

Goya Contemporary
Goya-Girl Press

Sonya Clark

Hair/Goods: An Homage to Madam C.J. Walker



Baltimore

Sonya Clark

Internationally acclaimed fiber and social practice artist **Sonya Clark** (born 1967) is a native of Washington D.C., and the daughter of a Jamaican mother and a Trinidadian father of Yoruba decent.

Clark's socially engaged practices address the complexity of American culture and history, including its evolution through colonization, slavery, inequity, and immigration. Clark's wide-ranging body of work has crossed styles and media, utilizing humble materials from daily life such as combs, thread, wigs, coins, seed beads, found objects, flags, and human hair, to craft exquisite objects that transpose craft into a potent stage for social commentary, activism, truth telling, and change. These objects simultaneously honor craftspeople and notable African American figures such as former President Barack Obama, or the entrepreneur Madam CJ Walker.

Sonya Clark links inanimate objects to the human condition to address race and visibility, heritage, and to expose and redress history. "Objects have personal and cultural meaning because they absorb our stories and reflect our humanity back to us. My stories, your stories, our stories are held in the object," says Clark.



The artist's family history informed her appreciation of diaspora and Afro-Caribbean traditions. Her maternal grandmother, a tailor from whom she learned to sew, and maternal grandfather, a skilled woodworker and furniture maker, further inspired the artist. Her work points out cultural symbols, often rooted in deep meaning and political histories. Her objects divulge Clark's respect for other cultures, and she has studied with craftspeople from Australia, Ghana, India, Brazil, China, and Indonesia to enhance her comprehension of the cultural association's objects transport, as well as to hone her technical acumen with tools, techniques, and scholarship with historical accuracy.

Clark has received numerous awards, including the James Renwick Alliance Distinguished Educator Award (2018), the Anonymous Was A Woman Award (2016), ArtPrize Juried Grand Prize (co-winner, 2014), the Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship (2010 and 2011), and a Pollock-Krasner Fellowship. Her work has been exhibited in more than 350 museums and galleries throughout the world.

Major projects include a two-year residency with The Fabric Workshop and Museum in PA; the exhibition *Sonya Clark: Monumental Cloth, The Flag We Should Know*; *Matrix* at Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, CT; *Sonya Clark: Self-Evident* at the African American Museum in Philadelphia; *The Hair Craft Project*, which honors the creative integrity of everyday, under-recognized hair crafters; the *Kente Flag Project*, which explored ideas of cultural symbols and hybridized identity; and *Unraveling*, which invites the general public to work side by side with Clark to systematically unravel the Confederate flag one thread at a time. In 2021, Clark opens her major one-woman exhibition, *Sonya Clark: Tatter, Bristle, Mend* at The National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington DC.

Clark was a Distinguished Research Fellow in the School of Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University where she served as chair for the Craft/Material Studies Department from 2006 until 2017. She is currently a Professor of Art at Amherst College in Massachusetts, from where she received an Honorary Doctorate in 2015.



