



To our dearest supporters,

If you've been following AVAM for some time, you may already know the name "Missionary Mary"—a woman whose artwork radiates joy, love, and hard-earned wisdom through the most unexpected of materials. Painted on old doors, pieced together with crushed glass, buttons, soda cans, and what others might dismiss as debris, Mary Proctor's works don't whisper—they sing. And they've touched hearts around the world.

Mary has spent more than thirty years sharing the kind of wisdom that only comes from weathering great adversity. Her message is deceptively simple: Be joyful. And not the easy kind. She reminds us that it takes real strength to be joyful in the face of sadness.

When I traveled down to visit Mary and her husband Tyrone in northern Florida, I was greeted not just with hugs and hospitality, but with a full-on immersion into their life—a life stitched with faith, grit, and sequins. They insisted on a "Mother's Day turkey" in lieu of dinner out, playfully debating whether a pair of hens would do the trick instead, arguing in the endearing way that only two people married for 44 years can. Mary welcomed me wearing rhinestone sunglasses, a purple sequin shirt, and a halo of blonde curls. At one point, she told me, "I'm not a celebrity, but I look like a celebrity." And I thought to myself: *You sure feel like one to me.*

I arrived there carrying a satchel of my own worries—about the world, the future, and all the tangled personal threads I hadn't quite sorted out. I left lighter. I left clearer. Mary had given me no sermon, no prescription—just her presence, her joy, and her truth. She showed me what it looks like to face adversity with your soul still singing.

It is my most heartfelt hope that this exhibition might offer a taste of that same feeling to every person who walks through it. That each visitor might leave a little lighter, a little more ready to keep going, and maybe even a little more willing to rejoice in their own shining life.

**This exhibition marks a beautiful threshold—the very first to open under the spirited leadership of our new Executive Director, Ellen Owens. It is our hope that it might stand as an auspicious beginning, a joyful bell rung at the start of a new chapter. Your support would mean the world to us to carry Mary's—and the American Visionary Art Museum's—radiant message of joy and resilience to new generations.**

With love and kindness,

Gage Branda  
Curator

**ART HEALS THE MIND BODY  
AND SOUL**

**800 KEY HIGHWAY, BALTIMORE, MD, 21230**

THE

# STRENGTH TO BE JOYFUL

MESSAGES FROM MARY PROCTOR

OPEN AUGUST 2ND, 2025 THROUGH AUGUST 2ND, 2027



"WHEN I CREATE, I FEEL LIKE A BUTTERFLY."

## THE STRENGTH TO BE JOYFUL



is a visionary art exhibition celebrating the life, spirit, and creative journey of Mary Proctor. Raised by her grandmother in rural Florida, Proctor turned to art after a fire took her grandmother's life. In the wake of this tragedy and during a deep depression, a spiritual vision told her to **"PAINT THE DOOR."**

Using salvaged materials and deeply personal memories, she creates powerful, joy-filled works layered with

handwritten messages, broken china, house paint, and all sorts of odds and ends from her flea market past. Her art speaks to forgiveness, resilience, and the everyday miracles of love and faith. This two-year exhibition, housed on the third floor of our main Zanyvl Krieger Building, features Proctor's story in her own words and the many wisdoms she has gained throughout her life. *The Strength to Be Joyful* invites viewers to **REFLECT, HEAL, AND CARRY FORWARD THE COURAGE AND JOY** that Proctor has so generously shared for more than 30 years. Her doors don't just open—**THEY SPEAK.**

In a world too often darkened by despair, AVAM is proud to shine its brilliant spotlight on a woman whose life and work sing like a gospel choir to the redemptive power of joy, love, and spirit-led creativity. This fall, AVAM presents "*The Strength to Be Joyful*," a landmark solo exhibition dedicated to the astonishing life and luminous work of Southern visionary artist Mary Proctor, also known to many as "Missionary Mary."



