

Seminal Works from the  
**N'Namdi Collection**  
of African-American Art

Oakland University Art Gallery

Curated by Dick Goody



## Seminal Works from the **N’Namdi Collection of African-American Art**

**George N’Namdi has been collecting art since he was an undergraduate at Ohio State in the late-sixties. After receiving a Ph.D. in Psychology from the University of Michigan, he left a successful practice to open Jazzonia, his first gallery in Harmonie Park, Detroit, in 1981. The gallery’s name, derived from the Langston Hughes poem of the same name, captures insight into the influences which inspire the collection and interests of N’Namdi.**

Recent appointee to the State of Michigan Arts and Cultural Council, N’Namdi supports an agenda of cultural enrichment through education and community involvement. This dedication is integral to his network of art galleries operating in Detroit, Chicago, and New York. It is best illustrated by his current stewardship of the \$45 million redevelopment of the Sugar Hill Arts District which is to be part of the new Detroit Creative Corridor stretching from Grand Boulevard to the Detroit River.

*“I’ve always felt a need to help the community, and that, in turn, helps artists. As a dealer, my goal is to help people collect art because it’s an action that enriches the community.”*

Among N’Namdi’s clientele are some of the nation’s most established museums such as The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Museum of Modern Art, The Studio Museum in Harlem, and the Detroit Institute of Arts. In parallel, his discerning connoisseurship has amassed a seminal art collection by artists with significant oeuvres and long established resumes.

It is obtrusive to state that the history of African-American art is one of struggle and racial discrimination. Most historical references about African-American artists focus on the Harlem Renaissance and more sparingly on the subsequent Black Arts Movement. While much can be said about the role of African Diaspora in the contemporary global art market, the foundation of this movement remains under-examined and has been largely marginalized by institutions outside those whose primary focus is on African-American art or cultural anthropology.

The N’Namdi Collection can be seen as a legacy investment which assists in securing the heritage of these artists. It is also a tool for educating audiences on the contributions of people of African descent to the discourse of modern and contemporary art. Hence, from a pedagogical perspective, in this context, this exhibition exposes an essentially European American audience to the ongoing cultural contributions of African-American artists over the last seventy-five years. It should be said, like all history, the contextualization of this collection is ongoing and is one of multiple perspectives and voices.

The Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement were significant developments in twentieth-century American art history; however, they do not fully represent the entire story. The fact that Harlem flourished as a cultural center for African-American arts is of consequence. These movements developed in part as a result of disparity and racial discrimination. By the 1920s, Harlem was a segregated community which had become the cultural nexus for the African Diaspora in North

America. As a result, the early decades of the twentieth century saw the coalescence of diverse cultures and traditions that developed a distinct autonomous intellectual, political, and cultural identity. At a time when race relations were at their most contentious and divisive, a union of ideas, activism, and social pluralities were solidified in this dense urban center. This somewhat precarious and often volatile incubator inspired artists, philosophers, musicians, and writers to explore work imbedded in contemporary African-American culture.

The Harlem Renaissance was a progressive expression of both extant and emergent perspectives which fostered a flowering of artistic confidence and productivity. Artists presented in this exhibition, such as Charles Alston, Romare Bearden, Beauford Delaney, and Jacob Lawrence, inspired a new generation of younger artists, who would later themselves become seminal figures in the latter half of the twentieth century such as Robert Colescott, Sam Gilliam, and David Hammons.

Concurrent with the burgeoning developments in painting, music, and literature, the emergence of fresh philosophical perspectives initiated by black activists, artists, critics, and theorists laid foundation for discourse that encouraged African-Americans to examine their collective and individual cultures as they defined it, not as it was inherited.

In 1903, sociologist W.E.B. DuBois (1868-1963) published a collection of essays on Black history and identity entitled *The Souls of Black Folk*. In this work and later writings he concretized scholarship on human rights as it related to African-Americans. He also developed political platforms addressing racial discrimination, assimilation politics, fiscal autonomy, and self-government. In parallel, Marcus Garvey, the Jamaican born activist (1887-1940), founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA)

which laid the foundations for Black Nationalism and the Civil Rights Movement. The divergent ideas forged by these and other social activists and philosophers addressed monumental issues such as identity politics and equal rights, which in turn would later promise greater freedom for generations of artists.

The Civil Rights Movements that followed and the subsequent murders of the leaders Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. marked a turning point in United States history that saw unprecedented turmoil. These tragedies further fueled the advances in scholarship that encouraged a generation of cultural innovators to seize the power of their struggle and re-focus their agendas to directly address the injustices in a strategic political manner.

Organizations were formed by artists that became driving forces that changed the museum system as we know it today. The Black Arts Movement, formed by Amiri Baraka, empowered largely self-taught artist Vincent Smith to seek alternative perspectives within his heritage to communicate his vision of cultural narrative. The Black Emergency Cultural Council (BECC) formed by Benny Andrews and Cliff Joseph, among others, negotiated with museum leaders and eventually mounted a protest against the controversial exhibition, *Harlem on My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900-1968* at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. While in discussions for greater African-American presence in exhibitions, curatorial input, and staff appointments the BECC was extremely disappointed upon the opening of the show that none of their demands were met: no African-American curators, critics, or scholars were consulted and initially no original artworks by African-Americans were to be shown.

These efforts marked the beginning of a more cohesive activism that solidified a network of efforts

working toward cultural equality and inclusion of African-Americans in what were essentially imperial, canonic institutions. Other organizations, such as the Women, Students, and Artists for Black Liberation (WSABAL) worked on behalf of artist Betye Saar to secure the first exhibition of black female artists at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1970.

The number of “firsts” accomplished by the artists in this collection is a testament to the delayed recognition of the ability, talent, and intellect of African-Americans that was largely unrecognized until the late twentieth century. Al Loving, for example, was the first African-American to have a solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1969. In 1971, Richard Hunt was the first Black American to receive a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art. It was not until 1997 that the first African-American artist, Robert Colescott, represented the United States at the Venice Biennale.

Well-represented in this exhibition are artists trained within the Western Academy. In the sixties and seventies their work focused primarily on abstraction. Ed Clark, Frank Bowling, and Jack Whitten produced work congruent with the contemporaneous movements of Abstract Expressionism, Hard-Edge Painting, and Lyrical Abstraction. In doing so, they were able to work within the artistic infrastructures of both African and European American networks. These artists, like all the artists in this exhibition, were pioneers of authentic historical narrative, technical innovation, and process.

It is worthy to note that several of the artists included this exhibition are not American. These artists provide a wider global context that recognizes the contributions made by artists affected by the African Diaspora throughout the world. Perhaps the most

effective example of this is the black British artist Frank Bowling. Born in Guyana, Bowling was educated in London where he developed a distinct voice concerning the debate on Black art. In the late sixties, working in the former center of colonial power, Bowling initiated discourse not on the formalistic or ethnic differences of art but on the standards by which the pedagogy of the canon has traditionally been taught and subsequently disseminated.

The idea for this exhibition came about after moderating a panel discussion at the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit on collecting in which George N’Namdi was a panelist. Articulate, inclusive and passionate, his confident presence conveyed his overriding sense of ethical responsibility as a collector. For the last four decades, N’Namdi has worked diligently to amass a collection which represents the plurality of philosophies in the history of African-American art. A testament of divergent approaches to art making under difficult social conditions, it speaks to the struggles and triumphs of these artists and the significance of their work as integral to the discourse concerning modern and contemporary art. Each artist has a unique story to tell, whether working in Harlem, New Orleans or San Francisco, Paris, London or Stockholm.



## George N’Namdi on Collecting

**“When I was a kid, although I was not interested in the making of art, I did, however, enjoy decorating and arranging furniture in the house. My parents had some paintings on the walls and I liked hanging them. I also had a great appreciation of clothing style. So my art awareness manifested itself in subliminal ways. I didn’t take art classes in high school. I took business classes instead. As a teenager, I was especially interested in being an advocate for the artistry of other people. I became a promoter for singing groups that performed at dances. I commissioned artists to make hand made posters because I was aware of the importance of marketing and branding.**

I suppose you could say I started collecting in 1968 when I bought four paintings by a college friend, Phyllis Dianne Jones, who was an art major at Ohio State. One of those pieces, *Stan’s Dance*, is in this exhibition. Up until then I’d been purchasing posters. I really liked her work and, just as much, I think, loved the thrill of purchasing the art. It felt very sophisticated. I paid \$125 for the paintings. That was quite a bit of money for a college student, especially since tuition was \$150 a quarter.

Upon moving to Detroit in 1976, I began to work formally with an art dealer from Chicago who would travel to Detroit to do weekend shows. I remember, to my surprise spending \$1,000 with him. That was the largest purchase I had ever made!

I’ve always gravitated toward abstraction. I would never have been able to articulate it at the time, but *Stan’s Dance*, for example, has a formal complexity, especially in the composition. Once you can see the intelligence behind a particular work, you understand that abstract art is a highly intellectual art form. People ask me if my interest in abstraction goes against the market. Well, you have to realize that the market affects so few people. There may be two thousand people in a room and maybe one percent buys art. Never focus on what the market dictates. You must focus only on expanding your own specific interests.

One of the reasons I started collecting was that the rebellion of the 60s induced in me this strong desire to preserve the culture of African-American people and I began to wonder specifically how I could preserve the culture through supporting and preserving visual arts, theater, dance and so on.

Collecting art is important because it changes people’s perception on life. It changes the activities they do. It changes their relationship with people and the way they think about things. It changes conversation. It makes them see the world differently. It’s not about glamour. It’s a total lifestyle change.

When I first went to Harlem in the late sixties I was fascinated by its history, particularly coming from Columbus, Ohio. It was a different world. I was in my early twenties when I first began to visit regularly. I liked to go to the art fairs in Harlem and I made a lot of purchases. I even commissioned a drawing by one of the artists. I associated Harlem with art, but not

in the context of galleries or museums. At that time, for me, it was mostly about art fairs and jazz clubs.

Many of the artists I collect I have a strong connection to because I've known them for a long time. Each one has a unique voice/style, which contributes something significant to art history, particularly to African American art history. When I met Vincent Smith for the first time, for example, I thought he was so cool – I mean *really* cool. I offered him a three person exhibit. The other two artists were a generation older than him. I didn't know that at the time. Vincent was so laid back and he carried a cane. Because of that, I thought he was much older than he was. He agreed to the show, but then he called me back and said *real* cool, in a *real* slow voice: "How did you come up with that group?" Then I realized that it wasn't that he was old – it was because he was *so* cool. Vincent was self taught – which is something I always respected about him. He took classes at the Brooklyn Academy, but he essentially taught himself how to paint. He had the need to make art. He came up with his own vocabulary, his own language, his color harmonies and his amazing sense of space. He was committed.

I have a particular affinity toward a group of artists, all of whom moved to New York in the early 60s, most after completing their M.F.A.s: Ed Clark, Howardena Pindell, Al Loving, Jack Whitten, William T. Williams, and Bill Hutson – I see them as a kind of collective, but when they came to New York they didn't know each other. What they had in common was that they all abandoned the traditional use of the brush and began to *make* paintings as opposed to *painting* paintings. Ed Clark, for instance was the first artist to produce a shaped painting (which is now in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago).

Al Loving and Howardena Pindell made large abstract collages. Jack Whitten made paintings with the Afro pick and did acrylic collage paintings. Prior to that time, most of the renowned artists like Romare Bearden, Norman Lewis, Jacob Lawrence, and Vincent Smith were native New Yorkers.

When I first moved to Detroit, I didn't know many artists, but I met MacArthur Binion, who had studied at Cranbrook. He was then living in New York and through him I started meeting other committed artists like the ones I mentioned above. I'd go to New York regularly and visit their studios. The gallery's first exhibition at Jazzonia (my first gallery) was all New York artists, mainly abstract work. Opening a gallery is a very compulsive act. I did it for several reasons. Firstly, as I said, I was interested in the preservation of African American culture, secondly, I feel that the arts are important for a community's mental health, and thirdly in that I was already collecting art, it seemed a natural way integrating that into a business.

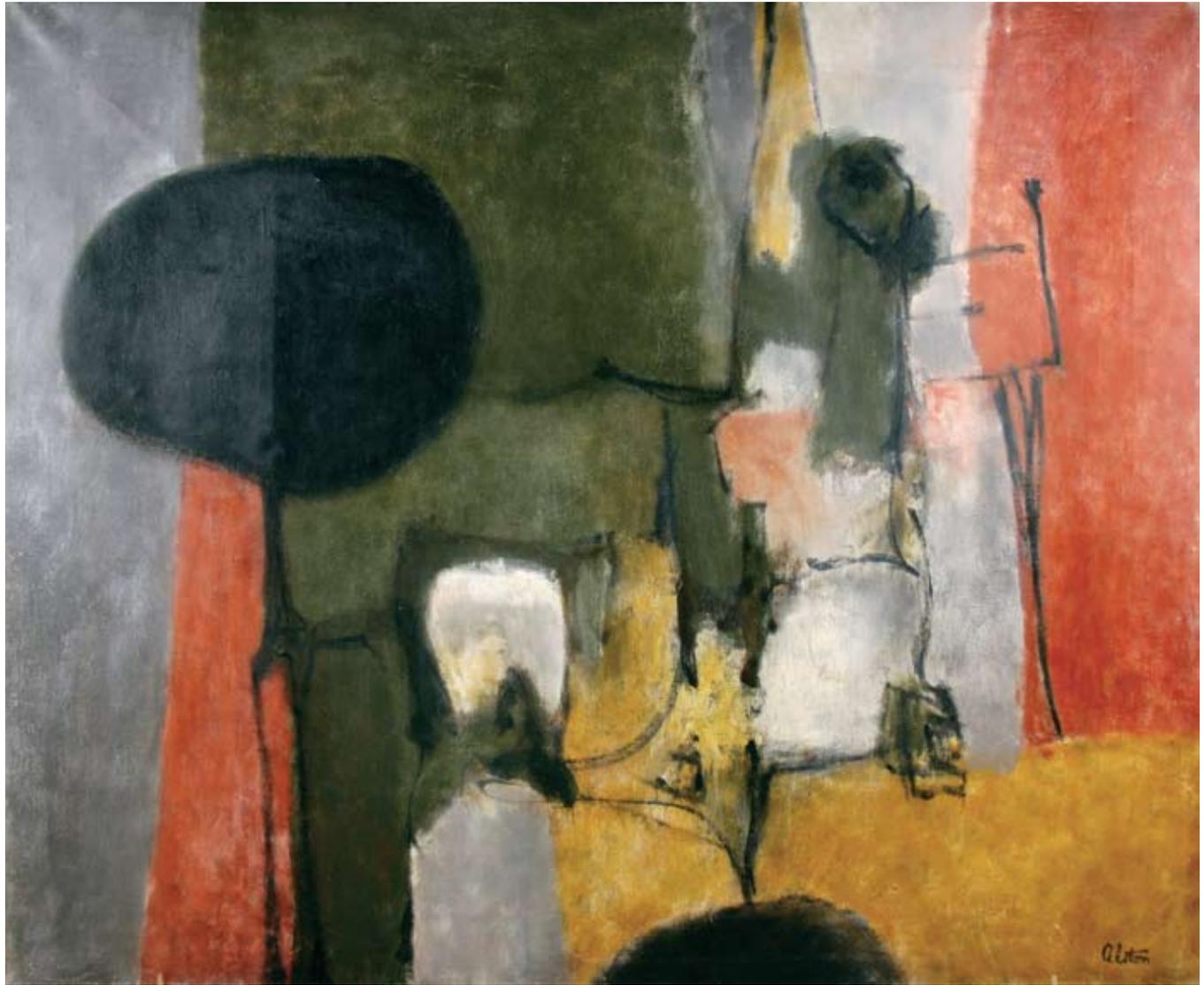
What most people don't realize is that art is a business. I had some very good teachers early on: Ed Clark, Al Loving, Nanette Carter, and MacArthur Binion. They further developed my understanding of abstract art. Ed Clark actually taught me how to install the debut exhibition at Jazzonia – the gallery was named after the poem by Langston Hughes. One thing I soon learned is that you have to maintain a level of consistency in the work you exhibit, even when it's unpopular to do so. I also learned that it's important to be a player in the national and international art scene. I opened Jazzonia in Detroit with a partner in 1981. In 1984, the gallery's name was changed to G.R. N'Namdi Gallery and in 1988 we moved to Birmingham, Michigan. I re-located back to Detroit in 2001. We opened a second gallery

in Chicago in 1996 in the River North art district, and in 2003 we opened a third gallery in New York City in the Chelsea art district.

