: <http://minnesotastreetproject.com>

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Sympathy

[Paul Laurence Dunbar](#) - 1872-1906

*I know what the caged bird feels, alas!
When the sun is bright on the upland slopes;
when the wind stirs soft through the springing grass,
and the river flows like a stream of glass;
when the first bird sings and the first bud opens,
and the faint perfume from its chalice steals—
I know what the caged bird feels!
I know why the caged bird beats its wing
Till its blood is red on the cruel bars;
For he must fly back to his perch and cling
When he fain would be on the bough a-swing;
And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars
And they pulse again with a keener sting—
I know why he beats his wing!
I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,
When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore, —
When he beats his bars and he would be free;
It is not a carol of joy or glee,
But a prayer that he sends from his heart's deep core,
But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings—
I know why the caged bird sings!*

About Toni Scott

Born and raised in South Central Los Angeles, Toni Scott makes art installations and individual artworks that explore her African-American, Native American, and European heritage. Her installation “Bloodlines” was the inaugural exhibition of Discovery at the California African-American Museum in 2009, funded by a special grant from the Annenberg Foundation. Other iterations of “Bloodlines” included “Bloodlines: The Work of Toni Scott” featured in a solo exhibit at South Carolina School of the Arts, Vandiver Gallery, Anderson University, and “Bloodlines” for La Sombra El Espiritu II: Women’s Healing Rituals in the Diaspora,” University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, both in 2013. In 2017, “Bloodlines Africa,” was invited as an installation at

Cornerstone Winter School in South Africa, and in 2018 "Aswarm with the Spirits of All Ages Here: Inconceivable Spaces of Slavery and Freedom" exhibited at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Sonja Haynes Stone Center for Black Culture and History.

In 2015, Scott became an artist-in-residence as part of the Dame Jillian Sackler International Artists Exhibition Program. The resulting exhibition was held at the Arthur M. Sackler Museum of Art and Archaeology at Peking University, in Beijing China. In 2016, she was invited as the First International Artist to exhibit a solo exhibition at the Changzhou Museum in Jiangsu Province of China. "The Circle and Cycle of Life," focusing on Indigenous culture, feminism and technological advancements of the 21st century were exhibited at Arthur M. Sackler Museum at Peking University, China for the 25th Anniversary of the Sackler Museum exhibition "Intervention: International Art & Culture," and acquired for their collection in 2019.

Her work is featured in the published book "Creative Souls: African-American Artists in Greater Los Angeles," written by UCLA professor Paul Von Blum, and was exhibited at the Watt's Towers Art Center in Los Angeles in conjunction with the book's publication. Other publications include 2012 "Bloodlines: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow," Pan African Studies; 2016 Changzhou Museum Publication Catalog; 2015 Arthur M. Sackler Museum Publication Catalog "DNA, Bloodlines and the Family of Mankind"; and a 2016 essay "Death at the Hands of the Police," in Tikkun Magazine. Scott received her Bachelor of Science in International Relations at USC, and a Master of Fine Arts at UCSB (2018). She currently lives and works in Santa Barbara with a studio on grounds that Native American tribes, the Mikiw and Kutamu lived.

About California Black Voices Project

[California Black Voices Project](#) is a grant-making program of the Minnesota Street Project Foundation for Black artists and curators working in California. Five grantees were selected through a jury composed of four prominent art world professionals. Each grantee receives \$10,000, and an exhibition presented at Minnesota Street Project, as well as virtually on MSP Adjacent.

Upcoming 2021–2022 exhibitions are currently in development with California Black Voices Project inaugural grantees Indira Allegra, Rashaad Newsome, and Leila Weefur.

For information visit: <https://minnesotastreetproject.org/california-black-voices-project>

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About Minnesota Street Project Foundation

Established in 2019, [Minnesota Street Project Foundation](#) embarks on initiatives to further develop the diversity and vibrancy of arts-related culture within and beyond the Project's model. The Minnesota Street Project Foundation is dedicated to the realization of a thriving, sustainable arts community in the Bay Area.

Through collaboration, the Foundation advances educational and civic programming and provides direct financial support to artist and arts organizations. The Foundation commits to fostering relationships with local, national, and international businesses, individuals, and institutions to support the evolving landscape of art practice and patronage. For more information on supporting expanded programming, please visit [Minnesota Street Project Foundation](#).

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