Permanent and Natural is a group show featuring hair as a form of personal expression, as cultural relic, and as artistic medium. Permanent and Natural explores the diverse contexts in which artists have incorporated the natural, malleable material that is deeply connected to individual and community identity. Featured artists in Permanent and Natural include:

Alison Braun: Seattle based photographer who captured many of the top punk rock and grunge bands while living in Los Angeles and Seattle in the 1980s and '90s.

Sonya Clark: Multimedia artist based in Amherst, Massachusetts who integrates hair and textile design to create work dealing with themes of race and identity.

CreativeSoul Photography: Atlanta duo Kahran and Regis Bethencourt’s photography focuses primarily on children featuring elaborate costuming and hairstyles to celebrate the beauty and versatility of black hair.

Y. Malik Jalal: Atlanta based painting and collage artist whose work focuses on the lives American decedents of slavery and their artistic traditions.

James Russell May: Louisville based artist who creates contemporary paintings based on ancient Greek and Christian mythologies.

Gabrielle Mayer: New Albany artist who creates Victorian hair wreaths and art installations.

Fahamu Pecou: Atlanta based artist whose Of Crowns and Kings series explores the ritual, majesty, and sanctity of Black men and their hair.

Steve Spencer: Little Rock, Arkansas based painter creates work that crosses folk art with pop culture.

Alexis Eke: Toronto, Ontario based illustrator influenced by traditional Japanese and Renaissance portraiture to create contemporary representations of black women.

Stacey Vest: Cincinnati based costume and wig engineer that creates wigs to wear and display. She draws inspiration from past, present, and future cultures from around the world and has developed a considerable following among the drag community.
“We feel that it is so important for kids of color to be able to see positive images that look like them in the media… Unfortunately the lack of diversity often plays into the stereotypes that they are not ‘good enough’ and often forces kids to have low self-esteem…We hope that viewers will see the beauty and versatility of afro hair and we hope that girls around the world will be inspired to love their unique differences and beauty within.”
Kahran and Regis Bethencourt (the photography duo behind CreativeSoul Photography) confront the fashion industry and its representations of African American children. Prior to studio sessions with the Bethencourts, people often sent images of their children wearing their hair naturally. When they arrived for their sessions, however, they would have straightened their hair because that was the expectation in the fashion industry.

Sophisticated Soul, 2017
Chrystal archival print
30 x 20 inches

Girl with the Pearls, 2017
Chrystal archival print
30 x 20 inches
CreativeSoul travels worldwide to capture images of girls and their natural hair to inspire them to embrace themselves for who they are, build confidence, and feel royal and empowered. CreativeSoul are inspired by steampunk, Afrofuturism, and traditional African styles. Kahran is also especially fond of the Victorian and Baroque eras, periods when people of color were rarely represented in art.

The Future is Now, 2019
Chrystal archival print
30 x 20 inches

A Lion’s Mane, 2019
Chrystal archival print
30 x 20 inches
In the 1970s, Major League Baseball found itself at the intersection of social and professional upheaval. Historian Dan Epstein wrote, “The rebellious, anti-authoritarian spirit that had been so palpable on college campuses since the late 1960s seemed to have finally infected the sport...
...If the integration of baseball in the 1940s and ‘50s sparked changes in American culture, then the ‘70s was the decade where the changes in American culture turned back around and impacted baseball.”

An anti-authoritarian sentiment found its way among the players, who began openly rebelling against decades of owner control of the game. The seventies were the first time players went on strike (1972) and saw the introduction of free agency (1976), where players were finally free of strict team control over their careers and they were able to sell their services to the highest bidder.

In an effort to attract free agents (and the fans who stopped coming to games after the player strike) some teams openly embraced the more colorful personalities and the big hair they wore to express their personal swagger. Other teams, like the New York Yankees, doubled down and drafted an official appearance policy (1973) that required players to be clean shaven (mustaches and goatees were permitted) and their hair trimmed above the collar.
This piece is a bridal wig Vest created for a fictitious Carnival themed wedding.

