

# Meaningful Fiction & the Figurative Tradition

The Art of  
Mequitta Ahuja

Sept. 14 - Nov. 22, 2017

The Robert & Sallie Brown Gallery and Museum



UNC  
THE SONJA HAYNES STONE  
CENTER FOR BLACK CULTURE  
AND HISTORY

**ARTS**  
EVERYWHERE

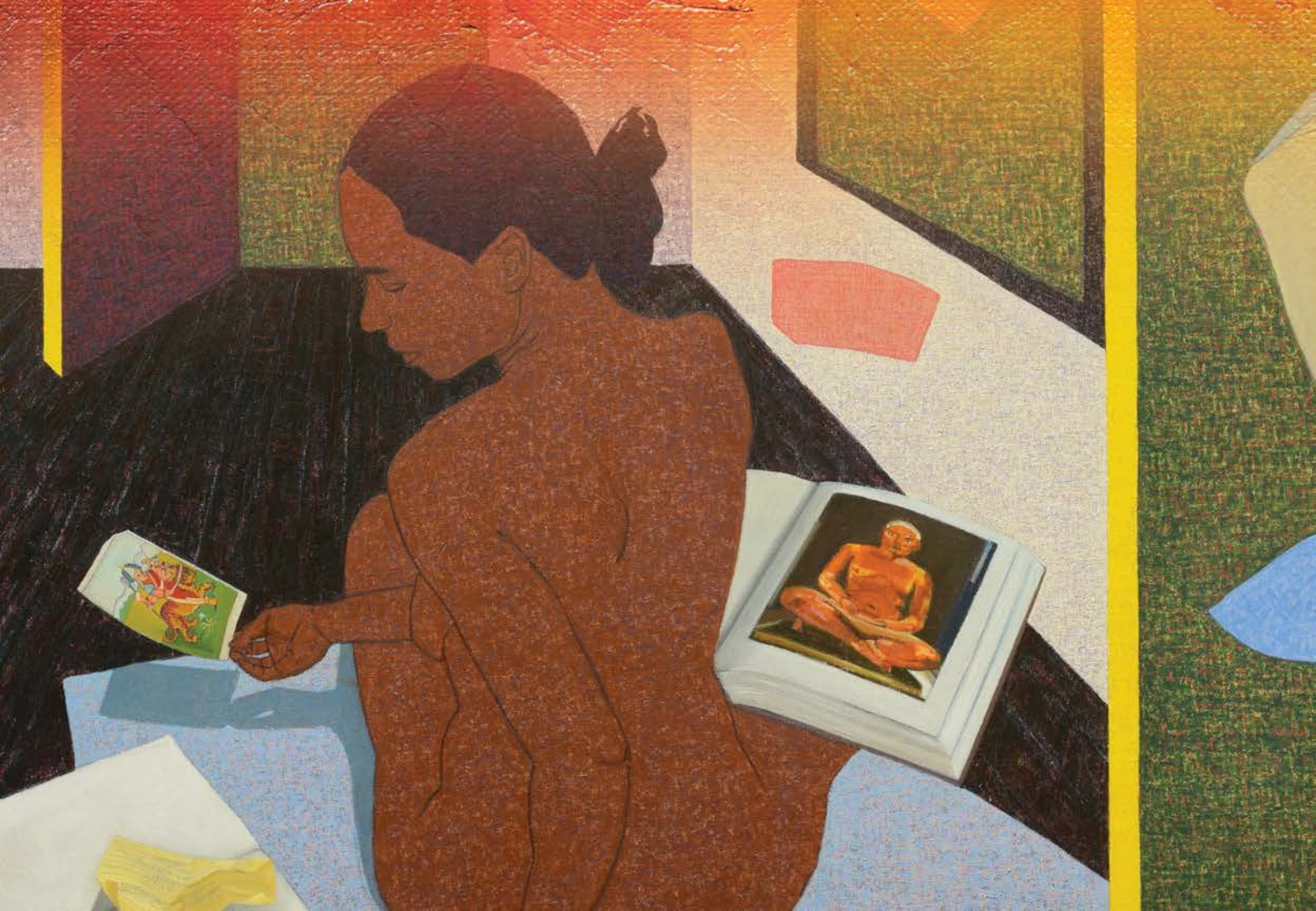


# Artist Statement

by Mequitta Ahuja

**M**y new self-portraits are not about myself. These works are about figurative painting and the artist as picture-maker. The figurative painting tradition, I argue, is the unseen made visible through a meaningful fiction. Meaningful fictions include painting conventions established over centuries and displayed throughout museums. I make the language of the figurative tradition clear by simplifying forms to basic shapes and by visually cataloging common motifs, such as: hand gestures, swags of fabric, meeting the viewer's gaze, creased paper presented as trompe l'oeil, architecture that frames a narrative, one-point perspective, the allegorical figure and pyramid and grid compositions. In individual works and in groups of works, I focus on essential issues of picture making such as scale, primary color and underlying geometric structure, visually cataloging painting conventions while using those conventions to make new meanings. I repurpose ideas and approaches to painting across time and geography including Egyptian form, Giotto frescoes, Hindu figuration and early American painting. In many of my works, I depict paintings within paintings, representing paintings as objects that come from specific cultural traditions. They shed and gain meaning as they move through time, place and through the hands of their owners. By working strategically within painting's pasts, I knit my contemporary concerns, personal and painterly into the centuries old conversation of representation and recast self-portraiture as a treatise on picture making.

My work is a form of tribute, analysis and intervention: tribute, out of sincere admiration for the figurative tradition; analysis, by making something vast comprehensible to both myself and to my viewers and intervention, by positioning a woman-of-color as primary picture-maker, in whose hands the figurative tradition is refashioned.







Mequitta Ahuja

