Text by Michael Slenske / *Photography by* Genevieve Gaignard

KARON DAVIS: THROUGH THE FIRE

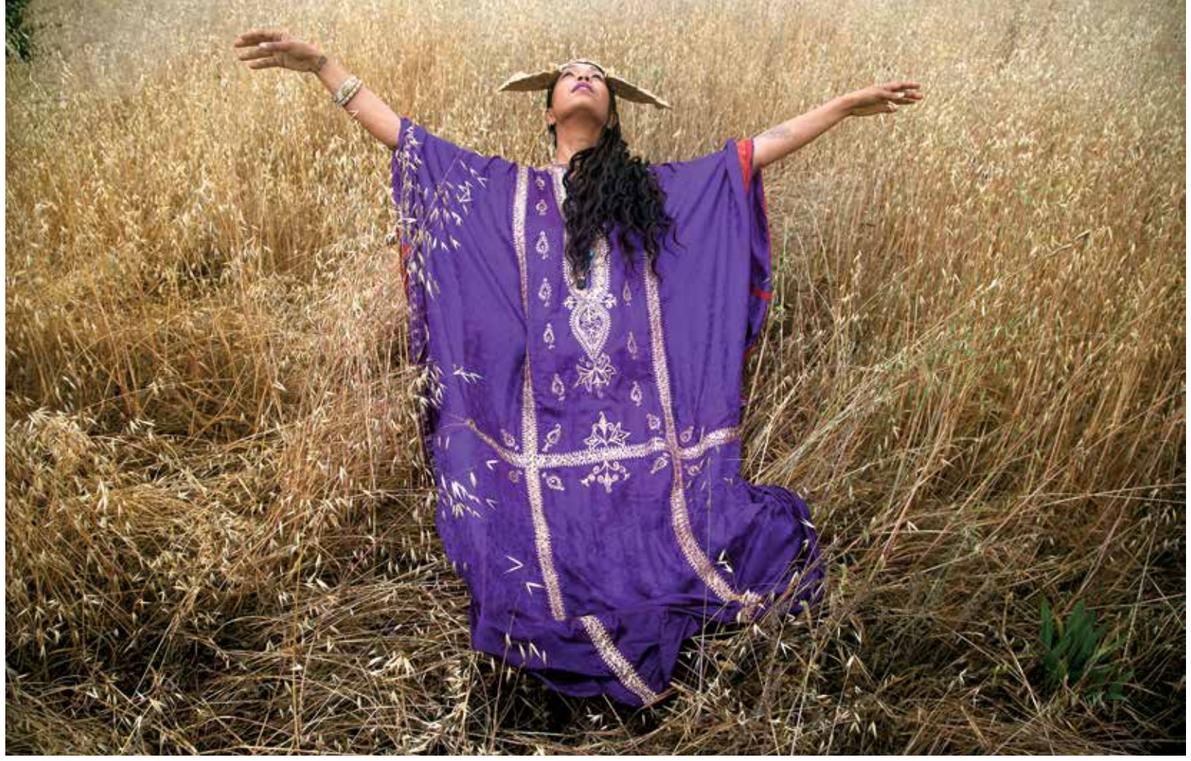
THE ARTIST AND CO-FOUNDER OF THE UNDERGROUND MUSEUM HAS OVERCOME LOSS AND GRIEF TO FLOURISH ANEW

It was a windy Friday night in Ojai last fall, and dinner plans for Karon Davis and her then-seven-year-old son, Moses, normally wouldn't involve a 17-mile drive to the neighboring town of Santa Paula—especially with her two twenty-something nephews in tow. But as the anniversary of her wedding to her late husband, Noah Davis, December 4 was a fraught date. Karon nd Noah, the Seattle-born Angeleno artist, were not the average artist couple. In less than a decade they met, got married and had a son, all while developing very serious side-by-side studio practices—with painting, sculpture and video work that examined beauty, pain, politics, the vulnerability of the human body, and the contemporary African-American experience—and co-founding the locally minded, internationally renowned Underground Museum in the West Adams-Arlington Heights area in 2012. Unfortunately, the couple's storybook romance was cut short three summers later, when Noah succumbed to an emotionally and financially crippling battle with a rare cancer that attacked (and ultimately stopped) his heart as the super moon rose over the lavender-painted home in Upper Ojai the Davises had settled into just two months prior to his passing on August 29, 2015.