Originally introduced by colonialists across the Americas and the Caribbean, Carnival is a colorful affair. Each region has developed its own traditions incorporating a mix of styles and rituals with heavy influences from African cultures.
At the world’s largest Carnival in Rio de Janeiro, scantily clad revelers dance in flamboyant, feathered, and bejeweled costumes. As the celebration comes to an end, the costumes are casually tossed aside without thought. As Carnival is a festival that bids farewell to the flesh leading into the Lenten season, so too do the costumes go the way of the flesh.

Vest is a Cincinnati area-based artist. She creates Neo-Baroque and Avant-Garde wigs, headpieces, and other haute couture wearable works of art. From the distinguished and understated to the outrageous, she wants her work to help transform the wearer’s personality and experiences by turning them into someone completely new and different. The artist states that her goal is, “to find beauty in bizarre and facilitate flamboyance for all beings of any age. On a daily basis I’ll find spontaneity and organic exploration of my surroundings inspired by the shapes, textures and divergency inherent to the natural world, increasing my desire to create sustainable works.”
**Inclinez Votre Chapeau**, 2017  
Hair, feathers, felt  
Dimensions variable

This piece was inspired by the lavish wigs worn by Constanze Mozart, performed by actress Elizabeth Berridge in the 1984 movie Amadeus.  

Women’s fashion during of the 18th century was heavily influenced by Marie Antoinette, first by imitation of her style, then in retaliation of her style. Fashion in the late 18th century was a period of transition as wardrobes shifted from the very elaborate Rococo style to the simpler, more “classical” ideals of the Enlightenment.

**Good Luck Charlie**, 2016  
Hair, race charms, straw paint  
Dimensions variable

Vest created Good Luck Charlie for a Kentucky Derby celebration at Belterra Park Cincinnati where she also served as a judge for a Derby hat competition.
Let Us Eat Cake, 2018
Recycled wedding cake decorations, paint, and hair
Dimensions variable

This piece was created for the 45-year anniversary of the Cincinnati Pride Parade. In addition to the celebrating the LGBTQ+ community, the event has served as a catalyst for the city’s gay rights movement, promoting acceptance of all individuals regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, and seeking protections against discrimination.

Let Us Eat Cake was created to support equal rights to domestic partnerships. It was worn in the parade by The Enquirer’s and The Greater Cincinnati Foundation’s 2017 Women of the Year award recipient and celebrated artist, Pam Kravetz.
Y. Malik Jalal

*Untitled*, 2019

Collage on pegboard

24 x 36 inches

Jalal is interested in the histories and experiences of the American decedents of enslaved people, particularly the organic artistic traditions in Black American communities.

In Jalal’s hometown of Atlanta, there are several strip malls that are destinations for discounted beauty and fashion needs, including hair braiding shops. In this collage, Jalal recreates a homemade pegboard hairstyle guide that you might find in one of the common salons that serve low income communities. Customers can point to a style and say, “This is what I want!”

These pegboards are also living portfolios of a stylist’s work and career. Jalal is attracted to the composition that grows organically over time as the stylist adds new samples to their repertoire. Jalal’s collage is composed of clipping from the same hair magazines that stylists use to create their homemade guides.
Y. Malik Jalal  
**Long Pan; Red Rice**, 2018  
Mixed media on canvas  
48 x 48 inches

In this painting, Jalal gives us a snapshot of a young child with her hair braided into cornrows. This style of braiding was so named because the rows of braids kept tight to the scalp resembled rows of corn planted in the American colonies. However, this technique has a long history predating the United States, tracing its lineage back to Africa where examples of this hairstyle have been found on sculptures dating back to 3500 BCE.
It was the enslaved peoples who brought the tradition to the New World, and with it codified meanings behind the people and the designs they wore.

Throughout parts of Africa, the design of these braids worn by a person can convey their age, religion, family, wealth, and marital status. There are even stories of enslaved peoples in South America that used this type of braiding to secretly communicate to others means of liberation, mapping paths to freedom, and squirreling away bits of gold and seeds to help them on their journeys.