I think what's significant about my collection is that it's an encyclopedic survey of the art work from a crucial time in African American history – the 1960s to now. Many of the pieces in this selected exhibition are particularly significant works from the artists' careers. The collection itself has over 200 works, about a quarter of which are exhibited here. In that it is encyclopedic, it does not purely represent my interest in abstraction. There are some major figurative figures: Bob Thompson, Robert Colescott, Vincent Smith, and Herbert Gentry. Each has an undeniable voice. Of course, a good representational figurative painting is still working in the abstract. In other words, forget the image – forget the narrative – does it work as just pure painting? When I look at representational work I can't divorce it from the abstract. Robert Colescott is a good example of what I'm talking about. When you look at his painting and take away his narrative, well, he's a hell of a painter. Our relationship blossomed because I could see that and he was so used to people just dealing with his narrative. I commented to him that if I was just looking at the narrative, we wouldn't be having the discussion. I felt such enthusiasm for the purity of his painting.

Art has shaped and defined who I am, my interests, and where I've travelled, and now my son, Jumaane, is the second generation in the business.

— George N'Namdi



## Charles Alston

American, b. 1907 Charlotte, NC, d. 1977 in New York, NY

*Once upon a Time*, 1959

Oil on canvas, 40 x 48 inches

Alston is one of the most influential New York artists of the twentieth century and critical to the development of African-American art in the United States. He attended Columbia College and received his M.F.A. at The Teacher's College at Columbia University in 1931. Trained as an educator, Alston was a prolific artist, activist, and teacher.

Alston was the first black supervisor of the Works Progress Administration in 1935 and managed the creation of murals for the Harlem Hospital Center. Additionally, he is recognized for his achievements as the first African-American to teach at the Art Students League in 1950 and The Museum of Modern Art in 1956.

Alston founded numerous community based workshops and organizations to support and encourage learning and discourse among African-American artists. Among them, "306" (originally known as the Harlem Arts Workshop and named for its address on 141st Street), a meeting place for artists such as Jacob Lawrence and Norman Lewis, as well as legendary writers and musicians such as Ralph Ellison and Benny Goodman. Romare Bearden, in addition to being his cousin by marriage, was also a close friend and student.

Addressing issues of civil rights, artist employment opportunities, and creating sustainable community programs were paramount to Alston's mission as artist and educator. His legacy in the form of artist illustrations and painting can be found in the permanent collections of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, the Detroit Institute of Arts, and Howard University, Washington, D.C.



## Emanoel Araújo

Brazilian, b. 1949, Bahia, Brazil, lives in Sao Paolo, Brazil

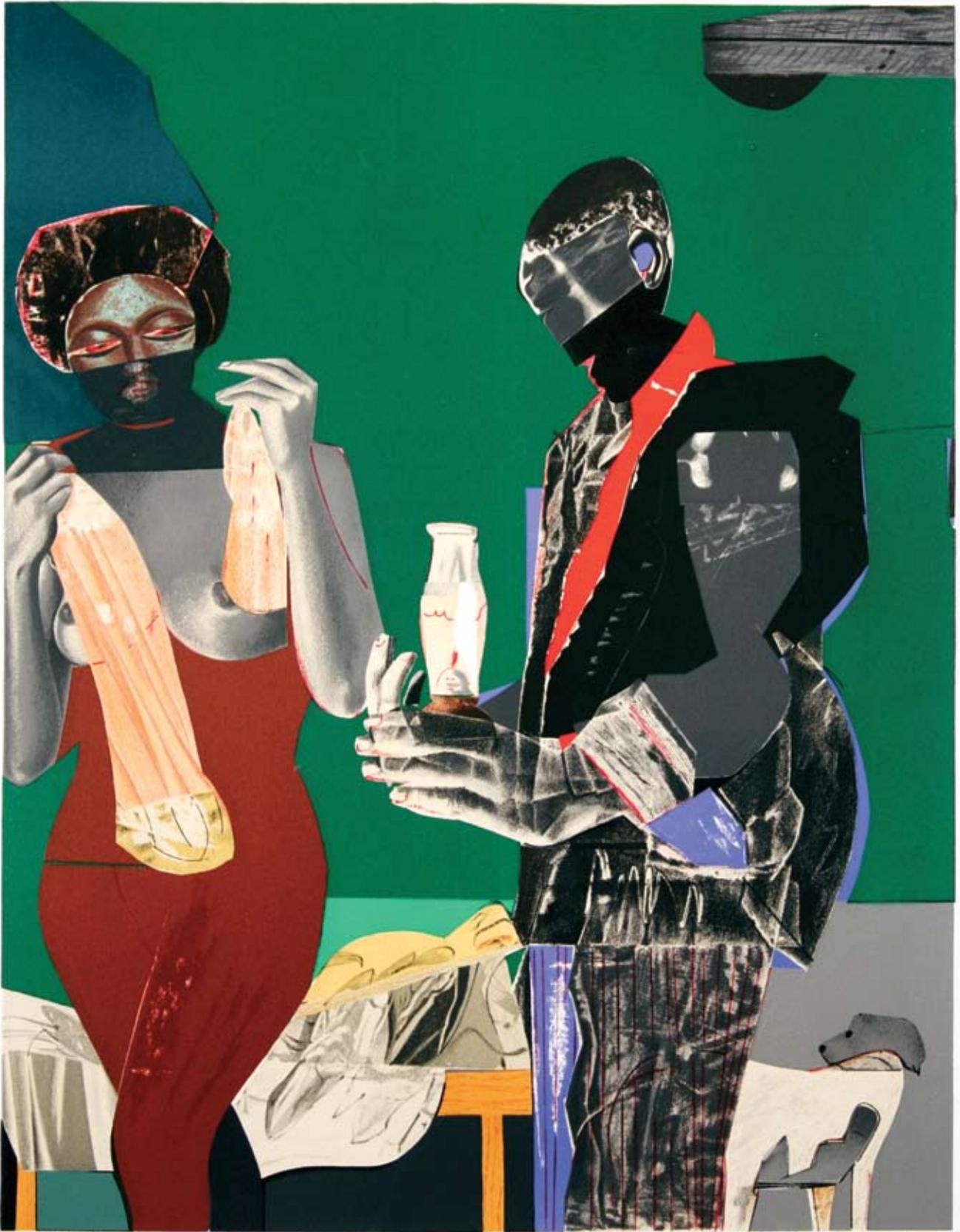
*Untitled*, 1991

Painted wood, 44 x 27 x 12 ½ inches

An artist, critic, statesmen, and museum professional, Araújo is a central figure in Afro-Brazilian postcolonial scholarship. Raised and educated in Brazil, he has dedicated his life to learning and disseminating the history of African Diaspora. He has held prestigious positions as the Director of the Museum of Art of the Bahia (1981-1983) and the Minister of Culture for Brazil (1992-2004).

Araújo's most notable achievement to date is the founding of the first museum in the world dedicated to the mission of rebuilding Afro-Brazilian heritage using a post-colonial model. The Museu Afro-Brasil, which opened in 2004, specializes in art and cultural artifacts made by or depicting black Brazilians.

Araújo's artistic expressions are aligned with his cultural passions. The artist creates neo-ancestral forms of primordial African gods in what he calls his "afro-minimalist" sculpture. The Yoruba god Eshu is among one of the deities present in the artist's oeuvre. Historically depicted by the colors of black and red, Eshu represents a teacher and mediator. A trickster-god who dispels lessons at the crossroads of our decisions, Eshu's presence represents the contradiction between our perception of events and the passage of time.



3/9

romare bearden

# Romare Bearden

American, b. 1911, Charlotte, NC, d. 1988, New York, NY

*Before the First Whistle*, 1973

Lithograph, 15 ½ x 12 inches

Bearden is the most well-known and successful African-American collagist in American art history. Initially his work depicted African-American culture and social scenes which captured the nuances of daily urban life in Harlem. In parallel, the techniques he used manipulated a variety of media such as photography, painting, and collage. His choices of media and selected thematic source material were a unique fusion of theme and process. The narratives in his work were reoccurring themes exploring jazz, urban life, and social relationships.

The Bearden family moved to Harlem in 1920. His home was often frequented by his parent's friends and influential American legends, such as W.E.B. DuBois, Duke Ellington, and Langston Hughes. The eclectic influences of his formative years encouraged the artist to explore the fusion between the arts, especially that of jazz and collage.

In this piece, the erotic narrative is carefully constructed: a muzzled woman undresses before a clothed masked man who cradles a lamp in his hands. The hackneyed green interior and presence of a dog indicate a modest, domestic *mise en scène*. The simplicity of the naked woman's form is contrasted by complexity of the man's black suit, made sinister by the red kerchief and blue accents. Such touches heighten the sexual tension and alienation between the two figures.

The artist graduated from New York University in 1935 with a B.A. in education. However, throughout college he took art classes and created political cartoons for local papers. At this time he also began attending the Harlem Artist Guild and the Art Students League. To earn a living, Bearden became a social worker with the New York City Department of Social Services. The artist enrolled in the U.S. military in 1942-1945 which later allowed him to take leave of his position as a social worker and travel to Paris to study art history at the Sorbonne.

In 1987, Bearden was awarded the National Medal of Arts, the nation's highest honor for artistic excellence presented by the President of the United States. In 1990, the Romare Bearden Foundation was established to preserve the legacy of the artist as well as provide art education, grants, and activities furthering the scholarship of Bearden's life and times. New York City honored the artist in 2005 with *Romare Bearden: A Homecoming Celebration* which lasted over six months and featured educational events and family programming that included over twenty cultural institutions throughout the city.



# Chakaia Booker

American, b. 1953, Newark, NJ, lives in New York, NY

*Industrialization*, c. 1980

Tires on panel, 50 x 50 inches

This sculpture is composed of discarded tires, inner tubes and nozzles that capture the attitude of the post-industrial age. The menagerie of rubber forms is confrontational and bilious. Booker conceptually utilizes recyclable materials to express the cyclical destiny of our consumer-driven waste. In this artwork, we can see that what we discard rarely actually disappears; the imprint of our cultural, economic, and social decisions impacts us long after they are manufactured.

In the catalogue for *Passages: Contemporary Art in Transition*, The Studio Museum in Harlem requested the artist provide ten words she thought of when she was creating art. She stated the following:

1. Movement
2. Texture
3. Color
4. Shredded
5. Spiked
6. Torn
7. Soft
8. Pliable
9. Rigid
10. Minimal<sup>1</sup>

Booker received her B.A. from Rutgers University and her M.F.A. from City College of New York in 1993. She held the position of Artist in Residence at the Studio Museum in Harlem in 1996. Selected exhibitions include the 2000 Whitney Biennale and 2001 *Invitational Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture* at the American Academy of Arts & Letters in New York City.

<sup>1</sup> *Passages: Contemporary Art in Transition*. New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 2000. Published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name shown at the Studio Museum in Harlem held November 17, 1999 – January 17, 2000 (75).



## Chakaia Booker

American, b. 1953, Newark, NJ, lives in New York, NY

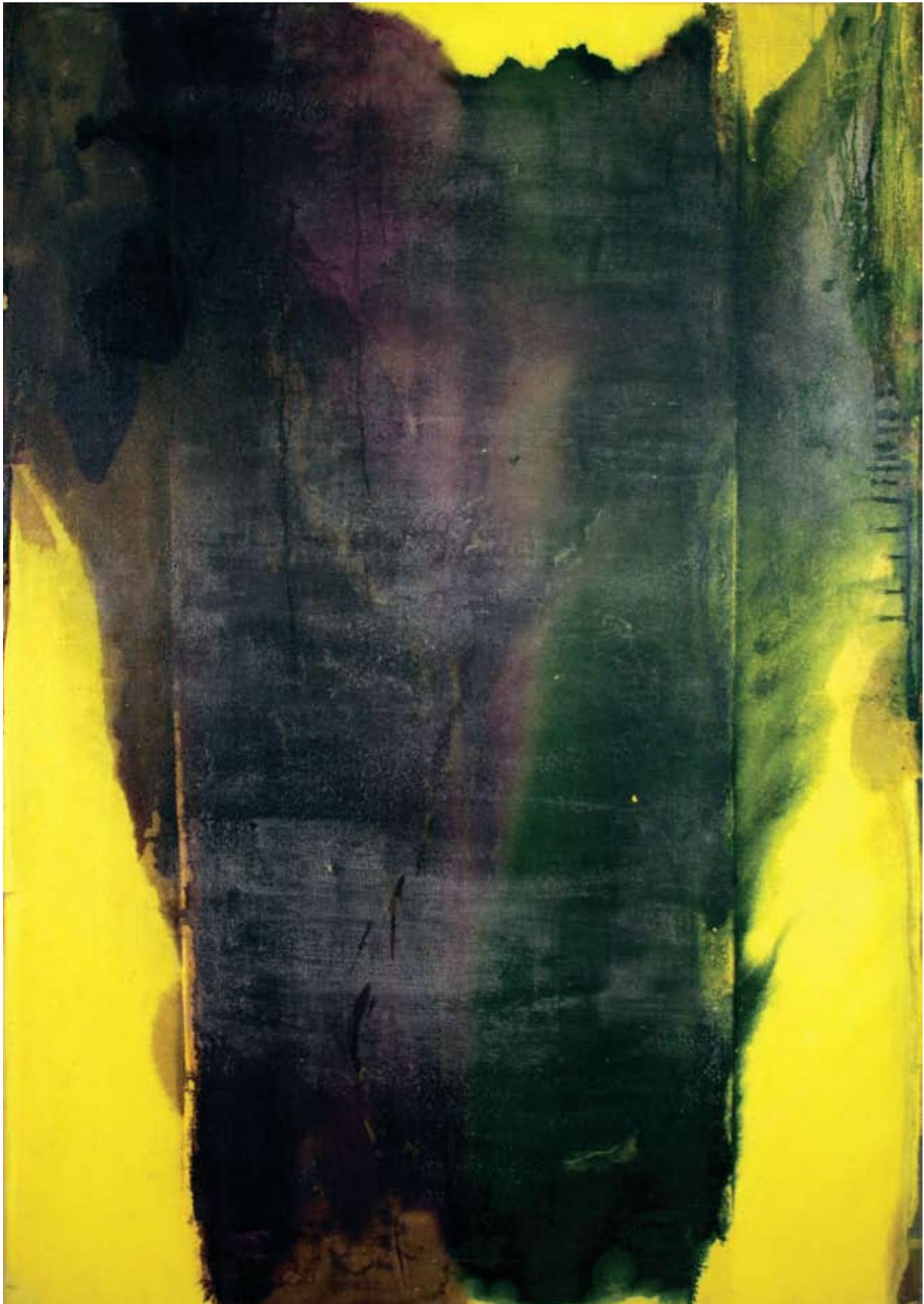
*Pioneer*, 1995-1998

Rubber Tire, wood, photo collage, and paint, 18 ½ x 12 x 7 inches

In Booker's work, black rubber is symbolic of resilience and issues of African-American identity. Using recycled tires and a pair of clogs, the artist creates a piece that can be interpreted as a cultural self-portrait. Inside the shoes are glued photographs of an African-American woman standing in a wooded area. The exterior/interior structure of this work can be seen as a metaphor for an outer façade of resilience juxtaposed against a more sensitive inner core. Formalistically, the exterior is a carapace of almost fetishistic, applied pieces of rubber. The interior of the shoes are collaged with similarly layered pieces of paper, yet the photographic layers invite speculation and encourage empathy, completely unlike the thick hide of armor-like exterior.