"I just didn't want to stay in the house," explains Davis. It's a warm but dry day in June when I visit Davis at the lavender house. Davis is casually decked out in one of her signature "flowy" dresses, most of which are sourced from the Ojai-based Belarusian designer Tatiana Shabelnik. She's got one of her trademark silk scarves wrapped around her braids and sips on a tea as she sits cross-legged on a wicker divan under the jasmine-covered patio outside her bedroom. While the subject matter is heavy, she calmly recalls the details surrounding that fateful Santa Paula sojourn last December. "We never go to Santa Paula," she insists, recalling she lured her family on the trip with the promise of getting a Christmas tree.

On the drive back to Ojai after dinner, with a large Douglas fir strapped to the roof of the car, Davis spotted police cruisers racing west on CA-150, but given her preternaturally chill demeanor, she didn't think much of it. That was until Moses started panicking at the sight of brush fires as they approached Santa Paula's Thomas Aquinas College. "Moses was freaking out, and then we got into a car accident," says Davis, who side-swiped an SUV in front of her as the driver made a quick U-turn. The post-

Karon Davis amid scorched trees near her Ojai home and studio. Dresses by Tatiana Shabelnik.



crash exchange was brief, because they both said to each other, "We need to get home." On the way back Davis called her neighbor, Lee Prather, a retired operations manager of a local organic food company who has lived in the Ojai Valley for two decades. He tried to pacify her and even made a quick call to a friend who also happened to be the town's former fire chief. "There's little brush fires all the time, don't worry about it," she remembers Prather telling her. "Pop open a glass of wine and chill. They'll take care of it."

Still, Davis couldn't help but be a bit unnerved by the sight of the flames coming from the college, so she and nephew Caleb, 24, soaked the grass and trees around the home with a garden hose while Oliver, 25, packed the cars. It was as this point that a friend who lived in the Santa Ynez hills called Davis to inform her that she and her family were evacuating. Davis's nephews, who had been monitoring the flames while spraying down the lawn, implored her and Moses to come outside to see the full moon, which had taken on the devilish hue of a blood orange.

"At that point you could see the smoke in the air, so I got Noah's paintings, grabbed my hard-drives, my computer, Moses, the urn, the cat—and that's when the lights went out," she recalls. "I was putting the last painting into my nephew's truck when I saw an ember fall and I thought, It's here. That's when you realize you have no power on this planet when it comes to mother nature."

As Davis eased down the driveway toward the road, she could see more police cruisers and officers informing her neighbors that evacuation was mandatory. "It was so smoky, I was just driving toward their headlights, and then I could see the flames coming from the house across the street," says Davis. "At this point you could hear horses running through the streets, people were letting all of their animals go, it was just madness. We drove down to town to get my mom and we thought we were safe, but her neighbor comes down the hill and says, 'We've gotta get out of Ojai, it's all going to burn.'"

While Moses reassured his mother that the house would survive, in her mind it was already gone, the latest casualty in a series of crushing losses. "What broke my heart was the idea of having to tell my son that the house his father worked so hard for was gone," says Davis. "But I was okay with it. We'll just rebuild, I told myself, it doesn't matter, I have everything that matters right here. And we ended up in a Motel 6 in Carpinteria."

What Davis couldn't have known at the time was that after she evacuated with her family, Prather remained on the property with his hose and battled the encroaching flames as they set her eucalyptus tree ablaze—charring Moses's playhouse, melting the drip lines, and killing dozens of gophers and rabbits burrowed in the yard in the process. "There was a blanket of embers coming from the tree about to hit the house, and Lee said, 'Karon, I knew if your house went down, mine would be next,'" says Davis, touring me around her front yard, which is still visibly singed in pockets six months after the blaze. The grass is crunchy and dry under our feet, but she points to an outcropping of berries, remarking, "After fire, there's new growth."

She let Noah's spirit guide her in transforming the UM into a model for community-minded arts institutions.

"We just had so much fun together," Davis says of her late husband, artist Noah Davis.

Coming from Davis's soothing lullaby voice, one that is anchored by the hard-fought wisdom that comes from experiencing four decades chock full of loves, losses, triumphs, failures and rebirths—as a dancer, filmmaker, sculptor, mother, activist and "spirit guide" (though she'd never call herself that) for one of L.A.'s most exciting art institutions—this time-worn bromide sounds like a call to arms. Of course, Karon Davis is not just a survivor. She's a thriver—a phoenix with a penchant for slow food, Alvin Ailey and the artistic inroads of black history, from Akhenaten to Hattie McDaniel.

