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A Homecoming at the Newark Museum of Art

West Orange artist Bisa Butler, who interned at the museum as a college student, hopes her newly acquired work will help viewers see all people as one.

By [Marlaina Cockcroft](#) | August 17, 2021 | Appears in the [August 2021](#) issue

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Bisa Butler's *The Warmth of Other Sons* depicts Black families moving north during the Great Migration. Courtesy of Richard Goodbody

When Bisa Butler created *The Warmth of Other Sons*, her quilted portrait of Black families traveling north during the early-1900s Great Migration, she used old photographs for reference. The faces were striking. In one photo, a boy stands “commanding your attention,” says Butler. “Who is this serious little child, and who are these people, and where are they going?”

As visitors to the Newark Museum of Art view the 9-by-12-foot piece created from layered fabrics, the West Orange artist hopes they will ask similar questions. “Sometimes Black people are looked at as other, as different,” which leads to prejudicial treatment, says Butler. “I hope when people see that piece and all my pieces, [they see] that Black people are just like they are.”

Creating *Warmth* during the pandemic gave Butler more time to focus on her art while also processing her reaction to contemporary events, such as George Floyd’s murder. “I had this important thing to work on in the midst of a really tumultuous time period,” she says.

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The piece is the museum’s first acquisition of Butler’s work. (A smaller piece, *Flowers for Faith*, is on loan to the museum.) Tricia Bloom, the museum’s curator of American art, proposed the acquisition. She was eager to work with Butler, a former Newark art teacher. The Newark arts community, says Bloom, has “a huge amount of pride in Bisa.”

Warmth was installed at the museum in time for its reopening in June. The serious boy is at the center of the piece, flanked by six older figures in brightly patterned garb.

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Butler, who interned at the museum as a college student, says of the acquisition, “This is a very nice homecoming.”

Tickets to the museum are timed and must be reserved in advance at newarkmuseumart.org.

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