Sonya Clark
Cornrow Chair, 2011

Upholstered chair, thread,
embroidery, braiding
36 x 20 x 20 inches
Clar-1009-C

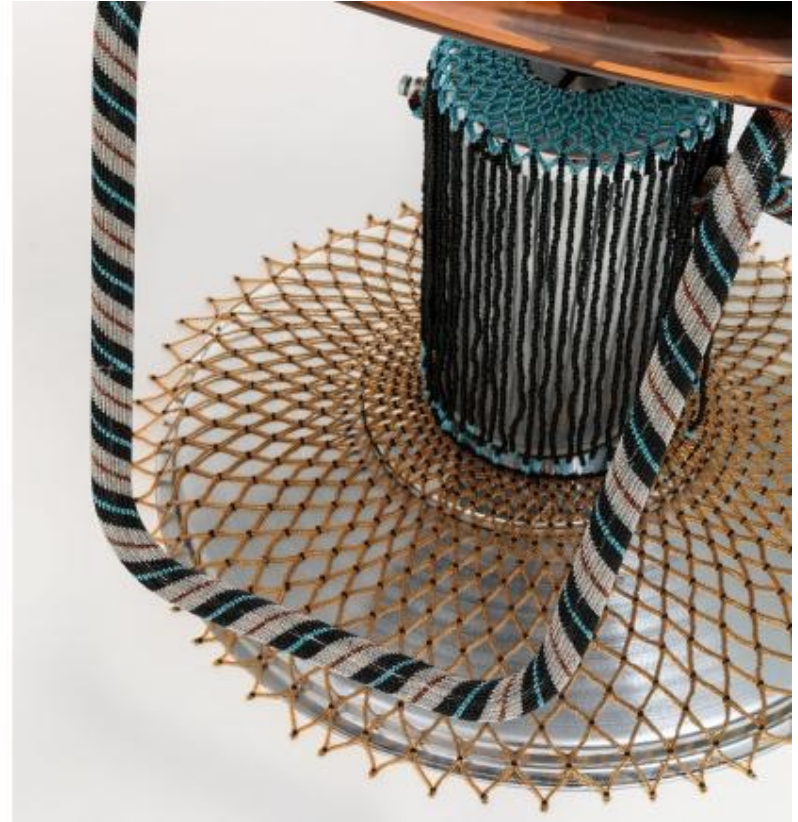


Sonya Clark
Throne, 2016

Found salon chair, cloth,
beads
50 x 30 x 30 inches
Clar-1010-C

“Hairdressing is
the primordial
fiber art.”

-Bill Gaskins





Installation of *Hair/Goods: An Homage to Madam C.J. Walker*

Sonya Clark
Hair Craft Project with Chaunda, 2014

Pigment print on archival paper
29 x 29 inches
Edition 2/10
Clar-1021-C



Sonya Clark
Hair Craft Project with Ife, 2014

Pigment print on archival paper
29 x 29 inches
Edition 2/10
Clar-1026-C



Sonya Clark
Hair Craft Project with Natasha, 2014

Pigment print on archival paper
29 x 29 inches
Edition 2/10
Clar-1027-C





Installation of *Hair/Goods: An Homage to Madam C.J. Walker*

Sonya Clark
Hair Craft Project with Nasirah, 2014

Pigment print on archival paper
29 x 29 inches
Edition 2/10
Clar-1023-C

“The poetry and politics
of Black hair care
specialists are central to
my work as an artist.
Rooted in a rich legacy,
their hands embody an
ability to map a head with
a comb and manipulate
the fiber we grow into
complex form.”

