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Selected Works by African American Women Artists

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INTRODUCTION

As part of its mission for nearly twenty-five years, the Anacostia Museum has provided a place for African American artists to exhibit their works and share their thoughts on creativity with the public. This special relationship continues with the exhibition “Gathered Visions: Selected Works by African American Women Artists.”

With “Gathered Visions,” the museum expects to further balance the chapter on contemporary art in America, with respect to African American artists in general and to women in particular. It must also be mentioned that the artists whose works are shown here represent a much larger assembly living in the United States. “Gathered Visions,” however, focuses on the achievements of some who hold a special place as contributors to the rich visual arts heritage of the metropolitan Washington area.

The relationships of many of the artists to this area run long and stand strong. We find, for example, that six were born in the city and have extended family links. Eleven received formal training from local universities including Howard University, the Catholic University of America, the University of the District of Columbia, and the University of Maryland. In addition to the numerous local galleries that have presented their works, other American, and indeed international, institutions have granted them exhibitions and recognition.

“Gathered Visions” includes fifteen individuals whose visual narratives articulate a multitude of experiences and universal concerns. Events in the life of Denise Ward-Brown, for example, are symbolically expressed through found objects and disassembled furniture, while monotypes created by Stephanie E. Pogue attest to that artist’s unabashed sharing of feelings and emotions common to most of us. Comments by Joyce E. Wellman take shape via painted images, metaphors that explain, among other things, human relationships and parental responsibility. To celebrate her pregnancy, Winnie Owens-Hart has created a segmented life-size sculpture that speaks to the importance of that occasion.

It should come as no surprise that the image of the black female, appearing in a variety of stylized forms, serves to facilitate the many messages. A “woman of color” figures prominently in a painting by Malkia Roberts, whereas warnings about the environment by Gail Shaw-Clemons present boldly colored depictions of African American women. In Viola Burley Leak’s fabric sculptures, women are integral to her accounts of African American history and often become the story themselves.

Issues concerning families, friends, and their influences are found throughout the exhibition. Printmaker Margo Humphrey spins her special tales about black love and male empowerment with formidable characters that represent the lives and deeds

of those who are close to her. The evocative assemblages of Renée Stout reveal messages about spiritualism and the African legacy and are selectively personalized by objects obtained from relatives and friends. Sylvia Snowden's new direction in painting bears witness to yet another arts tradition in her family — quilting — a craft practiced by her late grandmother, Miss Phoebe.

Works by abstract artists typically allow the viewer to formulate meaning in accordance with personal experience. To this end, Adell Westbrook paints circular shapes of various sizes with supporting rectangular patterns that spring from a color-rich palette. In addition, the selective overlapping of textured and flat geometric shapes by Erlena Chisolm Bland offer a variety of visual options. Complementing the more traditional approaches to creating are several sculptural forms that further define the perimeters of today's art. The installation by Martha Jackson-Jarvis represents her thoughts on traditional healing, while Lilian Thomas Burwell's "environmental exploration" transforms ordinary exhibition space into a statement on nature. Yvonne Pickering Carter adds a slightly different flavor to the show with her costume, adorned door, and multimedia video.

The artists of "Gathered Visions" have joined the ranks of Lois Mailou Jones, Delilah Pierce, Georgette Powell, the late Alma Thomas, and many other African American women who have contributed immensely in spirit and deed to a grand cultural heritage. In turn, those

whose works are featured here will no doubt continue to serve the visual arts tradition well with an impressive array of impassioned images.

The Anacostia Museum welcomes the artists of this exhibition and thanks them for being a part of this institution's ongoing efforts to recognize the achievements of African Americans.

Robert L. Hall
Project Director

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Guy C. McElroy
1948–1990

“Gathered Visions” is dedicated to the spirit and memory of historian and curator Guy C. McElroy, who initiated the research for this exhibition.

FOREWORD

"Gathered Visions: Selected Works by African American Women Artists" has provided the Anacostia Museum with another opportunity to give voice to the richness of the African American artistic traditions in the greater Washington area. We are deeply grateful to the participating artists for their collective and individual creativity. Individually, the works display many styles, media, and messages. Together, they form a powerful and moving tribute to the often ignored talents of African American women artists. We cannot allow the perils of racism and sexism to continue to exclude such integral visions and voices from our discussions of African American and American art.

