



Henry Wilmer "Mike" Bannarn, 1910 –1965

He was born in Wetumpka, Hughes County, Oklahoma on July 17, 1910. When he was still a child, the family moved to Minneapolis, Minnesota where he discovered his talent for art. He studied at the Minneapolis School of Arts (now known as the Minneapolis College of Art and Design).

He worked as a Works Progress Administration artist for the Federal Art Project and taught art at the Harlem Community Art Center in New York City, where he was a noted contemporary, friend and partner of another famous African-American artist, Charles Alston, with whom he ran the Alston-Bannarn Harlem Art Workshop in Harlem/NYC, NY. He was intimately associated with the "Harlem Renaissance" of the 1930s, being considered as one of the movements preeminent contributors. [1] Although he is primarily known for his work in sculpture, he was equally skilled as a figurist and character artist in the various paint mediums, conte crayon, pastel, free form sketch, etc.

In 1941, he returned to Minnesota and entered a piece of sculpture in the Minnesota State Fair sculpture competition, where he was awarded the first prize. The much-honored artist had won a painting prize at the fair a decade earlier as well, representing one of the earliest achievements by an African-American artist in that state's history.

He died on September 20, 1965 in Brooklyn, New York.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Bannarn

The following biography is based on information provided to AskART.com by Hassie Bannarn Betz, daughter of the artist:

<http://www.askart.com/AskART/artists/biography.aspx?artist=105308>

Henry W. Bannarn was born in Wetumpka, Hughes County, Oklahoma on July 17, 1910. When he was still a very young child, the family moved to Minneapolis, Minnesota. He died on September 20, 1965 in Brooklyn, New York. His favorite subjects were related to the American negro and the struggle for equality and justice. Some of his subjects were Frederick Douglass, John Brown, Richard B. Harrison, Matthew Henson - heroes of his time and before.

He also chose to sculpt lynch victims and midwives. His art was strongly rooted in his social conscience throughout his life. He was well known for his work with wood, stone, oil and water color. His watercolors were brilliant and powerful. Much of his work can be described as falling into the modern/abstract area. At the same time he was a strong draftsman and could draw and sculpt realistic

subjects easily. He spent most of his professional time in New York and Minneapolis. Over the years he exhibited at Clark Atlanta University, Howard University, The Schomburg, Harmon Foundation, Minneapolis Institute of Art and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. He was the first negro since Henry Tanner to exhibit at the Pennsylvania Academy.

In his early career, he sculpted animals such as deer, buffalo and cats. He was overlooked for an art scholarship to study in Paris because of his race. James Ford Bell, the president of General Mills felt that was unfair and offered him a scholarship to study in Paris or wherever he chose. He chose to study in Harlem. He studied sculpting with Aron Ben Schmucl. He also founded the Harlem Workshop with Charles Alston. The workshop became a meeting place for young aspiring artists, writers and intellectuals during the 1930's.

Henry Bannarn felt strongly about the racial problems facing black people and much of his work reflects that passion. He sculpted negro heroes and at one point, intending to do an entire series of these figures. He also sculpted lynch victims, and the faces of ordinary people whose stories are expressed in his work.

Bannarn never stopped creating art. He used whatever material was available to create, often making his own frames for paintings, or using wood and stone he found. When he was ill in the hospital, his room overlooked the east river and he drew the tugboats he saw from that window. He liked their sturdiness and endurance. He was also a teacher. As much as he loved art and his own ability to create it, he also loved to share it and inspire younger artists to reach for their dreams. After his death, many of the condolences my mother received mentioned that generous spirit of his which was cherished and admired by those who knew him.

In the 1950's and early '60's he continued to paint and sculpt. He painted a Black Jesus Christ for a local church. The deal was never completed so it was never sold. He painted numerous watercolors and oils for various shows, many of which are in Atlanta.

MIA Label



**Henry Bannarn, Cleota Collins,
plaster, pigment, 2011.64**

Henry Bannarn made this portrait of soprano singer and civil rights activist Cleota Collins in June 1932, when he was studying at the Minneapolis School of Arts (now MCAD). It is his earliest known work. Born in Kentucky, Bannarn's family moved to Minneapolis, when he was a child. Thanks to a grant offered to him by Minnesota philanthropist James Ford Bell, Bannarn was able to move to New York, where his studio on 306 West 141st Street became a creative center and meeting place for African American artists, musicians and poets. Within the movement known as the Harlem Renaissance, Bannarn became famous for his paintings, watercolors and sculptures and he was admired as a teacher and a mentor to younger artists.

This impressive portrait is the first known sculpture by this artist to come to auction, and is a very scarce, early example of his work before the WPA.

Born in Wetumpka, OK on July 17, 1910, Bannarn moved with his family to Minneapolis when he was a child. This sculpture was made before Bannarn had won two first place prizes in sculpture at the Minnesota State Art Fair Art Galleries and showed at the Harmon Foundation in New York in 1933. He moved to New York in 1934 after leaving the Minneapolis School of Art. He and Charles Alston rented the studio that became the Harlem Workshop or the "306."

Cleota Josephine Collins (1893 -1976) was a soprano singer from Ohio who enjoyed some acclaim during the Harlem Renaissance. She was a member of the Tuskegee Institute faculty at the time of this portrait. Powell/Reynolds pp. 173-174

Cleota Collins 1893-1976

The Crisis, Volumes 15-18

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A SINGER CLEOTA J COLLINS CLEOTA J COLLINS is an Ohio girl. Her father is the Rev Iva A Collins of the Ohio Conference retired. Miss Collins is a dramatic soprano and an accomplished pianist. She has studied at the Cleveland School of Music and the Ohio State University and has taught music at Florida Baptist College Samuel Houston College and the Episcopal School in San Antonio Texas. Through the interest of some white people in Cleveland Miss Collins has had the advantage of a vocal course under Lila Robeson of the Metropolitan Grand Opera Company who says of her pupil, "She has a very lovely soprano voice of beautiful quality and sings songs with style and intelligence," while Musical America reports, "The singing of Cleota J Collins was positively thrilling." The entrances of the solo voice were made fortissimo on a high A against a choral background descending in curious intervals that would probably have taxed the ability of a Caucasian voice. Miss Collins infused so much spirit into her work that the audience demanded a repetition. p. 287



CLEOTA COLLINS, Lyric Soprano



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