- Sonya Clark



Sonya Clark
Hair Craft Project with Anita, 2014

Pigment print on archival paper
29 x 29 inches
Edition 2/10
Clar-1022-C



Sonya Clark
*Hair Craft Project with Jasmine
and Jameika, 2014*

Pigment print on archival paper
29 x 29 inches
Edition 2/10
Clar-1024-C





Installation of *Hair/Goods: An Homage to Madam C.J. Walker*

Sonya Clark
Hair Craft Project with Ingrid, 2014

Pigment print on archival paper
29 x 29 inches
Edition 2/10
Clar-1025-C



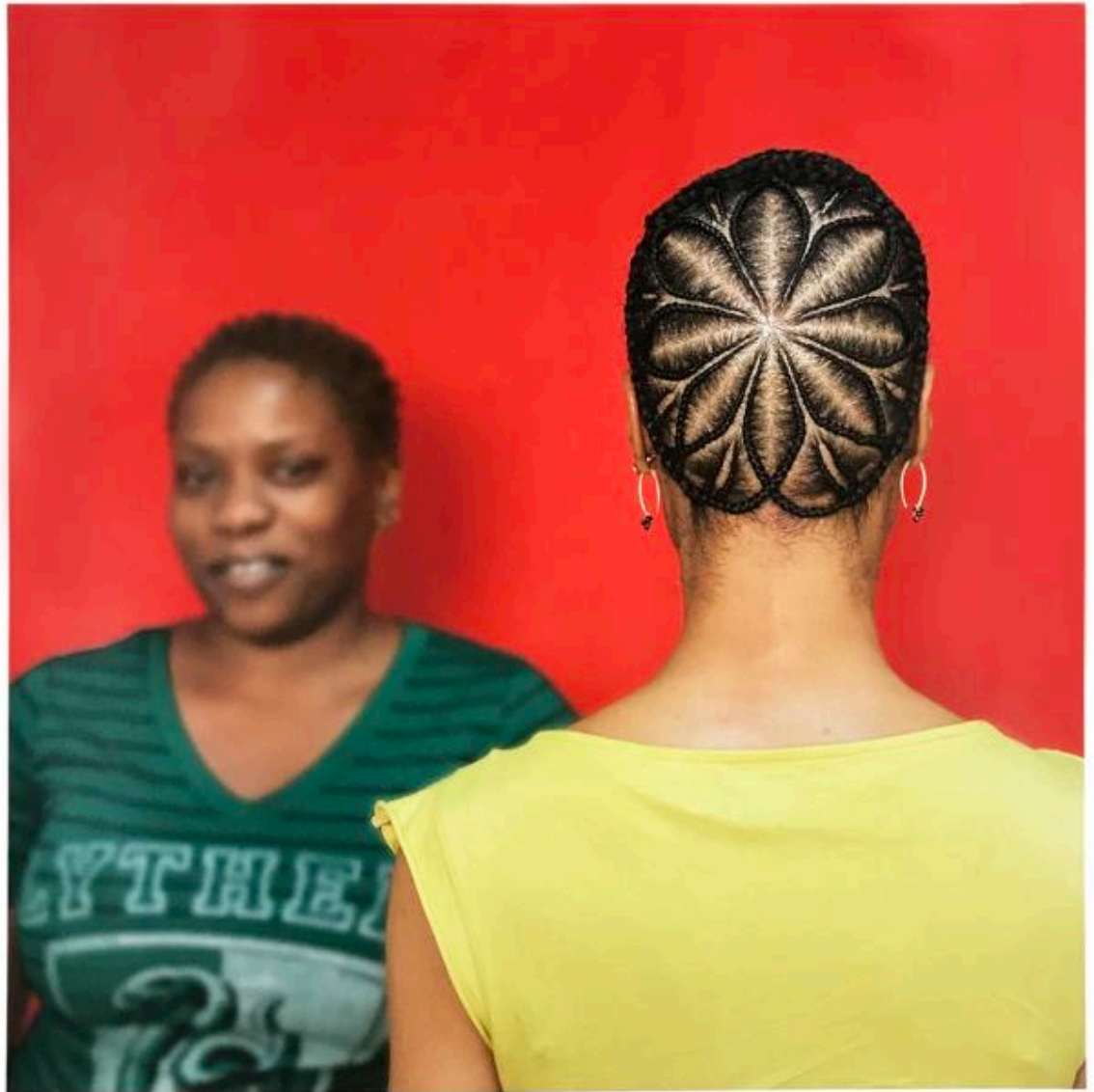
Sonya Clark
Hair Craft Project with Marsha, 2014

Pigment print on archival paper
29 x 29 inches
Edition 2/10
Clar-1020-C



Sonya Clark
Hair Craft Project with Jamilah, 2014

Pigment print on archival paper
29 x 29 inches
Edition 2/10
Clar-1028-C



Madam C.J. Walker (born Sarah Breedlove; December 23, 1867 – May 25, 1919) was an entrepreneur, philanthropist, and social activist chronicled as America’s first self-made female African American millionaire. Her amassed wealth accrued through her own tenacity, business acumen, and intellect. Walker built her fortune by developing and marketing a line of hair care and cosmetic products for black women through the business she founded, *Madam C. J. Walker Manufacturing Company*.

Walker produced generational wealth that had a major impact on her descendants, if not the African American community at large. The exhibition’s Curator, Amy Eva Raehse, says: “Walker is a historically relevant subject worthy of study across myriad disciplines including American History, Business, Economics, Feminist Movements, and even the principles of Socially Responsible Investing...yet Walker is often omitted from much of the white-centric history still taught in today’s educational curriculum. It is exasperating that this remarkable woman is not a worldwide household name, yet Clark celebrates her legacy in such a potent and beautiful way that aims to teach about Walker’s story and relevance.”

