

Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson was born in Columbus, Ohio, in 1940.

When she was a little girl, her father taught her how to draw and how to make books from homemade paper and "hogmawg," a collection of mud, clay, twigs, leaves, lime, animal grease, and glue. The artist uses hogmawg in both two-dimensional and three-dimensional work. Her mother taught her weaving, needlework, and button work.

From a very young age, she knew she wanted to be an artist and began attending the Columbus Art School (now the Columbus College of Art and Design) on Saturdays while she was still in high school and then continued after she graduated from high school.

Aminah creates sculpture, RagGonNons, rag paintings, paintings on cloth, drawings, and books. Many of them are about her family and community and about the stories she has been told by her elders. She also researches the lives of abolitionists, civil rights leaders, musicians, and writers and depicts them in her art.

Her art is grounded in her belief in the African concept of Sankofa, learning from the past in order to move forward. She has taken extended journeys to various countries in Africa; New York City; Sapelo Island, Georgia; Israel; and Chile. Each journey has resulted in a series of art that often includes a RagGonNon, a large and complex work of art that is often on cloth encrusted with buttons, beads, and other found objects.

The artist has had her work exhibited in museums and galleries throughout the United States and she has received numerous awards and grants from arts organizations. In 2002, the Columbus Museum of Art organized a retrospective exhibition of her work that traveled throughout the country. In 2004, Aminah was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship which is given to "talented individuals who have shown extraordinary originality and dedication in their creative pursuits and a marked capacity for self-direction."

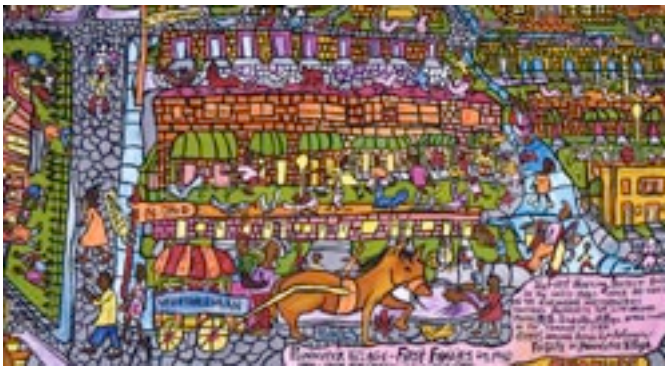
Her work is in many private collections and in many museums including the Columbus Museum of Art, the Cincinnati Art Museum, the Brooklyn Museum of Art, the Tacoma Art Museum and the Newark Museum.

## Timeline

### 1940

Brenda Lynn Robinson is born in Columbus, Ohio.

Family moves to Columbus' Poindexter Village, one of the first federally funded apartment complexes in the country.



*Poindexter Village – First Families in 1940*, 1995  
Private Collection



*Untitled, (Aminah and her dog)*,  
1950

"I began drawing at the age of three. My father would give me wood to paint on and paint in little enamel tins. My studio was under my bed...I never had any doubt in my mind about being an artist."

### Aminah



Aminah in hat at Beatty Park Recreation Center, 1950.



Aminah between her parents with sisters Sue and Sharon, 1951.

**1957**

Graduates from East High School.

Enters Columbus Art School (now Columbus College of Art and Design).



Aminah, 1957

**1963**

Participates in Civil Rights March on Washington.



*Unwritten Love Letter: March on Washington, 1989*

**1964**

Marries Clarence Robinson who is in the Air Force and moves with him to a military base in Boise, Idaho.



Aminah and Sydney, 1968



*Child of the Field*, 1978 (Sydney, age 11)

## 1967

Sydney Edward Robinson is born in Biloxi, Mississippi.

## 1968

Meets Columbus woodcarver Elijah Pierce.



Elijah Pierce, Mrs. Pierce, and Aminah

“Elijah Pierce was my spiritual mentor and friend. He was a great person, a great artist, and a person who walked with integrity, and he passed on so much of that wisdom to me... We just generally like to be around each other. There was just a connection there.”

Aminah

**1971**

Separates from Clarence, moves to Columbus with Sydney.

**1972**

Begins 19-year career with Columbus Recreation and Parks.

**1974**

Buys house in Columbus and moves there with Sydney



*Gift of Love, 1974–2002,*  
promised gift to the  
Columbus Museum of Art

“I started this chair in 1974. I was trying to find furniture for the house. So I said, “I need to build a chair.” I didn’t really have the materials, so my father and friends gave me scraps... It represents my family and community. That's what the chair is about—life in Columbus.”

