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The History of African-American Women Artists

XFORD

ture, and the relief carvings of the Hindu temples at Khajuraho (India), studied firsthand while traveling through India on a Fulbright-Hayes fellowship in 1981.⁴³

Between the early 1970s and the 1980s, Pogue shifted from a representational to an abstract aesthetic, as the “concept of the universal” became more central to her thinking. According to Pogue, “My visual vocabulary has expanded to include not just the world around me, but the world within. . . . I try to reach inward to the level of my subconscious.” Pogue’s introspective methodology manifests itself in prints filled with “elements of texture, muted color, and universal motifs” that persist in alluding, however indirectly, to nature.⁴⁴ This rooting in the natural world is evident in *India Pattern/Pattern of India*, which reiterates the lotus blossom design of a marble palace floor that the artist recalled from her travels to India (fig. 8.24). With the sovereignty of a blazing sun seen at close range, *India Pattern* introduces a wedge of the lotus silhouette into the upper right area of the composition. Layers of texture and translucent color create a shimmering effect, displaying Pogue’s command of her medium. Recently, Pogue has begun to explore new materials and three-dimensional forms by tearing her monotypes and reconstructing them to create printed paper sculptures.⁴⁵

While not a Howard graduate, painter and printmaker **Joyce Wellman** (b. 1949) availed herself, like so many others, of the D.C. art scene. In 1981, after studying with artist Valerie Maynard at the Studio Museum in Harlem and with virtuoso printmakers Robert Blackburn and Krishna Reddy (at his NYU Coop Print Atelier), she moved to Washington to join the W. D. Printmaking Workshop. Wellman later attended the Maryland Institute College of Art as a Ford Foundation fellow (1988), where she subsequently completed an M.F.A. (1998). In the mid-1980s, Wellman turned from printmaking to painting with imagery that is stylistically related to

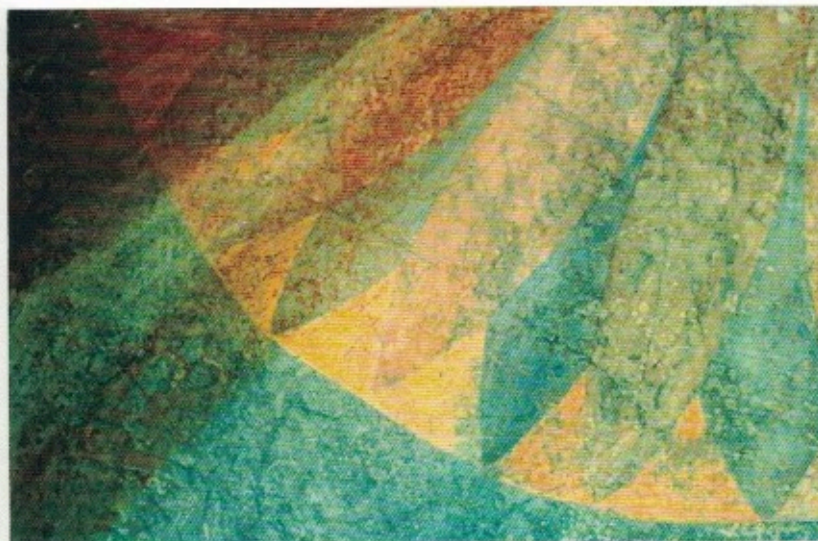


Figure 8.24
Stephanie Pogue
India Pattern/Pattern of India,
from the *Fan* series, 1986
mixed media on paper,
15 x 22 1/2" (38.1 x 57.15 cm)

Figure 8.25
Joyce Wellman
Under Sea Life, 1985
acrylic on paper, 22 x 30"
(55.88 x 76.2 cm)



the Washington Color School. The thoroughgoing nonobjectivity of the Washington School is not, however, what Wellman achieves in her painted gesticulations, which instead invoke livelier allusions to “walking legs, flexed torsos, and arms akimbo.”⁴⁶ While other works educe Wellman’s affinities with the geometric abstractions of Kandinsky or with the textures of German dada collage, works like *Under Sea Life* (1985) pair fields of color with restless inscriptions and call to mind the early works of Jackson Pollock (fig. 8.25). This composition along with many of Wellman’s abstractions are, in the artist’s judgment, instinctive and sentient: “My work . . . reveals itself through an unconscious process of placing color, form, cryptic signs, and marks onto the surface of my paintings. . . . I push and pull these abstractions in order to create visual sensations that evoke . . . an emotional response. This is my attempt to bring the viewer closer to a nonmaterial . . . world.”⁴⁷ Drawing and painting merge in Wellman’s works to create highly active, kinetic surfaces that are as much writing and gesture as they are painting and design. The surrealist automatism hitherto seen in the works of O’Neal is more emphatic in Wellman’s idiom. Indeed, actual numbers—a recurrent theme in the artist’s work and a metaphor for human beings—crop up in her pictograms, intriguing viewers with the potential import of their codex.⁴⁸

Returning to three-dimensional art, **Geraldine McCullough** (b. 1922) is, along with Chase-Riboud, one of an exclusive number of African-American women for whom abstract sculpture is their primary mode of expres-