Institute of Contemporary Art
University of Pennsylvania

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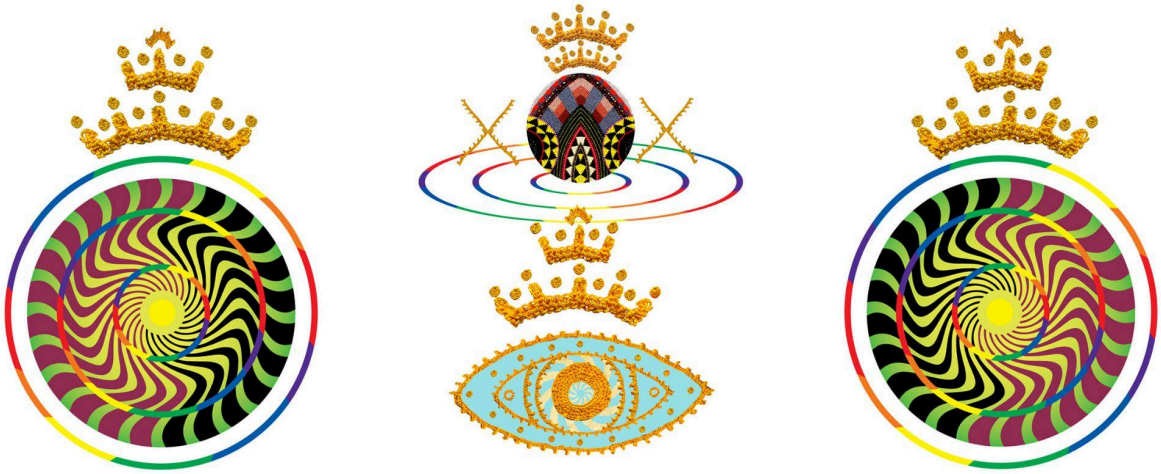


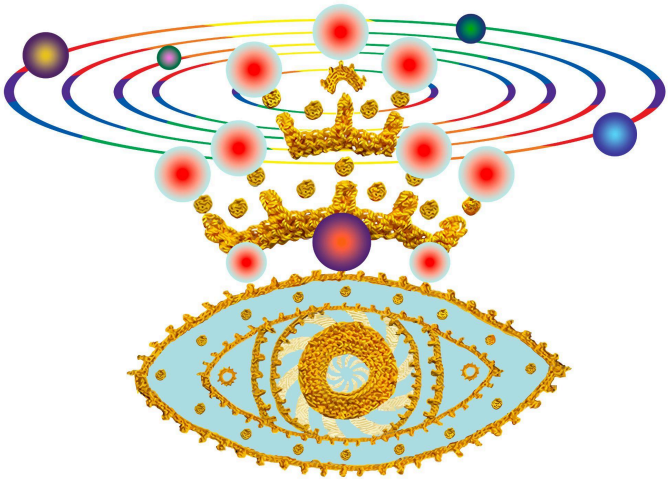
Xenobia Bailey Wraps ICA Philadelphia in "Funktional" Design Inspired by Sun Ra, the Funk Aesthetic, and Masquerade Traditions

Developed in Partnership With Maharam and Opening This July, *Entryways*: *Xenobia Bailey* Transforms ICA's Exterior with New Public Art Commission

Philadelphia, PA (May 22, 2025) — This July, the Institute for Contemporary Art, Philadelphia (ICA), unveils a striking new public artwork as part of ICA's annual *Entryways* commission by visionary artist Xenobia Bailey. Spanning 400 square feet, the site-specific installation transforms ICA's façade with a "Funktional" design and visionary illusion inspired by domestic crochet, natural cosmologies, masquerading culture, and local Philadelphia legend Sun Ra's artistic philosophy. *Entryways: Xenobia Bailey* was developed in partnership with Maharam, North America's leading creator of textiles for interiors, and is on view July 12 through August 9, 2026.

"*Entryways: Xenobia Bailey* continues our partnership with Maharam to transform ICA's entrance into a space for experimentation," said **Hallie Ringle**, ICA's Daniel and Brett Sundheim Chief Curator and Interim Director. "ICA champions exploration and public engagement in meaningful ways, and local artist Xenobia Bailey's site-specific work will do just that, inspiring visitors and redefining the way we remix, and they encounter, our space."

