

For Immediate Release

**Staten Island Museum to open major exhibition,
*Taking Care: The Black Angels of Sea View Hospital***

Revealing the groundbreaking work of Black nurses instrumental to curing tuberculosis

Members' Preview: Thursday, January 25, 6PM – 8PM

On view starting Friday, January 26, 2024

Public Opening Reception: Saturday, January 27, 2PM – 4PM

(Staten Island, NY – January 9, 2024) The Staten Island Museum presents a major exhibition, *Taking Care: The Black Angels of Sea View Hospital* opening to the public on **January 26, 2024**.

Taking Care highlights the groundbreaking work, lives, and legacy of the “Black Angels,” nurses who broke racial barriers and risked their lives to care for tuberculosis patients and administer the clinical trials that forever changed the trajectory of this horrific disease. In 1951, Sea View Hospital tested a breakthrough treatment for tuberculosis. In the context of a global resurgence of tuberculosis, the exhibition honors the legacy of the Sea View nursing staff and speaks to the continued relevance of their work today.

The exhibition includes heirlooms on loan from the nurses themselves and their families, such as a Bellevue School of Nursing cap on loan from Nurse Curlene Jennings Bennett, Nurse Kate Gillespie’s name badge on loan from her grandchildren, and a Harlem Hospital School of Nursing yearbook on loan from Thurston Grooms, Class of 1951. Also featured are objects on loan from Sea View Hospital’s own historic collections and Staten Island’s Historic Richmond Town, as well as oral histories documenting the experiences of Sea View nurses, administrators, and descendants.

“The ‘Black Angels’ were extraordinary, and their story is legendary. They were also real people with individual lives, families, flaws, and stories. They made difficult choices in pursuit of unknowable dreams. Taking Care honors their legacy and aspires to a future that continues and completes their work.”

– **Rylee Eterginoso and Gabriella Leone, Exhibition Curators**

Alongside historic objects and archival images, this exhibition presents *Back and Song*, a meditative film installation by artists **Elissa Blount Moorhead** and **Bradford Young**. This kaleidoscopic installation reflects on the manner in which health and wellness are part and parcel of the American Black experience from cradle to grave. *Back and Song* considers the labor and care provided by generations of Black healers—doctors, nurses, midwives, morticians, therapists, and health aides—and their histories of contribution to, and resistance against, the flawed and discriminatory structures of Western medicine.

In a poignant twist of history, 93-year-old **Virginia Allen**, a revered "Black Angel" who once served tuberculosis patients, has come full circle to reside on Sea View's campus, the very facility where she dedicated her service. This remarkable journey is not only a testament to her enduring spirit but also a living embodiment of the history depicted in ***Taking Care***. Through captivating artwork, archival images, historic objects, and an insightful oral history interview with Ms. Allen, ***Taking Care*** intricately weaves together the local history of the "Black Angels" with the broader narrative of Black healthcare workers, healers, and caregivers.

"This moving exhibition gives visibility to the Black women who made history on Staten Island by risking their lives to treat highly contagious tuberculosis patients and administering clinical trials. Taking Care honors these extraordinary women, offers reflection on the importance of health care workers, and invites viewers to experience a captivating film installation that elicits broader themes of care," said **Janice Monger, Staten Island Museum President & CEO.**



Virginia Greene, RN, on duty with
Ms. Sarah Smith and Ms. Mary Taylor
1938 - 1942

Gift of Richard T. Greene, Jr.,
in memory of Virginia (Lea) Greene
Collection of Historic Richmond Town | 21.012.0001

"We are so grateful to the Staten Island Museum and the 'Black Angels' for allowing us to be a part of this remarkable story. The inclusion of Ms. Allen, Ms. Herring and Ms. Jennings Bennett has greatly enhanced Back and Song and the narrative of this work. The 'Black Angels' and Sea View story is an incredible part of the continuum of stories of Black care in this country." **Elissa Blount Moorhead**



Elissa Blount Moorhead and Bradford Young, *Back and Song (Installation Detail)*, LMCC The Arts Center at Governors Island, 2022.

"Staten Island University Hospital is proud to be a part of Taking Care and honoring these courageous nurses who took charge on the crucial frontlines by providing comprehensive care to patients in need," said **Brahim Ardolic, MD, executive director at Staten Island University Hospital**. *"Tackling public health challenges, such as the widespread prevalence of tuberculosis, represents a pivotal chapter in the annals of medical history. The efforts to understand, prevent, and treat diseases on a community level not only shaped the trajectory of healthcare, but also highlights the resilience and dedication of those who contributed to the well-being of society."*

*"JPMorgan Chase is honored to support the Staten Island Museum and the launch of this historically significant exhibit honoring the 'Black Angels' and their commitment to their patients and public health," said **Kim Avilez, Staten Island Community Manager, JPMorgan Chase.** "For more than 220 years, JPMorgan Chase has been part of the fabric of New York City and we champion the work of the Museum to celebrate diverse stories, spotlight unsung heroes and serve as a cultural gathering place on Staten Island for all New Yorkers."*