For the greater part of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, cornrows in America have been largely been a choice of fashion. Made popular over the past 20 years by such pop culture stars as Venus and Serena Williams, Allen Iverson, Snoop Dogg, and Beyoncé, cornrows’ rise in popularity have not come without a price. Many African Americans have found themselves trapped between two extremes – being labeled as “thugs” for their hairstyle of choice on the one hand, while on the other having their culture being appropriated by others who don’t share their same histories and experiences.
Inspired by both the beauty and ethnology of hair, Clark explores the aesthetic of hair interwoven with cultural and spiritual representation. She says that from a very young age, she understood that hairdressing was an art form, that it was a form of sculpture on her head. She also recognized the value of the ritual of hairdressing as a child.
“The stories I was told and lessons I learned as I sat between the knees of a female relative as a child, and the sense of aesthetics expressed in the chair at the black beauty salon have molded my identity. Coming to know oneself and others through the rituals of hairdressing and hairstyling is a unique way of knowing.”

Long Hair is a digital print that measures the growth of a single lock of dreaded hair if grown over a person’s lifetime, from the cradle to the grave. The entire print is thirty feet long, though only a portion of it remains visible. It serves as “a reference to the measuring of one’s lifetime and destiny in a spun thread as Lachesis of the Fates.”

Lachesis and her sisters Clotho and Atropos formed the Three Moirai (Fates) in Greek mythology. Clotho’s role was to spin the thread of life, Lachesis drew out and measured the thread, and Atropos cut the thread. Lachesis was responsible for deciding how much life every person on earth lived, as well as being the decider of their destinies.
European attitudes towards the presentation of hair has ebbed and flowed over the centuries. Russel is fascinated by the architectural-like structure of how hair is depicted in ancient Greek and Roman sculptures and paintings. By the Middle Ages, though,
Europeans projected a much more modest appearances promoted by the Catholic Church, with both men and women covering their heads and hair.

However, the rise of the cultural and intellectual movement of the Renaissance in the 15th century brought with it an obsession with Greco-Roman culture. As interest in philosophy, science, and mathematics grew, cracks in the Church’s influence began to appear. This shift opened up new fashions as people began removing their veils and feel the wind blow through their hair once again.

While most depictions of people at this time were of patrons wealthy enough to commission artists of the time, Russel creates these hair studies detached from any specified individual. He purposely leaves the owner of the tresses ambiguous so they can just as easily be interpreted as the hair of a goddess, of a woman of nobility, or of a commoner.
Alison Braun

Braun began her journey photographing the top punk rock bands that came through Los Angeles at the age of fourteen when her father, an amateur photographer, gave her a Pentax K100. She leveraged her photography skills to gain access to shows at popular clubs along Hollywood’s Sunset Strip, such as Whisky a Go Go, the Roxy Theatre, and the Starwood.

Punk culture—music, fashion, and hairstyles—is an aggressive rejection of popular social trends and norms. Punk hairstyles play a major role broadcasting attitude.

Take, for example, the Mohawk, like those seen in Braun’s GBH Perkins Place photograph. With a strip of hair running down the middle of the head and shaved sides, the Mohawk has become synonymous with Punk Rock. In his book Hairdos of Defiance, author and photographer Ed Templeton states, “Having a punk hairstyle was a way to spit in the eye of polite society, to rebel and depart from the prevailing fashion trends. It was an emblem of non-conformity and a hairdo of defiance...”

But the Mohawk has a much deeper history than punks performing on the Sunset Strip. The term “Mohawk” comes from the indigenous North American Mohawk tribe, depicted in popular mid-twentieth century Western movies such as Mohawk and Drums Along the Mohawk.

Previous page:
*The Misfits, Glenn Danzig*, 1983
Photographic prints
25 x 19 inches
Ironically, the Mohawk style, as we know it today, more closely resembles the hairstyle of Pawnee tribes, rather than by the Mohawks themselves.

Other historical examples of the Mohawk style can be found in artwork depicting Eurasian nomadic warriors known as

*The Misfits, Jerry Only*, 1983
Photographic print
25 x 19 inches

*45-Grave, Mary Sims*, 1982
Photographic print
25 x 19 inches

From the historical archive of Alison Braun
Scythians, dating back to 600 BCE.

A male Scythian body dating back between 400 BCE and 200 BCE was found in 2003, preserved in a bog near Dublin, Ireland. The Clonycavan Man, as he came to be known as, had a fully intact Mohawk that was styled using plant oils and resins.

