



Indigo: Variations in Blue

AIKEN-RHETT HOUSE MUSEUM, C.1820

MARCH 13 - JUNE 28, 2026

CURATED BY TUSHARA BINDU GUDE, PH.D.

The beauty of indigo and the depth of its expressive power—as a color, pigment, and dye, as an idea and inspiration, as a basis for community, and as a catalyst of memory—inform this exhibition. The works, by eight artists of varied background and training who became personally connected through their explorations of indigo, highlight the collaborative nature of the medium as well as a generosity of spirit palpable among indigo practitioners in the Lowcountry.

Arianne King Comer, Hank Herring, Precious Jennings, Monique de La Tour, and Jim Martin live and work in Charleston and its surrounding region. **Amina Ahmed, Nyugen Smith, and Genesis Tramaine** are based in New Jersey but spent considerable time in Charleston as artists-in-residence at the Foundation for Spirituality and the Arts. All of the artists represent diverse ancestries and migrations that parallel the historical pathways of indigo across Asia, Africa, Europe, the Caribbean, and the Americas. They also demonstrate the diasporic consciousness with which indigo has come to be linked. At the c.1820 Aiken-Rhett House, their artworks gain a certain poignancy; the many variations of, and in, indigo blue installed throughout the property speak to the transregional and transoceanic networks that shaped Charleston and its environs, though at immense human cost.

Textiles have long been the primary medium for indigo expression. In shades redolent of sky, water, nature, divinity, among other things, indigo textiles carried a ritual, spiritual, or otherworldly value long before they became objects of desire that fueled plantation economies in South Carolina and elsewhere. The textiles in the exhibition—of cotton, silk, wool, even human hair—belie indigo's historical commodification, demonstrating the startling visual range and symbolic language of the dye in its past and present-day applications. The exhibition also presents indigo across a range of forms—installation, sculpture, and video—and through diverse media—including ceramic, paper, wood, and stone—that exploit its visual and historical multivalence. As a metonym for the plantation system at large, the Aiken-Rhett House provides a meaningful locus for these artworks, all of which highlight the value of indigo not only as a color but also as a tool for the interrogation of history, for the recovery and preservation of traditions, beliefs, and identities, and for the assertion of a common humanity.

The bamboo textile stands, courtesy of Johns Island horticulturalist Ed Swails, are inspired by a layer of chinoiserie wallpaper visible on the second floor of the Aiken-Rhett House. They speak to the global exchange of plants that brought non-native species of indigo and bamboo to the South. Several pedestals, acknowledging the labor that built Charleston, are fashioned from bricks used in the 1891 construction of Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church and generously lent for this exhibition.



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