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Wayne State unveils art exhibit today honoring Rosa Parks, Judge Damon Keith

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Rosa Parks is seen in her Feb. 22, 1956, mug shot photo. The photo was found in a book along with other records of the arrest's of Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks. / Kevin Glackmeyer/Associated Press

Wayne State University will unveil a new art installation at its law school today to honor two civil rights pioneers with Detroit roots: Rosa Parks and U.S. District Judge Damon J. Keith.

The news media will have a preview at 9 a.m. and the exhibit will open to the public at 10 a.m. The installation, "A Garland of Praise Songs for Rosa Parks," is made up of 26 wood, fiber and fabric totems.

The exhibit was created by Detroit's Lester Johnson through a grant from the DTE Energy Foundation. Johnson recently retired after 35 years as a fine arts professor at the College for Creative Studies in Detroit.

The exhibit will be open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. today and then from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays. Admission is free.



By David Jesse
Detroit Free Press
Education
Writer

Peter J. Hammer, director of the Keith Center, said he enjoys all that the creation represents.

"It's about civil rights and celebrates the friendship of Rosa Parks and Judge Keith," Hammer said in a press release. "Because it honors two Detroiters, it's also fitting that it was created by a Detroit artist."

According to a description of the installation: "The rich fabric is significant. It represents traditional African cloth worn by Africans and those of African descent. It embodies community, uniting the fabric makers, the art itself and the viewers. It honors Parks' vocation as a seamstress. And it highlights the brilliance of creation: Just as a seamstress builds bolts of cloth from threads, African Americans have created community, livelihoods and spirituality

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despite exclusion and injustice. Judge Keith exemplifies how African Americans have interwoven intelligence, bravery and tenacity to achieve greatness despite the odds. The fabric also illuminates the kinship between art and the civil rights movement, inviting us to contemplate the imagery, objects and narratives of social justice that exist outside courtrooms.”

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