The implication of the title, *Pioneer*, is that of someone leading the way as if the artist is saying: walk a mile in my shoes, and that to be a pioneer, one must be tough on the outside with a humanistic, vulnerable center. Attending Rutgers in the mid-seventies, Booker, a young African-American woman in her twenties was part of the first generation of black women to be admitted into the academy. Hence with this work we are offered the opportunity to walk in another's, or, the "other's," shoes.

The patterns of the applied pieces of rubber are both body armor and a skin that shows evidence of trauma. This scarified surface can be seen in parallel to the scarification long practiced in traditional African cultural rituals. In this context the pioneer's shoes record the ordeal of the journey and can be seen allegorically as a badge of honor. The tire tread motif can also be seen as paying homage to the minimal grid-like structures of African textile patterns. In this highly personal work, the artist acknowledges her cultural heritage and ethnic identity.



# Frank Bowling

British, b. 1936, Guyana, South America, lives in London, UK

*Autumn*, 1973

Oil on canvas, 70 ½ x 49 ¼ inches

Bowling attended both the Slade School of Fine Art and the Royal College of Art, London. While his achievements are often compared with student contemporaries at the time, such as Pop Artists: David Hockney, Derek Boshier, and Peter Phillips, Bowling has attained international success by pursuing abstraction. The winner of the Grand Prize for Contemporary Art for the first World Festival of Negro Art in Dakar, Senegal, in 1966, the artist shortly thereafter came to the United States and had a solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1971.

Bowling's upbringing in Guyana and education in Britain prior to the Civil Rights Movement in America brought a distinct voice to the debate on Black Art. After moving to the United States in the mid-sixties, the artist produced numerous articles and writings pursuant to his stance regarding the absence of black artists in the Western Art canon.

*"The art scene is full of things that everyone knows about; grapevine truths that people carry around [rather in the manner of beasts of burden] like guilty secrets. "Guilty" because, although everyone is free to air these general truths, they are only tempted to do so under duress or in instances of extreme passion – offensively or defensively. One of these guilty secrets is the neglect of the black artist."*<sup>1</sup>

— Frank Bowling, Discussion on Black Art, 1969

Bowling was elected as the first black British Academician at the Royal Academy of Art in 2005 and was invested with the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 2008. His work can be found in museum collections such as The Metropolitan Museum and The Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Tate Gallery, and Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

<sup>1</sup> Bowling, Frank. "Discussion on Black Art", originally published in *Arts Magazine*, May 1969. Currently available in its entirety at <http://www.frankbowling.com/flash/index2.html> (accessed July 31, 2008).



BOTTOM

# Carol Ann Carter

American, b. 1947, Indianapolis, IN, lives in Lawrence, KS

*Zipper*, 2001

Mixed media on canvas, 22 x 60 inches

*"The objects and spaces I utilize, suggest the creative field in which I play my work. It is a field of Art and Design where I practice movement and exchange of elements across boundaries. I am motivated by the dialogues among materials, intelligence or disciplines — by a kind of character conversion where one thing influences or develops by virtue of occupying space with another: red and green pigment meant for a painting, find their way to a chair...or when foot pain assists, over time, in the development of a shoe form. The field for these considerations — for this activity — is wide open."*<sup>1</sup>

— Carol Ann Carter, Artist's Statement

Initially, Carter was a printmaker. In 1984 she began experimenting with other media such as painting and fiber constructions. While artists like Sam Gilliam and Ed Clark expanded the range of painting by breaking free of the constriction of the rectangular canvas frame, Carter has often explored similar issues by conceiving her works, not necessarily as paintings, but as surface/objects associated with the functional roles of fiber creations, textiles, and other media objects. The collector George N'Namdi compares her "paintings" to the metaphorical concept of a skirt or wrap unfurled and exhibited as a hanging.

*Zipper*, with its palette of drab greens, initially has a military field uniform appearance. On closer examination it becomes clear that the artist has imbued the work with a post-military aura. It is akin to the idea of purchasing apparel from an army surplus store and making it one's own. The work is inserted with pockets, grommets, and text to suggest the idiosyncratic customized needs of the artist. Currently, the artist is working in time-based media including performance, video, and digital imaging.

Carter received her B.F.A. from the Herron School of Art at Indiana University, and her M.F.A. from the University of Notre Dame. The artist has been a recipient of a National Endowment Award and a J.W. Fulbright Fellowship for research in Stockholm, Sweden. She has been a Professor of Art in the Expanded Media concentration at the School of Fine Arts at the University of Kansas since 1996.

<sup>1</sup> Carol Ann Carter. University of Kansas - The School of Fine Arts. Faculty Page.  
<http://www.arts.ku.edu/~sfa/art/expandedmedia/carter/index.shtml> (accessed July 31, 2008).



# Nanette Carter

American, b. 1954, Columbus, OH, lives in New York, NY

*Motion Cleansing # 2, 2002*

Oil on Mylar, 57 ½ x 52 ½ inches

Carter attended Oberlin College, Ohio, and double majored in Art History and Studio Art. As part of her program, she studied abroad at L'Accademia di Belle Arti Perugia, Italy, and traveled throughout Europe and Africa before receiving her B.F.A. in 1974. While attending Pratt Institute for her M.F.A., she met her mentor, Al Loving, who introduced her to the collector George N'Namdi.

A winner of a National Endowment of the Arts Award in 1981, Carter is committed to creating art and sharing her knowledge with others. She has been a professor at Pratt Institute since 2001. In 2007 she traveled on behalf of the U.S. State Department to Syria as part of a cultural envoy to create discourse with female artists from Europe and the Middle East.

Best known for her technique of applying oil paint on frosted Mylar sheets, Carter uses the term “scapes” to describe her work. Chance and randomness are explored through the artist’s experience with materials and familiarity with process. The dynamic forms, produced by the fluid motion of the paint overlays on the surface of a flat background, create the illusion of motion.

Carter’s artwork is represented in museum collections across the United States including the Studio Museum in Harlem, The Newark Museum, The Schomburg Library in New York, and The Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

*“Metaphorically, scapes have allowed me to weave various political themes and concepts into my work. Whether my topics are denouncing wars or celebrating nature I will use scapes (land, water, under water, sky or outer space) to relay my themes.”<sup>1</sup>*

— Nanette Carter, Artist Statement

<sup>1</sup> Nanette Carter. Pratt Institute. Faculty Page. [http://www.pratt.edu/newsite/index.php?group\\_id=46&show\\_faculty=1&page=2#](http://www.pratt.edu/newsite/index.php?group_id=46&show_faculty=1&page=2#) (accessed on July 31, 2008).



## Ed Clark

American, b. 1926, New Orleans, LA, lives in Paris, France, and New York, NY

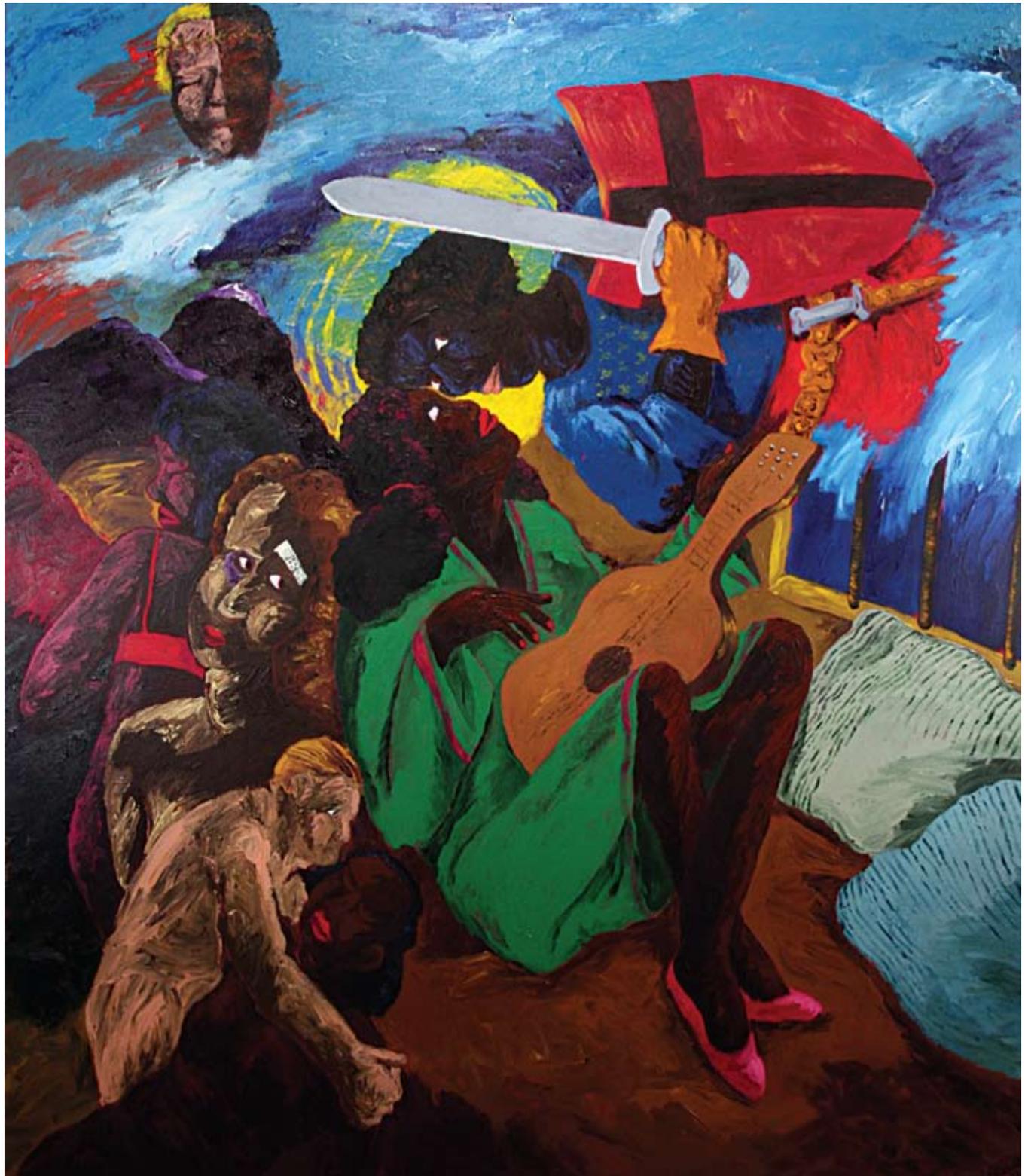
*Wasted Landscape*, 1961

Oil on canvas, 81 ½ x 79 ¾ inches

A native of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Clark left high school to join the U.S. Air Force at seventeen. In 1947, after service in Guam, he returned to the United States and settled in Chicago. The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (G.I. Bill) allowed Clark to enroll at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1947 to study fine art. During work on his undergraduate degree, he studied abroad at the prestigious L'Academie de la Grande Chaumiere, in Paris. Clark remained in Paris for five years and received critical acclaim for his work including the "Prix d'Othon Friesz" Musée des Arts Decoratifs, at the Musée du Louvre in 1955 which solidified his position in the burgeoning Parisian art scene.

Clark moved to New York and helped co-found a gallery in SoHo in 1957 where he is credited with being the first artist to exhibit work on a shaped canvas. His trademark brushstroke and vibrant contrasting colors exude confidence, intuition, and a mastery of gestural control and materials.

The recipient of numerous honors, such as a National Endowment for the Arts Award and a Congressional Achievement Award, Clark recently had a retrospective of his work at the Pensacola Museum of Art in 2008. His work can be found in museum collections around the world including at the Detroit Institute of Arts, Art Institute of Chicago, the Studio Museum in Harlem, and the Museum of Modern Art in Bahia, Brazil.



## Robert Colescott

American, b. 1925, Oakland, CA, lives in Tucson, AZ

*Knowledge of the Past is Key to the Future: A Prayer to Saint Maurice*, 1986

Acrylic on canvas, 85 x 72 ½ inches

Colescott's oeuvre critically examines and re-contextualizes the absence of African-Americans in the pictorial representation of Western art history. His most reproduced painting, *George Washington Carver Crossing the Delaware: Page from an American History Textbook*, 1975, includes a triumphant black George Carver Washington in a satire of Emanuel Leutze's *Washington Crossing the Delaware*, 1851.

After receiving his B.A. from the University of California, Berkley, Colescott studied with Fernand Léger in Paris from 1949-50 where he was advised to discontinue the practice of abstraction, which Léger felt was inconsistent with the interests of common people. Colescott continued studying abstraction which he later integrated into his monumental, satirical narrative canvases. He was an artist-in-residence at the American Research Center in Cairo from 1964 to 1967. At this time he realized that his work did not have to be governed by Euro-centric traditions.

Instead of merely depicting Saint Maurice as he has traditionally been presented, Colescott explores the fickle accuracy of Western art historical authority in this painted narrative. Scholarship suggests that Saint Maurice was a Coptic Egyptian and many medieval depictions exist reinforcing this claim. This knowledge allows the viewer to begin the process of questioning the conventions of objective truth.