"She has a unique position running the Underground in addition to being an emerging artist and all the demands of being a single mother on top of that," says Kahlil Joseph, Noah's brother and a founding member of the Underground who is also a Grammy-nominated, Peabody Award-winning director who has worked with Kendrick Lamar, Beyoncé and Arcade Fire and shown his films at MOCA, Tate Modern and the New Museum. "These are all things that before Noah passed she wasn't, so she has these three huge new responsibilities. I always just say, I'm the man behind the woman—I'm the wife of the Underground."

To wit: When Noah left Karon with his audacious plans for the Underground Museum—which partnered with MOCA in the year before his passing but only staged one of the 18 shows he'd planned during his lifetime—she leaned into the task of heading an institution that was now responsible for the handling, preservation, curation and presentation of masterworks plucked from MOCA's permanent collection. She let Noah's spirit—and copious collaged notebooks he'd made—guide her in transforming the UM (or as Karon pronounces it, "the *um*") into a model for community-minded arts institutions across the globe—one that stocks a serious community library and bookstore (filled with essential tomes on conceptual art, black history and wellness) while offering free yoga and meditation in the Purple Garden that Noah designed (and Karon is constantly adding to) out back. On any given week the UM might host talks by *New Yorker* critic Hilton Als or *Moonlight* director Barry Jenkins; performances by Alice Smith, Kamasi Washington and Mark Ronson; and various fashion shows and fundraisers. All this from what was once a quiet family affair whose inaugural exhibition featured her soulful plaster sculptures and an art-historical survey called *Imitation of Wealth*, for which Noah recreated iconic pieces by art stars like Jeff Koons, On Kawara and Dan Flavin—a defiant DIY response to the museums and collectors who wouldn't (at least back then) lend such blue-chip works to an institution run by a black family in a predominantly black and Latino neighborhood. That show, in a bit of tragic irony, made its debut at the MOCA storefront the day he died. "I just got so used being in the background and supporting Noah," says Davis. "But now I have to speak for the UM, I have to get up and give speeches, I have to give interviews, I have to show up."

When she was faced with a mountain of debt after Noah's passing (her car was actually repossessed that very week), she literally shredded the medical bills into a handful of poetic and potent plaster sculptures of nurses and children, many painted with Noah's oils, for *Pain Management*, her cathartic and critically acclaimed solo debut at the Arts District gallery Wilding Cran.

"At that time we were just in survival mode," Davis recalls. "I was like, I'm not going to pay that bill, I just want my husband to live, whatever he needs. I had to hire someone just to help me open my mail because I had so much anxiety. It was just stacked and we started shredding everything, and that's what's inside the wings, that's my debt. That's really about the health industry and people going into debt and the cycle of food and cancer. I really believe that it's in our air, in our food, in our water. It's an epidemic that nobody was talking about."

Since that time, Davis has lost five more friends to cancer, including the mother and sister of gallerist Anthony Cran. Cran and his wife and partner, Naomi deLuce Wilding, actually planned to give Noah a solo show in the fall of 2015. "It's funny, I first met them as their waiter when I was working at Ammo in West Hollywood," says Cran, who stills calls the couple "my biggest cheerleaders" six years later. After Noah passed away, Cran said to Karon, "Why don't you do a show with us?" he recalls. "She was hesitant but agreed and did that show in three to four months."

The resulting exhibition, which opened in September 2016, took nearly every last penny and emotion that Davis had left. What started out as a cathartic primal scream in her garage studio morphed inside the space of the gallery into a no-holds-barred group therapy session. Visitors would sit for hours inside *Waiting Room*—an installation in the back of the gallery mimicking those soulless antechambers in which the Davises spent countless hours hoping and praying at Cedars Sinai and UCLA—and they would sob and share stories of the family and friends they, too, had lost to cancer. *ArtForum* raved about the show in not one but two reviews, calling it "a hallucinatory journey as told through the re-creation of a waiting room and eight characters composed of plaster casts, and one of shredded medical bills, indicating the financial as well as affective burden she carried throughout this ordeal."

"I was kind of able to step out of being her brother in that moment and witness something really special happening," says Joseph. "It felt like the beginning of something."