*"The Foundation is pleased to support this artist-driven investigation into an unsung local history that contributes to national conversations on caretaking and race," says **Rachel Bers, Program Director, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts.** "Through historical artifacts, first-hand narratives, and contemporary visual art, 'Taking Care' connects the story of nurses at Sea View to broader currents in Black history and healthcare that celebrate the labor of Black healers."*

*"The women we know as the 'Black Angels' played a vital role in healthcare in New York City during the tuberculosis pandemic," said **Laurie M. Tisch, President of the Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund.** "Their work saved many lives. The community mural that we commissioned at NYC Health + Hospitals/Sea View pays tribute to the Black Angels and other caregivers throughout the site's history," continued Ms. Tisch, "and we are thrilled to support the Staten Island Museum's exhibit, Taking Care, which will raise awareness of their heroism and add depth and contemporary relevance to their stories."*



Nurses on staff at Sea View.
Collection of Sea View Hospital.

About the Artists:

[Elissa Blount Moorhead](#) is an artist, mother, and visual storyteller exploring the poetics of Black quotidian life. She has created public art, books, exhibitions, and images for the last 25 years. She creates films and time-based installations, such as *Back and Song*, *As of A Now*, and Jay Z's 4:44 video. Elissa has been recognized with the Sundance Institute | Comedy Central Comedy Fellowship, Saul Zaentz Innovation Fellowship, US Artists Fellowship, Creative Capital Award, and is currently developing a project in the Sundance Episodic Lab.

Artist, director and Academy Award-nominated cinematographer [Bradford Young](#) is known for his artful, poetic and humanistic visual style, as showcased in his cinematography for film and television including Ava DuVernay's *Selma* and *When They See Us*, Ron Howard's *Solo: A Star Wars Story* and Denis Villeneuve's *Arrival*, for which he was nominated for an Oscar for Best Cinematography in 2017— the first African American to be nominated in that category.

Exhibition curated by Rylee Eterginoso and Gabriella Leone.

Scholar Advisory Panel:

Debbie-Ann Paige

Public Historian, Professional Genealogist, and Doctoral student, College of Staten Island, CUNY

Maria Smilios

Author of the recently released book, *The Black Angels: The Untold Story of the Nurses who Helped Cure Tuberculosis*, published by Penguin Random House

Dr. Rita Reynolds

Associate Professor/Chair, History Department, Wagner College

Lisa Holland

Senior Librarian, Instruction and Archives, Wagner College

Cynthia Connelly, RN, PhD

Professor of Nursing and the Associate Director of the Barbara Bates Center for the Study of the History of Nursing at the University of Pennsylvania.

Taking Care is made possible by:

Presenting Sponsor Staten Island University Hospital



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Laurie M Tisch
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Andy Warhol

The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts



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RELATED PROGRAMMING

Taking Care: Artists and Scholars Discussion

Thursday, February 15, 6:30PM - 8:30PM

Doors open at 6:00PM

Limited capacity, registration required.

\$15 adults/\$10 members. Free for students

Join artists Elissa Blount Moorhead and Bradford Young (Back and Song) in conversation with scholar advisors Debbie Ann Paige, Dr. Rita Reynolds, and Lisa Holland for a discussion around their research and participation in *Taking Care: The Black Angels of Sea View Hospital*. Reception to follow.

Brunch for Women in Healthcare

Saturday, March 23, 11:00AM-1:00PM

Limited capacity. Registration required.

Free for women in healthcare. \$50 for general public.

This special brunch, sponsored by JPMorgan Chase, invites women healthcare workers for an afternoon of music, food, and celebration to honor their service in our community and highlight the legacy of “The Black Angels” as featured in the current exhibition *Taking Care*.

Additional programs will be scheduled throughout the run of the exhibition.

ABOUT THE STATEN ISLAND MUSEUM

Founded in 1881, the Staten Island Museum engages visitors with interdisciplinary exhibitions, public programs, and educational activities for all ages. The Museum's mission is to spark curiosity and create meaningful shared experiences through natural science, art, and history, deepening our understanding of the environment, ourselves, and each other.

The Staten Island Museum is a proud member of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG), a public-private partnership with the City of New York, and receives operating support from the City of New York which owns its building through the Department of Cultural Affairs, Commissioner Laurie Cumbo, from Mayor Eric Adams; NYC Council Staten Island Delegation and Council Members Kamillah Hanks, Joe Borelli, and David Carr; and Staten Island Borough President Vito Fossella.

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The Museum is open Wednesday – Sunday: 11am – 5pm. Universally accessible. For advanced tickets and information visit StatenIslandMuseum.org.

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