



wig series | sonya clark



COMB

WIG

HAIR

HAIR

WIG

COMB

HAIR

WIG

COMB

The Wig Series has been inspired by the continuum between fiber processes and hairstyles in the African Diaspora.

The line between hat, wig, and hairstyle is often blurred. **What remains constant is the attention to the head as a place**

worthy of inspired adornment and indicative of inner states. When Erykah Badu sings : “ you better pick your afro

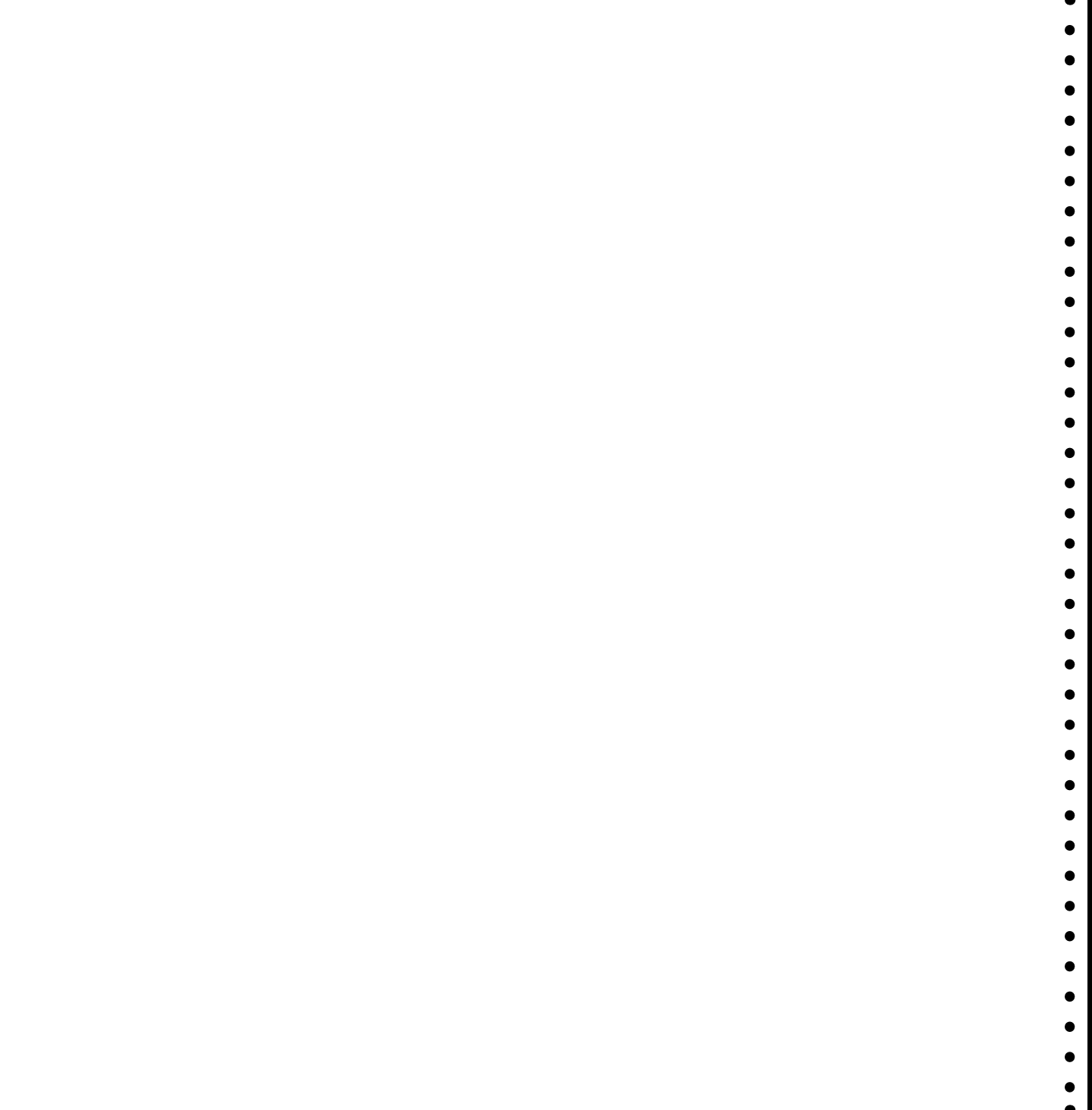
Daddy ‘cause it’s flat on one side” , she implies that the subject of her song is as psychologically unkempt as his hair.

The Wig Series embraces order and design as semiotic devices. Several pieces are based on a mathematic sequence, the

Fibonacci Series. Each number in the sequence is the sum of the previous two. The pieces have a number of sections

that corresponds to a number in the Fibonacci Series (1,1,2,3,5,8,13,21).

