

# RISD MUSEUM

## ***Helina Metaferia: We've Been Here Before*, July 2, 2022-June 25, 2023**

This installation—presented here and on the courtyard wall just outside the museum’s entrance—features portraits of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) women and femmes, or people who adopt a feminine appearance, manner, or persona. Metaferia, an Ethiopian American artist based in New York City, photographed these and other local people in a 2021 workshop with the museum’s Education Department. She then conducted research at libraries and archives at RISD and Brown University to source historical images. Each subject wears a headdress largely composed of images from protests that relate to an aspect of their identity, as well as their own family photographs. The designs framing the portraits were drawn from Jamaican, Japanese, and Peruvian objects in the museum’s collection, further reflecting each individual’s cultural heritage.

The installation’s process, its placement in a prominent public location, and the works themselves demonstrate Metaferia’s understanding of “how gatherings can be a site for change, akin to how histories of protest give way to political and social change” for marginalized people and communities that are often overlooked. This is a RISD Museum commission, and the vinyl hangings here, the banner outside, and original collages created to produce them will all become part of the collection, further preserving the moments of continued activism Metaferia’s project celebrates.

—Dominic Molon, Richard Brown Baker Curator of Contemporary Art, and Ahmari Benton, Nancy Elizabeth Prophet Fellow

Every exhibition is the result of collaboration, care, and shared labor. The artist wishes to acknowledge the work that went into the many facets of this project by thanking those listed here.

Thank you to the following people who made this exhibition possible:

RISD Art Museum: Ahmari Benton, Laurie Brewer, Sarah Ganz Blythe, Deborah Clemons, Julie D’Amico, Erik Gould, Sionan Guenther, Marny Kindness, Kara Nandin, Laura Ostrander, Amy Pickworth, Derek Schusterbauer, Kajette Solomon, Stephen Wing

Workshop Participants and Collage Models: Shándíín Brown, Karen Harris, Davi Sapiro-Gheiler, Caitlin Takeda

Photography: Alonso Nichols

Installation Photography: Dee Sparks

Research & Printing Assistance: Wesley Sanders

Studio Assistance: Barbara Byrd, Melanie Wu

Mural Installation: George Hovagimian, MBsigns, Zeno Mollo

Institutions: Brown University John Hay Library, John D. Rockefeller Jr. Library, and Visual Art Department; RISD Art Museum

Organizations: Silver Art Projects Residency

Thank you to all the people unnamed across the art ecosystem who make this and every exhibition possible, including those who travel to see the exhibition.

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A list of sources for the collage images can be found at the museum's Visitor Services desk and at <https://risdmuseum.org/exhibitions-events/exhibitions/helina-metaferia-weve-been-here>.

## CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Helina Metaferia, American  
*Headdress 39, From We've Been Here Before, 2022*  
Mixed media collage on vinyl  
101.6 x 101.6 cm (40 x 40 inches)  
Courtesy of the artist

Helina Metaferia, American  
*Headdress 42, From We've Been Here Before, 2022*  
Collaged paper  
243.8 x 121.9 cm (96 x 48 inches)

On view here and inside the RISD Museum café, this installation features portraits of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) women and femmes (individuals adopting a feminine appearance, manner, or persona). Each subject wears a headdress largely composed of images from protests that relate to an aspect of their identity, as well as their own family photographs. Sháhdíín Brown, the museum's Henry Luce Curatorial Fellow for Native American Art, is shown here. Brown's Diné (Navajo) tribal affiliation is represented by images of Diné textiles, her family members, and Native American political demonstrations.

Metaferia, an Ethiopian American artist based in New York City, photographed Brown and other local people in a 2021 workshop with the museum's Education Department. She then conducted research at libraries and archives at RISD and Brown University to source historical images. The installation's process, its placement in a prominent public location, and the works themselves demonstrate the artist's understanding of "how gatherings can be a site for change, akin to how histories of protest give way to political and social change" for marginalized people and communities that are often overlooked. This is a RISD Museum commission, and this banner, the vinyl hangings inside, and the original collages created to produce them will all become part of the collection, further preserving the moments of continued activism that Metaferia's project celebrates.

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—Dominic Molon, Richard Brown Baker Curator of Contemporary Art,  
and Ahmari Benton, Nancy Elizabeth Prophet Fellow

Helina Metaferia, American  
*Headdress 41, From We've Been Here Before* 2022  
Collaged paper  
101.6 x 152.4 cm (40 x 60 inches)

Helina Metaferia, American  
*Headdress 40, From We've Been Here Before* 2022  
Collaged paper  
101.6 x 101.6 cm (40 x 40 inches)