Colescott, who is now present in most introductory texts in Modern Art history, introduces a fundamentally new discourse into the hegemony of the canon. In parallel to this, he was the first African-American artist to represent the United States at the Venice Biennale in 1997.



# Beauford Delaney

American, b. 1901, Knoxville, TN, d. 1979, Paris, France

*Untitled*, 1965

Oil on canvas, 35 x 28  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches

Delaney studied at the Massachusetts Normal School and moved to New York in 1929 where he settled in Greenwich Village. He took classes at Art Students League, studying with Thomas Hart Benton and John Sloan. Among the life-long friendships he established was one with Charles Alston, a seminal figure in the development of advocacy for African-American art and cultural advancement in Harlem. Delaney was selected to assist Alston on the Works Progress Administration mural project at Harlem Hospital.

In 1945, *The Amazing and Invariable Beauford Delaney*, a chapbook by Henry Miller, brought the artist considerable attention as a celebrated Greenwich Village curiosity. He had become an established figure when on his voyage to Paris in 1953 he happened to travel with Herbert Gentry. Like many artists featured in this exhibition, Paris offered an alternative to difficulties of living in New York. Delaney, who ultimately settled there, discovered a way of life less encumbered by racism and sexual bigotry.

In Paris, Delaney's style of painting became free and looser. In New York, he had tended toward a more literal realism, accented with incised black outlines. The artist was noted particularly for his deft handling of light infused pigments and his expressive use of yellow.

Throughout the fifties Delaney exhibited in Paris, Spain, Italy and Germany. In 1960 he suffered a mental breakdown brought on by anxieties over money and exacerbated by his dependence on alcohol. By 1964 he had rebounded. Friends bought him a studio on the rue Vercingétorix and he showed his new abstract paintings at the Galerie Lambert. This was a prolific period, particularly in the volume of abstract works produced. He went on to make a number of significant portraits of various influential people in his circle.

In 1978 the Studio Museum in Harlem mounted his first major retrospective. Delaney died the following year and was buried in Paris.



## Herbert Gentry

American, b. 1919, Pittsburg, PA, d. 2003, Stockholm, Sweden

*The Claw*, 1958

Oil on canvas, 45 ½ x 39 ¾ inches

Gentry moved to New York with his mother in 1924 when he was six years old. At the height of the Harlem Renaissance, the young man was surrounded by the growing African-American cultural scene. His mother was an original member of the famous Ziegfeld showgirls and is credited by the artist as being his guiding influence. Her social circle was full of lively characters such as her close friend, jazz-musician, Duke Ellington, and dancer, Josephine Baker.

In this painting, Gentry used biomorphic shapes and color planes to create a largely abstract composition. However, he also employed subconscious and surrealist sources. These emergent images can be deduced upon closer inspection: a large face, a black cat, and the ominous claw stretching out from an ambiguous form in the background. *The Claw* was exhibited in *Explorations in the City of Light: African-American Artists in Paris 1945-1965* at the Studio Museum in Harlem in 1996. The collector, George N'Namdi, considers this painting the artist's most significant work.

Gentry's paintings can be seen in collection institutions such as the National Museum in Stockholm, Sweden, the National Museum of Modern Art in New Delhi, India, El Museu d'Arte Expanyol Contemporani in Madrid, Spain, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.



## Herbert Gentry

American, b. 1919, Pittsburg, PA, d. 2003, Stockholm, Sweden

*Centered Places*, 1980-81

Acrylic on canvas, 52 x 35 ½ inches

After graduating high school, Gentry began attending New York University for Business Administration and took art classes offered by the Works Progress Administration at night. After two years, he was drafted into the U.S. Army and served as part of the 90th Coastal Artillery and Anti-aircraft Regiment in Paris from 1942-1945.

This introduction to Paris extended Gentry the freedom to pursue artistic success without the relenting racial stereotypes and discrimination occurring in the United States during this time. Like many of the artists featured in this exhibition, Gentry took advantage of the G.I. Bill when he returned to Paris to study art in 1946. Among the institutions at which he attended classes were the Sorbonne, L'Ecole des Beaux Arts, L'Academie de la Grande Chamiere, and L'Ecole des Hautes Etudes.

*"I enjoyed the freedom in Paris, which even white Americans felt, if you haven't had that experience, it's very hard to explain to you. It's not the country, it's the city. Can you imagine, first being away from your parents, on your own, to move on your own? To be able to make a turn, do anything you want to do more or less, and if you're an artist – really to go and express yourself without having to join a club – being away from home that's enough."*<sup>1</sup>

— Herbert Gentry, 1991

In 1958, the painter moved from Paris to Sweden. At this time, he began exhibiting his work throughout Scandinavia. In 1975, The Swedish Royal Academy of Art sponsored a retrospective of Gentry's work. He was the first and only American painter to receive such an honor from the institution.

<sup>1</sup> Liza Kirwin. "Oral History Interview with Herbert Gentry." *Smithsonian Institution: Archives of American Art*, May 23, 1991. Available in digital archive at <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/gentry91.htm> (accessed July 31, 2008).



# Sam Gilliam

American, b. 1933, Tupelo, MS, lives in Washington, D.C.

*Trade Mark*, 1994

Acrylic on canvas and aluminum, 71 ½ x 98 x 10 inches

Recognized for being the foremost African-American Color Field Painter, Gilliam has received critical acclaim for his work as a Lyrical Expressionist. The use of spontaneous color application using process-based techniques allows for experimentation resulting in controlled, but not calculated, results. His painting process entails staining or pouring acrylic paint straight onto canvas. He often cuts up his paintings into geometric divisions and stitches them together in a patchwork quilt-like mosaic. Unencumbered by the restraints imposed by a rectangular stretcher, his paintings can then be hung like a drapery, utilizing the inherent material quality of canvas. Gilliam's process also expands the possibility of painting by gleaning inspiration from architecture, allowing him to render his work in three dimensions as is the case here.

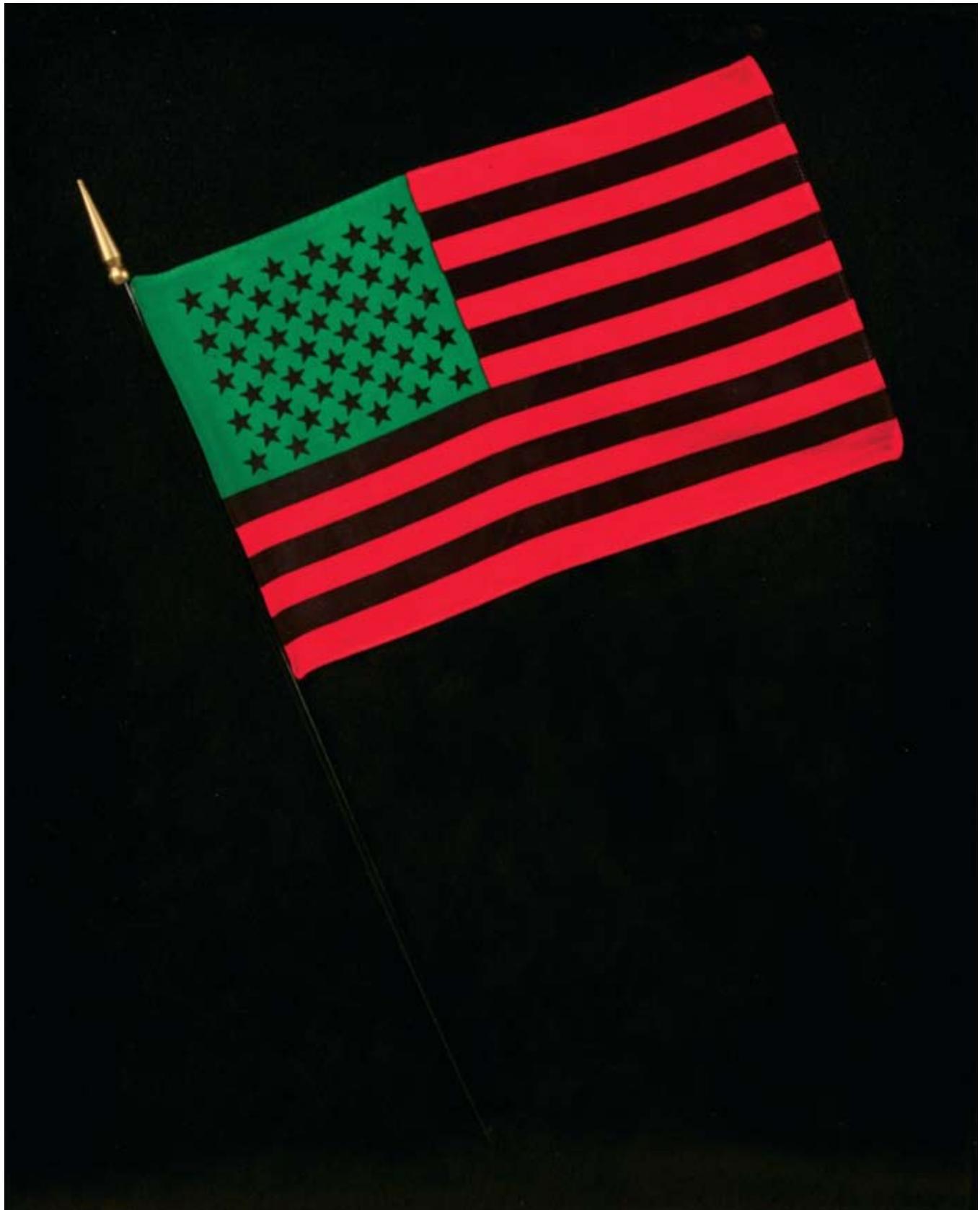
While pursuing his B.A. at the University of Louisville, Kentucky, Gilliam served in the army from 1956-1958. He returned to university and received an M.F.A. in 1961. Shortly thereafter he moved to Washington, D.C., and became a member of the Washington Color School whereupon he began receiving critical acclaim for his work. His experimentation with, and ultimate abandonment of, the traditional canvas stretcher frame led him to become the first painter to introduce the use of unsupported canvas in 1965.

A recipient of the National Endowment for the Arts Award in 1967, Gilliam has received considerable success throughout the United States which continues to the present day. In 2005, he was honored with a major retrospective by the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., and his work can be found in museum collections such as the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C., The Metropolitan Museum of Art and The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and The Tate Gallery in London.

*"In the poet Pablo Neruda's process, which he calls "Geography of Poetry", he keeps a table of common stones for inspiration. In Miró's process, he incorporates the essence of the constellation. Lucio Fontana and Jackson Pollock utilized cut canvas. Piet Mondrian moves painting from the canvas to the wall using tape. The Dogon, which is the ancestral culture of Mali, use cut eye-slits in their sculpture to project light. They also paint the calendar on the sculpture of the human figure in the form of dots to transcribe time. These are all stimulating non-linear processes that inspire other directions in one's thinking."*<sup>1</sup>

— Sam Gilliam, 2005

<sup>1</sup> Binstock, Jonathan P. Sam Gilliam: *A Retrospective*, Corcoran Gallery of Art: Washington, D.C., 2005 (82).



# David Hammons

American, b. 1943, Springfield, IL, lives in New York, NY

*African-American Flag*, circa 1990

Mixed Media

Duchampian in nature, Hammon's work is often sardonic but always poignant. He is a master at utilizing commercial objects in the form of readymades, found objects, or site-specific work to create high art culture that undermines racial and societal stereotypes. Steeped in historical references, Hammons manipulates the semiotic value of objects loaded with political meaning. He encourages the viewer to examine their preconceived stereotypes or cultural mores regarding African-American culture.

The color and medium of this small display is loaded with political and ideological significance. The colors originate from their use by the U.N.I.A (Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League) organized by Marcus Garvey in 1914 to mobilize and unite persons of African descent. The colors have also been adopted by the Black Nationalist movement.

Hammons is keenly aware of the iconic value of the flag in terms of twentieth century art history. Aside from this, the flag itself acts as a national symbol that represents the fifty states and thirteen original colonies. When the colors are replaced, the flag takes on another Nationalistic meaning. The viewer is confronted with their perception of our collective identity and the hypocrisy of racism in our united nation.

Hammons attended the Los Angeles Trade Technical City College, the Chouinard Art Institute and the Otis Art Institute at Parson's School of Design in Los Angeles graduating with his M.F.A. in 1972. He has been recognized with two National Endowment of the Arts Awards. In 1991 he received a MacArthur Fellowship.

Versions of this work can be found in the permanent collections of The Museum of Modern of Art and Studio Museum in Harlem, New York.



## Richard Hunt

American, b. 1935, Chicago, IL, lives Chicago, IL

*Untitled*, 1976

Copper resist drawing, 21 x 15 ½ inches

A native of Chicago, Hunt received a B.A.E. from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1957. He traveled abroad to England, Italy, France, and Spain, before serving in the U.S. Army. In 1962, Hunt received a Guggenheim Fellowship and shortly thereafter began exhibiting nationally. In 1971, he became the first African-American to receive a retrospective at The Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Hunt is a sculptor who works chiefly in welded steel and bronze. Many of his works are monumental, abstract public commissions which combine mechanical and anthropomorphic forms.

Although as a student Hunt's specialty was welding, he also studied printmaking, particularly lithography. An avid draftsman, producing prints is a natural form of expression for the artist, which also translates well into his three-dimensional work, as can be seen in this copper resist drawing.

Today, Hunt is recognized as one of the foremost abstract sculptors of his generation. Along with his large scale outdoor commissions, the artist's work can be found in the permanent collections of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden and National Gallery in Washington, D.C., as well as at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York.



# Richard Hunt

American, b. 1935, Chicago, IL, lives in Chicago, IL.

*Untitled*, circa 1968

Welded steel, 21 x 14 x 12 inches

*“Work in the factory contrasts with work in the studio, where the sculptor’s head, hand, and hammer can shape an idea in a spontaneous generation, which is frozen in time as it is fused with the torch’s heat.”*<sup>1</sup>

— Richard Hunt, Artist’s Statement

In 1967 Hunt began accepting commissions for large public sculptures. This welded steel piece dates from that period, but is of a domestic scale. Hunt’s large public sculptures combine massive anthropomorphic and geometric forms. In contrast, this work’s structure is organic and plant-like, although its thrust and stance are somewhat akin to the Winged Victory of Samothrace in the Louvre.

*“Public sculpture responds to the dynamics of a community, or of those in it, who have a use for sculpture. It is this aspect of use, of utility, that gives public sculpture its vital and lively place in the public mind.”*<sup>2</sup>

— Richard Hunt, Artist’s Statement

In his artist’s statement Hunt alludes to the directness and ease with which his small maquette-like sculptures can be formed: this in opposition to the labor and time necessary to manufacture a monumental commissioned work.

