

OFF THE WALL

News & Views from **JUST LOOKIN' GALLERY**

Published for Ethnic Art Lovers Everywhere

Spring/Summer 2001

Notes from
Here & There

It's hard to believe this is our fifth year publishing **Off The Wall**. The first issue was mailed to less than 500, this issue will find its way into over 2,000 mailboxes and onto our website. We couldn't have

kept it going without the feedback and support of all our readers and visitors. Thank you. With this issue, we are officially combining the Spring and Summer issues. This will allow us more time to spend with all of you that visit during the Summer plus a chance to seek out the best art from the array of Summer Festivals. We know many of you plan your vacations around art & music. Check out our calendar for a brief listing of some of the best museum exhibits and festivals. ❖ Have you ever seen **James Denmark's** charcoals from the early seventies? We have several pieces and he is so known for being a colorist and college artist; it's amazing to see his vision in black & white. And looking at them reminds me that master artists are great even early in their careers. ❖ Speaking of which - can an artist be too good? We have a forty-year span of works by **Carl Owens** and it seems like everyday I fall in love with a different one. I'm glad his work sells so quickly or my art budget would be in serious trouble! ❖ **Gilbert Young** has been almost too busy to paint in 2001. First, he was named Barnes & Noble Artist of the Month, Atlanta in February. Then he was selected to receive the Heritage Award for Artistic Excellence, presented at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture/Harlem, New York. Next, he was chosen by American Greeting Cards to be the first African American artist featured on calendars distributed worldwide in 2002 and 2003. "The Art Of Gilbert Young" calendars are being published by three American Greetings Companies, each company will feature a different work of his on its cover. Catching his breath from all that activity, he was a guest panelist at a symposium at Harvard University School of Law, received a proclamation from the town of Cambridge and is now working on "Black Art on Tour." I'm glad we've managed to get a few new paintings and he has promised more soon. ❖ **Keith Mallett's** etchings have been flying out of the gallery. If you're looking for a great couples piece - don't miss "Rhapsody." He's being mysterious about the new ones he's working on. We'll keep you posted. ❖ We are eagerly awaiting some new pastels from (Continued Page 4, Column 1)

A Tribute to One Who Inspired Many **Dr. John Biggers** 1924-2001

It is always hard to lose a master artist. Losing one who devoted his life to teaching and enriching the lives of others is devastating. And yet Dr. Biggers will live on forever with over twenty-five murals in public spaces; and the inspiration he provided to the current generation of artists, most notably Paul Goodnight (they met in Africa in 1981) and his many students at Texas Southern University where he established and was head of the art department from 1949 until his retirement in 1983.

Biggers loved to paint public works. As a muralist, Dr. Biggers was greatly influenced by Charles Alston, Aaron Douglas, Diego Rivera and Hale Woodruff. A master of metaphor; weaving together the mosaic patterns of ancestral quilts with the symmetry of the shotgun houses he revisited in so many of his paintings and the unyielding steel of his ubiquitous railroad tracks; no other artist so perfectly melded southern Black American culture and African symbolism. I remember spending over an hour studying one of his murals at Hampton University; transfixed by his innate storytelling ability and the complexity of his geometric patterns. The uniqueness of his style was his ability to blend strength and spirituality; to turn the mundane into stories of endurance and triumph. Biggers' years at Hampton (1941-1946) began the themes that remained his focus throughout his career. Having Elizabeth Catlett and Charles White as two of his earliest influences most likely helped to fuel his social expressionism. His early works reflected his anger at the plight of blacks in America. "Crossing the Bridge (1942), his first painting, depicts people moving in search of a better life. Similar social commentary infused his work in the 1940's. His time at Pennsylvania State University saw the completion of several murals, most notably Baptism (1947-48). In a later interview he said this period was a time of great growth both as an artist and as a person. The depicting (Continued Page 3, Column 2)

ARTY - FACTS

The Nasty 'C' Word! - Part 2

Gallery Hours

Tuesday - Friday 10 AM to 7 PM
Saturday 10 AM to 6 PM
Sunday Noon to 5 PM

Mondays and Holidays
by appointment

*"The artist must bow to the monster
of his own imagination."*

Richard Wright

"A Brush of Culture" Home Art Parties

Get a few friends together and enjoy the latest art in the comfort of your home. We can produce a show around a theme such as jazz or history; show strictly original works or a general selection of gallery offerings.

All you have to do is invite at least 25 and no more than 100 friends, and provide light refreshments. Just Lookin' provides invitations, promotional materials and a great host/hostess incentive package. We are currently reserving dates for Summer & Fall 2001. Don't miss the chance to have the luxury of a "gallery for a day" in your home.

