



# Master Barber, Masterpieces

One of Baltimore's most interesting art galleries is tucked inside a Sowebo barbershop.

# W

While Sowebo barber Troy Staton buzzes hair off Carlos, a regular customer and long-time friend, the two men jaw about the recent good fortunes of the Ravens, Orioles, and Blast. "You know, most folks don't even know our soccer team just won their title," says Staton. "I knew," says Carlos, thumbing his chest. "But the team gets no recognition," says Staton. "Not like back in the day when they played at the Arena." "You mean 1st Mariner?" asks Carlos. "It'll always be the Civic Center to me." Mention of the Civic Center triggers an exchange about downtown spots they frequented—Crazy John's, the Penny Arcade, and Gino's—and concerts they attended. "Remember the Prince show?" Staton asks, momentarily silencing the clippers in his hand. "Wasn't that the one where he made love to the bed? You know, I saw LL Cool J at the Civic Center, too."

"The Fresh Fest," says Carlos, smiling. "I remember what I was wearing—a Patrick Ewing [jersey] and New York Knicks hat. I was up in that show."

"I had on those Adidas Ivan Lendl shorts and shirt from Charlie Rudo's with the Top Ten Nikes."

"The red, white, and blue?"

"Nah, burgundy."

"They were nice. You know what else I liked at the Civic Center? Roller derby."

Staton nods, clicks on the clippers, and resumes cutting. It's typical barbershop banter in a Hollins Street barbershop, New Beginnings, that's far from typical. Besides being a master barber, the 45-year-old Staton collects art, and he's turned his well-appointed shop—spiral staircase, plush sofa,

**▲ Pictured:** Troy Staton at work, surrounded by photos from the Bonnie Schupp exhibit he curated.

wood floors, and outdoor cafe tables—into one of the city's more interesting galleries. Bonnie Schupp photos line the walls, and you might spot a Renee Stout sculpture (made of dreadlocks collected by Staton) or a Lou Stovall print upstairs.

Since opening the shop five years ago, Staton has curated and/or booked shows of drawings by Stout (winner of last year's Sondheim Prize), paintings by Ernest Shaw, Linda Day Clark's Gee's Bend photographs, and work by the Iris PhotoCollective, which includes Pulitzer winner Clarence Williams and Pulitzer nominee Andre Chung.

**Staton first got into contemporary art by watching *The Cosby Show* as a teenager.**

"I didn't learn about all that by going to art school," says Staton. "I learned by doing research and listening to artists. That's how I got to be a barber, too. I listened, and I learned."

**At 13, Staton started** cutting hair on the porch of his mother's house in Cherry Hill. He initially picked up the clippers to "straighten out" the haircuts his mother gave him and then did the same for his brother, before making customers of friends in the neighborhood. It wasn't long before he was hanging out at Heavy's Barber Shop at Cherry Hill Shopping Center, where he sat and watched Heavy and another barber, Kaisie, cut heads.

"They would quiz me," recalls Staton. "What kind of blade is this? What kind of hair cut is that?" Then, I'd go home and practice. It kept me out of trouble."

He refined his barbering talents at the Westside Skill Center in the 1980s before going to work at Harry's Afro Hut and Lenny's House of Naturals. Saying he was "trained by all the legends," Staton ticks

## To Look Your Best, You Need the Best

Johns Hopkins facial plastic and reconstructive surgeons Drs. Patrick Byrne, Lisa Ishii and Kofi Boahene focus exclusively on the face. Their experience is what you can count on to achieve a new, rejuvenated you.