A major piece of Hunt’s public sculpture was recently “unearthed” in Harlem. *Harlem Hybrid*, 1976, a 5,500 pound work of welded bronze, stands at the corner of 125th Street and Morningside Avenue. In the late 1980s the Parks Department of New York City painted the sculpture black to cover layers of encrusted graffiti. Homeless people had slept under it and children used it as a climbing frame. Over the years it was eventually covered with fifteen layers of paint. In June 2008, under Hunt’s supervision, *Harlem Hybrid* was fully restored to its original bronze patina.

<sup>1</sup> Hunt, Richard. Artist Statement. <http://www.richardhunt.us/pages/STATEM-1.html> (accessed July 31, 2008.)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



## Bill Hutson

American, b. 1936, San Marcus, TX, lives in Lancaster, PA

*Untitled*, 1985

Mixed media on paper, 40 x 29 inches

After serving in the U.S. Army from 1954-1957, Hutson moved to California settling in San Francisco in 1959. The area offered potential for the artist to explore his interests in art from a more formal perspective. Largely self-taught, he began creating abstract canvases incorporating found objects to considerable success. His art was purchased by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1961.

The importance of travel and migration from one location to another is extremely significant to the artist's development. For almost fifteen years he traveled throughout Europe living in France, Holland, and Africa, returning to United States in 1977.

During the early seventies, Hutson sublet an apartment in SoHo and befriended his neighbor, Al Loving. This connection to the New York art scene and the emerging Black Nationalist Movement encouraged socialization with other African-American artists working within the tenets of abstraction.

Hutson creates depth by layering richly blended gestural surfaces that contain precise geometric forms. The ground for this series of work is achieved by pouring acrylic paint on a painted surface to which a plastic sheet and weighted board are applied. After the paint dries, the board and plastic are removed. Hutson then applies tape and additional layers of acrylic to achieve abstract harmonies.

In 2008, Hutson curated *Something to Look Forward To: Abstract Art by 22 Distinguished Americans of African Descent*, in conjunction with the Phillips Museum of Art at Franklin & Marshall College in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The exhibition featured artists over sixty-years-old that included Frank Bowling, Ed Clark, Sam Gilliam, David Hammons, Al Loving, Richard Mayhew, Howardena Pindell, John T. Scott, and William T. Williams.

HN  
IO

# Rashid Johnson

American, b. New York, NY, 1977, lives in New York, NY

*HNIC*, 2001

Photography on paper, 83 x 80 inches

Using irony and paradox, Johnson transforms cultural items such as throwback jerseys, afro combs, and portraiture into fluid semiotic devices. Working in multiple mediums such as installation, video, and photography, the artist uses historic art, literature and popular culture sources in the creation of his work. The acronym H.N.I.C. stands for “Head Nigga in Charge.” The term is an ironic, back-handed compliment referring to a black man in power of little or no consequence. Additionally, the reverse graffiti appearance and scale of the work on paper evokes the appearance of “low” art in a fine arts environment.

*“Young artist seeks audience to enjoy poly-conscious attempts at post-medium condition production.”*

*“Must enjoy race mongering, disparate disconnected thoughts and sunsets (really). Familiarity with the work of Sun Ra, Joseph Beuys, Rosalind Krauss, Richard Pryor, Hans Haacke, Carl Andre and interest in spelunking the death of identity a plus. I’m looking for an audience with a good attention span that is willing to stay with me through the good and the bad. I enjoy creating videos, producing sculptures, and making photographs. My interests are costuming, Sam Greenlee novels, Godard films and masturbation. Ability to hold conversation using only rap lyrics, and a sense of humor a must.”<sup>1</sup>*

— Rashid Johnson, 2008

Johnson, working after the Civil Rights and subsequent Black Arts Movement of the seventies, is described as a Post-Black artist. He does not claim to represent or speak to a specific African constituency or identity; rather his work operates in the realm of black culture as it has been assimilated in the twenty-first century.

The artist received his M.F.A. from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2005.

<sup>1</sup> Rashid Johnson for Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery. Press Release for the artist’s first New York exhibition “The Dead Lecturer,” which was on view February 22 – March 29, 2008. Available in digital archive at <http://www.nicolekagsbrun.com/rjohnson/rjohnson.html> (accessed on July 31, 2008).



## Phyllis Dianne Jones

American, b. 1948, Columbus, OH, lives in Oakland, CA

*Stan's Dance*, 1968

Mixed media and acrylic on canvas, 35 x 30½ inches

This is the first painting purchased by the collector, George N'Namdi, when he was an undergraduate in the late sixties. Jones was a fellow student that often created posters for parties that the collector worked at as a disc jockey and M.C.

He states, "*We knew each other in High School. She'd design posters for bands I was promoting and then she went to Ohio State. Everyone was shocked because the painting cost \$120; at the time tuition was \$150 a quarter!*"

Disparate forms and surrealist shapes dominate the canvas that is interspersed with newsprint scenes among them a lion, a race car, and a family fishing trip. This abstract work takes on various interpretations which best underscore the collector's interest in formalism.



## Artis Lane

Canadian, b. 1927, North Buxton, Ontario, Canada, lives in Los Angeles, CA

*Untitled*, 1987

Acrylic on canvas, 41 x 30½ inches

Often the collector, George N'Namdi speaks of artists as “trans-mediums”. He attests that artists who are compelled to work, regardless of styles or –isms, are providing a direct link between emotion and a visual language. Evidence of this can be seen in the depiction of Lane’s subjects. Her confident brushstrokes, alla prima technique, and harmonious palette create fluid energy that captures the essence of the sitter in her paintings.

Lane is a versatile artist; her pursuits in painting, drawing, and sculpture have garnered international attention. Her creation of sculpture and memorials of Civil Rights leaders Mary Jane McLeod Bethune (1875-1955) for the National Council of Negro Women Building in Washington, D.C., and Rosa Parks (1913-2005) for the National Portrait Gallery as among her most regarded works.

Renowned for her popular celebrity portraits of distinguished patrons such as President Bill Clinton, Maya Angelou, and Oprah Winfrey, Lane is a veteran of the national art scene.

She attended the Ontario College of Art in Toronto and with the assistance of the Urban League’s Detroit Chapter became the first African-American woman to be accepted to the Cranbrook Art Academy in Bloomfield Hills, MI.



# Jacob Lawrence

American, b. 1917, Atlantic City, NJ, d. 2000, Seattle, WA

*The General Toussaint L'Ouverture*, 1986

Silkscreen, 28 x 18½ inches

*"Most of my work depicts events from the many Harlems which exist throughout the United States. This is my genre... the happiness, tragedies, and the sorrows of mankind as realized in the teeming black ghetto."*<sup>1</sup>

— Jacob Lawrence

Lawrence is the most recognized and influential African-American painter in American art history. After his parents separated when he was twelve, he moved with his mother and siblings to Harlem. His mother enrolled him in an afternoon program at the Harlem Arts Workshop, where under the guidance of the artist Charles Alston, he was encouraged to follow his creative instinct for art.

In 1936 Lawrence received a position at the Work Progress Administration as an easel painter. For his commission he decided to make a series of forty one paintings depicting the life of General Toussaint L'Ouverture (1743-1803), the Haitian abolitionist revolutionary. A former slave who overthrew the French government, he became the first black leader of a post-colonial republic. Epitomizing Lawrence's work, the portrait is defined by its economic composition, stylized line, and matte color palette.

Lawrence is recognized for other epic series depicting African-American culture, history and prominent leaders. His most significant series, *The Migration of the Negro* illustrates the exodus of African-Americans from the South to urban industrial centers in the North during the first half of the twentieth century.

Like those that inspired him, Lawrence also became an accomplished teacher at the Art Students League, Black Mountain College, New York, at the New School, the Skowhegan School of Painting and, finally, at University of Washington in Seattle.

The artist received numerous retrospectives: the first in 1974 at the Whitney Museum of American Art and most recently the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C., in 2001.

<sup>1</sup> The Jacob and Gwen Knight Visual Resource Center. Art and Life. The Biography of Jacob Lawrence. <http://www.jacobandgwenlawrence.org/artandlife01.html> (accessed July 31, 2008).



# Norman Lewis

American, b. 1909, New York, NY, d. 1979, New York, NY

*Morning*, 1963

Oil on canvas, 64 x 50 inches

As an undergraduate student, Lewis found solace in like-minded intellectuals in the 306 Group. Among the artists who met in Charles Alston's Harlem studio were Romare Bearden, Jacob Lawrence, Raymond Saunders, and writers such as Ralph Ellison and poet Langston Hughes. Intensely committed to community activism, he formed the Harlem Artist Guild and subsequently was appointed to a teaching position for the Work Progress Art Program at the Harlem Community Arts Center and George Washington Carver School in 1936.

In 1963, Lewis founded the artist group, Spiral, which met in Greenwich Village and included members such as Charles Alston, Romare Bearden, and Richard Mayhew. Their primary agenda was to promote and organize a cohesive strategy for African-American artists operating in the New York art world. A primary concern was the issue of Black Art and the implications of defining it in the context of a largely segregated gallery system.

Although Spiral was a short lived organization, its contributions to the advancement of Black Art and artists have had a lasting influence to this day. To these efforts, Lewis and Bearden, the co-founders of Spiral, opened the Cinque Gallery in New York in 1969. They also took part in the protest against The Metropolitan Museum of Art's controversial exhibition *Harlem on My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900-1968*. Along with Lewis and Bearden, other protesters included members of the Black Cultural Council and artists Charles Alston and Raymond Saunders.

Lewis' abstract paintings construct a discrete balance between form and absence. Often employing the use of black over-painting on top of previously laid down chromatic forms; Lewis subtracts and adds until a tension occurs between his color harmonies and the surrounding void.

The artist's first retrospective occurred in 1976 at the Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York.



# Alvin Loving

American, b. 1935, Detroit, MI, d. 2005, New York, NY

*Self-Portrait*, circa 1969

Oil on canvas, 41  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 48  $\frac{1}{4}$  inches

A native Detroiter, Loving graduated from Cass Tech High School in 1955. His father, Alvin Demar was a professor of Education Administration at Wayne State University and upon the receipt of grants, traveled to India with his son to work as a consultant on the development of the secondary school system for the Indian government. Loving attended Flint Junior College and the University of Illinois for his B.A. and received his M.F.A from the University of Michigan in 1965.

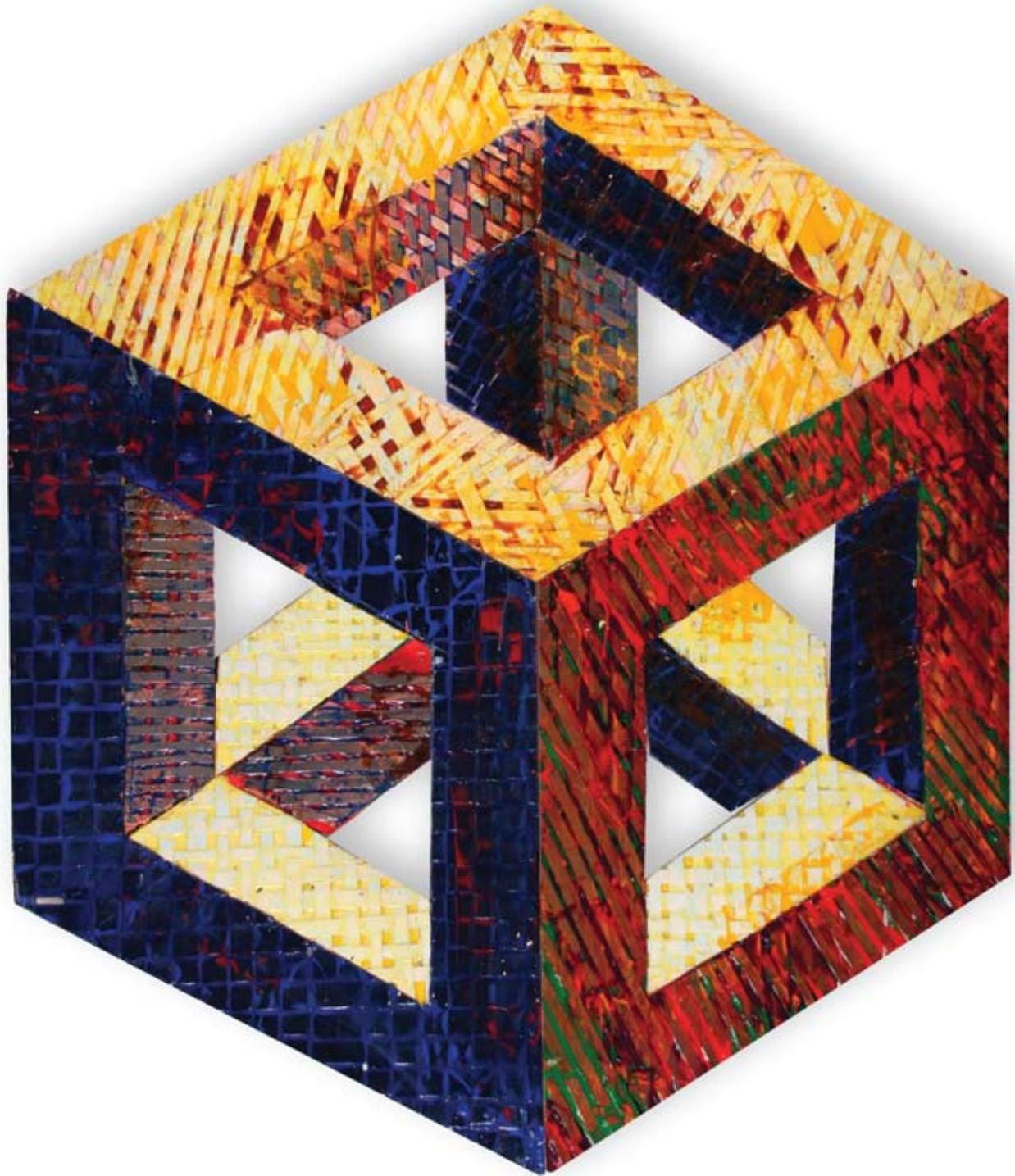
Loving was a recipient of four National Endowment for the Arts Awards (1970, 1975, 1976, and 1982) for his work in painting and poster designs for his collaboration with the Raymond Johnson Dance Company.

While his abstract work traditionally contained Modernist devices consisting of flat planes, saturated of color, and hard-edge geometric form, Loving showed a departure from these conventions in this self-portrait. Here, geometric forms are complimented with soft edges, color planes are infused with shadow, and the painterly planes of color show the artist's hand in the making of this work.

Al Loving was the first black artist to receive a solo show at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1969. This achievement is after much personal struggle and work on behalf of the greater African-American art movement in New York, specifically the work of the Black Emergency Cultural Council and smaller art contingencies such as the artists group Spiral founded by Romare Bearden and Norman Lewis.

Loving received several prestigious public commissions such a monumental acrylic painting in New York's Kennedy International Airport, a stained glass wall at the Broadway Junction subway station in Brooklyn, and Pewabic Pottery mural over 100 feet in the Millender Center Station of the People Mover in Detroit.

His artwork can be found in the permanent collections such as The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Studio Museum in Harlem, the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, as well as the Detroit Institute of Arts.