"Practically all great artists accept the influence of others. But . . . the artist with vision sees his material, chooses, changes, and by integrating what he has learned with his own experiences, finally molds something distinctly personal."

Romare Bearden

Before we turn this space over to collectors to tell their stories - I was chided by a client/collector for something I wrote in the last issue. I said in this column that collectors concentrate on originals rather than limited edition reproductions. As he pointed out, almost all of us (myself included) start our collections with limited edition prints and then move on as our tastes, expertise and budgets allow. We will hear his story next issue. The following is one couple's odyssey into building what is now lovingly called "The Pehl Collection"

"Collecting art is not a hobby. It is, instead, a passion with a purpose. The passion is to enjoy the works and talents of others. The purpose is to support and promote artists." This was recently said by a lady that less than 10 years ago had never been inside an art gallery or dreamed of purchasing art. She is now owner of over sixty (and growing) original works. This is not a rich woman - just one whose interest in art (nurtured and shared by her husband) propels her to visit galleries wherever she is and to plan vacations around art shows & exhibits. How does one go from no thoughts of art to collecting? In the case of this couple, it was a chance event. The husband's office happened to overlook a new art gallery opening in town. He had been to a few galleries but nothing had ever grabbed him. But this gallery focused on original art by living African-American and African artists. After his initial visit, he asked his wife if she had ever considered collecting original contemporary art. She said she had never considered that she could or would own art. With a little prompting, she 'discovered' the same gallery. And was overwhelmed with what she saw. In her words, "I saw power and strength. I saw color and texture. I saw message and meaning. I saw soul." Within two weeks she fell in love with, and purchased, her first piece. Her second visit to a gallery was her second purchase. Together she and her husband began to learn about art and artists. Her love of art done by African-Americans led her to explore women artists and pieces done by other ethnic groups. She collects purely for pleasure not investment but through her developing eye and astuteness, her collection has greatly increased in value.

Here are some of her tips for turning a passion for art into a collection:

- ◆ Buy what you fall in love with. The pleasure it will give you for years is worth the price.
- ◆ Buy with your heart not to match your couch.
- ◆ Find a gallery that answers questions and helps you learn about art.
- ◆ Most galleries have payment plans. Always ask.
- ◆ Go to where the artists are. Festivals, exhibits and small art shows take place every weekend.
- ◆ Don't be afraid to buy works by undiscovered artists.
- ◆ Carrying lunch, getting hair or nails done less often, cooking rather than eating out are some ways to fit art into your budget.

If you would like more info on The Pehl Collection, they have published a brochure available at Just Lookin'. Next issue: Ted's Story

HPing UPs

In the last issue, we asked you to answer questions about your three-dimensional objects. Armed with the answers we are now going to explore a few basic rules:

- ⇨ Consider the proportion of both the space and the object.
- ⇨ Don't set a very large heavy sculpture in a small space.
- ⇨ Don't place small sculptures in large spaces. They will get lost.
- ⇨ Don't place a strong vertical sculpture into a space that has very horizontal lines. Conversely, strong horizontal objects look terrible in soaring vertical spaces.
- ⇨ Do place delicate detailed objects close to eye level.
- ⇨ Make sure to place breakables in a protected spot.
- ⇨ Do place very detailed pieces against a plain wall and away from clutter.
- ⇨ Keep very tactile pieces where you can touch them easily.
- ⇨ Do group small objects if they share a theme. A collection of pottery, wooden and resin angels is one example that would work on a shelf or table.
- ⇨ Do group objects that have been created from the same material. A grouping of Shona stone sculpture, regardless of their theme, for example.
- ⇨ Totally unrelated objects can work together if they have similar texture and proportions.
- ⇨ Consider using a mirror behind a work that is complete on all sides if you need to display it in an area where the back can't be seen. Or put in on a lazy Susan.
- ⇨ Don't set sculpture in front of a window. Strong backlighting from a window will silhouette the piece and wipe out detail.
- ⇨ Don't surround bold sculpture with clutter.
- ⇨ Don't place glass or acrylic sculpture in front of a bright painting or floral drapes. The colors will show through the acrylic.
- ⇨ Don't light figurative sculptures from below. The angle of the lighting can greatly distort the features.
- ⇨ Don't be afraid to set large sculpture on the floor. Just make sure it doesn't interfere with traffic flow.
- ⇨ Pedestals work great with most three-dimensional objects and can be used in many ways and places in a room.
- ⇨ A pedestal should be several inches wider than an object and heavy enough to support it. Choose taller pedestals for smaller works and vice versa.