**DISCOVER WHAT'S POSSIBLE.**

*Johns Hopkins Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery is a division of Johns Hopkins Department of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery*

**Call for Appointments: 1-877-546-4530**  
Locations in Baltimore, Lutherville and White Marsh



Things to See

UPCOMING EXHIBITIONS

JUNE

→ **Ulysses Marshall**  
Painter, collagist, and self-described “artist in exile,” Marshall studied under Grace Hartigan at MICA and has exhibited at the Corcoran and Reginald F. Lewis museums, among many others. The influence of Marshall’s grandmother, a quilter, can be seen in his colorfully pieced together work. **Opening reception: June 22**

JULY

→ **Jerry Prettyman**  
Prettyman specializes in painting blues and jazz musicians, and his portraits of Miles, Mingus, and Satchmo reflect the intensity of those icons. Other pieces simply capture the overall vitality of the music. **Opening reception: July 13**

AUGUST

→ **James Phillips**  
Associated with the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, Phillips incorporates African patterns and designs into kaleidoscopic paintings that pulse with color. **Opening reception: August 17**

SEPTEMBER

→ **Karen Buster**  
Buster does remarkable things with an X-acto blade, creating assemblages and prints that nudge graphic design into the realm of fine art. **Opening reception: September 14**

OCTOBER

→ **Clarke Peters**  
The star of HBO’s *Treme* and *The Wire*, Peters recently exhibited his paintings in New Orleans and this will be the first local show of his work, which ranges from abstract art to Impressionism to realism. **Opening reception: TBA**



Ulysses Marshall, “Langston at the Savoy.”



James Phillips, “Sunburst.”



Ulysses Marshall, “Exiled.”

off what he learned from each one: “Lenny [Clay] was master of the Afro, [Willie] Harry had a good concept of the business side, Mr. Heavy [Alexander Foy] could cut a fade with great finesse, and Kaisie [Kaiser Livingston] taught me to do a shape-up and how to listen to customers. I’ve carried on all these things that they instilled in me.”

That includes having a strong sense of community. “They were good people, family-oriented,” says Staton. “They taught me that you don’t just show up in a community, you make yourself part of the community and do what is needed.”

There’s evidence of that all around the shop. A dozen suits hanging near the staircase are available to folks needing them for job interviews, and Staton will throw in a haircut, too. Customers can use free Wi-Fi or check out the well-stocked library that includes classics, art books, and children’s books. The shop also collects food for the Maryland Food Bank, partners with an adult day-care program at a nearby church, distributes candy at Halloween, and provides summer jobs for local teenagers.

Staton sees the art he exhibits as an extension of the community work. “This might be the only place some people ever see art because they’ve taken art out of the schools,” he says. “And you definitely don’t see much on television about art. So I started putting art on the walls so kids could see it, only to find out that the adults knew less than the children. So my mission became showing art, mostly work by African-American artists, in an environment that is warm, friendly, and not intimidating.”

The effort has impressed no less than MICA’s Leslie King-Hammond, who commends Staton for showing “exceptional works of art” and “transforming the traditional barbershop into a place for having your body, mind, and spirit renewed.”

Sowebo Arts president Bill Adler concurs, praising New Beginnings for its “great art shows” and “positive impact on the community” and gives Staton extra credit for exhibiting local artists.

But it was Staton’s birthday party at New Beginnings in 2012 that really impressed Renee Stout. It featured hand-rolled cigars,

seafood, and a lively crowd that spilled onto the sidewalk and included Sowebo residents, museum curators, and artists. At one point, Stout overheard a man ask his companion if she liked “the African pieces”—which included Stout’s dreadlock sculpture—on view in the window. “I don’t like that kind of stuff, because it scares me,” she said. “Troy knows what kind of art I like.”

“Well, I like those pieces,” he replied.

Stout says the snippet of conversation, an exchange at a barbershop about tastes in contemporary art, “confirmed that what Troy is doing is so worthwhile and appreciated by the community.”

**Staton first got into** contemporary art by watching *The Cosby Show* as a teenager. He fixated on the artwork hanging on the Huxtables’ walls, and three artists, in particular, caught his eye: Romare Bearden, Varnette Honeywood, and Paul Goodnight. “I didn’t know who they were at the time, but I found out,” says Staton, who, years later, visited Goodnight’s studio in Boston.