Since that new beginning, Davis's haunting, soul-capturing figures have made appearances in exhibitions at Seattle's Frye Museum, the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art in Northern England, L.A.'s Nicodim Gallery and the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery. Her beatific *Mawu* sculpture from the *Pain Management* show was part of the stunning *POWER* survey of 37 African-American female artists (including L.A.'s own Betye Saar, Brenna Youngblood and Njideka Akunyili Crosby) at Sprüth Magers Los Angeles, and her most recent work, *And miles to go...*, depicting a father carrying a son on his shoulders—an obvious nod to Noah and

Moses and the simultaneous strength and vulnerability of black male bodies—anchored the *People* group show of figurative sculpture at Jeffrey Deitch's New York outpost. Then this spring she received the biennial grant from The Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation (whose previous recipients include Rodney McMillian, Liz Craft and Mark Bradford), and her *Nicotine* nurse from the *Pain Management* show (there's also *Morphine* and *Ifosfamide*, each named after the drugs associated with the family's struggle with cancer) was just acquired by the Brooklyn Museum.

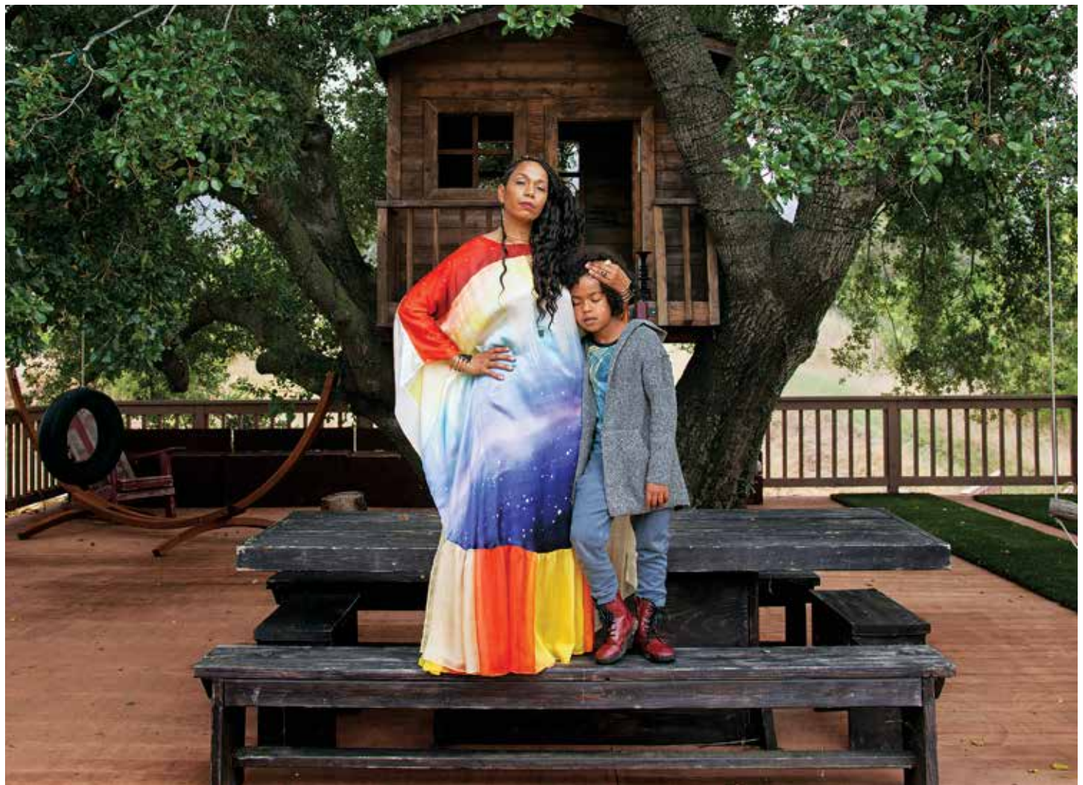
"It's her time," adds Cran, who says there are now waiting lists for Davis's work. "She's not stepping away from the Underground Museum, but she is focusing on her art. She's sitting on a pile of dynamite that's about to pop. She's just got so many ideas in video, photography and performance."

But those commissions (and ideas) may have to go on the back burner, I realize, when Davis tours me through her garage studio, which she used to share with Noah. For months after his passing she could only enter the space for the purposes of crying, and for months after the fire she was forced to work out of Kahlil's Los Angeles studio while the insurance company ozoned everything in her space. Today the light-filled workshop is littered with a small retinue of metal sculpture supports to hold her figures, a few plaster limbs and countless reminders of Noah: A portrait of him by Henry Taylor sits along the work bench; his collages for the garden are taped to the walls.