Sonya Clark
Hair Craft Project with Kamala, 2014

Pigment print on archival paper
29 x 29 inches
Edition 2/10
Clar-1018-C



Sonya Clark
Hair Craft Project with Dionne, 2014

Pigment print on archival paper
29 x 29 inches
Edition 2/10
Clar-1019-C





Installation of *Hair/Goods: An Homage to Madam C.J. Walker*

Sonya Clark
For Colored Girls, A Rainbow #1, 2019

Wig, cast plastic combs, wrapped
thread
12 x 12 x 5 inches
Clar-1015-C



Sonya Clark
For Colored Girls, A Rainbow, B1,
2019

Wig, cast plastic combs, wrapped
thread
12 x 12 x 5 inches
Clar-1032-C



Sonya Clark
For Colored Girls, A Rainbow, O1,
2019

Wig, cast plastic combs, wrapped thread
12 x 12 x 3 inches
Clar-1031-C



Sonya Clark
Gold Teeth, 2008

Plastic combs, individually cast
bronze teeth
5.5 x 1 inches
Clar-1008-C



Born in Louisiana, Madam CJ Walker was the only of her siblings born into freedom, after the Emancipation Proclamation was signed. In the early 1870's Walker helped her family pick cotton on the plantation where they had been enslaved. Her parents died young, leaving Walker an orphan by age seven. With very little formal education, Walker moved to Mississippi where she began working as a "domestic."

Walker married by the age of 14 and gave birth to a daughter, A'Lelia, in 1885. In 1888 Walker, now divorced, and her daughter moved to St. Louis where Walker worked as a laundress. In 1905, Walker moved to Colorado where she began to develop her hair care business. In 1906, she married (a third time) Charles Joseph Walker, taking on the moniker Madam CJ Walker. By 1908, Walker's success afforded her the opportunity to move to Pennsylvania to establish Lelia College, a training program for women aspiring to work in the field of hair care. Training agents, Walker's company and sales associates grew nationwide, with offices from Indianapolis to Harlem, New York. By the time of her death, Walker had purportedly trained and employed over 20,000 women.