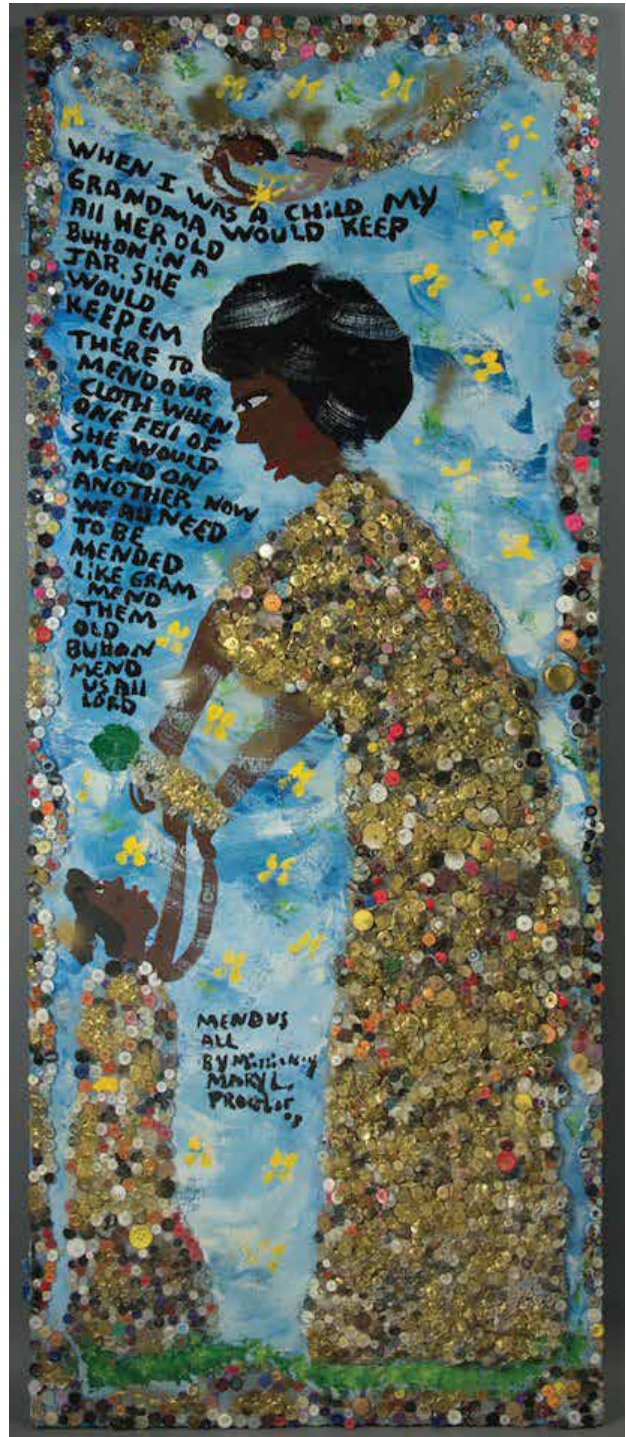
Mary Proctor's art is gospel—both in the themes it uplifts and the salvational role it played in her own life. Born in Lloyd, Florida, to an absent father and a mother much too young, Proctor was raised by her beloved grandparents, Miss Hattie Cooksy and Mr. Frank Cooksy. Her grandmother, whom Proctor affectionately called her best friend, was a wellspring of love, protection, and practical wisdom. Miss Hattie's words and presence reverberate throughout Proctor's art to this day—morsels of guidance stitched lovingly into every painted message. Proctor's early life was marked not just by hardship, but by the radiant, abiding presence of a grandmother who taught her that kindness, gratitude, and faith were sacred acts. That grandmotherly wisdom became the cornerstone of her spiritual and creative life, surfacing time and again in Proctor's painted tributes and affirmations to the world.

