

## LIFESTYLE

### Smithsonian's Anacostia Community Museum: "Preserving Mark "Too Sharp" Johnson's Boxing Shoes"

By Miriam Doutriaux, Collections Manager, Smithsonian's Anacostia Community Museum

In honor of Black History Month, we highlight one of the ways the Anacostia Community Museum preserves African American history. Many readers will be familiar with the champion boxer Mark "Too Sharp" Johnson, the first African American to capture both the IBF World Flyweight and IBF Super Flyweight championships—twice. Also known as "Too Sharp", Johnson hails from southwest D.C. and was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame (IBHOF) in 2012, and the Washington, D.C. Boxing Hall of Fame in 2018.

Years earlier, in the early 2000s, Johnson was in contact with the

Anacostia Community Museum. As a rising star of the boxing world, and a DC native, he agreed to donate some of his equipment to the museum, with a vision to preserving it for the future. The items — including a pair of custom-made shoes, personalized shorts, boxing gloves and a red leather helmet — were collected "in the moment," as Johnson fought his way to the top, and long before he became a Hall of Famer.

This year, the museum reached out to him to talk about his shoes. They were beat-up, full of holes and tears, with the soles coming off in parts. The museum wanted to conserve them. When museums do conservation work, they consider a variety of factors, including how to preserve some-

thing for the long term, but also whether to make it look "like new" or not. Conservators can seem like magicians, turning back time to fix holes and disappear nicks and cracks. Yet what if the holes, nicks and cracks are part of the story? In the case of Mark Johnson's boxing shoes, there was a strong argument for retaining the wear and tear they endured as artifacts of the boxing ring.

Johnson came to the museum to examine the shoes. They were his favorite, and he admitted to wearing them well beyond their expected lifespan. Tassels were the rage in the 1990s, and videos show him wearing several pairs of similarly tasseled shoes. Some of the holes were sustained in fights. Some of the wear is due to his positioning and footwork as



▶ Smithsonian's Anacostia Community Museum is located at 1901 Fort Place SE - Washington, DC 20020



▶ Mark "Too Sharp" Johnson donated this pair of custom made shoes. They have since been conserved and rehoused. (Photo by Smithsonian's Anacostia Community Museum)

a southpaw, a left-handed boxer who put his right foot forward. In discussing the shoes, Johnson demonstrated his expertise and shared reflections on his illustrious career, as well as his current work training at-risk youth and engaging in violence prevention with the D.C. Department of Parks and Recreation.

Johnson shared reflections with the public at a recent Twilight Tuesdays event at the museum. His equipment was on view, carefully stored (or in museum parlance, rehoused) in new cushioned, acid-free containers. The

shoes are stored upright, with padding, in a slide-out drawer that ensures their stability and protection. They keep their holes and tears, and bear them proudly. Mark Johnson made history and has helped preserve his-story in a way that is authentic and true to the original context.

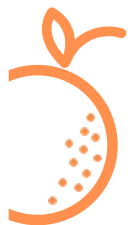
To learn how to store your own personal items, join us on March 31st at 6:30 pm, for Twilight Tuesdays at the museum. Staff will demonstrate how to create high-quality conservation-grade containers for objects. Bring a personal item, and consult with staff on how best to preserve your own treasures for posterity. **WI**

WJLA/ABC7's "On The Road" series will broadcast live from the museum on Tuesday, February 18 beginning at 5 a.m. Mark "Too Sharp" Johnson will be interviewed during the 6-9 a.m. hours along with museum staff and representatives from the Washington National Opera. That evening's Twilight Tuesdays program at the museum features an aria from "Blue" the WNO's upcoming production about a family's struggle when a teenager is shot by the police. Visit [anacostia.si.edu](http://anacostia.si.edu) to learn more about Twilight Tuesdays and other museum public programs.



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