Sonya Clark
Mom's Wisdom, 2011

Crayon and burning on
polyester
30 x 24 inches
Clar-1014-C



Sonya Clark
Madam CJ Walker II
(comb tapestry), 2019

Combs, thread
5.5 x 5 x 1 inches
Clar-1011-C





Installation of *Hair/Goods: An Homage to Madam C.J. Walker*

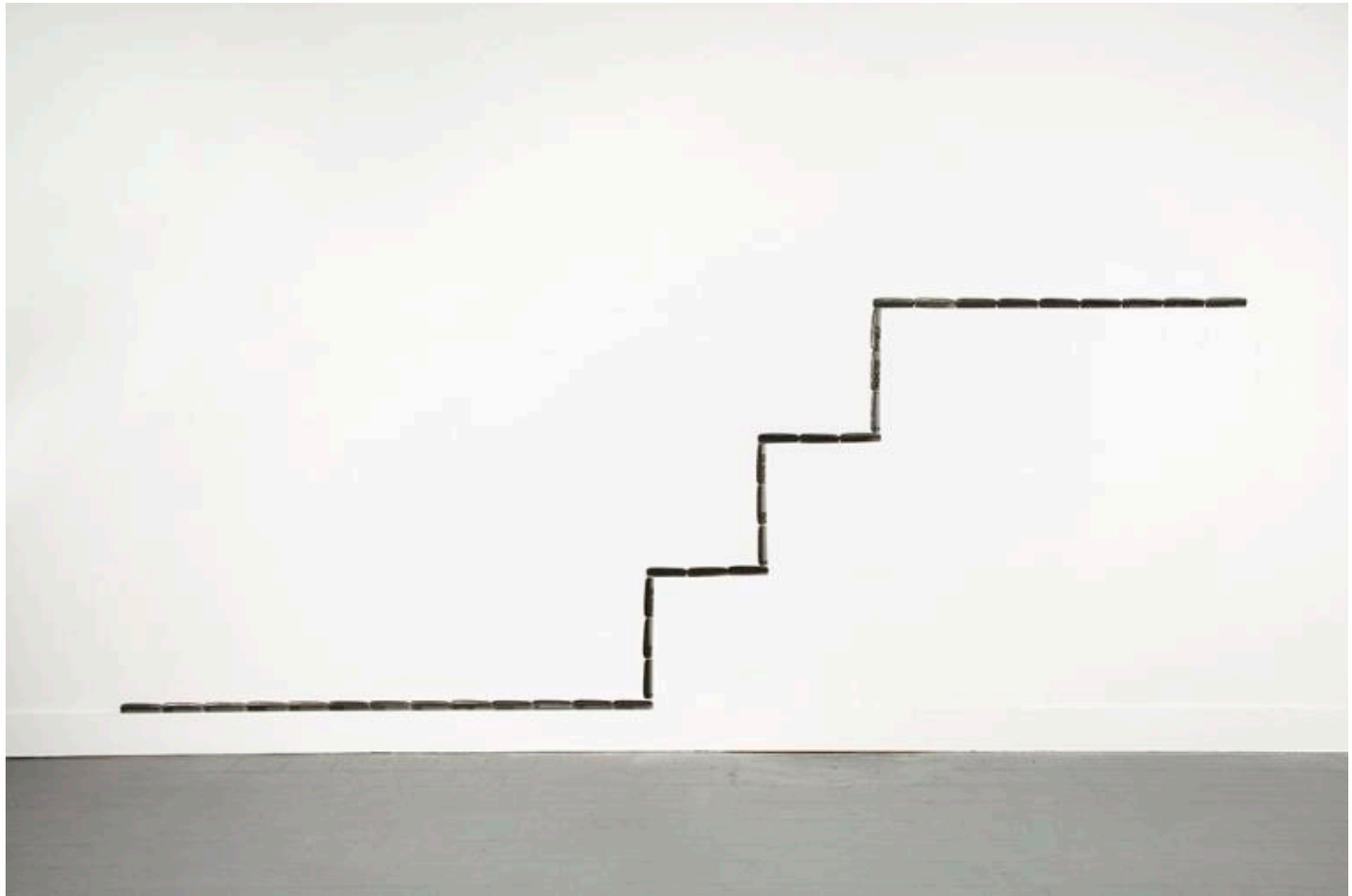
Sonya Clark
In Her Own Words, 2008

Combs, thread
5.5 x 5 x 1 inches
Edition of 5
Clar-1013-C

“I am a woman who came from the cotton fields of the South. I was promoted to the Washtub. I was promoted to the Kitchen.

I promoted MYSELF to the business of hair...on my own grounds.”

- Madam CJ Walker



Sonya Clark
Madam CJ Walker and Me, 2013

Artist's hair suspended in medium
25 x 18 inches
Clar-1012-C



Madam CJ Walker and the NAACP

In 1918, a year before her death, Madam C.J. Walker hired Vertner Tandy (the first recognized African-American architect in NY) to build Villa Lewar - a thirty-four-room, 20,000-square-foot mansion near the Hudson River in the most exclusive part of Irvington, NY.

According to Walker's great-great granddaughter, the scholar A'Lelia Bundles, the name Villa Lewaro was suggested by the famed Italian tenor Enrico Caruso, and is an acronym formed by combining the first two letters of each word in her daughter's name: Leila Walker Robertson.

Constructed at a staggeringly high price for the time, Villa Lewaro was lavishly furnished with some of the most coveted and expensive objects one could buy in her day. According to Bundles, Madam CJ Walker understood the symbolism of being visible, and her elaborate luxuries spanned from gold-leaf trimmed pilasters to massive crystal chandeliers, the finest China, and a Louis XV-style music room complete with an Estey pipe organ and glided harp.

On Aug 25th, 1918, Walker celebrated the opening of Villa Lewaro with a party honoring Emmet J. Scott. Nearly 100 black and progressive white activists were gathered among the gardens, pool, and general grandiosity for social mingling and political debate. Many noteworthy guests visited Walker's villa such as W.E.B. DuBois, Melville Charlton, Joseph Douglas, Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, and James Weldon Johnson.

Walker passed in 1919 leaving the estate to her only child, A'Lelia, who maintained the dwelling until her own death in 1931 whereafter it was bequeathed to the **NAACP**. Like many organizations whose funding was crippled by the great depression, the NAACP sold the estate to remain financially solvent. The property changed hands several times until it was eventually returned to a private resident in the 1980's: Harold and Helena Doley, the owner of the oldest African-American owned Wall Street banking firm. The mansion was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2014 and still remains in the Doley family.

Sources:

Bundles, A'Lelia. *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C. J. Walker*. Washington Square Press, 2002.

Bundles, A'Lelia. In person conversation with Sonya Clark.

