

# Biography of ALVIN PETTIT

## Sculptor / Painter

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New York/New Jersey based artist, Alvin Dwight Pettit Jr. has established himself in the field of figurative sculpting and painting for over 30 years. Born in Washington, DC and raised in Baltimore, MD., as a child he drew inspiration from his elders, who were also affiliated with the arts. His father and grandfather both painted as a hobby. His father, A. Dwight Pettit Sr., a prominent Baltimore Civil Rights Attorney, would sell his own paintings for extra money during his college years at Howard University in the mid to late 60's. These paintings usually reflected the Black consciousness mindset during the movement of that era, which lead Alvin to recognize the importance of using art as a tool for social change. His great uncle in Greensboro, North Carolina was a professional art teacher, and began instructing Alvin in the skills of drawing at a very early age. His great grandmother, who was a pillar of her community in a small town in Mississippi, was also hugely influential on Alvin, due to her extraordinary talents in the craft of artistic quilt-making. His early professional influences included both historical and contemporary artists such as sculptor Auguste Rodin and painter Barkley Hendricks. However, as a child, Alvin was mostly inspired by comic books and the artists that created them. Illustrators such as Frank Miller, Neil Adams, and Frank Frazetta, heavily Influenced his artistic style. His fascination for sculpture also began at an early age, while attending *ST. Michael's Elementary School* in Baltimore, and observing the vast array of ornate statues of religious figures within the school's cathedral.

Pettit's formal training began at the age of 10, when his grandfather enrolled him into a children's program at the **Maryland Institute College of Art**, where he was immediately transferred to the advanced level life-drawing classes. Throughout his adolescent years, he gravitated towards the competitive thrill of competing and winning in many local student art competitions throughout Baltimore. However, Pettit's more intensive academic art training began during his high school years, after being accepted into the **Baltimore School for the Arts** in 1985, where he also graduated from in 1988. Within this time, at the age of 16, he was granted the opportunity to travel abroad as part of a student summer program to study sculpture at **Scarborough College** in the UK. Shortly after, Pettit relocated to New York City to attend college at the **School of Visual Arts**, where he earned his BFA in 1992. During these years, his desire to become a comic book artist led him to studying under legendary figures in the industry such as cartoonist Will Eisner. However, towards the later part of his student years, he would turn his attention towards creating larger-scale paintings and sculptures, which lead to him changing majors from cartooning to illustration and more traditional fine arts.

Pettit's professional career began in 1994, after being hired as an assistant sculptor to world-renowned pop artist **Jeff Koons**, where he helped to create some of the artist's most iconic works, such as the 10ft' **'Balloon Dog'**. During this time, Pettit furthered his artistic training at the **New York Art Students League** in 1996. Throughout the later half of the 90's, his career shifted to illustration, where he produced works for many clients such as **Saturday Night live, Today's Black Woman Magazine, The Gap, and The Conan O'Brian Show**, to name a few. In 1998 he continued to develop his reputation as a prolific artist by becoming a product designer for the Long Island, NY based animatronics company **Telco**

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**Creations.** Here he would design and sculpt animated holiday figurines to be sold in the stores of **Disney, Walmart, Nordstrom** and many other retail giants. These are the years when he would also enhance his skills in marketing and advertising.

Beginning in the early 2000's, Pettit's focus would shift heavily towards creating large-scale commercial sculptures for major institutions and corporations such as the **NY Museum of Natural History, Macy's Thanksgiving Parade, and Saks Fifth Avenue.** During this time, his talents also extended to curating and installing exhibitions for the **NY Guggenheim Museum.** From 2006 to 2010, Pettit began sharing his extensive knowledge by accepting a position as an instructor at the **Kubert School of Design & Cartooning** in New Jersey, where he trained students to become professional comic book illustrators for major corporations such as Marvel and DC Comics.

In 2013, Mayor Steven M. Fulop of Jersey City, NJ, appointed Pettit as director of the **Mary McLeod Bethune Life Center**; the largest municipally owned and operated community facility of its kind in the City. Over the last decade, Alvin has spearheaded the Center's transformation into one of the most highly revered Cultural epicenters in the area. The Center provides arts, wellness, and educational programming to all of the City's residents and surrounding communities abroad. However, more specifically, the **Bethune Center** (as it is coined) has become the most prominent venue for creative activities within the predominately African-American community in which it resides.

Pettit currently serves on the board of the **Jersey City Arts Council, the Jersey City Artist Certification Board, and the Jersey City Public Art Advisory Board.** He continues to create works for gallery exhibitions and outdoor public spaces. A few of his more recent noteworthy artistic achievements include the creation of the official Jersey City **Black Lives Matter** street mural in 2020, and the sculpting of Jersey City's 11.5ft' bronze **Mary McLeod Bethune Monument** in 2021. In addition, Pettit played a major role in designing the Bethune Park in which the monument stands. Most recently, the City of Philadelphia, PA selected Pettit out of fifty nationally competing artists to create their official permanent **Harriet Tubman Monument** to stand in front of its City Hall. The future 14ft' bronze sculpture will be the first public work of art dedicated to an African-American woman in the City's history.