

Set Theory

JOYCE WELLMAN

Prints • Paintings • Drawings



Gallery 1 January 16 - March 7
UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS • LITTLE ROCK

Art is the fuel that carries me on an adventure to discover the mysteries of the Universal and the individual self. Because art is both seen and felt it has the power to engage the body, mind and spirit. Guided by the universal intuition and random chance, the grammar, emotion and passion of my art becomes knowable and meaningful, informing ourselves and our world.

~**JOYCE WELLMAN**

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JOYCE WELLMAN

A REFLECTION by Helen E. Jackson

The art of Joyce Wellman is rooted in both the visionary and in the organic. An abstractionist by choice, her works are full of iconic imagery. Signifiers, numbers and runes emerge from swirls of modulated pigment recalling distant cosmologies, clandestine language, cryptic messages, secrets and dreams. The body of her work, of the last two decades in particular, reference primal memories of the subconscious mind and explore the intuitive language of dreams and pre-cognition.

Trained originally as an educator, Ms. Wellman began the formal study of art in her mid-thirties. She is, at this point in her development, a mature artist well versed in the structure of composition, spatial relationships, color and line. As she approaches mid-career we may certainly view her as philosophically developed, grounded in technique yet freed from the limitations of conformity. The various works presented in this exhibition cross both genre and medium. They are centered fundamentally in abstraction, but incorporate elements of the naïve as well as the narrative. There are three graphic series, one titled *Steal Away*, another, *Pieces of a Dream*, and the other, *St. Vesica Pisces*: one narrative, one drawing on elements of the naïve or "outsider" tradition and one symbolic in the main. Also included in the exhibition are thirty large and small scale paintings and drawings and a limited edition art book.

The visual and plastic arts exert a powerful communicative force with compelling sensory

impact. Color, light, space and composition profoundly affect our aesthetic sensibilities, drawing us imperceptibly toward an interface of mood and memory. Ms. Wellman, however, moves beyond the conventional dialogue to elicit an enigmatic conversation with the subconscious. This is particularly true in the series, *Pieces of a Dream*. The geometric wood constructions such as *Circle Synergy*, direct the eye inward toward further interior constructs and mathematical concepts, thus challenging the viewer to consider dimensions beneath the surface plane. Time, space, and symbol create a dislocation of elements, forming a puzzle of intellectual construction. The viewer is invited to travel a path beyond, and perhaps behind, the predictable world of three-dimensional space. Individual elements float, trail, submerge and re-emerge.

Elemental forms - circle, square, pentagon and rectangle - are often repeated in spatial augmentation, compressed or enlarged. The viewer must allow the eye to wander and suspend concrete analysis.

It is significant that prior to taking up the study of art, Ms. Wellman was a teacher of mathematics. Her approach to the construction and deconstruction of the visual world owes much to mathematical principle and particularly, the laws of geometry. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that she has embraced the writings of Robert Lawlor and his seminal work, *Sacred Geometry*. Geometry (geo-metry) translates literally as the measure of the earth.¹ Lawlor asserts that the practice of geometry is an approach by which the universe is ordered and sustained. Therefore, "geometric diagrams can be contemplated as still moments revealing a continuous, timeless, universal action generally hidden from our sensory perception."² In her work Ms. Wellman employs sacred and mathematically potent forms that float in a universal but fragmented



Pieces of a Dream #16, 2004



Something Different, 1989

firmament. These signatories appear throughout her work but are apparent most prominently in *Pieces of a Dream*. *Momma's Numbers*, a precursor to *Pieces of a Dream*, is a large-scale mixed media drawing completed in 1989. This seminal work marks the point of debarkation in her exploration of the subconscious and is a deliberate attempt on the part of the artist to investigate the subliminal symbolism embedded in childhood memory. For instance, Ms. Wellman has a fascination with the potency of the symbol "X." The X is a mythic and phenomenal form. It is the symbol for the crossroads and a unique marker that harbors mysterious potency. The artist states, "X is a special letter in our alphabet. In a mathematical framework the X represents the 'unknown' or variable fac-

tor. It is a very powerful placeholder. It represents the preconscious, the mystery beyond the veil. X has a vibratory power. As humans we are dualistic beings – male and female. And what is the X chromosome? We are born XX or XY. The X chromosome is dominant, from X you can get Y the Y being a broken X. Again, the X is the primary placeholder. There is powerful vibration inherent in this symbol."