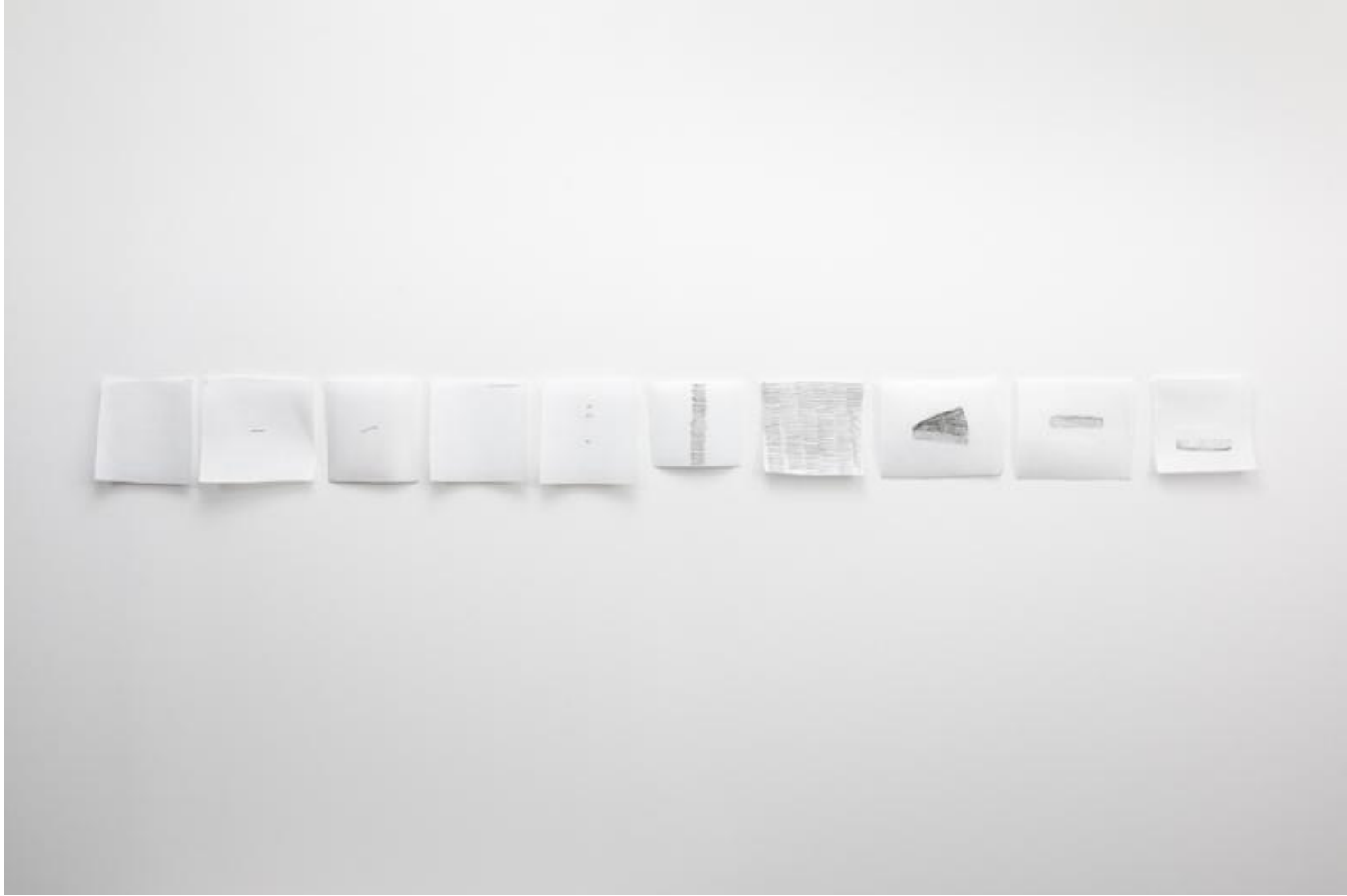
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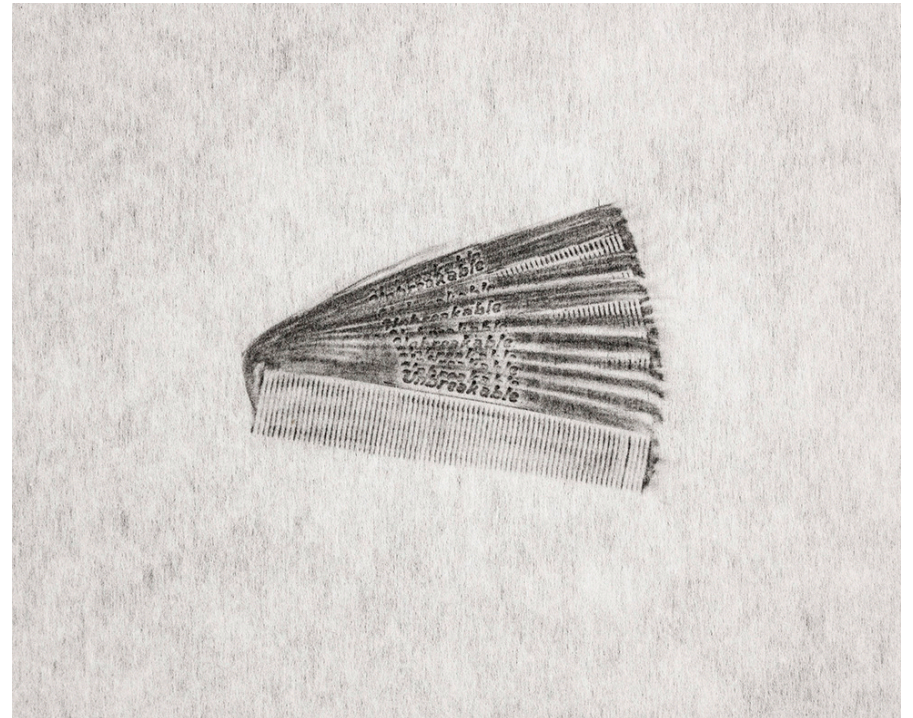
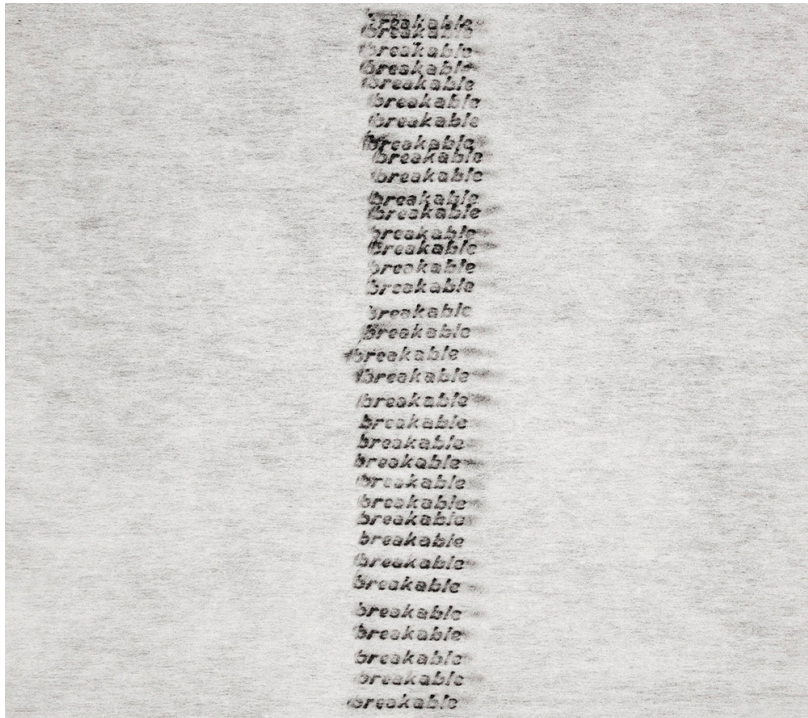


Installation of *Hair/Goods: An Homage to Madam C.J. Walker*

Sonya Clark
Unbreakable, 2014

Crayon on polyester
12 x 12 inches
Series of 10
Clar-1016-C





Detail images of *Unbreakable*

Sonya Clark
Hair Bow (Blonde), 2013

Human hair and found bow
29 x 1 inches
Clar-1006-C



Sonya Clark
Hair Ladder, 2013

Human hair
108 x 9 inches
Clar-1005-C





Installation of *Generations: Joyce J. Scott and Sonya Clark*

Sonya Clark
Hair Necklaces 1 (Copper Twist),
2012

Human hair
16 x 6 inches
Clar-1000-C



Sonya Clark
Hair Necklaces 4 (Chain), 2012

Human hair and copper
16 x 6 inches
Clar-1002-C



Sonya Clark
Hair Necklaces 5 (Branches), 2006

Human hair
16 x 13 inches
Clar-1003-C



Sonya Clark
Hair Necklaces 6 (Graduated Pearl),
2011

Human hair
25 x 6 inches
Clar-1004-C



Sonya Clark
Watermelon World, 2014

Wood, cotton, embroidery, pins
7 x 5 x 5 inches
Clar-1007-C



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