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Sonya Clark". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.







Viewed as sculpture in a white-walled gallery, Sonya Y. S. Clark's headdresses, hats, and wig-like constructions inspire a straightened spine and dignified, assured carriage. The physical response draws energy up through the body to the top of the skull, focusing attention on the head's subtle balancing act...

One can be a whole person without arms, breasts, fingers or a nose. But without a head, there is no self - and perhaps no home for the soul. It is this understanding of the head's spiritual importance, drawn from

African traditions, that drives Clark's interest in headdresses and hairstyles. **If the head houses the spirit**

then its adornment and protection is a sacred act of reverence and celebration.



TWO TREES

2002, cloth and thread

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit.

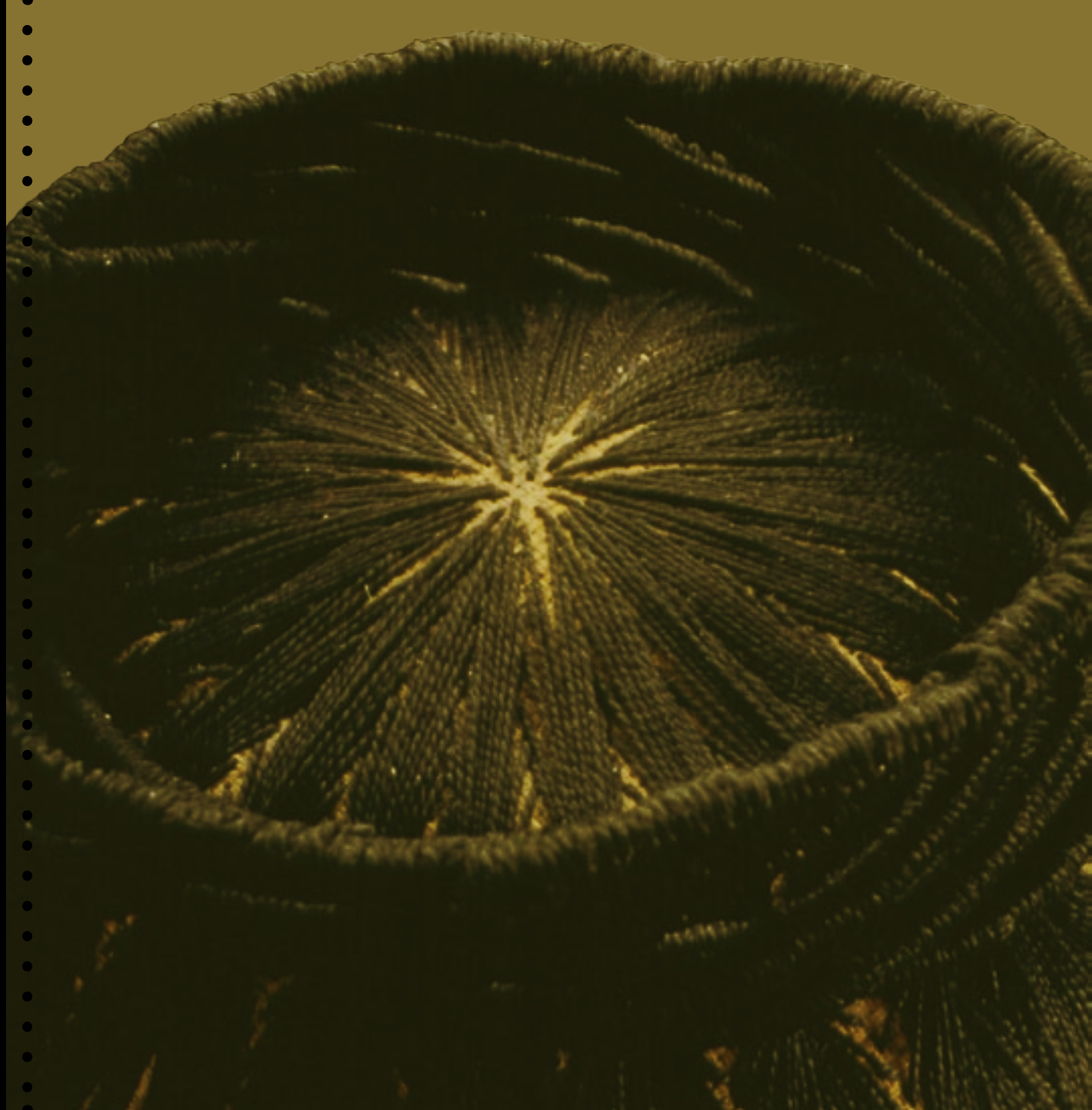
Etiam condimentum sapien ut elit. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Etiam condimentum sapien ut elit.