The present collection of paintings, prints and drawings span a period of two-and-a-half decades. Through them one can chart the progression of both the artist's narrative and painterly development. Some of the smaller graphic works are the result of collaborative processes. Printmaking as a medium offers a natural template for such an explora-

tion. Ideas can be explored, techniques can be shared and methods -both innovative and traditional- can be investigated or challenged. Improvisation occurs in the exchange between creative intellects generating new pathways of exploration. In the summer of 2004 Wellman shared a collegial collaboration with acclaimed printmaker Margo Humphrey in her studio at the University of Maryland. Concepts explored there were further refined during a trip to Kenya as a visiting artist sponsored by the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi at the invitation of Kenya's Kuona Trust. While there Ms. Wellman presented a master printmaking workshop to regional artists and was the sole American artist invited to participate in the first East African Women Artists Workshop during a six-week residency at Lake



Bughead, 1988

Navaisha, Kenya.

The *St. Vesica Piscis* series, on the other hand, appears to be drawn from deep within the recesses of the psyche. Nevertheless, they also reflect some fundamental religious origins as they deal with the conjunction of spirit, mind and matter. The Vesica Piscis is a philosophical construct, a representation of the interstice between the mystical and the mundane. The visual vocabulary of these works makes use of symbol, sine waves, repetitive patterns and mystical numeric formulae.

The five prints from the *St. Vesica Piscis* series deserve close inspection;

here the artist has anthropomorphized a symbolic construct. However the "saint" designation, attributed by the artist, lies beyond gender - neither male nor female, but indicative of a universal force within nature. The Vesica Piscis stands as proxy for the central point of reference and reflects the search for the self in a quest for authenticity and validation. In her own words, "St. Vesica Piscis mitigates the conflict between the objective and non-objective world that exists within both the micro and macrocosm of our real spiritual selves. Metaphorically it also evokes the X symbol or crossroads. However, not as

a cruciform, or any intended Christian reference; the X here is the point of intersection and represents the place where the everlasting-eternal (spiritual) and the mundane world of the here and now meet." This repetition of thematic material underscores Ms. Wellman's preoccupation with the shadowy world of the subconscious and the truths that lie beneath the perceived reality of our lives.

In their collective presentation the three graphic series explore the limits of technique, material and perception of space. However, Ms. Wellman's work always directs the viewer towards a point of destiny, some place of final destination and ultimate, perhaps subversive knowledge. *One Angry Pony*, one of the larger drawings is simply whimsical. On the other hand, the various two-dimensional paintings on canvas explore the boundaries of color, form and motion. These works frequently nullify the concept of edges, and become portals to visions of cosmic proportion. The collected works create a vibratory song, full of color and motion, energy and joy. The pleasure is in the viewing.

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¹ Lawlor, Robert. p. 6. In recounting the response of early agricultural societies toward the natural phenomena of cyclic seasonal change, the author asserts that the yearly flood pattern of the Nile "symbolized to the ancient Egyptian the cyclic return of the primal watery chaos, and when the waters receded the work began of redefining and re-establishing the boundaries. This work was called geometry and was seen as a re-establishment of the principle of order and law on earth." Lawlor, Robert. *Sacred Geometry: Philosophy and Practice (Art and Imagination)*. New York, N.Y.: Thames and Hudson, 1989.

² Ibid. p. 6. "One of the ways to view the Vesica Piscis is as a representation of the Intermediate realm which partakes of both the unchanging and the changing principals, the eternal and the ephemeral.

* Helen Elaine Jackson is an independent curator, former gallery owner and a focused collector of works-on-paper by women artists. Capitol East Graphics Gallery showcased works by U.S. and international artists of color for 22 years in the Washington, DC.



St. Vesica Piscis 5th, 2004

A NOTE FROM THE CURATOR

Set Theory: Prints, Paintings and Drawings is an exhibition chronicling the artistic journey of Joyce Wellman from the late 1980's to the present. Wellman's drawings explore exciting and dynamic mark making. Working with printmaking and multiples has allowed her to set a variety of compositional resolves around a common theme of numbers, forms and abstraction. Wellman's paintings range from the elegant surfaces of her color field abstractions that pull you into a meditative space to the rich colorful surfaces of her most recent paintings which excite.

I am grateful to Joyce Wellman for agreeing to present her work in Little Rock and working with the students at UALR during her February visit.

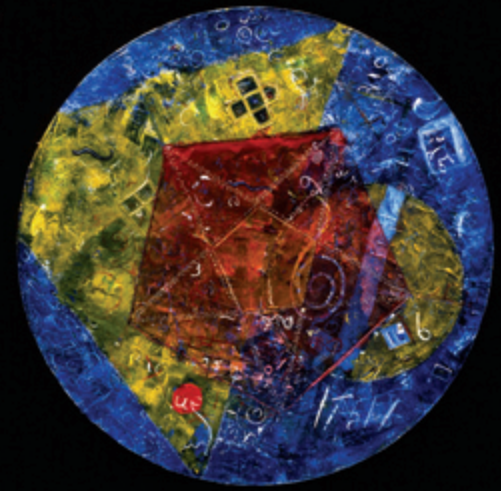
I would like to thank Nathan Larson, my curatorial assistant for his expertise and assistance with the installations

presented in the UALR Galleries and his on-going care in maintaining the UALR Permanent Collection. His service to the University and the Art Department is invaluable.

