



SELF EVIDENT (FOR SALLY HEMMINGS) (2015)

Self Evident (for Sally Hemmings) explores American family diversity through a dress. The skirt of 18th century garment holds the family tree of Sally Hemmings, her half-sister Martha Wayles Skelton and Sally's master and father of her children, President Thomas Jefferson. The family tree shows Sally Hemmings and Martha Wayles Skelton had the same white father, Captain John Wayles. Martha married Jefferson and Sally became a slave in the President's household. Martha, dying after childbirth, made her husband promise not to remarry to spare their children her experience of a cruel stepmother. A widower, Jefferson went to Paris to negotiate on behalf of the United States taking Sally as his enslaved nanny. Their intimacy produced a pregnancy in France, where slavery was illegal and Sally could have been a free woman. Hemmings returned to America after making Jefferson promise their children would be free at age 21. They had several children born in the United States.

Some Hemmings/Jefferson descendants became famous writers, musicians, war heroes and politicians. Descendant Frederick Madison Roberts was elected California's first black Assemblyman. Both Sally Hemmings and Martha Jefferson worked for a better life for their offspring, using methods available to them at the time.

Through *Self Evident* Ellison explores how actions in the household and statehouse intersect to affect lives and liberty. The bronze, cast at the Walla Walla Foundry in

Artist:

Tori Ellison

Collection:

City of Inglewood

Medium:

Wall Mounted Sculpture

Material:

Cast bronze with Engraving and Patinas

Size:

40" x 20" x 10"

Inglewood Public Library
101 West Manchester Boulevard
Inglewood, California

Washington State, is made from a plaster mold based on the artist's extended studies in the costume collections in Jefferson's Monticello, Virginia estate. The sculpture was inspired by Monticello Wakes, an opera about Sally Hemings created by Garrett Fisher and Tim Appello with set and costume design by Ellison. Monticello Wakes premiered at Loyola Marymount University with the school's professional choir performing in Inglewood's lecture hall in October 2015. Inglewood City Council proclaimed April 16, 2016 as Sally Hemings Day to honor the sculpture dedication and a great American leader.



Tori Ellison

Tori Ellison is a visual artist creating painting, sculpture, installation and prints. Her work is in public and private collections and she has exhibited in widely and presented solo exhibits across the United States. Ellison won fellowships from MacDowell Colony, Blue Mountain Center for the Arts, Women's Studio Workshop and Virginia Center for the Arts; has published art writing in LA Weekly and Seattle Times, among others, and edited publications for the Guggenheim Foundation and Philadelphia Museum of Art. Tori Ellison earned her BA from Reed College in Portland and MFA from the School of the Visual Arts in New York. She resides in Los Angeles.



Sally Hemings Day in the City of Inglewood

WHEREAS, the United States Congress established the month of March as Women’s History Month in 1987; and

WHEREAS, Women’s History Month highlights the extraordinary legacy and ongoing achievements of American women. Men and women have worked together to build this nation; often women were unsung and their contributions unnoticed; and

WHEREAS, the achievements, leadership, courage, strength and love of the women who built America are as vital as that of the men whose names we know so well. It is an essential and indispensable heritage from which we can draw pride, comfort, courage, and long-range vision from women especially the leaders of color who struggled for equality. One such women is Sally Hemings; and

WHEREAS, art, as an essential part of the arts and humanities, affects every aspect of life in America today, including education, the economy, and community pride. Art enhances and enriches the lives of all Americans and Tori Ellison’s sculpture reflects on how, at the birth of this nation, policy was made in the statehouse and implemented in the household. The bronze dress signifies women’s impact on history written, hidden and revealed; and

WHEREAS, Self Evident acknowledges Sally Hemings’ work for a better life for her offspring, knowing, as Jefferson wrote: “Those who come after us will be wiser than we are, for light is spreading.” Now, therefore be it resolved that the Inglewood City Council, does hereby proclaim April 16, 2016 as **Sally Hemings Day**.