"Gathered Visions" is by no means a comprehensive examination of African American women artists in metropolitan Washington. It is, instead, a lively survey that we hope will provoke further discussion and create the demand for more exhibits. We hope that it is the beginning of a process through which the role of African American women artists in Washington is placed in proper historical and cultural perspectives.

Certainly the exhibit confirms the wisdom of our decision to focus our research, exhibition, and collection activities on Washington, D.C., and the states of Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. A fertile ground for African American history and cultural activity, this region is home to a treasure trove of documents, artifacts, and works of art. "Gathered Visions" is a perfect example of the richness of this regional focus.

The exhibition of works by fifteen dynamic and dedicated women artists has also given us a chance to explore a variety of issues. Their

work looks at the environment, spirituality, birth, home, and community. These sister-artists have shared not only their works but their talents; they have taught, demonstrated, and lectured. They have become a part of the Anacostia family as well as the Anacostia tradition in African American art.

Since 1968 the museum has hosted a number of exhibits focusing on African American art. One of the most notable was the Barnett-Aden Collection exhibit in 1974. "Gathered Visions" encourages us to do more. We have learned that art can serve as a vehicle for greater understanding of our unique community. With the help of people like those who allowed us to gather their visions for this exhibit, we are assured of being able to bring vibrant and meaningful art to our patrons and supporters.

We acknowledge with deep thanks the work of the Anacostia Museum staff for their efforts in making this exhibit a reality. Particular appreciation is given to Robert L. Hall of the museum's education office for continuing the project after the untimely death of Guy C. McElroy. Robert's dedication and experience as a curator of other art exhibits enabled him to bring to fruition this significant and, to our institution, fitting focus on contemporary art.

Steven C. Newsome
Director, Anacostia Museum



"Gathered Visions" artists First row, from left: Viola Burley Leak (seated on floor), Joyce E. Wellman (standing), Stephanie E. Pogue (seated on chair). Second row, from left: Malkia Roberts, Erlena Chisolm Bland, Lilian Thomas Burwell, Renée Stout (seated on stool). Third row, from left: Sylvia Snowden, Martha Jackson-Jarvis, Adell Westbrook, Margo Humphrey, Yvonne Pickering Carter, Gail Shaw-Clemons. Not shown: Winnie Owens-Hart, Denise Ward-Brown.



JOYCE E. WELLMAN

Painter, printmaker, educator

Joyce E. Wellman uses figures and animals to address aspects of her life. *Egg on a Leg* expresses her thoughts on parental responsibility through dramatic manipulation of oil paint stick on paper. *Mammal* depicts an undersea creature representing humankind's subconscious and serves as a metaphor for meditation. Wellman has elected to embellish the creature with hair and a goatee to provide a symbolic human connection. Her themes are often self-apparent after the improvised renderings have been completed.

Egg on a Leg, 1989
Oil paint stick on paper

"I have experimented with and evolved a certain set of ideas, images, and symbols through drawings, mixed-media paintings, prints, videos, installation projects, and in collaborations with other artists. The basis of this five-year process has been the use of imagery that reveals itself through color, archetypal forms, cryptic signs, and marks in two-dimensional, multimedia abstract works. The real challenge is to take these freely drawn abstract forms through a process that results in a sensual and visual impact evoking from the viewer an emotional response to these visual stimuli. My intention is to confront the viewer with a vocabulary of archetypal imagery aligned to the nonmaterial and soul force in life."

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST



ERLENA CHISOLM BLAND

Random Abstract, 1990

Acrylic on mineral surface

53 x 43½ x 3 in.

Lent by the artist

Dots and Stripes Fornever, 1990

Acrylic on mineral surface

24½ x 15½ x 2½ in.

Lent by the artist

LILIAN THOMAS BURWELL

From Passages In and Out of the World, 1990

Acrylic on canvas installation

150 x 84 x 153 in.

Lent by the artist

YVONNE PICKERING CARTER

Doors: Entrances, Exits and Trances — Known and Unknown, 1990

Performance video

6 min., 39 sec.

