Virginia Jackson Kiah

June 3, 1922 – December 28, 2001

Engagement

> "I loved art, but I couldn't go to a museum because my skin was black. I told my mother that someday I'd like to have a museum everybody could go to." Virginia Jackson Kiah

Virginia Jackson Kiah was a nationally acclaimed artist, educator, civil rights activist and museum founder. Her portraits represent both the famous and the unknown. Using the **super skill of engagement**, she connected with all subjects through her portraiture, her education, and her museum. Kiah's sought-after work hangs on the walls of the *Baltimore Women's Civic League*, *Carnagie Institute* and *Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD)* as well as private collections. The *SCAD Museum of Art* building is dedicated in her honor due to her tremendous contributions to the art community and her commitment to educaton. Because she was not able to go to museums as a child, she was determined to have a place to engage with art that everyone could enter. Her home became *The Kiah Museum* in 1959. Her slogan was "art for the masses."

Born in Baltimore in 1911 to civil rights activists, Virginia Jackson was raised with full awareness of the difficulties of being of African descent in the United States. However, she was also supported in her own dreams to become an artist, a profession that was not generally supported by the African American community at large.

After high school, she earned a bachelor of fine arts degree from *Philadelphia College of Art*, becoming the first African American at the school to earn the highest honor in life drawing. She continued her studies in Pennsylvania and New York and earned a masters degree from *Columbia University*.

In 1950, she married Dr. Calvin L. Kiah, a professor and ultimately the chair of the educaton department at *Savannah State College* (now University). Following her move to Savannah, she taught at *Beach High School* until 1963, after she returned full-time to her own portraiture art. Virginia Kiah engaged with and supported the local as well as the art community at large as she continued her own artistic endeavors.

Virginia Kiah established *The Kiah Museum* in 1959 for everyone to enjoy and became a founding member of the *National Conference of Artists* through *Atlanta University* in order to promote, recognize and inspire Africa American art and artists.

Virginia Kiah continued her own art and *The Kiah Museum* until her death at the age of 90, leaving a legacy of engagement and collection of portraits. *The Kiah House Museum* in Savannah is now in the process of being restored. **Scan the QR code to learn more.**

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