Eventual Autumn, 2003 | oil on linen, 62 x 50 inches
IN 1834, CHARLES SMITH OLDEN – together with his new bride Phebe Ann Smith – returned to Princeton after a ten years absence in New Orleans. Using savings from a successful mercantile business and a small inheritance, he purchased his grandfather’s homestead and authorized the construction of Drumthwacket. The impressive Greek revival style home and colossal portico is inspired by the southern architecture of the city that left an indelible mark upon the future Governor.

Almost 200 years later, the buildings and architecture of New Orleans continue to inspire New Jersey painter, Philemona Williamson. Each oil on paper piece features a single structure set against vibrant hues that simultaneously fill columns or seep through windows. Space is mostly undefined as background and foreground merge in the interplay of shape and color. Only the titles of each work root the images to a specific place. Philemona’s house portraits simultaneously capture a respect for the past, celebrate the present and suggest the future.

Philemona’s signature work features adolescent youth. Each oversized canvas is dominated by one or two figures set against rich colorful backgrounds punctuated with just enough information to set the scene. There is an element of fantasy that only the innocence of childhood can conjure, yet the dream-like tranquility is disrupted by the burgeoning undercurrents of adolescence. The dizzying transition from childhood to adulthood is breathlessly suspended within the universality of Philemona’s figures. The young people depicted, in the artist’s words, ‘blur the lines between race, gender and class.’ They represent every child and remind the viewer more of what unites the human experience than what may divide.

On behalf of the Drumthwacket Foundation, I would like to thank Philemona Williamson for generously sharing her work; June Kelly, owner and Director of the June Kelly Gallery, NYC for her assistance with the exhibit; and Robyn Brenner, Curator and Executive Director of the Foundation for bringing Philemona’s work to Drumthwacket.

Tammy Murphy
President Drumthwacket Foundation
Sunday Picnic, 2010  |  oil on linen, 48 x 60 inches
Children on Green Leaves, 2017 | oil on linen, 46 x 75 inches
(above) Orion Avenue  |  oil on paper, 22 x 30 inches
(below) Melpomene Place  |  oil on paper, 22 x 30 inches
Terpsichore Street  |  oil on paper, 22 x 30 inches
Conti Street    |  oil on paper, 22 x 30 inches
Humanity Street | oil on paper, 22 x 30 inches
Verbena Street | oil on paper, 22 x 30 inches
Dryades Street  | oil on paper, 22 x 30 inches
Lowerline Street  | oil on paper, 22 x 30 inches
Erato Street | oil on paper, 22 x 30 inches
Pauger Street | oil on paper, 22 x 30 inches
Desire Street  |  oil on paper, 22 x 30 inches
Marigny Street  |  oil on paper, 22 x 30 inches
A Contemplative Perch, 2017 | oil on linen, 60 x 48 inches
False Tinder, 2018  |  oil on canvas, 48 x 60 inches
PHILEMONA WILLIAMSON

EDUCATION
1979  MA, New York University, New York
1973  BA, Bennington College, VT

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS SINCE 2010
2017  Philemona Williamson: Metaphorical Narratives, retrospective, curated and essay by chief curator Gail Stavisky, Montclair Art Museum, NJ; catalogue
Hovering Tales, June Kelly Gallery, New York
The Beautiful Somewhere: The Art of Philemona Williamson, guest curator, Arturo Lindsay, former Professor Emeritus and former Chair of the Department of Art and Art History, Spelman College, the Sonja Haynes Stone Center for Black Culture and History, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; brochure
2015  Black & Colored: Recent Paintings, June Kelly Gallery, New York
2013  Philemona Williamson: New Works, Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts, Wilmington, DE
2012  Philemona Williamson: New Work, Center for the Arts, Holtzman Gallery, Towson University, Towson, MD; catalogue
2010  Fractured Tales, June Kelly Gallery, New York

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS SINCE 2009
2017  Converging Voices: Gender and Identity, curated by Karen T. Albert, Deputy Director and Chief Curator, Hofstra University Museum, Hempstead, NY; brochure
2016-17  Visions of Our 44th President, organized by the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, Detroit, MI, curated by Peter Kaplan of Our World, LLC, The Black Archives Historic Lyric Theater, Miami, FL, travelling exhibition
2016  Recharging the Image: Selections from the Mott-Warsh Collection, Visual Arts Center of New Jersey, Summit, NJ
2014  Aljira at 30, Dream and Reality, New Jersey State Museum, Trenton
2012  Five Decades of Collecting, Sheldon Museum of Art, Lincoln, NE; catalogue
2010  Shrew’d: The Smart & Sassy Survey of American Women Artists, curated by Sharon Kennedy, Sheldon Museum of Art, Lincoln, NE; catalogue
Children’s Pleasures: American Celebrations of Childhood, curated by Donna Barnes, Ph.D., Emily Lowe Gallery, Hofstra University Museum, Hempstead, NY; catalogue
2009-12  A Complex Weave: Women and Identity in Contemporary Art, organized by Rutgers-Camden Center for the Arts and co-curated by Dr. Martin Rosenberg, Rutgers University and Dr. J. Susan Isaacs, Towson University; catalogue. The exhibition will travel nationally under the auspices of the Curatorial Assistance Exhibition and Art Services; catalogue

PUBLIC & CORPORATE COLLECTIONS
Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, MI
Mint Museum of Art, Charlotte, NC
Montclair Art Museum, New Jersey
Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, MA
Hampton University Museum, VA
Sheldon Art Museum, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE
Mott-Warsh Art Collection, Flint, MI
Reader’s Digest Art Collection, Pleasantville, NY
AT&T, NJ

GRANTS & AWARDS
2015  Joan Mitchell Foundation Residency, New Orleans, LA
2008  Bau Institute, two-week residency, Otranto, Italy
1997  Joan Mitchell Foundation Award in Painting, New York
1993-94  Ludwig Vogelstein Grant, New York

Melpomene Place (detail)
THE DRUMTHWACKET FOUNDATION

The Drumthwacket Foundation serves to inspire pride in and enhance civic awareness of Drumthwacket, the official New Jersey governor’s residence and a nationally landmarked historic site. The Foundation facilitates restoration and conservation of the residence and offers educational and cultural programs that recognize the rich diversity of New Jersey’s communities and residents.

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