



THE INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ART

Norman Lewis

(1909-1979)

ART AND LEGACY





Norman Lewis
Flames to Freeze, 1951.
oil on canvas, 50 x 25 1/2 in.
P. Bruce Marine and Donald Hardy Collection

Cover: detail from *Flames to Freeze*

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The Nurturing Space of Cinque Gallery

JOYCE WELLMAN

NORMAN LEWIS, ALONG WITH ROMARE BEARDEN AND ERNEST CRICHLLOW, are among the lineal descendants of the Harlem Renaissance sculptor and teacher Augusta Savage. She created creative sanctuaries for young artists, enabling them to achieve their potential in the face of racism and exclusion. Lewis, Bearden and Crichtlow, as Ms. Savage had in the 1920s and 1930s, created a space for young, aspiring African American and artists of color when they founded the Cinque Gallery in 1969.

Cinque Gallery straddled the East and West Villages in Manhattan; its mission was to exhibit African American artists, to educate the public about their work, and to offer art programs to the community. From 1969 until it closed its doors in 2010, Cinque was a space in which artists could express themselves.

My first New York City exhibition was held at the Cinque Gallery. I was living on East 5th Street and 2nd Avenue, two blocks away from the Cinque Gallery. I was a young aspiring artist, looking to fulfill dream of joining the ranks of Abstract Expressionist painters. Sometime between 1973 and 1974, Chris Shelton, a wonderful abstract sculptor who was the gallery's director, invited me to exhibit there. And my experience didn't end with that three-person show at Cinque. Chris Shelton became a friend and mentor, who introduced me to other abstractionists: Howardena Pindell, Ed Clark, Bill Hutson, Joe Overstreet and Corrine Jennings. I also hung out at Overstreet and Jennings' Kenkeleba House, a gallery where all the hip, New York artists of color congregated and exhibited.

Through Chris Shelton, I met Bearden and Crichtlow. As they had, Chris nurtured the creative explorations of young artists of color in a space in which we could thrive! We learned that it's not only "about" the artist: we began to think about the artist, the art and the viewer because the artist needs the engaged viewer. While I never met Lewis, I was inspired by his delicate and mysterious abstractions. But most importantly, I was inspired by the Cinque founding trio's powerful determination to insert the next generation artists of color into the New York art scene. Lewis, Crichtlow and Bearden laid a foundation and energized the hopes, dreams and aspirations of so many young artists. It made a difference to me. From

their examples, I learned to let the art speak and to work hard to create an art that engages the viewer, first and foremost!

Joyce Wellman is a Washington, D.C.-based abstract artist. Her prints, paintings, and drawings have been exhibited in the US, Guyana, and Kenya. Her mural, *Autumn Passages*, was commissioned for North Carolina A&T State University in Greensboro. Wellman is a Ford Foundation Fellow who studied at the Maryland Institute College of Art.



Joyce Wellman
In Praise of Wow o Wow, 2013
acrylic on canvas
40 x 30 in.