In the studio Davis seems to be meditating most on perseverance. For the past year she's also been suffering from torn muscles in both of her hands—first from playing nurse to another family member, then from trying to save everything and everyone from the Thomas Fire—which she's now treating with Platelet-Rich Plasma. She had just finished her third round of injections when I arrived, just three months from her next show, *Muddy Water*, which opens this month at Wilding Cran. with an installation featuring a boat, a car and a house—all of which will appear to be sinking into the gallery floor—the show will examine ideas of displacement, evacuation and the titular Bessie Smith classic (*Muddy water in my shoes/Reeling and rocking to them lowdown blues/They live in ease and comfort down there/I do declare*).

"It's about survival and looking at women on these boats or makeshift rafts," says Davis. "What do you grab? Your purse? Your photo album? Your favorite doll? What are the things that mean the most?"

Jeffrey Deitch, who first met Karon a few years ago at his Los Angeles home when he was the director of MOCA, wasn't even aware of her art career until he saw the Wilding Cran debut. "I was just stunned by her talent," says Deitch. "When Noah was alive, she let him take the limelight. But the reaction to her sculpture in our show has been so enthusiastic. It carries this personal story, but it also makes a much bigger statement about the black man today and his burden. It's one of the most profound works of art by a younger artist that I've ever shown."



"It's her time," says Anthony Cran. She's just got so many ideas in video, photography and performance."

This is all to say nothing of the fact that Davis was left to raise Moses without Noah's physical presence. Even if the love and legacy he left behind are everywhere, permeating everything, the weight of that legacy can take a toll, even on someone as patient, deferential and diplomatic as Karon Davis.

"I think I met her at a pivotal moment in terms of her realizing if she didn't take a breath and slow everything down, she would be not only overwhelmed by her grief but overwhelmed by things just happening so quickly," says Lorna Simpson. The two artists knew of each other for years but just met last summer at a dinner party in the home of their mutual friend, British-born L.A.-based sculptor Thomas Houseago. The two (Karon considers Simpson "a big sister") now talk all the time—mostly on the phone, since Simpson lives and works in Brooklyn—about life, family, even how each might best execute a show or a new work. For Simpson, it's important for Davis to ask herself: "What does it mean to be her now in relation to the Underground Museum, as an artist, and in her relationship to her son—helping him and guiding him through his grief?"

Davis seemed to be doing just that when I met her in June: packing for her annual mother-son adventure with Moses. This year's destination: Greece. "I'm planning to go to Egypt next," says Davis, who has long been obsessed with ancient Egyptian sculpture. "I'm promising Moses I'll take him. It's my dream trip."

Helen Molesworth—the former chief curator of MOCA who helped spearhead the partnership between the Underground Museum and MOCA and worked alongside Noah at his hospital bed in the year before his death, a period during which Davis planned those 18 exhibitions—has her own take on Davis's perseverance. "A lot of artists' widows or the people who survive artists live through the dead artist like an avatar, but Karon is not going to do that, because that's not who she is and that's not what she and Noah were about," she argues. "Some people are really strong. Karon Davis is really strong."

Davis with her son, Moses, at their Ojai property, spared by the Thomas fire.

Some people acquire strength, others are born with it. Karon Davis got a little of both as the youngest of four sisters, three of whom were Tauruses born on the same week into "this crazy seventies life of a biracial hippie couple," she says. Davis's father is Broadway legend Ben Vereen, and her mother is the ballet dancer Nancy Vereen. They met in New York during rehearsals for the production of *Golden Boy* (starring Sammy Davis, Jr.) at the London Palladium, and Nancy offered to get them an apartment overseas when British landlords wouldn't rent to Vereen because he was black. Karon was actually born in Reno right after her father performed a set at Harrah's, which flew the family home on its private jet.

"She was a free child in every way," recalls Nancy, who stops by the house during my visit to take care of Moses. Nancy moved to California after Noah got sick; she first stayed in a trailer on their Ojai property, but she now lives in town. "They were born into the theater, literally," she says of her daughters. "They learned all the hotels, they knew the kitchens, knew the back staircases to the dressing rooms. They were catered to and spoiled. But holidays were always hardships, because we'd always be on the road with her dad—holidays are when entertainers work."