## Alvin Loving

American, b. 1935, Detroit, MI, d. 2005, New York, NY

*Dreams of Amorgos #15*, 1998

Acrylic on rag paper on plexi-glass, 61 x 52 inches

Loving's box motif was a major reoccurring theme in his work from the late-sixties and early-seventies and belong to the artist's Hard-edge painting period. His early work was extremely precise with no modeling or painterly application of pigment. Working primarily on canvas, his geometric paintings were flat, isometric illusions. These cube forms were an exploration of the late Modernist device the grid and his personal interest in the illusionistic push and pull inherent in the projection of geometric planes.

His preoccupation with the cube is revisited in this wall hanging almost thirty years after it was originally conceived. However, in this incarnation the work is made with relief-formed acrylic on Plexiglas. It takes the strict formal structure of the grid and uses incised lines, broken color, cross-hatching, and mosaic surface to infuse the hard-edge linear structure with a more intimate, expressive vocabulary than his earlier work. In this way he is taking the cold minimalist grid form and imbuing it with character and warmth.

*"Everything is an experiment. I never know what is going to happen. However, consistent ideas come up again and again. I work in the tradition of making things and this tradition carries a history with it. I think of myself as a kind of composer in the tradition of Jacob Lawrence, but I don't bring a narrative with it."*<sup>1</sup>

— Al Loving, 2002

<sup>1</sup> N'Namdi, Jumaane E. Al Loving Interview, 2002. "Lighter Than Air." Belleville, Michigan: Belleville Lake Press, 2004 (27).



## Richard Mayhew

American, b. 1924, Amityville, NY, lives in Oakland, CA

*Untitled*, 1973

Oil on canvas, 72 x 60 inches

Mayhew arrived in New York in 1945. He attended classes at the Brooklyn Museum Art School, the Art Student's League and went on to receive a B.A. in Art History from Columbia University. In 1959, Mayhew was awarded a grant that allowed him to study in Florence, Italy. Subsequently he received a more considerable grant from the Ford Foundation that permitted him to expand his travel throughout Europe for the next two years. He visited museums throughout France, Holland, and Spain studying directly from the Masters of European painting.

Returning to the United States in 1963, Mayhew focused on the use of ethereal color in his spiritual landscapes. Concurrently he became involved in activism. He was an active member of the artist group Spiral, co-founded with Romare Bearden and Norman Lewis in Greenwich Village.

Formally, Mayhew's work is influenced by his African and Native American heritage. His expansive abstract expressionist paintings concentrate on tonal harmonies and the spiritual aspects of light on natural forms. The notion of artist as trans-medium is particularly true in the case of Mayhew. He conceptualizes the representation of his work as a transformation of the essence of nature through unconventional use of the color spectrum.

Mayhew held teaching positions at the Brooklyn Museum and the Pratt Institute and in 1991 he retired as a Professor Emeritus at Pennsylvania State University. Mayhew's work can be seen in collections throughout the United States including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York University, The Brooklyn Museum and The Museum of African Art in Washington, D.C.



## Charles McGee

American, b. 1924, Clemson, SC, lives in Detroit, MI

*Noah's Ark #8*, 1984

Mixed media on canvas, 60  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 45  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches

*"I'm delighted that nature gave me this propensity to share the little information it has given me. And that is the motor that drives me into tomorrow, thinking about what I can do to help humanity if indeed I can contribute. But, as puzzling as it is to me, it's very beautiful to see some of the results that have come out of the teaching process, it's continual, it's compulsive, it's always there. Everything that I do is about trying to make tomorrow a better day, not only for myself, but for all around me, and I think that that's the reason that I was given talent in the first place."*<sup>1</sup>

— Charles McGee, 2007

*Noah's Ark # 8* is contemporaneous with one of McGee's best known works, *The Blue Nile*, 1987, mural in the Detroit People Mover's, Broadway Center Station. While the latter work is in enamel, a closer look at this painting's surface reveals a collection of found materials. Included in this work are a newspaper, women's hose, the artists own black and white drawings, duct tape, commercial packaging, and Chinese text. By using a democratic myriad of materials, McGee alludes to multiplicity of life on this planet and the sanctity of all life forms.

From 1947-1957, McGee took classes at the Detroit Society of Arts and Crafts. In 1968 he attended the Escuela Massana and the Barcelona School of Graphics, Spain. In addition to creating art, McGee has worked in an auto assembly plant, as a government cartographer, operated an art gallery and taught at Eastern Michigan University and the University of Michigan. His role as an artist has always been inextricably linked with his commitment to education and his community. In 2006, Charles McGee was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Human Letters Degree by Marygrove College, Detroit, MI.

<sup>1</sup> McGee, Charles. "WHY." University of Michigan Detroit Center. This exhibition and blog space ran from November 17 – January 26, 2007. Available in digital archive at <http://whyproject.blogspot.com/2007/11/charles-mcgee.html> (accessed July 31, 2008).



## Allie McGhee

American, b. 1941, Charleston, WV, lives in Detroit, MI

*Stairway to the Stars*, circa 1990

Acrylic on canvas, 46 ¼ x 61 inches

*“As an artist I have always been inspired by the diverse rhythms of our environment. It has been a great reserve of energy for my work. In my recent works instead of seeing the natural world as a rational observer, I see it from within as if through a telescope or microscope. These “nuvisions” into nature’s macro and micro energy, mass rhythm and beauty inspire new imagery for my work.”*<sup>1</sup>

— Allie McGhee, Artist’s Statement

After attending Cass Technical High School in Detroit, McGhee studied at Ferris State College and Eastern Michigan University graduating in 1965. A Detroit native for over five decades, he is committed to art in public places such as his commissioned work in the Michigan Avenue Station of the Detroit People Mover. His paintings are distinguished locally as well as celebrated in prestigious national museum collections such as the Detroit Institute of Arts and the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York.

In this painting, McGhee favors a binary palette of blue and ochre. The yellow ochre functions as an earth tone denoting mass and form. With the exception of the foreground, the blue recedes like air. Such allusions to landscape are prevalent in the paintings of this period. However, McGhee’s abstractions are informed by the repetitious process of layering pigment. The action of applying paint is of paramount importance. Hence, the tactile surface of his work becomes evidence of the physicality of their creation.

McGhee favors using sticks to apply paint rather than brushes. Rejecting the brush, pulling and scraping paint across his canvases, he brings himself closer to the surface of his paintings. The action of using a stick allows the artist’s hands to interact with the paint and surface in a visceral way. Often identified as a “stick painter,” he has, in fact, exhibited works constructed from the by-products of his stick process; the thin paint splattered lengths of wood which he arranges in lathe-like constructions.

<sup>1</sup> McGhee, Allie. Artist’s Statement. “Rhythms: Micro to Macro.” New York: G.R. N’Namdi Gallery, 2005.



# Tyrone Mitchell

American, b. 1944, Savannah, GA, lives in New York, NY

*The Score*, 1980-1981

Wood and pigment, 42 ½ x 51 x 13 ½ inches

Tyrone Mitchell uses natural materials and modernist tenets to create sculpture that relates to African Diaspora. After his studies at the New York Studio School and Art Students League, he traveled to West Africa in 1969. He became acquainted with the cultures of the Dogon people of Mali and the Yoruba of Nigeria. This exposure to his ancestral land became extremely influential in the development of his art.

In 1980, the artist returned to his birthplace of Savannah and began an artist-in-residency in the Georgia Sea Islands. Currently, a government owned nature preserve, during the eighteenth century (specifically the island of Ossabaw), was used as a slave trading and holding center until the American Civil War. The island's history became an intrinsic part of his work.

A recipient a Guggenheim Fellowship and The New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship, Mitchell's artwork has been exhibited at major institutions including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Studio Museum in Harlem and El Museo de Artes Visuales in Venezuela.

*"I think the period divided people down the middle in terms of who was "really" a black artist – an artist whose work reflected the political environment in a specific way. If you look at the work of the sixties, there were people whose work represented specifically the social situation. But there were a lot of artists whose work, before and after that period, was primarily abstract and there was no element in that work that was palatable to the movement. I think a lot of those black artists suffered. A lot of them stopped making art."*<sup>1</sup>

— Tyrone Mitchell, 1990

<sup>1</sup> Wright, Beryl J. "Tyrone Mitchell." New Jersey: Newark Museum, 1990 (7).



89

V. P. ...

## Vicente Pimentel

Dominican, b. 1947, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, lives in Paris, France

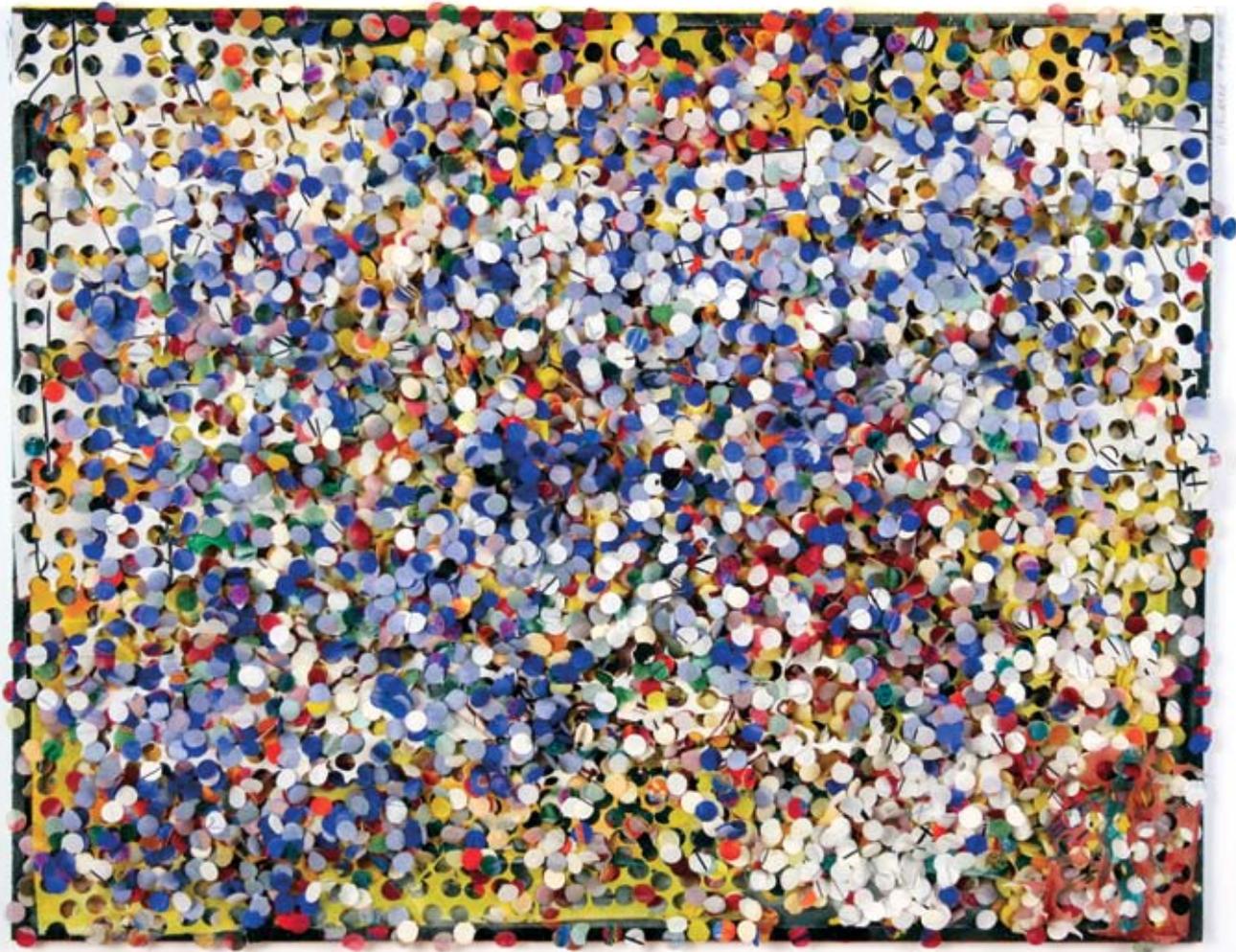
*Untitled*, 1989

Mixed media on canvas, 69 x 82  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches

Vicente Pimentel has lived in Paris for thirty years. He moved there after studying at the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes, Santo Domingo. Against a backdrop of poverty, his work recalls an image from his childhood of awaking in the wooden shanty where he slept to the sight of a large sheet that served as a roof with a huge rust stain at its center. Not unlike the blot of a Rorschach test, seeing the stain over and over again, became a formalistic source of much of his work.

He sees painting as a form of abstract writing. The red rust form has a strong presence in much of his work. His paintings are the panoramic abstract translations of architectural structures, musical instruments and the conglomeration of childhood memories.

Pimentel has work in the Fonds National d'Art Contemporain, the Pompidou Museum Collection and the Museum of Modern Art in Paris.



## Howardena Pindell

American, b. 1943, Philadelphia, PA, lives in New York, NY

*Untitled # 79, 1975*

Mixed media, 16 ½ x 20 ½ inches

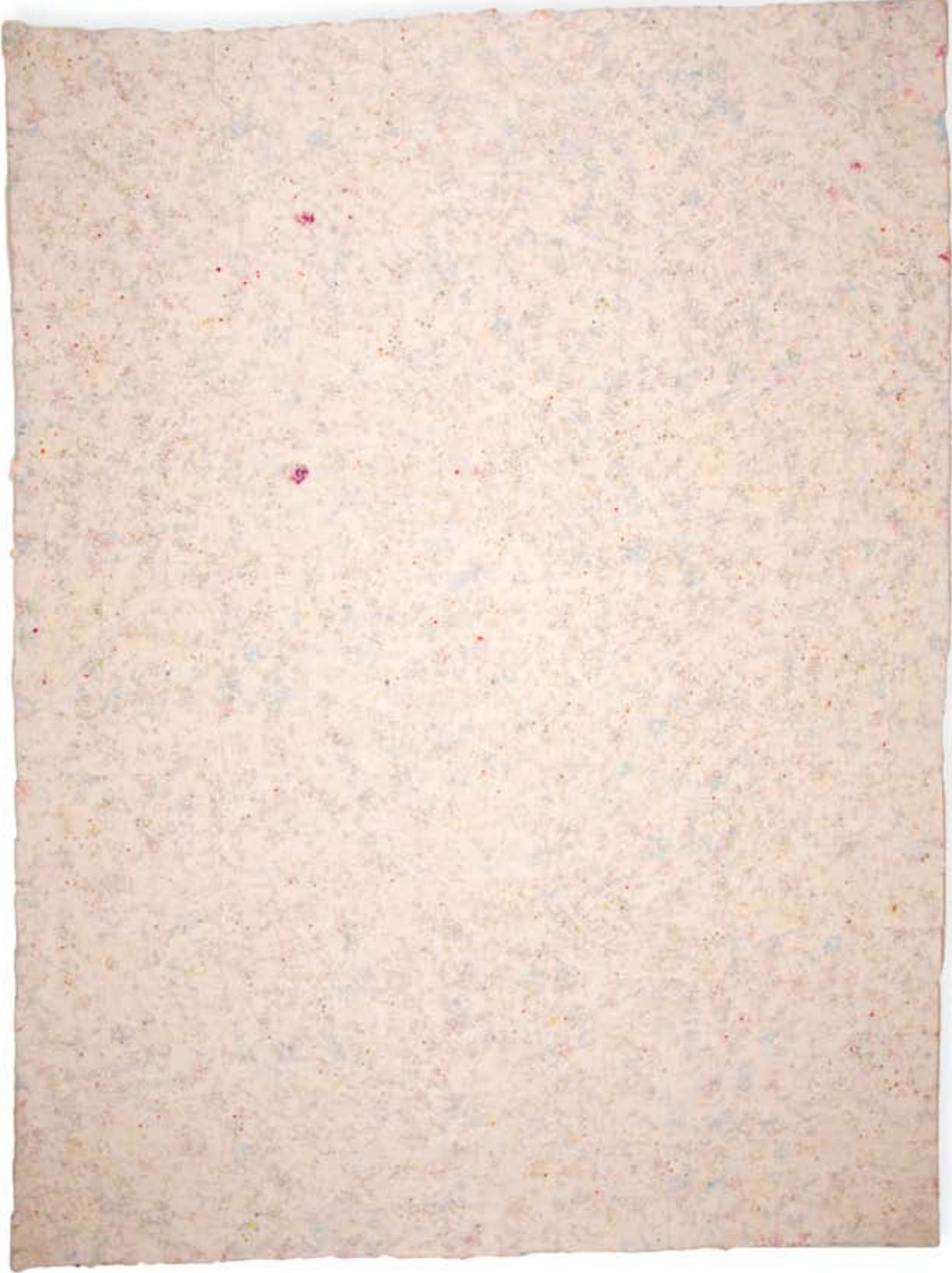
Pindell's career trajectory began in 1969 at The Museum of Modern Art in New York City where she was a Curatorial Assistant. Within a decade, she rose to the position of Associate Curator in the Department of Prints and Illustrated Books.