GBH Perkins Place, 1983
Photographic print
25 x 19 inches

Battalion of Saints, Chris Smith, 1983
Photographic print
25 x 19 inches

From the historical archive of Alison Braun
Another unique hairstyle in punk circles was the “devilock,” a style made popular by the band The Misfits, as seen in two of Braun’s photos. The Misfits formed in 1977 in New Jersey. By 1981, the Misfits completed their transformation from the more typical “Manhattan” punk look into something more dark and sinister. Black leather and silver spikes accompanied the full blown adoption of the ghoulish devilock hairstyle, where the hair on the sides and back of the head are kept short, and the front bangs are grown long and hang down the middle of one’s face. This aesthetic follows the band’s path toward the horror-punk genre. While they maintained the social defiance of their punk peers, they separated themselves by being less political and more shock and gore, effectively creating a subset of a subculture. Jerry Only and Glenn Danzig drew inspiration for their devilocks from hairstyles of 1970s skateboarders and Eddie Munster. The Misfits even wrote a song titled “Devilock,” released in 1983 on their Earth A.D. album.
Soundgarden, Chris Cornell, 1990
Photographic print
19 x 25 inches
From the historical archive of Alison Braun
Eke’s “digital paintings” are created primarily using Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator programs. She describes her work as “a mix between Afrofuturism and contemporary Renaissance.”

She creates the type of images she wishes she had been exposed to as a middle school student, when she began studying art. There were few, if any, Black artists represented.
This spurred both a desire to create art that emphasizes contemporary Black beauty and for others to see talented Black woman artists represented in museums and galleries.

Eke believes that what we see plays a big role in self-expression and the things we say. Eke’s trademark white lines connect the eyes and mouth of all her subjects for this reason. Whether hair is filled in or erased, she says, is purely an aesthetic design decision. Does your mind automatically fill in the hair, or divert focus elsewhere?
Pecou’s installation *Watch the Throne* is part of a larger series titled Of Crowns and Kings. Recent controversies surrounding Black hair expression (such as schools banning certain styles of natural hair and the fight to pass legislation to end discrimination) prompted the artist to create the series.
Pecou celebrates the rituals and majesty of Black men and their hair. The artist sees the barbershop as “a sacred space where Black men are free from the trappings of society, and the barber chair is a transformation chamber where men enter, but kings leave.”

Pecou reimagines the barber chair as a throne. Three slow motion close-up videos of Black men getting haircuts captures the sacred ritual of Black male grooming.
First shown at Backslash Gallery in Paris, France in 2019, *Watch the Throne* makes its American debut here at the Carnegie Center for Art and History.
While popular in the mid to late nineteenth century, hairwork, or jewelry made from human hair, eventually fell out of favor. The twentieth century saw a cultural shift away from elaborate Victorian trends and a rise in ready-made goods.

Because historical techniques are lost over time, artists like Mayer are forced to teach themselves how to create these art forms with little assistance from mentors. Mayer began creating hairwork after she purchased a broken hair flower in a shop in New Mexico. Enthralled, she took it apart in an effort to reverse engineer how it was constructed so she could replicate similar techniques with new work. While she does work with synthetic hair and horse hair, human hair is her primary medium of choice.
Sisters (left)
Synthetic and human hair, wire
16 x 14 inches

Mother & Daughters (below)
Human hair, wire
14 x 18 inches

Victorian Landscape (not pictured)
Human hair, wire
16 x 14 inches
**Posies** (right)
Human hair, wire
17 x 17 inches

Examples of hair art and jewelry can be found dating back to the medieval period, but its prominence peaked in the Victorian era, which embraced romanticism and mysticism. When Queen Victoria’s husband, Prince Consort Albert, died in 1861 the popular Queen began a formal mourning period that lasted the remaining 40 years of her life, giving rise to mourning fashion throughout the British Empire. The practice also found an amenable audience across the Atlantic in the United States, a grieving nation mourning significant losses of life due to the Civil War. Mourning pieces created with the hair of loved ones reflected the exaggerated sentimentality of the day.

Hair also became a popular medium to work with due to its natural malleability, its resistance to decay, and its easy access as a material. Hair was used to make wreaths, brooches, rings, necklaces, and was even kept in scrapbooks where samples were traded amongst friends, similar to autograph books of today.