In 1995, Proctor had a profound vision that would come to shape her entire life's calling. One night, she awoke with a sense of foreboding —seeing a vision of smoke, she woke her husband to tell him something didn't feel right. He reassured her, and she lay back down. But then, she saw her grandmother—vivid and unmistakable. Her grandmother told her to take care of her boys. Then came the words: "I'm going." That same night the call came: her grandmother's home was engulfed in flames. When Proctor lost her grandmother along with her aunt and uncle in a sudden and devastating house fire. It was as if her light had been extinguished. The grief was soul-shattering. In that abyss of sorrow, Proctor turned inward and upward, crying out to God in desperate search for meaning, for mercy, for direction. Her grief almost silenced her. In her sorrow, she undertook a spiritual fast, thirty days without food, during which she asked God again and again: "Why, why did you take my best friend?" On the final day, she received what she describes as a divine directive: **"PAINT THE DOOR."**

IT MAY SEEM DARK  
AT TIMES YET I  
HOLD ON I KNOW  
THE SUN WILL  
SHINE

### **In Mary's words:**

*"I heard something say 'Paint the door.' So I grabbed the door and I grabbed some blue and white paint and I started painting the door. And before I knew it, that when I did that, I started painting a woman, just a woman, a figure of a woman. And she had on blue dress. I had blue. So I really like blue and white. And she, the dress came in that painted dress blue. And I know it in the thing, out of the blue, I was given words. I was writing out what I was saying. I'm like, you know, I'm writing down what I'm hearing in the spirit. I'm writing down, oh boy. And I kept writing. I kept writing, and I kept writing. Before I knew it, the door was filled. Everything I was hearing, everything I was going through. And when I know there was a woman figure with a whole body of writing around it. So I went, whoa... dang... what is this? So I grab another door. I don't know how many doors I did. I started writing what I did when I was a child, because I used to write for grandma... my [art] yard had begun with what grandma said, what grandma did, and then other stuff that I just thought of, you know, came along... taking blue willow plates, taking things, crushing it, taking buttons, put on other things. And all of a sudden I wasn't thinking about grandma anymore, much of nothing."*



**MEND US ALL**



**"I WAS DELIVERED. I HAD BEEN HEALED. I MEAN, I GOT HEALED BECAUSE WHAT I WAS DOING IS ART AND HEALING ME FROM THINKING ABOUT WHAT I WAS GOING THROUGH AND WRITING, RELEASING MYSELF IN ART..."**

Proctor now channels that healing power into every piece she creates—not to revisit pain, but to share what she's learned: that joy and healing is possible. Her works are richly layered with embedded objects, sequins, buttons, Bible verses, anecdotes humorous and wise, and affirmations that speak directly to the human soul. Whether honoring the memory of her grandmother or channeling words of divine healing, her art is always an invitation to be grateful and awake to everyday miracles—to recognize that even sorrow, when transfigured by love and faith, can become a portal to joy.



Mary Proctor's work arrives at a critical moment. In the aftermath of global pandemic trauma, political polarization, and deepening loneliness, her joyful affirmations are nothing short of balm, a reminder that there is always a path to joy, so long as you have the strength to pursue it. This exhibition will be a sanctuary—a space for spiritual rest, uplift, and collective wonder—featuring more than 35 of her most iconic painted stories, accompanied by audio recordings detailing their details and inspirations straight from Proctor's own mouth.

*"I want people to gather up what Mary brought to the world and that's joy, hope, love and peace."*



## WHEN A MAN LOVES A WOMAN

He'll never hurt her nor  
break her apart.

Cause He knows loving Her  
is better than breaking Her  
Heart.

If they shall fuss He'll walk  
away and come back when  
he can make thing right.

Loving Her is better than  
fighting any day or night.