In the Fall issue we will talk more about lighting and caring for three-dimensional objects.

Biggers (Continued from Page 1, Column 2)

of shotgun houses began when he moved to Texas in 1949. He continued to use them allegorically in his work, transforming them into symbols of strength and pride. He began infusing his work with more African imagery and a trip to Ghana in 1957 increased his use of vibrant colors. "Jubilee," published as a serigraph, was painted during this visit to Ghana. Slowly his painting evolved into the bright multi-layered geometric intricacy that most of us consider his trademark. In the 80's and into the early 90's, he began using Native American & Asian symbols in his works. It was during this period that those wonderful turtles and birds began to appear, along with those omnipresent washboards and African combs, as reoccurring symbols. "Quilting Party" a lithograph done in 1981 will always be one of my favorite pieces. Part of the 'Shotgun Series', the shotgun houses are used as the roots from which two women flow upward. Almost transparent African quilt patterns are a major focus in this piece, which was conceived from a mural that Dr. Biggers painted at the Music Hall in Houston, Texas. Another favorite (and the first Biggers print I ever bought!) is "Four Sisters." The ladies, seen from the back, are clothed in quilt patterns woven out of fine thread that seems to shimmer in unseem sunlight. A washboard is tucked into the skirt of one sister and they seem to be walking towards the railroad track in front of them. A tall African comb is standing at a very ordinary looking picnic table, an almost surrealistic touch that still has me baffled as to its meaning. And perhaps that is what I love most about the mastery of Biggers. In addition to respecting his intrinsic originality in a variety of mediums, every piece of his I've seen has some element that forces me to stop and think.

"Art is a refining and evocative translation of the materials of the world."

Awendolyn Brooks



SHOWS & SPECIAL EVENTS

May 27 - August 19
Jacob Lawrence
Phillips Collection - Washington DC

July 13-15
Artsape - Baltimore MD

August 11 - 12
Kunte Kinte Heritage Festival
St. Johns College - Annapolis MD

August 30 - Mid February
African Art - Natl Geographic Society
Washington DC

Sunday - September 16
Meet Renowned Artist
Verna Hart
Noon to 6 PM
Just Lookin' Gallery
Verna will be showing new works
and her latest serigraph

News (continued from Page 1, Column 1)

Mario Robinson. His technique is so exacting, it's impossible for him to keep up with the demands of his ever-growing group of fans. ❖ I don't know where **Cal Massey** gets his inspiration. He's busy painting several new abstract series. I can't wait to see the ones he's called "Energy's Destiny." ❖ **Verna Hart** is getting ready to release a new serigraph. Called "Piano Man 2001", she's keeping the edition a low 150 S/N. ❖ **Charly Palmer** has been busy teaching summer art camps for the High Museum while his alter ego 'Carlos' has been painting a variety of colorful, energetic abstracts. ❖ **Preston Sampson** is busy creating a new body of work. ❖ Maya Angelou recently acquired one of **Andreas Goff's** Raku sculptures for her growing collection. ❖ **Carolyn Crump** is doing amazing sculpting with handmade paper. I don't know how to describe her latest works, they have to be seen and felt. ❖ Hope you get a chance to catch **Rondell** at one of the many shows they are doing coast-to-coast this Summer. Their fiber art is so unique; I wish its splendor would reproduce better on our web page. ❖ **Selma Glass** is creating wonderfully intricate embossed pieces on copper. ❖ And for the wall space stressed, **Melvin Clark** has promised a series of small pieces. ❖ I know we will see a lot of you this Summer and we hope you will join us for our Fall kick off art show with Verna Hart. Until then - Happy Collecting

VISIT US ON THE WEB

www.justlookin.com

I want to thank all of you for your patience awaiting our new webpage. We currently have over 500 originals at the gallery, wonderful sculpture in several mediums and many unique pieces which we can't wait to share with all of you. Trying to get them onto an easy navigable, visually exciting webpage is quite a challenge - and taking way too long! We are working on it constantly and by the end of summer, we hope you will agree - it was worth the wait. In the meantime, please send your E-mail address to justlookin@justlookin.com so we can notify you of JUSTLOOKIN.com's Grand Opening Special.

"And even if I have studied for many years and all over the world, ...I have still been able to preserve the primitive in me...My aim is to express in a natural way what I feel, what is in me, both rhythmically and spiritually, all that which in time has been saved up in my family of primitiveness and tradition, and which is now concentrated in me."

William H. Johnson

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