



NEWS RELEASE

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Mobile, Alabama – On January 26th, 2019, the Mobile Medical Museum will unveil the third and last commissioned work in a series of sculptural portraits by local artist April Livingston. Titled *Motherwork*, the piece is a tribute to the vital health care services provided by midwives throughout Alabama's history.

Motherwork is a cast-iron sculpture showing eight pairs of life-size hands clasped together to form a circular, shield-like shape, with an open space between the hands that allows light to pass through. From the side view, the sculpture curves outward, resembling the swollen belly of a pregnant woman. Each pair of hands is cast from a real-life midwife or obstetric nurse.

The title of the work is a term used by the distinguished sociologist Patricia Hill Collins to describe the work traditionally performed by midwives, who were predominantly African American women:

Women of color have performed motherwork that challenges social construction of work and family as separate spheres, of male and female gender roles as similarly dichotomized, and of the search for autonomy as the guiding human question... 'motherwork' goes beyond ensuring the survival of one's own biological children or those of one's family. This type of motherwork recognizes that individual survival, empowerment, and identity require group survival, empowerment and identity.

The sculpture will be permanently installed in the Museum's Robert Thrower Medicinal Garden, along with the other sculptural portraits by Livingston: *Portrait of Bessie McGhee*, depicting a beloved Poarch Creek midwife and herbalist; and *Portrait of Dr. James A. Franklin, Sr.*, showing one of Mobile's first and most successful African American physicians. The new sculptures have been designated a bicentennial project by the Alabama Bicentennial Commission. The Mobile Medical Museum will be offering curriculum-based tours and other public programs throughout the year so that visitors of all ages can engage with the presented historical themes on many levels.

"Through the 19th century, midwives attended a majority of births in the United States and other countries across the world," says Dr. Daryn Glassbrook, Executive Director of the Mobile Medical Museum. "In 2017, lay midwives were legally permitted to attend home births in the state of Alabama for the first time in over 40 years. At the start of this new era, we hope

that *Motherwork* will inspire new conversations and reflections about the historical legacy and future of midwifery.”

The creation of *Motherwork* has been made possible by grants from the Alabama State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts.

About the Mobile Medical Museum

Founded in 1962, by Dr. Samuel Eichold, II, the Mobile Medical Museum preserves and exhibits medical artifacts and archives to commemorate Mobile’s prominent place in the history of medical education and public health within the state of Alabama and the Gulf Coast. The Museum’s collections and exhibitions provide the public with a broad understanding of the evolution of the art and science of health care.

Since 2004, the Museum has been located at the Vincent-Doan House, Mobile’s oldest extant private residence, which is located on the midtown campus of the University of South Alabama Children’s and Women’s Hospital. Included on the National Register of Historic Places of the National Park Service, the house was built in 1827 by Captain Benjamin Vincent, who commanded several cargo vessels that sailed between New Orleans and Mobile.

The Museum’s collections include thousands of medical artifacts, photographs, and documents from the past 300 years. The Museum also houses the J.L. Bedsole Archives and Ben May Library, which together contain over 50 cubic feet of letters, doctor’s registers, photographs, and rare books.

The Mobile Medical Museum is a locally supported 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and does not receive any funding from federal, state, county, or city taxes.