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# Art in the heart of family matter at new Epcot exhibit



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Bernard and Shirley Kinsey and their son, Khalil, flank "The Cultivators." The painting has three figures that represent the Kinseys. (Ricardo Ramirez Buxeda, Orlando Sentinel / March 3, 2013)  
 Dewayne Bevil on Attractions  
 Theme Park Ranger  
 11:51 a.m. EST, March 7, 2013

It was a third-grade homework assignment that sparked the creation of a collection of African-American art and artifacts on exhibit at **Epcot**.

The **Kinsey Collection**, gathered by **Bernard and Shirley Kinsey**, grew from a desire to help their son, **Khalil**, learn about his family tree for school.

"We could only go back a few generations. I remember that part distinctly because a lot of my friends and classmates could go back a lot further," says Khalil. "It kind of left me, as a kid, wondering what was going on."



**Dewayne Bevil on Attractions**



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The Kinseys decided to use art as a conduit to the past, purchasing works that spoke to them or reminded them of their youth in Florida. Bernard Kinsey is from West Palm Beach, and Shirley Kinsey was born in St. Augustine. They met while students at **Florida A&M University** in Tallahassee.

They started adding rare documents, letters and books to their personal trove, which was kept in their house in California, where they moved after college. Bernard Kinsey became a vice president of **Xerox Corp.** there and the couple became known as philanthropists. In 2005, after the **Los Angeles Times** published a story about their home, a museum approached them, Shirley Kinsey says.

"We knew folks were interested," she says. "Our son's friends would come, and Bernard would give them a history lesson and they wouldn't want to leave. We sort of knew it was touching something somewhere."

Since then, the Kinsey Collection has been in several museums, including a stint in the **Smithsonian Institution** in Washington, D.C. Now 40 of their pieces are in the gallery in Epcot's **American Adventure**.

"One of the things we love about Disney is that they're storytellers just like the Kinseys," says Bernard Kinsey. "What has sustained the Kinsey collections over these last seven years, is not just having books and manuscripts and two- and three-dimensional objects. ... It's really the story of unearthing these remarkable people that nobody knows about."

Among the noteworthy-but-unnoticed folks put in the spotlight are **Josiah Walls**, an African-American elected to the **U.S. House of Representatives** from Florida in 1871, and **Phillis Wheatley**, a poet and the first African-American woman to have a book published.

The **Walt Disney Imagineering** touch also is on display at the Epcot exhibit. Disney was responsible for the displays, wall coverings, graphics and color schemes, says **Jason Roberts**, a WDI producer.

Disney created special interactive lanterns for the Kinsey exhibit. Guests will see flickering photos inside, sort of a cross between a flame and a tiny movie.

"Whenever you touch the lanterns, it gives you a little bit more in-depth story, some inspirational stories," Roberts says. "You'll see some imagery inside the lanterns along with a voice-over that touches on one of the themes."

The Kinseys expect the diversity of their crowd will expand with the theme-park location.

"We've been in several museums," Shirley Kinsey says.

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"But Disney offers a totally, totally brand-new experience for us and a totally different audience from people who go to museums."

Relatives of the Kinseys are represented in the Epcot exhibit, including Bernard's father, **U.B. Kinsey**, who was a school principal in South Florida. In 1942, he and colleagues hired **Thurgood Marshall** to represent them in a lawsuit that sought equal pay for Palm Beach County's African-American teachers. Marshall became the first black justice on the U.S. Supreme Court.

The sewing machine of Shirley Kinsey's grandmother also is at Epcot. Shirley Kinsey recalls growing up in the 1950s and '60s and not being allowed to try on clothes in stores. So her grandmother sewed them all.

"I had a hard time letting this one go. It has not been in an exhibit before," Shirley Kinsey says. "There's a little piece of fabric there [on the machine] that's been there since she passed away." She died in 1975.

She has other favorites at Epcot, including a bust of abolitionist leader **Frederick Douglass**.

"It's very, very eye-catching because of its size and the intensity of his gaze. It's almost like his eyes follow you," she says.

She also likes an untitled painting by **Hughie Lee-Smith**, an artist born in Eustis. It portrays a pig-tailed girl jumping rope and looking to the horizon.

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