Lent by the artist

Costume for *Doors*, 1990

Acrylic on canvas, fabric, and paper

66½ x 86½ x 36 in.

Lent by the artist

Door XI: Latched, 1990

Painted wood, canvas, dried flowers, metal, chintz, and plastic

86 x 39 x 26 in.

Lent by the artist

MARGO HUMPHREY

"Lady Luck" Says, Come Take a Chance, 1985

Color lithograph

22¼ x 30½ in.

Lent by the artist

The Night Kiss/Midnight Rendezvous, 1985

Color lithograph

22¼ x 30 in.

Lent by the artist

The Last Bar-B-Que, 1989

Color lithograph

26 x 38¼ in.

Lent by the artist

MARTHA JACKSON-JARVIS

Snake Doctor Blue, 1989
Clay and copper installation
100 x 108 x 8½ in.
Lent by the artist

VIOLA BURLEY LEAK

Field Trilogy, 1985
Cotton, chintz, yarn, and metallic thread
55 x 47½ x 5 in.
Lent by the artist

Sunday Sunder, 1985
Cotton, silk, satin, and nylon
59 x 19 x 18 in.
Lent by the artist

Descendants, 1985
Cotton, silk, satin, suede, wood, paper, and plastic
51½ x 36 x 7 in.
Lent by the artist

WINNIE OWENS-HART

Star Four Water Jar, 1990
Clay and grass
10 x 9 (diam.) in.
Lent by the artist

Trimesters, 1990
Clay
63 x 18 x 24 in.
Lent by the artist

STEPHANIE E. POGUE

Self-Portrait: Cinnamon Toast, 1989
Monotype
30 x 22½ in.
Lent by the artist

Self-Portrait: Anxiety, 1989
Monotype
30 x 22½ in.
Lent by the artist

Self-Portrait: Discovery, 1989
Monotype
30 x 22½ in.
Lent by the artist

MALKIA ROBERTS

Guardian, 1986
Oil and acrylic on canvas
50 x 42 in.
Lent by the artist

Celebrations, 1990
Oil on canvas
50 x 42 in.
Lent by the artist

GAIL SHAW-CLEMONS

Never Take for Granted the Air You Breathe, 1990
Colored pencil, egg tempera, and collage
on paper
36¼ x 27¼ in.
Lent by the artist

Vital Signs of the City, 1990
Colored pencil and collage on paper
32½ x 27¼ in.
Lent by the artist

SYLVIA SNOWDEN

Miss Phoebe's Quilt, I, 1990
Acrylic on canvas
78 x 60 in.
Lent by the artist

RENÉE STOUT

Exorcising My Demons, 1989
Acrylic and dirt on wood and polystyrene, dried alfalfa sprouts, powdered fungi, corn husks,
paper, plastic, hair, metal, glass, feathers, foil, and bones
36½ x 12 x 6 in.
Lent by the artist

Spirit House, 1990
Acrylic and dirt on wood, pencil on paper, cotton, and metal
11 x 5½ x 5¼ in.
Lent by Clarencetta Jelks

The Game, 1990
Acrylic and dirt on wood, ink and pencil on paper, leather, glass, hair, plastic, foil, bones, metal,
and bugs
20 x 32 x 3 in.
Courtesy B R Kornblatt Gallery, Washington, D.C.

DENISE WARD-BROWN

Crack in the Sky, 1989

Painted wood

43½ x 24 x 5 in.

Lent by Dianne Flannagan Montgomery

Early Spring, 1989

Painted wood and mica

42 x 18½ x 2½ in.

Courtesy Jones Troyer Fitzpatrick Gallery, Washington, D.C.

Kuba Gift, 1989

Painted wood and mica

52½ x 27 x 5½ in.

Courtesy Jones Troyer Fitzpatrick Gallery, Washington, D.C.

JOYCE E. WELLMAN

Egg on a Leg, 1989

Oil paint stick on paper

42 x 30 in.

Lent by the artist

Mammal, 1990

Oil paint stick on paper

42 x 30 in.

Lent by the artist

ADELL WESTBROOK

Untitled, No. 3, 1984

Acrylic on canvas

48 x 48 in.

Lent by the artist

Solar, No. 4, 1985

Acrylic on canvas

50 x 36 in.

Lent by the artist