Aminah

**1979**

Study trip to Africa, receives name "Aminah" From a holy man in Egypt.

I made paper before going to Africa... I made a leather pack to hold my drawing paper and a leather pack to hold my pencils and ink. All I wanted to do was draw and capture the spirit of the people.



Aminah demonstrating spinning at a Columbus Recreation and Parks program, 1979.  
Photo by Kojo Kamau.



*Streets of Dakar, Senegal, 1980*

**1983**

Visits Sapelo Island, Georgia, where her ancestors were slaves before and during the Civil War.

First group exhibition at the Carl Solway Gallery, Cincinnati, Ohio.



*Basket Woman, 1984.*  
Huntington National Bank

Sapelo is off the coast of Savannah, Georgia and it takes twenty minutes to cross over on the Sapelo ferry. In the early 1800s, it was owned by Thomas Spalding. He would go to the auction block in South Carolina, purchase a lot of slaves, and bring them back to Sapelo to work the cotton and sugar cane fields.

Aminah

## **1989**

Receives Governor's Award for the Visual Arts from the Ohio Arts Council.

Receives a grant from the Ohio Arts Council for a residency at PS 1 in Queens, New York.

Receives a Minority Artist Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts to work with Robert Blackburn at the Printmaking Workshop in New York City.



Red Scarf (from New York Series), 1989 Private Collection

Group exhibition– Stitching Memories: African–American Story Quilts, Williams College, Studio Museum of Harlem, Oakland Museum, and others

**1990**

Columbus Metropolitan Library commission



Life in Sellsville and Life in the Blackberry Patch, 1990.  
Columbus Metropolitan Library

## 1992

Group exhibition, Will/Power at the Wexner Center for the Arts, The Ohio State University.

Writes and illustrates *The Teachings*, published by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

The spirituals speak of survival, of freedom and determination, of love and faith, of justice and hope. The spirituals, weaving together the memories that carry us into the future, must not be forgotten. They are our stories, our chants, our dreams, our lives. As they did so long ago, they continue to reach out and offer hope.

Aminah, from *The Teachings*



Cover art for *The Teachings*, 1992

## 1994

Aminah's son Sydney dies.

## 1997

First exhibition at Hammond Harkins Gallery, Columbus.

## 1998

Ohio Arts Council residency in Herzilya, Israel.



*Muslim Arab, Old City Old City of Jerusalem, 1998*



*Orthodox Jew, Old City of Jerusalem, 1998*

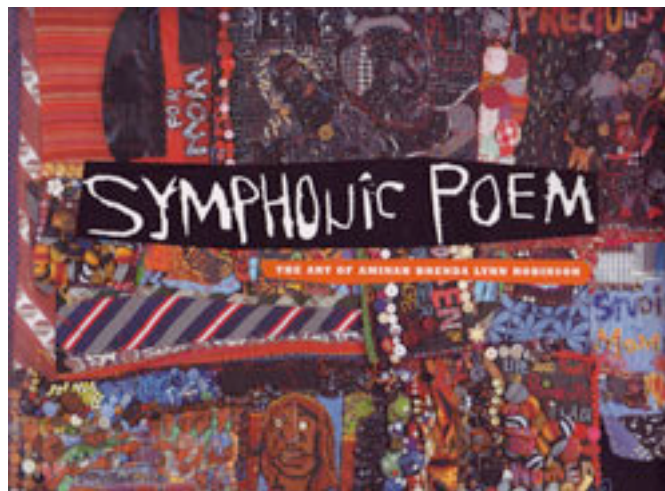
“In Israel, I took in the three religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. I saw a whole spectrum of people, and they were all sacred.”

Aminah

**2002**

Symphonic Poem, retrospective exhibition at the Columbus Museum of Art.

Receives an honorary doctor of fine arts degree from Ohio Dominican University.



Cover, Symphonic Poem catalogue, 2002

**2003**

2003 National Underground Railroad Freedom Center commission,  
Cincinnati.



*Journeys*, detail, National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, Cincinnati

**2004**

Solo exhibition at the National Museum of Fine Arts, Santiago, Chile.

Receives MacArthur award

**2006**

Symphonic Poem travels to Brooklyn Art Museum, Tacoma Art Museum,  
and Toledo Museum of Art.

Solo exhibition at ACA Gallery, New York City.

2007

Ohio University Baker Center commission.

Water Street: New Work by Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson, Columbus Museum of Art.



Life Along Water Street, 2007



Aminah at Ohio University Baker Center, 2007  
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