I would also like to thank Corri Bristow and Alex Moomey for their help in designing this brochure and with on-going gallery duties.

The UALR Art Department is especially indebted to the McLarty Companies and the UALR Friends of the Art for their sponsorship of the exhibition and underwriting the printing of this publication. Thanks also to The Office of Campus Life: Minority Advocacy Program for agreeing to sponsor the reception for Joyce Wellman.

Brad Cushman
Gallery Director



Global Blues, 2004

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful for the support, inspiration and love I have received in presenting the exhibition, "Set Theory". Thanks to the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) Department of Art for inviting me and making "Set Theory" the kick-off art exhibit in a year-long series of art exhibits in association with the 50th anniversary of the Central High School desegregation crisis which occurred in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957. I give big thanks to Sharon Farmer, Flo McAfee, Barry Donald Jones for their friendship, and to Helen Jackson who has written this wonderful essay about my work. I give a very special thanks to AJ Smith, a fantastic artist, educator and colleague. He introduced my work and me to his colleagues in the UALR art department. I am especially grateful to Donna and Mack McLarty for their love of art and artists. Their generous gift helped make this catalogue a reality! My heart felt thanks go to Sandy Woodard of the McLarty Companies of Little Rock for her support. Many, many thanks to Brad Cushman, UALR Gallery director and his staff who have worked diligently to bring artistic voices like mine to the UALR and the greater Little Rock Communities.

It is my wish that every artist can experience such support for their art and the joy it brings.

~JOYCE WELLMAN



Helping Hands, 2004

works in the exhibition

Moma's Numbers

1989
50 x 38 inches
oil stick & mixed media

Something Different

1989
38 x 50 inches
oil stick

Light Bulb Head

1988
50 x 38 inches
oil stick & mixed media

Bug Head

1988
50 x 38 inches
oil stick & mixed media

One Angry Pony

1989
50 x 38 inches
collage & mixed media

St. Vesica Piscis 5th

2004
12 x 9 inches
mixed process print

St. Vesica Piscis 1st

2004
9 x 12 inches
mixed process print

St. Vesica Piscis A to Z

2004
9 x 12 inches
mixed process print

St. Vesica Piscis 8th

2004
9 x 12 inches
mixed process print

Pieces of a Dream #5

2004
9 x 11.5 inches
color viscosity etching

Pieces of a Dream #16

2004
9 x 11.5 inches
color viscosity etching

Pieces of a Dream #20

2004
9 x 11.5 inches
color viscosity etching

Pieces of a Dream #4

2004
9 x 11.5 inches
color viscosity etching

The Crossroads

2005
11.75 x 11.75 inches
color viscosity etching

The Doors to Hopes & Dreams

2005
11.75 x 11.75 inches
color viscosity etching

Helping Hands

2005
11.75 x 11.75 inches
color viscosity etching

Many Mandellas

2005
11.75 x 11.75 inches
color viscosity etching

North Star

2005
11.75 x 11.75 inches
color viscosity etching

Circle Synergy

2006
39 inches diameter
acrylic on wood

Global Blues aka Big Blues Love Circle

2006
39 inches diameter
acrylic on wood

Untitled Synergy

2006
39 inches diameter
acrylic on wood

El Nigritos World

2004
36 x 72 inches
acrylic & paper on canvas

Blues Indigo

2001
50 x 40 inches
acrylic & mixed media on wood

Thunder Blues

1998
72 x 60 inches
acrylic on canvas

Evening Sky

1998
72 x 60 inches
acrylic on canvas

Sun Burst

1998
72 x 60 inches
acrylic on wood

Ascension I & II

2006
(I) 30 x 22.5 inches
(II) 22.5 x 30 inches
acrylic & mixed media
painting on paper

Balance Master I & II

2006
(I) 30 x 22.5 inches
(II) 22.5 x 30
acrylic & mixed media
painting on paper

The Big Five

2005
60 x 48 inches
acrylic on canvas

Variations

2006
40 x 30 inches
acrylic on canvas

Listen Here

2006
48 x 60 inches
acrylic on canvas

Evening Tide

2006
40 x 30 inches
acrylic on canvas

Steal Away

2005
Abstract color
limited edition art book
connecting visual art with
the spoken word through
an audio CD accompaniment.
This work was created in the
winter of 2005 while Joyce
Wellman was the visiting artist
at the Experimental Printmaking
Institute of Lafayette College in
Easton, Pennsylvania.

Gallery Hours M-F 9am-5pm • Saturday 10am-1pm, Sunday 2-5pm • Closed University Holidays

www.ualr.edu/artdept/gallery

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Front Image *Listen Here*, 2006