Throughout the seventies, Pindell steadily created a series of collages that used meticulously constructed layers of hole-punched pieces of paper as the substance of the work. Process-based, these works liberate form from the traditional surface of the picture plane.

In this untitled numbered series from 1975, Pindell replicates her signature collage technique forming a meticulous system of stenciling, collage and sewing. Using colored papers, both in the form of template and their discarded circular discs, this work is comprised of a multiplicity of positive and negative structures which result in a unique surface tension.

Pindell received her M.F.A. from Yale University in 1969. Since 1984 she has been a Professor of Art at New York State University. Post-1980 her work became increasingly political. She currently works in diverse mediums including collage, painting, and video.

Her work can be found in numerous museum collections, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., and The Museum of Modern Art, New York.



BOTTOM

## Howardena Pindell

American, b. 1943, Philadelphia, PA, lives in New York, NY

*Untitled*, 1978

Mixed media on canvas, 83 x 113 inches

In the 1970s Howardena Pindell's work focused on process and surface. Post-Minimalist in orientation, she adopted a systems-based technique which employed the grid format and use of dots in repetition to produce surface-oriented works exploring the economy of mark. The artist used no stretchers to mount her work. Here, the work is installed with tiny metal tacks, which essentially integrate it into the surface of the wall.

In this case, prior to commencing painting, Pindell actually amassed hundreds of five-inch square pieces of canvas and then sewed them together creating a quilt-like surface which is entirely invisible in the finished work. The extraordinary labor inherent in such a process is indicative of the artist's high regard of the relationship between work and value. The result, particularly in this work, epitomizes Pindell's lightness of touch and the delicate balance between opacity and translucency which, in turn, produces a subtle shimmering staccato effect. In consequence, the painting appears to float and hover on the wall, heightening its distance from traditional stretcher-based paintings and their encumbered associations with twentieth-century modern art.



# Betye Saar

American, b. 1926, Los Angeles, CA, lives in Los Angeles, CA

*A Sign in the Sky*, 1984

Mixed Media, 16 ½ x 19 ½ inches

Using found objects, photographs, and ready-made installations, Saar conjures simulated memories and personal narratives from imagined and real origins.

Curiosity  
about the unknown  
has no boundaries.  
Symbols, images, place and cultures merge.  
Time slips away.  
The stars, the cards, the mystic vigil  
may hold the answers.  
By shifting the point of view  
an inner spirit is released.  
Free to create.

– Betye Saar, Artist Statement

Saar received her B.A. in 1949 from the University of California, Los Angeles, and subsequently worked on her M.F.A. at the University of Southern California and at California State University at Northridge and Long Beach.

Early in Saar's career the organization of Women, Students, and Artists for Black Liberation (WSABAL) worked on her behalf and along with Barbara Chase-Riboud, she took part in the first exhibition of black female artists at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1970. Widely exhibited, she has also received numerous accolades, among them two National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships in 1974 and 1984.

After thirty years exhibiting her work, in 2005 the University of Michigan Museum of Art honored her with the travelling exhibition, *Betye Saar: Extending the Frozen Moment*. Other notable future exhibitions include group shows in 2008 at the Museum of the African Diaspora in San Francisco and *Wack! Art and the Feminist Revolution* at the Vancouver Art Gallery, Canada.



# Raymond Saunders

American, b. 1934, Pittsburgh, PA, lives in Oakland, CA

*Lady with Red Heart Walking*, 1980

Drawing with collage, 16  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 20  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches

Active in the discourse of African-American art in the sixties, Saunders contributed some of the most prolific writing to the period with his pamphlet, *Black is a Color*, published in 1967. It states in part,

*“Some angry artists are using their arts as political tools, instead of vehicles of free expression,...an artist who is always harping upon resistance, discrimination, opposition, besides being a drag, eventually plays right into the hands of the politicians he claims to despise—and is held there, unwittingly (and witlessly) reviving slavery in another form. For the artist this is aesthetic atrophy.*

*“Certainly the American black artist is in a unique position to express certain aspects of the current American scene, both negative and positive, but if he restricts himself to these alone, he may risk becoming a mere cipher, a walking protest, a politically described stereotype, negating his own mystery, and allowing himself to be shuffled off into an arid overall mystique.*

*“Racial hang-ups are extraneous to art. No artist can afford to let them obscure what runs through all art — the living root and the ever-growing aesthetic record of human spiritual and intellectual experience. Can't we get clear of these degrading limitations, and recognize the wider reality of art, where color is the means and not the end?”*<sup>1</sup>

— Raymond Saunders, *Black is a Color*, 1967

Saunders position most deftly addresses the paradoxical discourse regarding Black Art. The pride and sentiment representing the desire to express something unique to one's ethnic experience, was at the time mutually exclusive to conforming to the established system. Saunders broke these polarizing stereotypes by being a participant in key art activist organizations such as Spiral and the Black Emergency Cultural Council.

The artist's work can be found among the permanent collections of institutions such as The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art, and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles.

<sup>1</sup> Saunders, Raymond. Excerpt from *Black is a Color*, out-of-print pamphlet, originally published in 1967. Accessed online at the American Studies program at University of Virginia. <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ug01/westkaemper/callaloo/gallery6.html> (accessed July 31, 2008).



## John Scott

American, b. 1940, New Orleans, LA, d. 2007, New Orleans, LA

*Black Bottom*, 1998

Steel, aluminum and enamel, 83 x 38 x 18 inches

Scott's kinetic sculptures found their inspiration in both the cultural traditions of African Diaspora and the locale and culture of New Orleans. He explores the communal and personal as it relates to religion, music, geography, and African folklore.

His colorful, dynamic sculptures ruminates particularly on musical jazz forms as well as motion and dance. In the eighties, he worked on a series that were based on the Diddley Bow, a stringed instrument brought to America by slaves and still played today, particularly in the Mississippi Delta as a blues instrument.

Apart from a sojourn to complete his M.F.A. at the University of Michigan in 1965, Scott spent his life in New Orleans, the last forty of which he taught at his undergraduate alma mater, Xavier University. Scott's long teaching career illustrated his commitment to service and community. He worked steadily until Hurricane Katrina damaged his studio, which effectively curtailed his ability to continue to make welded sculpture. However he was able to maintain his output of drawings until his death in 2007.

In 1992, the artist was selected for a MacArthur Fellowship Genius Grant and in 2005 the New Orleans Museum of Art, LA, mounted a retrospective of his work: *Circle Dance: The Art of John T. Scott*.



# Charles Searles

American, b. 1937, Philadelphia, PA, d. 2004, New York, NY

*Chieftan*, 2000

Acrylic on wood, 81 x 49 x 14 inches

*“My work as a sculptor grew out of my early work as painter. The medium I use most often is painted wood. Although abstract, my work still often has a reference to the figure, in particular, dancers.”*<sup>1</sup>

— Charles Searles, 2005

Initially a painter, Searles was drawn to the artifacts in the collection of Museum of Archeology and Anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania. He participated in the exhibition *New Black Artists* at the Brooklyn Museum in 1969 and *Contemporary Black Artists in America* at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1971. The following year he received a diploma from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts at the University of Philadelphia. A fellowship from the Academy in 1979 allowed him to travel to Ghana, Nigeria, and Morocco which solidified his interest in African sculptural forms, masks and design patterns. Searles' polychrome works not only united his immersion in painting and sculpture, they fused his interest in traditional African forms and his involvement in Afro-Cuban music.

Searles was commissioned throughout the eighties and nineties to create public sculptures. A notable work of the period is the monumental bronze piece, *Freedoms Gate*, 1993, installed at the Fulton Street Traffic Triangle, Brooklyn, New York, which was commissioned by the Department of Transportation.

*“My sculptures are wall hung and free standing, which challenges me to think frontally as well as in the round. I combine my curvilinear and flat forms which gives the work a lot of movement. Negative spaces in and around the piece become part of the sculpture and charge them with energy. It has been said that my work has a positive and multi-cultural feel. This is exactly what I want to convey.”*<sup>2</sup>

— Artist's Statement

<sup>1</sup> Charles Searles. Artist's Statement. “Charles Searles, Standing Tall.” New York: G.R. N’Namdi Gallery, 2005 (8).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



# Vincent Smith

American, b. 1929, New York, NY, d. 2004, New York, NY

*In the Yard*, 1972

Oil, sand, collage on canvas, 48 ¼ x 69 ½ inches

Largely self-taught, Smith was born in Bedford-Stuyvesant and took art classes at the Brooklyn Museum Art School and Skowhegan School of Painting in Maine. He credited his knowledge of art history primarily to visits to the Brooklyn Public Library when he was a child. Although information was sparse on black artists, the library held volumes on the German Expressionists. Influenced by African art, they became significant in the artist's development.

After leaving school in his teens, Smith spent time working at various jobs such as a railroad and post office worker. He was active in the Greenwich Village social scene of the mid-fifties. His close friends, jazz musicians Charlie "Bird" Parker and Thelonious Monk, artists Richard Mayhew and Jacob Lawrence, and poet and activist Amiri Baraka (formerly known as Le Roi Jones) were all influential in the development of the artist's oeuvre.

Jacob Lawrence wrote an essay for Smith's 1973 exhibition *Vincent Smith: Recent Paintings* at Larcada Gallery, New York, in which this painting was originally shown:

*"I look forward to viewing the work of Vincent Smith which is always vital in content and exciting in form. The facades of the buildings and the faces of their inhabitants – as expressed through the elements of texture, color and shape – allow one to appreciate the creative process of Vincent Smith as well as the energetic like forces of the big city – its people and their way of life. The works are accomplished with sensitivity, probing incisively for the character and essence of the scene of which the artist is so much a part... I admire the symbolic scene paintings: In The Yard with its mask-like figures and timeless forms... syncopated in color, is a fine tribute from a perspective painter, expressing the staccato pulsating beat of a snare drum, the sound of a trumpet and the metallic ring of a piano."*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lawrence, Jacob. "Vincent Smith: Recent Paintings." New York: Larcada Gallery, 1973.



## Vincent Smith

American, b. 1929, New York, NY, d. 2004, New York, NY

*Let it be Like Men*, 1972,

Oil, sand, collage on canvas, 49 ½ x 61 ¼ inches

The deaths of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. plunged a nation further into racial disharmony and redefined the Civil Rights Movement. Smith's art strove against the backdrop of this turbulent period and subsequently his work became dedicated to his political agenda. Under the leadership of the activist and poet Amiri Baraka, founder of the Black Arts Movement, Smith focused his energies on matters of the Black experience. Personal and universal, the artist explored cultural tribulations through moving narrative compositions.

The rich palette, infused with sand, transposes the urban grit of city into the surface of this painting. The subjects of the painting confront the viewer directly with their gaze. A Priest, depicted in profile, implies that the scene occurs inside a church. Four faces appear in the windows, their presence indicative of the disparity prevalent in the lives of African-Americans outside the sanctuary of the church.

Smith's work can be found in public collections such as the Art Institute of Chicago, The Museum of Modern Art in New York, The National Museum of American Art in Washington, D.C., The Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.



# Bob Thompson

American, b. 1937, Louisville, KY, d. 1966, Rome, Italy

*Caledonia Flight*, 1963

Oil on canvas, 77¼ x 57 inches

After briefly studying medicine at Boston University in 1956, Thompson returned to his hometown to study painting at the University of Louisville. He was a prolific painter who often appropriated work of the Old Masters in his large scale paintings.

This composition is based upon an etching from one of Francisco Goya's most significant works entitled *Los Caprichos (The Whim)*. Plate 65 from the series, *Donde Va Momma (Where is Mother Going?)*, 1799, depicts a menagerie of figures descendent upon a naked woman as she is supported by a beastlike creature. The series was intended by Goya to be a representation of the prejudices and social ills that occur in all societies.

The economic urgency in Thompson's painting process deftly depicts the implied violence of the etching.

Thompson received considerable professional success in the United States during his short career which ended prematurely from gall bladder surgery when he was 29. An avid traveler, the artist died in Rome. Ultimately, he has left a legacy of over 1,000 paintings. In 1998, the Whitney Museum of American Art organized a retrospective of his work.

Thompson's paintings are included in the permanent collections of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Art Institute of Chicago, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, The Brooklyn Museum, The Denver Art Museum, the Detroit Institute of Arts.



## Jack Whitten

American, b. 1939, Bessemer, AL, lives in New York, NY

*Formal Relay*, 1979

Acrylic on canvas, 22 ¼ x 22 ¼ inches

Over the course of his illustrious career, Whitten's abstractions have taken on multiple incarnations. However, one consistent reoccurrence in his work is the innovation of technology and tools in his process. In 1974, Whitten's contract with the Xerox Corporation was one of the first of its kind in which a company furnished new technology and supplies for experimental use by an artist. The impact of this can be seen in the repetition and photographic characteristics of multiplicity in Whitten's oeuvre.

