



Harlem Toile de Jouy

Sheila Bridges

Changemaker and design industry leader **Sheila Bridges**, **AAS Interior Design '93**, confronts her field's racial barriers while providing clients with the cutting-edge, tailored interiors for which her celebrated practice is known. Bridges cites persistence as a key to success and hopes her story will inspire young designers of color to courageously follow their dreams as well. For Bridges, it's partly a matter of visibility: "It's no different from children seeing that our former President and First Lady were African-American. Suddenly, the possibility became real, and young African-Americans could aspire to great heights in any industry."

With her provocative pattern Harlem Toile de Jouy (above right), Bridges replaces the traditional pastoral motifs of French toile with scenes depicting African-American subjects at leisure, playing basketball,

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dancing, and fashioning hairstyles. Subverting dominant white cultural references with stereotypical Black ones, Bridges slyly challenges the design canon while underscoring the power of representation. The critically acclaimed design—which debuted in 2006 as wallpaper and has since been applied to upholstery fabric, bedding, dishware, umbrellas, and clothing—inserts a Black perspective into decorative arts history with a product that speaks to an often ignored audience. Today the affordable hand-screen-printed paper is part of the collection of Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum. Reflecting on the pattern, Bridges says, "As a designer, it's necessary for me to be aware of what's happening in the real world. I wanted to create something accessible to everyone, not just the elite."

sheilabridges.com



Facing a Foggy Mirror

Christopher Udemezue

The immersive photographic series *Facing a Foggy Mirror*, created in 2017 by **Christopher Udemezue**, **BFA Integrated Design '08**, illuminates the lesser-known histories of people of color and the Caribbean LGBTQ+ community. In his photographs, the artist suspends tropical landscapes and allegorical scenes in saturated hues against a dramatic black abyss. Intentionally placed symbols—such as the floating white hand of a colonizer, shown below—hint at Udemezue's objective: to reclaim and defend his people's suppressed legacy.

By representing historically unseen individuals in contemporary media, Udemezue establishes his present-day perspective, asking, in his words, "Where is my queer self? What are the stories of my trans sisters during the fight for freedom in Trinidad and Tobago? What are the stories of my femme brothers in Puerto Rico's rebellions against the Spaniards?" Udemezue continues, giving answers, "We were there, too. We have always been here."

While at Parsons, Udemezue began investigating the past under the guidance of longtime faculty member Susan Weller. She urged him to claim his title as artist and commit himself to a career in art. Since graduating, Udemezue has developed his creative voice and continued the conversation on racial identity through projects like RAGGA NYC, a platform that combines community events and online interviews. Just last year, RAGGA NYC was exhibited in the New Museum. "People of color in general, and Caribbean people living here in the United States, are too often disconnected from their story," says Udemezue. "I'm here to help people find themselves."

christopherudemezue.net

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