Though Karon's early years were spent in Los Angeles—and on the road—Nancy wanted more stability for her girls as they grew up, so she moved the family in the early 1980s to Saddle River, New Jersey, where they were free to roam horse country and also be close to New York City, a dynamic that seems to mirror Moses's Ojai-L.A. existence.

Davis's after-school rituals included classes at Broadway Dance Center and STEPS along with visits to see her father at whatever theater he was performing in at the time. She has fond memories of watching Savion Glover, Gregory Hines and Phylicia Rashad perform from the wings, and she recalls a couple of trips to Atlantic City, where she saw a young Mike Tyson spar and got an early glimpse of Donald Trump before his first bankruptcy (or political campaign).

"I remember being young and watching Alvin Ailey's funeral on PBS and I was like, That's what I want to do," says Davis. As a teenager, she enrolled in the summer intensive program at The Ailey School, where she danced from eight in the morning to eight at night (and went dancing into the wee hours at Palladium, Limelight and Tunnel). "We were good girls, but we loved to dance in clubs. My sister Kavara was two years older than me, so she was my running buddy."

After graduating high school, Davis moved to Atlanta to attend Spelman College, a private liberal-arts university for black women, where she enrolled as a theater major, then left in her sophomore year because the school didn't have a film program. "I always had a camera in my hand," recalls Davis. "I always wanted to tell stories, and I would watch my father come home so upset from auditions because the roles were so stereotypical. I remember him one time coming home literally in tears and saying, 'I'm so sick of this Amos and Andy crap I have to go in for.' I remember going in for roles as well, and it was always a prostitute or a baby mama, so I really wanted to change that and create the roles."

She applied to USC and was accepted into the film school's intensive summer program. Before knowing if she was accepted as a full-time student, she sold everything she owned in Atlanta and moved to Los Angeles. "I remember when I got the acceptance letter just dropping to the floor and crying because I didn't know how I was going to tell my parents if I didn't get in," says Davis. "But I stepped out on faith, and I'm finding the more I've done that in my life, it's worked out."

During her third year of film school she did just that when a friend invited her a trip to her hometown, Grayson, Oklahoma, one of the few African-American settlements around Tulsa from the Black Exodus to the west. It was there that Davis got her first look at Black Wall Street and

the Cowboys of Color Rodeo, which kicked off a four-year passion project following the Compton Cowboys around the black rodeo circuit for a documentary feature, partly shot on Super 8.

"I would save up my money and go out on the road with them," says Davis. "But this is why I don't do film anymore." Some "friends" offered to help her finance the project, but they were secretly dubbing her tapes and attempted to pass off "a really bogus contract" to an eager young filmmaker they clearly didn't realize was raised with a top-notch Hollywood B.S. meter.

"When you're young you just want to make the art, you don't think of all that stuff that they should teach in universities, but that should be the first thing: how to protect yourself," says Davis, who got that schooling some years later (at the "Noah Davis School of the Arts") when she met the then-studio-less painter at an old Craftsman in West Adams (with its own Josephine Baker room) known as Casa La Femme. Davis lived there, with three or four other aspiring artists, depending on the week. While the parties were constant, Davis was busy assisting Bryan Barber, the director behind a number of music videos (and the movie *Idlewild*) with Outkast.

"I worked on all the research for *Idlewild*, went out to North Carolina and got to see how a film works from an idea to development to the studios getting involved to distribution," says Davis, who quit after the film wrapped in 2005 in hopes of adapting *Leaving Atlanta*, Tayari Jones's coming-of-age novel set against the backdrop of the Atlanta child murders, which Davis and her producing partner had optioned a few years prior. It was just before this film project that she met Noah, who was living and working in Houseago's former Boyle Heights studio, which neighbored Aaron Curry's. One of Karon's roommates was organizing art exhibition-nightclub pop-ups and invited the young Noah to use Casa La Femme as a makeshift studio.

"I'd come home and there was Noah in the living room, painting this huge beautiful piece," says Davis. "We just had so much fun together, but he was dating somebody and I was a workaholic." A few years later, however, her friend invited Noah and Kahlil over for a party, and in early May of 2008 Noah asked if he could come by her house because his neighbors were lighting off fireworks.

"We locked ourselves in our house," says Davis. "We just disappeared and fell in love and made work together."