# Biography

**M**equitta is a figurative painter. She holds an M.F.A. from the University of Illinois and lives in Baltimore, Maryland. On June 1st, 2007, Holland Cotter of the New York Times, sighting Mequitta's NY debut exhibition stated, "Referring to the artist's African-American and East Indian background, the pictures turn marginality into a regal condition." Mequitta has focused her career efforts on museum exhibitions, most notably: Portraiture Now at the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery, Marks of Genius at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, State of the Art at Crystal Bridges, Champagne Life at the Saatchi Gallery, Global Feminisms at the Brooklyn Museum and The Bearden Project at the Studio Museum in Harlem. Mequitta's top priority is time in the studio which has led her to participate in artist in residence programs at the Core Program, the Maryland Institute College of Art, the Studio Museum in Harlem, the Siena Art Institute in Siena, Italy and at the Dora Maar House in Menerbes, France. Mequitta's work has appeared in Modern Painters, and in 2010, she was featured in ArtNews as "An Artist to Watch."





**Border** | 84" x 80"



**A Real Allegory of Her Studio** | 84" x 96"



**Sales Slip** | 84" x 80"



**Birthright** | 84" x 80"





Charm | 42" x 40"



Seated Scribbler | 84" x 80"



Author | 84" x 80"



Close Quote | 84" x 80"



### About the Robert and Sallie Brown Gallery and Museum

The Robert and Sallie Brown Gallery and Museum at the Sonja Haynes Stone Center for Black Culture and History is dedicated to the enrichment of visual culture on campus and in the community. The Brown Gallery supports the Stone Center's commitment to the critical examination of all dimensions of African-American and African diaspora cultures through formal exhibition of works of art, artifacts and material culture.

### History and Overview of the Stone Center

The Sonja Haynes Stone Center for Black Culture and History is part of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. As a Center within the Academic Affairs Division under the Provost's Office, we play a central role in supporting the academic mission of the University. We have a commitment to broaden the range of intellectual discourse about African Americans and to encourage a better understanding of the peoples of Africa and the African diaspora and their perspectives on important social and cultural issues.

## THE SONJA HAYNES STONE CENTER for BLACK CULTURE AND HISTORY

*The UNIVERSITY of NORTH CAROLINA at CHAPEL HILL*

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