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**Tina Allen: The Ancestors' Spirit, A Warrior's Heart
and God's Hands in One Woman
In Struggle Spotlight
By Dr. Anthony Asadullah Samad, PhD
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[Tina Allen](#), sculptor extraordinaire, is now among the ancestors. I love Tina Allen, who was a personal friend and one of the deepest spirits I've ever met. I will hold her memory close. She was a walking spiritual witness of our past and present existence, seeing anything and everything in the context of God, ancestry and art. God blessed her with a talent of replicating life in clay and bronze. She could see it, feel it, hear it and mold it into a life-like image.

Tina didn't see people as they are. She saw them as God intended them to be. She always lived in the present but had an uncanny connection to the past. She talked about her subjects as if they were alive and present with her. Even if they have been among the ancestors for decades, even centuries, she still felt them. With the spirit of the ancestors upon her, God gave her the surest set of hands, what I can only call "God's hands," to be able to mold things in the image of God - only as God could present them, in their physical presentations.

Her work is all around us. You've seen them-the famous figures; Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, A. Philip Randolph, George Washington Carver, Alex Haley, Sammy Davis, Jr. and the cultural abstracts that reflect the best of the African Diaspora - Icon I (Tribute to the Afro-American Man), Icon II (Tribute to the African American Woman), Delta Heart, Angel, Eclipse, Sula (I & II) and Sula's Gift, God's Precious Loan, and my personal favorite, Our Love I and II (The Dream). When this woman put her hands, her touch, on a work, it was as if God, himself, fashioned it from a clump of clay. That was Tina Allen.

Tina was funny, almost quirky, about her work, about life, about politics, about the black community. She always had an informed view of things and almost always left you with something to think about when the conversation was over. About six years ago, we were dancing at a party at actress Judy Pace's home, celebrating her daughter, Julia's, successful play run in L.A. From 8 to 10 was "old school" music that the "grown folks" were partying to, and after 10, when Julia's friends started to arrive, the music took a "generational turn." Instead of going with the beat to this "booty song," Tina started analyzing the misogynistic underpinnings of the lyrics that made it difficult for a real woman to dance to something that subliminally degrading her. That was deep. But that was Tina. Even when she was having fun, she was thinking.

She was like that from the time I met her when she came to Los Angeles twenty years earlier. She would talk about her (and talk to her) pieces as if they were alive. When I brought a limited edition bust of the greatest African American leader of all time, Frederick Douglass, who almost single-handedly forced the deconstruction of America's iron clad institution of slavery (and lived to tell about it), Tina personally delivered it and talked about the bust in the first or second person, as if he was a member of her family. "He likes to be in the sun," she would say, or he shines right up when you use this kind of cloth, "Ain't that right, Frederick?" To this day, everybody in our household talks to the Frederick Douglass bust.

My most personal memories of Tina are during one of the most precious moments of my life, my wedding to my wife, Debra. When Deb and I got married 16 years ago, we put her first *Our Love* sculpture on our wedding invitation. We promised to buy it after the wedding, but in the midst of saving for a new home, private school for kids, etc. we waited too long and she sold it. Approaching our tenth anniversary, I asked Tina to find the now rare, *Our Love*, for me. She couldn't and only had her personal edition. After three months, she said, "I tell you what, people been asking me for years to re-issue or do another *Our Love*. I'll do another one for you and Debra, and it'll be called, *Our Love II*. She sent me internet photos of her progress, and on two days before our tenth anniversary, she delivered the first issue (1 of 32) of her limited *Our Love II* sculpture. We all cried when we saw it. It was a powerfully moving moment for Debra, Tina and me. That is how I'll always remember Tina Allen, doing things, big and small, that brought complete pleasure to people. Love was important to Tina. She loved to love, loved to be loved and loved to show love. It showed in her work. It showed in her life. It showed in her spirit.

Tina Allen has left her mark on the world until the end of time. Statues and sculptures tend to last hundreds, even thousands of years. Every time we look at a work of Tina Allen, we will see her love. Her love, like our love for her, will last that long, too.

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