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For Immediate Release:

SANA MUSASAMA Raised Earth

**Eric Firestone Gallery
40 Great Jones Street, New York, NY 10012
September 5 – October 18, 2025
Opening Reception: Friday, September 5, 6:00–8:00PM**

Eric Firestone Gallery is pleased to announce its first solo exhibition of the internationally recognized ceramic artist Sana Musasama. The exhibition will be a dynamic installation of Musasama's formative *House* series: vertically stacked ceramic sculptures, like abstracted small-scale temples, exploring multicultural connections to home and community. The work is inspired by the artist's time living in adobe houses in West Africa in the mid-1970s, her recurrent travel to Cambodia, and time spent in the American West.

The slab-formed ceramics are multi-planar, touched and textured structures with deep color areas and repeated oval shapes that can be read variously as eyes, leaves, or vaginal forms. They are etched with intricate sgraffito marks suggesting body adornment, weavings, flora, and fauna. Elements extend from the planes: rings suggesting jewelry and grids like open baskets or seed pods. In her *House* series, Musasama uses both earthenware and stoneware and accomplishes her vivid colors through various ceramic glazes, often finishing her works with salt or soda firing to create exquisite surfaces that contrast with the red-brown clay she prefers.

Musasama first began her *House* series in the late 1970s, and they were the subject of a 1985 exhibition at the Studio Museum, following her 1983–84 residency with the museum. She decided to revisit these works 45 years later, creating what she called “siblings” to the original works in response to the isolation of 2020. Over the past two years, the artist has worked across the globe to create about twenty significant new *House* sculptures. This will be the first time work from the two periods are joined into a solo, survey exhibition.



Sana Musasama in her studio, 2023. Photograph by Grace Roselli, Pandora's BoxX Project.

Musasama (b. 1951, New York, NY) is a Black activist feminist artist and global citizen, whose time spent living with women and girls in village societies in Cambodia, South America, Asia, and West Africa has shaped her artwork,

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Sana Musasama | *Tuscarora (House Series #4)* | 1983-84
glazed stoneware
64 x 14 x 10 in.

developed alongside her humanitarian work. She defines her practice through the motto “Inspire, Commit, Act.”

Musasama grew up in St. Albans, Queens, and continues to live and work in her childhood home. She received her BA from City College, City University of New York in 1974, and her MFA from Alfred University in 1987. Musasama’s first formative trip was to Sierra Leone in the 1970s, where she lived amongst the Mende people. Musasama notes that traveling around the world centered and grounded her, making her understand the differences between what she grew up with, and how others around the world grew up and lived.

During her travels, which often involved living in village societies, she would first get to know people and the culture by going to markets, which were dominated by women. Musasama came to understand how women look out for other women. Young girls—the daughters of these women—often became her guides, as she learned the language, how to shop, prepare food, and use tools.

She also came to appreciate how clay is everywhere, and that “it comes in as many different colors as we do.” The landscape and the decorative arts were inspirations for her work. The patterns of rice paddies in Vietnam found their way onto the surfaces of her ceramics, as did the sgraffito lines of the temples of Burma. She understood that baskets—which were often lined with clay or mud—were the origins of pottery, and incorporated the patterns of their weaving. Cinnamon plants sold on the side of the road informed leaf patterns. The sight of rows of cabbages inspired her to experiment with walls of clay conveying compression. Abstract signs and symbols were everywhere: in adornment practices, markings of identity, and clothing that signified specific societies. Musasama combined these visual forms with her expertise in ceramics.

Musasama recognized that her travels were joyous but also could be uncomfortable, scary, and dangerous, and these feelings were embedded into the forms. Her small-scale temples explore healing from multi-generational trauma through the touch of clay.

Through an article in *Glamour* in 2006, Musasama learned about the Somaly Mam Foundation, which rescued teenage girls and young women who were victims of sex trafficking. She traveled to Cambodia to volunteer for a program that used artmaking and craftwork as a healing modality from this trauma. After her first experience, she knew that she would spend the rest of her life working with these Cambodian girls on beading and textiles. She developed the entrepreneurial “Apron Project” to give girls who lacked education an extra way to make income through their creations. On her first trip to Cambodia, Musasama was dismayed to realize she had never been taught about the Cambodian genocide. She began to make ceramic work reflecting the images and remains she saw.

Musasama’s self-stated goal is to create art “for us,” centering her experience as a Black woman, to tell cultural and historical stories which are often suppressed.

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Her work often moves past its racist, historical narrative. They speak of cultural pride and self love. From early in her career, Musasama has been committed to spaces that highlight Black artists and celebrate multiculturalism within New York. In addition to the Studio Museum, she had a residency and exhibitions at the Jamaica Arts Center (where she has taught since 2008), and showed at Cinque Gallery in the 1980s.

Musasama is the recipient of an Anonymous Was a Woman Grant (2002) and the Outstanding Achievement Award (2018) from the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts (NCECA) for her years of teaching and her humanitarian work with victims of sex trafficking in Cambodia. In 2024 she was the subject of a solo exhibition at the Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, NY, and became the first recipient of the NCECA Innovator Award. Musasama's work is held in the collections of the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY; the Hood Museum of Art, Hanover, NH; the Museum of Art and Design, New York, NY; Cooper Hewitt National Design Museum, New York, NY; Mint Museum of Craft and Design, Charlotte, NC; the European Ceramic Work Center, s-Hertogenbosch, the Netherlands; the Archie Bray Foundation, Helena, MN, and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York, NY.

Eric Firestone Gallery began working with Musasama in 2022, presenting an in-depth solo installation of her work at the 2023 New York edition of the 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair. Over the past two years, Musasama has participated in a series of residency programs: the Watershed Center for the Ceramic Arts, Edgecomb, ME; Township10, Marshall, NC; The New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University, NY; Penland School of Craft, Mitchell County, NC; the Archie Bray Foundation, Helena, MT; and most recently the Shangyu Celadon Modern International Ceramic Center in Zhejiang Province, China.

Her work will be included in the exhibitions *Re-Union: Syd Carpenter, Martha Jackson Jarvis, Judy Moonelis, Sana Musasama, and Winnie Owens Hart* at the Frances M. Maguire Art Museum and *Clay Has Memory: Generational Knowledge from Africa* at the Princeton University Art Museum, both opening in 2026.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue with an essay by Patricia Spears Jones.



Sana Musasama | *House Series #17* | 2023
glazed earthenware
25 x 16 x 11 in.

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For further information, contact: press@ericfirestonegallery.com