For the *Entryways* commission, Bailey began by crocheting decorative elements of vibrant yarn, before draping these crochet afghans over a ladder and photographing them. These images were digitally composed into the work's centerpiece: a figure of Afrofuturist musician Sun Ra, whose Philadelphia-based jazz group Sun Ra Arkestra embodied a holistic Black cosmology and philosophy. Bailey drew inspiration from masquerading traditions—used to channel ancestral spirits—and memories of homemakers such as her mother, who transformed household furniture pieces by draping colorful crochet textiles over them. Astrological symbols orbit the figure and reappear across the building's surface. Later this year, Bailey will also introduce a digital element to her process for the first time. An Augmented Reality (AR) feature will extend the installation into an interactive realm and virtually suspend the masquerade designs, underscoring their multidimensionality and further evolving a "Funktional" Black aesthetics into the future. Deploying intuitive, organic improvisation, Bailey translates the frequencies of Sun Ra's music into a symphony of crochet stitches, colors, and forms that come to life through AR. Honoring Sun Ra's ability to bring the frequency of a Black cosmic aesthetic into material culture and lifestyle and using textiles as animating masks that energize space, Bailey's *Entryways* design reimagines ICA's façade as that of Sun Ra's spirit welcoming visitors and passersby.



"In this expansive new commission, Xenobia Bailey draws on the legacies of Black utilitarian makers, including her own maternal lineage, from whom she inherited her 'Funky' textile aesthetics. She brings her medium of crochet, which she associates with domestic and sharecropping textile craft, into conversation with the architecture of ICA," remarks **Denise Ryner**, ICA's Andrea B. Laporte Curator. "Bailey carries this spatial expansion into the all-encompassing experimental cosmos of Sun Ra's

Arkestra, who surveys Philadelphia from above. Bailey adds to this Funk-tional orbit a towering masquerader."

Entryways is a continuation of Bailey's ongoing, multi-part, research project *Paradise Under Reconstruction in the Aesthetic of Funk,* a series she began in 1999 to build a distinctly African American aesthetic—one she experienced in her childhood, but had not seen represented in her academic industrial design education. Bailey's body of crochet work, developed since 1984, stands as a testament to evolving textile material culture "funktioning" simultaneously as a source of sanctuary, comfort, historical preservation, and cultural identity. Born in Seattle and raised in rural and urban Washington, Bailey's early life was shaped by Northwest forestry seasonal rhythms and land and stream-based living, guided by tools like the farmer's almanac. Informed by this upbringing of being in sync with the natural environment, as well as thorough research on independent historical and contemporary radical elite Black communities, Bailey's work contributes to an ongoing dialogue on the material culture of funk, and emphasizes research, experimentation, development, and sustainable socio-economic models.

About Xenobia Bailey

Internationally recognized artist Xenobia Bailey (b. 1955, Seattle, WA) produces artworks and installations inspired by urban material culture and rural African-American homemakers. A student of ethnomusicology and industrial design, Bailey is well known for her crocheted sculptural headwear, wall hangings, and tents that articulate the utilitarian material crafts of the funk counterculture of the 1960s and '70s. Using fiber and found items as her primary materials, Bailey produces a range of pieces that frequently riff on traditional home furnishings with inventive twists of color and texture.

Exhibition Organization and Credits

Entryways: Xenobia Bailey is commissioned by The Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania (ICA) and developed in partnership with Maharam as an initiative of Maharam Digital Projects. The installation is curated by Denise Ryner, ICA's Andrea B. Laporte Curator.

About Maharam and Maharam Digital Projects

Founded in New York in 1902, Maharam is a leading creator of textiles for commercial and residential interiors. Recognized for its holistic commitment to design, Maharam embraces a range of disciplines from product, graphic, and digital design to art and architecture. Represented in the permanent collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Stedelijk Museum, among others, Maharam partners with a range of cultural and educational institutions to honor design history and encourage critical dialogue.

Maharam Digital Projects is an ongoing series of digitally printed, large-scale wall installations designed in partnership with emerging and established artists. Initiated in 2009, the collection has grown to include over 100 projects with artists including Polly Apfelbaum, Teresita Fernández, Spencer Finch, Liam Gillick, Marilyn Minter, and Sarah Sze, and renowned designers such as Hella Jongerius, Karel Martens, and Paul Smith.

About the Institute of Contemporary Art | University of Pennsylvania

The Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania (ICA Philadelphia) is a global hub for contemporary art and ideas. Free and open to all, ICA Philadelphia is dedicated to supporting artistic practices across disciplines and serving as a laboratory for risk-taking, community-building, and knowledge-creation. Since 1963, ICA Philadelphia has championed the University's commitment to cultivating the next generation of imaginative creators and thinkers. Through commissions, exhibitions, programs, publications, and special projects, ICA Philadelphia fosters bold experimentation, curiosity, and discovery. Learn more at icaphila.org.

Also on View at ICA

Organized in partnership with The Studio Museum in Harlem, ***Mavis Pusey: Mobile Images*** is the first solo museum exhibition of the geometric abstractionist Mavis Pusey. This extensive survey of paintings, drawings, prints, and archival materials examines Pusey's incredible decades-long career from Retreat, Jamaica, to New York, London, and Paris, and includes extensive research and preservation initiatives for the artist's work, as well as a publication. This exhibition is curated by Hallie Ringle, Daniel and Brett Sundheim Chief Curator, and is on view July 12–December 7, 2025.

Image Credit

Entryways: Xenobia Bailey. Photo courtesy of the artist and Maharam.

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