CROWN

1999, cloth and thread

Crown is an homage to a statement by James Baldwin. He suggested that as people of African descent in the Americas "we must find our lost crowns and wear them?"





UNUM

1998, cloth and thread

COLLECTION OF MADISON MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

The concept "unity of many into one" is reinforced as all of the threads are wrapped into one form. The antennae is likened to traditional hair-styles that connect one's head and destiny with the power and guidance of ancestors and divine spirits.



DRYAD

1998, cloth and thread

COLLECTION OF JAMES DOZIER

The spirit of a tree is embodied on the head. This image was inspired by the baobab tree at the center of many West African villages as well as a quote from Pablo Neruda "What did the tree learn from its (roots) to be able to talk with the sky?"



HEMI

1998, cloth and thread

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Parting the hair in two is an outward recognition of the inner structure of the hemispheres of the brain. It also speaks of the crossing from one hemisphere to the next and implies something of the Middle Passage.

1123



TRIAD

1998, cloth and thread

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The scalp is divided into three sections. Each section is combed into a braid. The universal trinity: beginning, middle and end or past, present and future is exemplified in this child's hairstyle that is ubiquitous throughout the African diaspora.

11235



FINGERS

1998, cloth and thread

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The scalp is the palm. It is divided into five sections. The thread wrapped extensions become the fingers. The palm holds the knowledge. The fingers gather and extend knowledge through action, gesture and deed.

112358



SPIDER

1998, cloth and thread

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Only one creature on earth has eight legs. The spider, Ananse, is known as a trickster in Ghanaian stories. These stories crossed the Atlantic and were reinvented with the characters Aunt Nancy or Brer Rabbit.

11235813



ONIGI

1997, cloth and thread

This piece is directly influenced by the Nigerian thread-wrapped hairstyle, onigi, which means sticks. The hairstyle forms a nimbus of projections around the head.

1123581321



TWENTY ONE

1998, cloth and thread

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The number twenty one has multiple meaning in American culture. If one is playing blackjack it is a lucky number, it also signifies adulthood and responsibility.

Issues of African cultural ancestry, artistic memory, aesthetic

distinctiveness, and ritual authority converge in the work

of Sonya Clark... It resonates with a complexity far beyond

the materials, methods and formal strategies employed.

Bill Gaskins

New Art Examiner, March 1997

Flipping one's wig. Sonya Clark flips the wig, turning things on their head, as it were, making hats that seem like hair. These wigs reveal rather than conceal, showing the kinds of hairstyles black women might have with a meticulous consciousness of their hair and its potential for artifice.

Layered beneath the craftsmanship and detail of Clark's works are insinuations about the head that as old as African lore cycles; cultural artifacts that have burrowed themselves into proverbs and rituals.

Many art students learn to draw the head at about one-ninth to one-tenth the height of the body. However, in much West African art, what is known as an African proportion prevails. The head forms approximately one-fourth the height of the body symbolically concretizing its relative value. Except

WIGGED SONYA CLARK

REFERENTIAL

—

REVERENTIAL

—

IRREVERENT

for the exquisite life heads from nine hundred to five hundred years ago, most West African art is stylized and symbolic. This aesthetic expresses the notion that visual reality is not primary, but instead reflects or materializes the principles and spiritual realities

and relationships that form the visual. Among the Yoruba of Nigeria the head, *ori*, is the seat of knowledge and personality, and it is where the eternal spirit that animates humans resides.

It is so significant that there is a shrine to the head in many households known as an *ibori*. The *ibori* is often covered with cowrie shells, the equivalent of silver dollars, as

a testament to the value of the head.

Perhaps elaborate hairstyles function sympathetically with the cowries on an *ibori*. They adorn an important place, accentuating its value and increasing its potency

with the added value. Women of African descent have created elaborate hairstyles for generations and these adornments have been documented to a degree in art. Sonya Clark has transformed this tradition of importance and artifice into art and, semiotically, into signs for the old African and African American discourse on hair and the hairstyles that might be seen as signposts on the journey of contemporary descendants of recent blues travelers.



Colonial photograph ca. 1910 of a Nigerian woman wearing an elaborate hairstyle.

The works are referential, reverential, and irreverent all at once. Clark's wigs don't hide bad hair days, but suggest BAD hair days. They remind, and surprise. Yet they can be unsettling because they look a bit like disembodied scalps. Because the works are, in the end, human references, one cannot encounter the work and not become engaged. Sonya Clark has flipped her wigs for us. And that's a good thing.

Dr. Michael D. Harris, 2005

Professor Harris teaches Art History at the UNC-Chapel Hill and is the Consulting Curator of African American Art at the High Museum in Atlanta. His most recent book is "Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation." He earned a PhD from Yale University and an MFA in painting from Howard University.