"I just think it was an excuse for him to come over, but then he never left," says Karon. "We spent every single day together after that and ended up getting a house together in West Adams." Like most couples with more ambition than money, they loved to check out the real estate in the neighborhood, especially the old Fitzgerald house, a landmark 1906 Italian-Gothic-meets-Queen-Anne manor designed by Joseph Cather Newsom for the music store mogul James T. Fitzgerald. In the seventies it was sold and later used as a venue for weddings, AA meetings and even a catering location for the cast of *Soul Train*.

"We had no money and no good credit, but we would go there and just dream big," says Davis. "In Noah's mind we could make this happen, we could find people to invest. We would go in and take pictures, we would write up ideas of what each room would be. There was a prefab library and a screening room named after Hattie McDaniel, because she was the first black person to move into the neighborhood and she fought the city to do so. This is what we did, we locked ourselves in our house. We just disappeared and fell in love and made work together."

That December, Noah and Karon were flown out to Miami during Art Basel for the opening of the seminal *30 Americans* survey of black contemporary artists at the Rubell Family Collection—a show that placed Noah's work in context with idols like David Hammons and Henry Taylor, who ditched the glitz of the art-fair grind to drink beers with the couple in their hotel room. Noah had asked Karon to marry him in L.A., and during that trip they went to the courthouse and were wed the day after the opening. "They were total soulmates in every sense of the word," says Joseph. "They had a real creative life together, and that continues to this day."

While Noah's paintings of black figures were gaining attention, he didn't like the implied pigeonholing from gallerists and collectors who wanted him to be a black figurative painter to the exclusion of other ideas he wanted to explore. So after his father, Keven Davis—a prominent sports-and-entertainment lawyer who represented the Williams sisters—passed away in 2011, Noah invested his inheritance in the opening of the Underground Museum (of which Keven was considered a posthumous co-founder) in a former storefront at 3508 West Washington Boulevard. By design, the UM had no signage on the facade, to keep it first and foremost an institution for and by the neighborhood but also to ward off so-called "art washing" developers hoping to gentrify minority neighborhoods on the backs of artists.

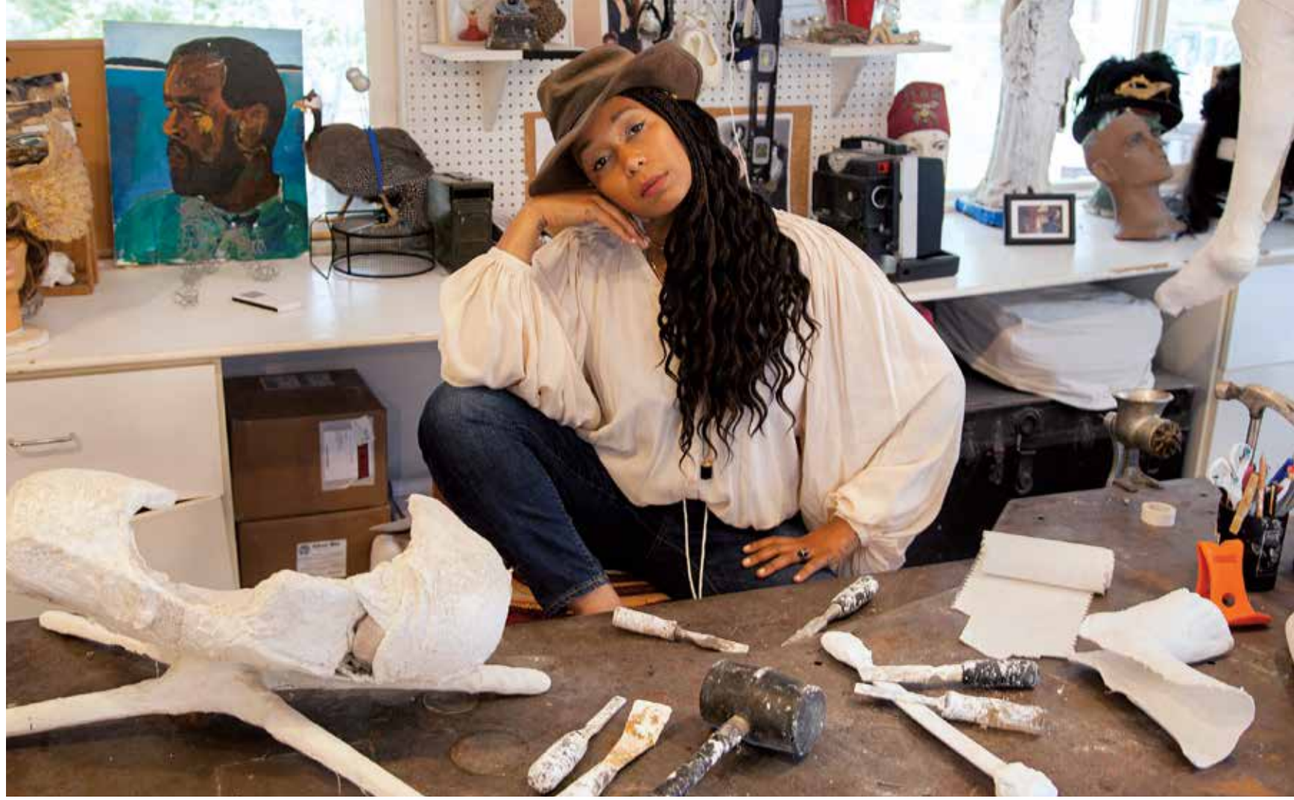
"I loved the energy and the sense with Noah that we can make a museum in L.A.," says Houseago. "He had this real agency with the city, and I felt like I had no agency as this weird European artist. It was my first experience with L.A. artists who were just open and fearless. And with Karon I was really impressed that she was making these sculptures dealing with the body and dealing with this very emotional language that seemed in conjunction with this big social concept that she and Noah were working on."