The grid, a fundamental Modernist device, is prevalent in Whitten's work in the late seventies. Surprisingly, the precise, exacting appearance of this painting is created by the dragging of a paint-coated comb across the surface of the canvas. Flat diluted color is applied to the ground providing depth, energy and resonance.

*"First I used the afro-comb with a couple of paintings, and then I began to recognize a pattern. That's when I wanted more control, so I started making the device myself. The afro-comb became a big carpenter saw. In fact, MoMA has one from 1978."*<sup>1</sup>

—Jack Whitten, 2007

Whitten's art can be seen as primarily a personal form of expression and not as a political statement. While the use of afro-combs in the artist work addresses the ethnocentric value of a cultural object, it is used as an aesthetic choice that furthers the artist's experiments in formalism.

<sup>1</sup> Storr, Robert. "Jack Whitten with Robert Storr." *The Brooklyn Rail*, September 2007, <http://www.brooklynrail.org/2007/9/art/whitten> (accessed July 31, 2008).



## Jack Whitten

American, b. 1939, Bessemer, AL, lives in New York, NY

*Summit*, 1998

Mixed media on canvas, 84 x 72 ½ inches

Process takes precedence in this monumental collage. Made of dried acrylic paint cast into various molds it, much like that of Whitten's other works, is based on the grid format. Concealed beneath layers of corrugated cardboard, found objects, and accumulated paint the grid is now relegated and all but concealed beneath the layers of pigment and collage. Undoubtedly abstract, a triangle protrusion emerges, providing insight into the title of the piece.

Whitten attended the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama in 1959 and Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in 1960. In 1964, he attended The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art.

Essentially a Post-minimalist, Whitten's early success secured his participation in one of most seminal, controversial exhibitions in American art history: *Harlem on My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900-1968* at The Metropolitan Museum in New York. This exposed the artist to mainstream art institutions. His incisive experimental formalism was rapidly embraced and this led to subsequent exhibitions in the 1969 and 1972 Whitney Museum of American Art Biennials. This was followed by a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in 1973.

Whitten has received numerous retrospectives in his honor most notably in 1983 at Studio Museum in Harlem and in 2007 at P.S.1 MoMA Center for Contemporary Art in New York.



# Bernard Williams

American, b. 1964, Chicago, IL, lives in Chicago, IL

*Buffalo Soldier*, 1996

Oil on canvas, 85 ½ x 67 inches

Williams' interests in museology and history guide his dedication to art, pedagogy, and community service. Williams fosters discourse outside the gallery and museum sphere by creating outdoor, community-based murals that encourage interactive participation and input from the surrounding residents.

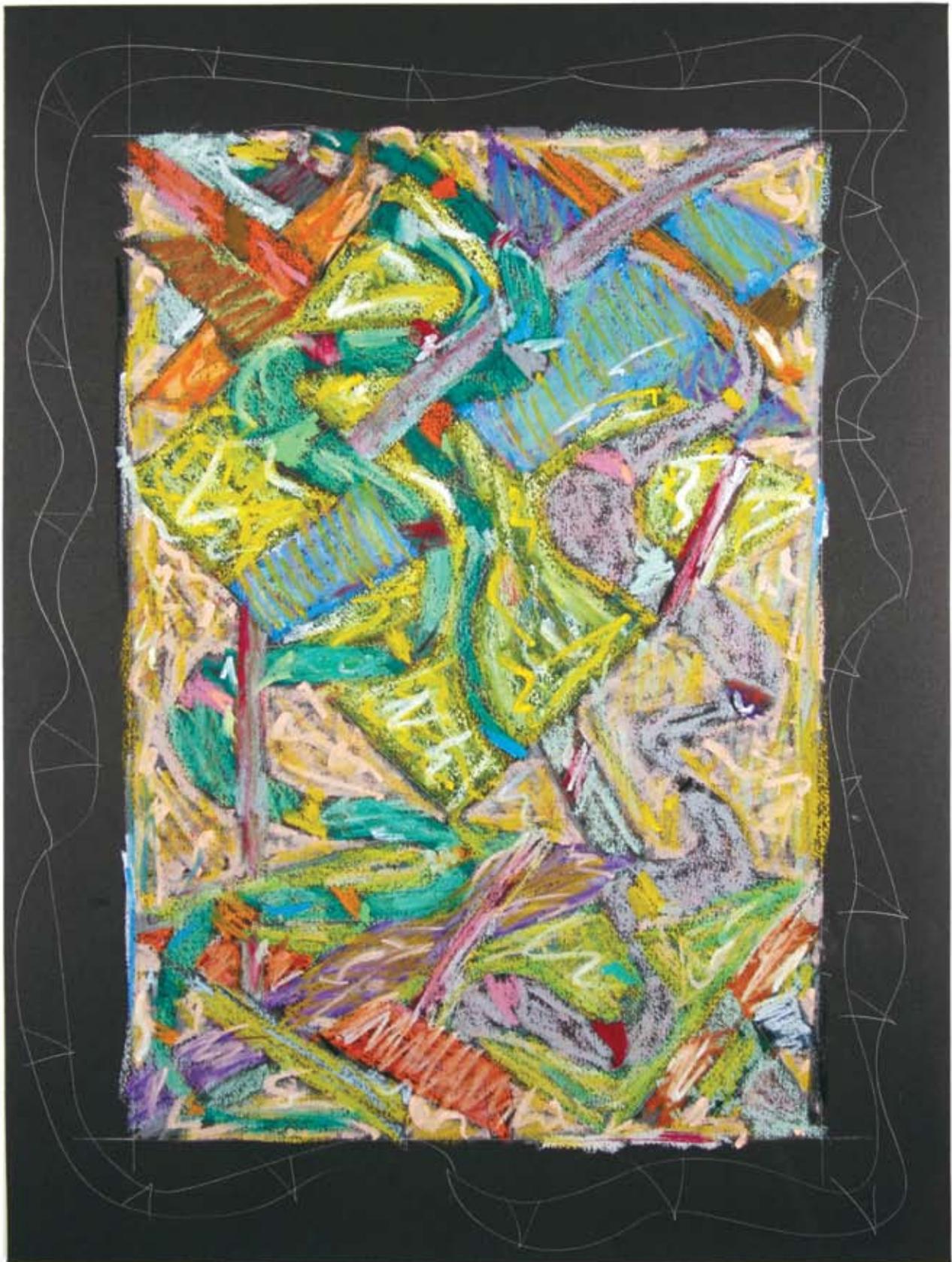
Williams received a B.F.A. from the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana and his M.F.A. from Northwestern University in Evanston in 1988. Throughout the course of his studies, he also took classes at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine. His educational experience and deft understanding of the historical importance of art in public spaces and the representation of objective truth can be seen in his large scale paintings.

In the tradition of Charles Alston and his Work Progress Administration students Romare Bearden and Jacob Lawrence, Williams continues the practice of creating art in public spaces made by community members and representative of the people. Bearden's influence can be seen in the collage-like techniques that William's employs in his work using signs and vast colors planes to produce paintings representing potentially forgotten histories.

*"This work grows from my continuing investigation of American and World history and culture, along with related interests in archeology, cartography, and ethnology. In many of my works, signs and symbols are collected and arranged in order to speak about the complexities of history and human development and movement through the ages. Retrieving and reinterpreting details of history and culture are central to my impulses. Multiple stories and fragments are layered and lined onto my canvases or chosen surface. The viewer is urged to consider his or her place in the forceful flow of culture and events."*<sup>1</sup>

— Bernard Williams, 2008

<sup>1</sup> The Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art. "Bernard Williams." Further information on this exhibition that runs through September 2008 can be found at [http://www.eiteljorg.org/ejm\\_WhatsHappening/Exhibitions/details.asp?id=1546](http://www.eiteljorg.org/ejm_WhatsHappening/Exhibitions/details.asp?id=1546) (accessed July 31, 2008).



Elmington

1915

## William T. Williams

American, b. 1942, Cross Creek, NC, lives in New York, NY

*Ellington*, 1988

Etching, oil, and pastel on paper, 30¼ x 24¼ inches

As a part of his graduate studies at Yale in 1968, Williams proposed the Artist-in-Residence (AIR) Program to the organization that was to become the Studio Museum in Harlem and in doing so, gave the museum its name. Over forty years later, the program has been host to numerous successful artists such as Chakaia Booker, David Hammons, and Tyrone Mitchell. In the tradition of community activism, the museum was founded to provide artists in the urban center of African-American culture a place for greater discourse that was not being provided by the mainstream Euro-centric art communities.

Williams has been a distinguished voice in the dialogue surrounding the re-contextualization of the role of African-American art in the Western art canon. A professor of painting at City University of New York since 1971, he is instrumental in creating a platform that enables young artists the opportunity to challenge the existing hegemony of American art.

Williams discussed the role of the AIR program at the Studio Museum in Harlem in 2006:

*“Part of the infrastructure is certainly the contribution of this museum as a training ground for so many of those who have gone on and now are in a place where they can make a difference. It took that many years to begin to put all of the infrastructure in place. The future is that – it’s the future, where a lot of these things will be unraveled. The body of work is there, it’s just a question of time. Art history is one of those things that’s constantly being reassessed and rewritten.”*<sup>1</sup>

Williams’ work can be found in the permanent collection of institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney of American Art in New York, as well as the Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut.

<sup>1</sup> Williams, T. William. “Energy/Experimentation: Black Artists and Abstraction, 1964-1980.”  
*Black Artists and Abstraction: A Roundtable*. New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 2005 (82).



## Acknowledgment

My wife, Carmen, has shared my appreciation and enthusiasm for this collection. Art has been a major influence in our lives, as evident in our home, our work places, where we travel, and the people who are in our lives. Art has always been a part of our children's lives. Kemba, Jumaane and Izegbe have almost shared a familial bond with some of the most profound artists of this era as the artists have watched them grow into adulthood. Each of our children are collectors in their own right. I am especially gratified that my son, Jumanne, joined G.R. N'Namdi Gallery in 1996, one year after graduating from college. He is now the director of the Chicago gallery and over the past few years is responsible for building an impressive national cadre of art collectors. To have a family, where as individuals each of us is an advocate for art within our own work context, is more than I could have envisioned in *the sixties*. Now I can say with great conviction through experience and understanding, that preserving *African American culture through art*...No better legacy.

# George R. N’Namdi

## PERSONAL

**Birth Data** 09/12/46 – Columbus, Ohio

**Marital Status** Married – Carmen N’Namdi

**Children** Kemba, Jumaane, Izegbe

## EDUCATION

1978 University of Michigan, Ph.D. Developmental Psychology

1974 University of Michigan, M.A. Psychology

1972 Ohio State University, M.A. Education

1970 Ohio State University, B.S. Education

## PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYMENT

2004-Present President G.R. N’Namdi Gallery, New York, N.Y.

1996 -Present President. G.R. N’Namdi Gallery. Chicago, Ill

1981-Present President G.R. N’Namdi Gallery, Detroit, MI

1976-1986 Assistant Professor – Wayne State University, Detroit, MI,  
College of Education and Center for Black Studies

1978-1982 Psychologist Wayne County Department of Health  
Detroit, MI – Child and Family Therapist

1972-1978 Research Assistant/Lecturer University of Michigan  
Ann Arbor, MI and Dearborn, MI

## BOARDS

State of Michigan’s Council of Art and Cultural Affairs, Lansing, MI

Friends of African American Art – Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, MI

Woodward Heritage Organization – Wayne, Detroit, MI

Detroit Economic Group Corporation – Special Projects, Detroit, MI

Art On the Move – Detroit, MI

Nataki Talibah Schoolhouse of Detroit – Detroit, MI

## LECTURES

- 11/28/07 University of Michigan Off Site Gallery, Ann Arbor, MI  
“Art & Urban Development Forum”
- 02/22/07 The Newark Public Library (5 Washington St, Newark, NJ)  
“The Art of Fine Art Collecting” Lecture and Slide Presentation
- 2004 – 06 Wayne State University, African-American Art Lecture Series
- 04/8/03 Wayne State University, Organization of Black Alumni and Black Graduate  
Business Students Association “Business Development in the Urban Community”

## AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

- 2005 Southern Poverty Law Center/ Certificate of Appreciation/ Name added to  
*Wall of Tolerance in Montgomery, Alabama*
- 2004 National Conference of Artists/Michigan Chapter/Vision and Excellence in the Arts Award  
*Detroit Free Press* – G.R. N’Namdi Gallery – Best Gallery for African American Art  
Keep Detroit Beautiful Recognition Award – G.R. N’Namdi Gallery
- 2004 National Council of the Arts – Michigan Chapter “Vision Excellence in the Arts Award”
- 2003 & 2004 *Detroit Free Press* “Best Gallery for African American Art”
- 2003 *Detroit Free Press* – G.R. N’Namdi Gallery – Best Gallery for African American Art
- 2002 Certificate of Special Recognition – G.R. N’Namdi in Recognition of  
Outstanding and Invaluable Service to the Community
- 2002 Belleville Area Council for the Arts – G.R. N’Namdi Gallery – Appreciation Award
- 1999 Patron Award – Wayne State University Arts
- 1996 National Conference of Artists, Michigan Chapter – George N’Namdi  
Recognition of Commitment, Support and Service in the Visual Arts
- 1992 Detroit Chapter of Jack & Jill of America, Inc. – George N’Namdi

Seminal Works from the  
**N’Namdi Collection of African-American Art**

Catalogue written and edited by Dick Goody

Artist catalogue entries by Monica Bowman,  
courtesy of G.R. N’Namdi Gallery

Designed by Debra Lashbrook  
Photography by Alejandro Garcia

**Oakland University Art Gallery**

Department of Art and Art History  
College of Arts and Sciences  
208 Wilson Hall  
2200 North Squirrel Road  
Rochester, MI 48309-4401  
(248) 370-3005  
[www.oakland.edu/ouag](http://www.oakland.edu/ouag)

Director, Dick Goody  
Assistant to the Director and Registrar, Jacqueline Leow

ISBN 978-0-925859-46-4  
Printed by DotPress LLC, Chicago

Copyright 2008 Oakland University Art Gallery. All rights reserved.  
No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without the  
written permission of the Oakland University Art Gallery.

**Oakland University Art Gallery exhibitions are made possible  
through the generous contribution of individuals, companies  
and foundations.**

**Benefactors: \$5,000+**  
Marianne Fey Miller and John Miller

**Patron’s: \$2,500 – \$4,999**  
Peter and Aggie Corrado (Infinity Outsourcing)

**Directors’ Circle: \$1,000 – \$2,499**  
Annette Balian  
Nora and Guy Barron  
Elizabeth DuMouchelle  
Phebe Goldstein  
Dr. and Mrs. David E. Haines  
Joyce LaBan  
Kathryn LeBlanc  
Stephan Loginsky  
Pam Mitzelfeld  
Elaine Ohno  
Domenica Vitale

The above gifts were made between June 2007 and June 2008.

Oakland University Art Gallery apologizes for any  
inaccuracies or omissions.



This exhibition was made possible in part by a grant from The Kresge Foundation, Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs, National Endowment for the Arts, and by the College of Arts and Sciences, Oakland University.