He sought out other artists, including Lou

Stovall and abstract painter Sam Gilliam in D.C., and even cut Stovall’s hair during a studio visit. He started collecting art—including a shadowbox piece by Gilliam and a print from Stovall—and, at one point, confided to Gilliam he wanted to exhibit art at the barbershop. The legendary artist, says Staton, told him he’d better “do it right.” Staton seems to have taken that advice as a guiding principle: He chooses the work for each show (with input from local arts aficionados), hangs it himself, and labels each piece carefully.



He came to see the barbershop as “a beautiful platform” for showing art and his corner of Sowebo—with nearby Hollins Market, CUPS Coffeehouse, and the Afro-centric Umri Siki gallery—as a great location. “The barbershop is the last pure place in America that hasn’t been tainted or corrupted,” he says. “Money has tainted our hospitals, schools, all of that, but barbershops haven’t lost that feeling of family and community. As a result, I’ve found it’s the perfect place to introduce people to art and let them forge a relationship with it.”

Staton loves it when kids tell him they went to a museum because they developed an interest in art while getting a haircut. “That was my vision,” says Staton, who also makes it abundantly clear that he considers cutting hair to be *his* art form. “I like art, but this is my medium,” he says, holding up the clippers. “And this man wants a regular haircut, shaped up real nice.”

His customer nods. “Make no mistake,” says Staton, “the masterpiece I’m currently working on is this man’s hair, right here.” **E**

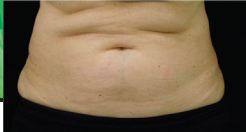
**JOHN LEWIS** is arts and culture editor at *Baltimore*.

**VISIT THE ARCHIVES**  
baltimoremagazine.net/archives  
**Top Salons 2013**, January 2013  
*Includes Balance the Salon, a salon/gallery.*  
**Art All Around**, October 2011  
*King-Hammond calls New Beginnings “must-see” art.*

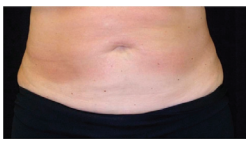


Say goodbye to stubborn fat with our clinically proven, FDA-cleared, totally non-surgical treatment without the downtime.

**ACTUAL PATIENT**



**BEFORE**

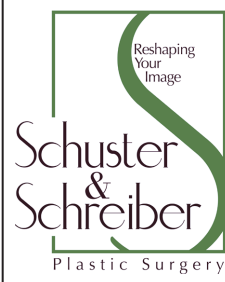


**60 DAYS AFTER ONE COOLSCULPTING® TREATMENT**

**MENTION THIS AD AND RECEIVE \$100 COOL CASH TOWARDS ANY COOLSCULPTING TREATMENT**

**Gift Certificates available**

**First Plastic Surgery Practice in Baltimore to offer CoolSculpting!**



**10807 Falls Road, Suite 101  
Baltimore, MD 21093  
(just north of Greenspring Station)**

**Call 410.902.9800 or visit [www.CoolMyFatNow.com](http://www.CoolMyFatNow.com) to schedule a free consultation.**

Board Certified - American Board of Plastic Surgery



CALL US WHEN EXPERIENCED. COMPASSIONATE CARE MATTERS MOST

**410-323-1700  
1-888-353-1700**

CARE NETWORK SINCE 1957

www.ELIZABETHCOONEYAGENCY.COM

R.N.s • L.P.N.s CERTIFIED NURSING AIDES HOME NURSING CARE COMPANIONS ESCORT • TRANSPORTATION	PERSONAL ASSISTANCE HOURLY • LIVE-IN EMERGENCY • RESPITE SHORT • LONG-TERM PRIVATE DUTY	FLEXIBLE CARE OPTIONS CUSTOMIZED CARE  <b>CARING FOR FIVE GENERATIONS OF FAMILIES</b>
--	---	--

LICENSED & BONDED | MOST INSURANCE AND CREDIT CARDS ACCEPTED | 24-HOUR SERVICE

**TRUST, INTEGRITY & EXCELLENCE SINCE 1957**