# THE THINGS MY OLD GRANDMOMA TOLD ME YESTERDAY HOLDS ME TODAY.

*I'm glad I'm following her old pattern.*

- 1. Love the Lord with All your Heart*
- 2. Everybody that Smile in your face ain't your friend*
- 3. Stay out folk business.*
- 4. If you ain't got nothing good to say dont say nothing at all.*
- 5. Don't eat from everybody kitchen.*
- 6. Respect everyman.*
- 7. When folk talk about you, hold your head up.*
- 8. Don't put your hands on nothing ain't yours.*
- 9. Don't be a tale tailor, a Liar.*
- 10. Leave women's men alone.*
- 11. Tell your business to God.*

*Thanks Grandmoma*







MY GRANDMA'S OLD BLUE WILLOW PLATES



THE  
STRENGTH  
TO BE JOYFUL

MESSAGES FROM MARY PROCTOR

August 2nd, 2025 through August 2nd, 2027

Exhibition and Sponsorship Opportunities

Benefit Categories	Buttoned Butterflies \$2,500+ (Unlimited)	Joy Carriers \$5,000+(8)	Shine Spreaders \$10,000+(4)	Sequined Saints \$25,000+(2)	Blue Willow Wonder \$50,000(1)
Sponsor Listing on Website & Signage	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ Lead sponsor across all platforms
Listing on Social Media & Press Release, more than 105,000 subscribers across all platforms				✓	✓
Use of AVAM Event Space. Subject to availability.			50% discount on use of AVAM's 2nd Floor Jim Rouse Visionary Center Conference Room (capacity 20)	1 free use of AVAM's 2nd Floor Jim Rouse Visionary Center Conference Room (capacity 20)	One free use of AVAM's 3rd-floor café space (capacity 60)
Fall 2025 Exhibition Preview Party Tickets	2	2	4	6	10
Private Curator Tour					Up to ten guests
Free One-time use General Admission Passes		4	6	10	20



Exhibition Dates: August 2nd, 2025 to August 2nd, 2027

### ***Exhibition Sponsorship & Partnership Opportunities***

We hope you will be inspired—whether by your own love of visionary wonders, your belief in the transformative power of joy, or the deep truth that art lives within all of us—to partner with us and generously support this soulful, original exhibition and its rich educational programming.

#### **\$50,000 (1) "Blue Willow Wonder" Presenting Sponsor**

- Listed as sponsor for "The Strength to Be Joyful" exhibition, across all platforms — website, social media, museum collateral and branding, throughout the two-year life of the exhibition
- One free use of AVAM's 2nd Floor Jim Rouse Visionary Center Conference Room (capacity 20), subject to availability, throughout the exhibition year
- 6 tickets to Fall Exhibition Preview Party (Fall 2025)
- Discount code for 10 one-time use free admission passes, valid until Fall 2027

#### **\$25,000+ (2) "Sequined Saints" Exhibition Sponsors**

Listed as sponsor for "The Strength to Be Joyful" exhibition on AVAM's website & exhibition signage throughout the two-year life of the exhibition

- 4 tickets to Fall Exhibition Preview Party (Fall 2025)
- 50% discount on use of AVAM's 2nd Floor Jim Rouse Visionary Center Conference Room (capacity 20), subject to availability, throughout the exhibition year
- Discount code for 6 one-time use free admission passes, valid until Fall 2027

#### **\$10,000+ (4) "Shine Spreaders" Exhibition Sponsors**

Listed as sponsor for "The Strength to Be Joyful" exhibition on AVAM's website & exhibition signage throughout the two-year life of the exhibition

- 2 tickets to Fall Exhibition Preview Party (Fall 2025)
- Discount code for 4 one-time use free admission passes, valid until Fall 2027

#### **\$5,000+ (8) "Joy Carriers" Exhibition Sponsors**

Listed as sponsor for "The Strength to Be Joyful" exhibition on AVAM's website & exhibition signage throughout the life of the exhibition

- 2 tickets to Fall Exhibition Preview Party (Fall 2025)
- Discount code for 4 one-time use free admission passes, valid until Fall 2027

#### **\$2,500+ (unlimited) "Buttoned Butterflies" Exhibition Sponsors**

Listed as sponsor for "The Strength to Be Joyful" exhibition on AVAM's website & exhibition signage throughout the two-year life of the exhibition

- 2 tickets to Fall Exhibition Preview Party (Fall 2025)