

# Charles Criner

*An Obama Momma*  
Stone lithograph on paper  
30 x 22 inches

LMFA Permanent Collection



Charles Criner, a Houston-based artist, depicts the historical moment of Barack Obama's presidential election with a joyous black woman picking a star from the sky positioned in front of an African slave quilt. In many of Criner's lithographs and paintings, people's hands are disproportionately large. Most of the people in his work are working-class—many are depicted working in fields picking cotton, peas, potatoes, and so forth. Their large hands tell a story, as the hands are the part of the body that performs this sort of work.

"An Obama Mamma," is one such artwork. This hard-working exuberant woman's hands are exaggerated purposefully for effect. Criner also often uses family members or people close to him as inspiration for the faces in many of his pieces. His art is personal and reflects many of the things that he was familiar with when growing up, from church ladies to children playing on abandoned railroad boxcars to people fishing (one of his favorite hobbies) and more. Every piece carries a story that is close to his heart and memory.

Like his mentor and Texas Southern University professor, renowned artist Dr. John Biggers, Charles had a chance to travel to Africa, and he felt very moved by the experience. The art created from that travel experience is powerful and beautiful. Criner created an Underground Railroad series of prints, and he also celebrated Juneteenth with a series of lithographs that were made into posters.

Here, Charles is pulling a lithography print off a Starwheel Oak Press from 1830.



Criner continues to create his artwork using an antique Starwheel Oak Press from 1830. He teaches lithography workshops, leads tours, and helps educate people about printing techniques at the Printing Museum in Houston, Texas. If you visit at the right time and get lucky, you might be able to see him working on a new lithograph or printing another one of his creations. Such a sight is a rare treat, as there are not many presses of that vintage still in operation.

Dr. John Biggers thought of his students as his greatest accomplishment, and Charles Criner has fulfilled that part of his mentor's dream with his many soaring achievements.