It's not always cool to use words like *spirit*, *belief* and *devotion* in serious conversations in serious art circles about "serious art," but Davis's brilliantly white plaster sculptures—full of imperfections, holes and so many deft (and devastating) touches of hand—all seem to possess what Joseph Beuys would have called "soul power" while capturing—to borrow a phrase from one of Davis's icons, Alberto Giacometti— "the true dignity of the object." Though it was Noah who first schooled Karon about plaster, she really got a sense for the material after she visited Houseago's studio and saw the remnants of the process in the tubs.

"The way she uses the fragility and physical presence of sculpture and this age-old idea that sculpture can have a social space and be a healing and cathartic presence, I find that extraordinary," adds Houseago. "There's an embarrassing, awkward earnestness to sculpture, and there's something really profound about Karon's openness. The art world really needs this, because a lot of people are coming into the art world very strategically, and she's not. And you feel it in the objects, that she believes you can imbue an object with emotion, a thought process and presence of the body, which is amazing, because there aren't that many people who dare to do that."

What first appealed to Davis about plaster was the immediacy of it. "You have to work fast," she says. "It's all about time, capturing time, and there's something about the gauze and my deep connection to Egypt." Though she still loves to work with plaster, Davis is looking to expand her sculptural practice into bronze works and to revisit her history with dance, theater and film. "Someone asked me what my work is about—socioeconomic constructs and stuff—but it's really about the spirit and how your body moves through that. They are imperfect, but I try to capture an emotion."

In many ways this is what Karon Davis brings to every aspect of her life, including the Underground Museum, which is also entertaining ideas of future expansion (not only in its physical footprint in L.A. but with some pop-ups overseas). If you ask most people in the UM family what that ineffable quality is that can attract hundreds, even a thousand, people of all ages, races and socioeconomic situations into a "secret garden" (to quote Davis) in West Adams, some might talk about how rigorous and academic the shows are. Others might note that the quality of the works and artists (like Deanna Lawson, who will take over the entire museum this fall) that they now have access to via MOCA or the UM's growing list of friends is on par with those of any serious institution in L.A.—or the world, for that matter. But most would say this Beuysian soul power is derived from Karon Davis, even though she would demur and point the finger back at Noah.



Davis in her Ojai studio. The portrait of Noah Davis behind her is by Henry Taylor.

"When we're installing shows I can feel his spirit, and if I have questions, we've learned to let the spirit move through the space and move through all of us, and it just works out," says Davis. The ability to tap into this spirit—Noah's or that of the cosmos—and transform it into something beautiful is perhaps Karon's greatest gift, according to Molesworth.

"My strongest bond with Karon comes from the desire to make a space that feels like the world we want to live in, however transitory it is," says Molesworth. "We came out onto the dance floor at the last opening and we heard a song and both of us were like, Let's dance! We were on the steps to the garden and the dance floor was packed with a predominantly black crowd, with lots of white people and brown people, but it had this vibe, and it was just great. And we both just smiled at each other and said, 'Utopia.'" •

Karon Davis, *Muddy Water*
Wilding Cran Gallery, 939 S. Santa Fe Ave., 90021
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