

CAMILLE MORINEAU AND AWARE PRESENT  
**SISTER GERTRUDE MORGAN**  
SPOTLIGHT, FRIEZE MASTERS 2022



*Sister Gertrude was strong and frisky. She described to me how God came to her in a dream, and told her to stop playing the guitar and instead to illustrate the Bible. But God did not say anything about stopping playing the tambourine, so she continued with that.*

Lee Friedlander, photographer (2009)

Photographed by Lee Friedlander, lionised by Andy Warhol, re-mixed by King Britt, the remarkable **Sister Gertrude Morgan** (née Gertrude Williams) was a rare and rarified figure in the aesthetic history of 20th century America: a confident female artist, whose visceral image-making went hand-in-hand with the saving of souls.

Born in 1900 in Lafayette, Alabama, **Morgan** was as modest as she was larger-than-life. Her *New Orleans Gospel Mission* was a spiritual home for believers and non-believers alike. For it was here that she proselytised and painted and rattled her tambourine, when she was not out singing, preaching and teaching Bible to neighbourhood strays.

These moments became the content of her legend. **Morgan** depicted the everyday alongside the divine, outputting her pictorial rhetoric onto any surface she could find. Scraps of card, window blinds, paper fans and serving trays carried her repertoire. They evoked a biographical other-worldly hybrid, where *New Jerusalem* resembled New Orleans, and where the good Sister's marriage to Jesus, God or both, swirled among the heavenly bodies and elliptical texts.

*The first time I heard her voice it just pierced my whole spirit.*  
King Britt, music producer (2005)

Although the Black Arts Movement was peaking on the East Coast of America, **Morgan** remained remote from their community, separated by not only by geographical distance, but also by artistic intent. She was a local Louisiana hero, even a star: a stout, middle-aged, African-American lady, who was successfully painting - and exhibiting her painting - at a time when few peers dared even expose their material, let alone in the racist, misogynist and conservative South.

Often to be seen on the streets in her signature white pinafore, it was the performative nature of her practice which brought her to the attention of Larry Borenstein and Allen Jaffe. Working together, these high-octane stalwarts of the city brought **Morgan**'s work into dialogue with the wider arts community via Borenstein's art gallery at Preservation Hall.

**Morgan**'s prolific output led to a fast uptake amongst the New Orleans arts community of the 1960s and 1970s, reaching New York via Andy Warhol's Interview Magazine and a 1973 article by Rosemary Kent. Major exhibitions were to follow, including the Corcoran Gallery's barrier-breaking *Black Folk Art in America 1930-1980* (1982), which toured the US. Almost 40 years after her passing, a major retrospective curated by William Fagaly opened at New York's American Folk Art Museum, and traveled to New Orleans Museum of Art.

**Morgan** has today been rediscovered by a younger generation of American and international curators. Her work was a foundation stone in *Outliers and the American Vanguard Art* (2019), curated by Lynne Cooke, and travelled from the National Gallery at the Smithsonian (Washington DC) to the High Museum (Atlanta) and LACMA (Los Angeles).

Earlier this year, **Morgan** was featured in the central pavillion of Cecilia Alemani's *The Milk of Dreams* at the 59th Venice Biennale. Her emblematic song *Got a New World in My View* (1970) was featured in the Martin Luther King Jr biopic, *Selma* (2014); and her classic *Let's Make a Record* was reworked by DJ and producer King Britt in 2005.

The 2022 installation in Spotlight at Frieze Masters features rarely seen large-scale works, as well as elements of the artist's original *Faith Mission* in New Orleans. Prices range from £7,500 to £55,000, with select works reserved for museums and public collections. This is the first time that **Sister Gertrude Morgan** has been presented as a standalone artist at an international art fair.

*I am a missionary of Christ before I'm an artist.*  
**Sister Gertrude Morgan** (1973)

#### Selected Collections

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington DC  
High Museum of Art, Atlanta  
Louisiana State Museum Collections  
The Ogden Museum of Southern Art, New Orleans  
New Orleans Museum of Art  
American Folk Art Museum NYC  
Philadelphia Museum of Art  
Milwaukee Art Museum  
National Gallery of Art, Washington  
LACMA, Los Angeles  
The Johnson Collection Spartanburg, SC

#### Selected Exhibitions

Twentieth-Century Folk Art, Museum Of American Folk Art, New York, 1970  
Dimensions Of Black, La Jolla Museum Of Art, California  
Louisiana Folk Paintings: Bruce Brice, Clementine Hunter, Sister Gertrude Morgan, Museum Of American Folk Art, 1973  
Black Folk Art In America, Corcoran Gallery Of Art, Washington D.c., 1930-1980  
Huntington Art Gallery, University Of Texas, Austin, 1989  
Outliers And American Vanguard Art, National Gallery Of Art, Washington Dc, 2018  
The Milk Of Dreams, 59th Venice Biennale, Italy, 2022

