

Celebrating African American Artists in History

Lecture by Suzanne Roberts, January 14, 2016

Notes by Marne Zafar

JOSHUA JOHNSON/JOHNSTON 1765-1830

- First documented professional African-American artist.
- Baltimore. Born a slave on the Wheeler Plantation.
- Thought to be a slave in the household of Charles Peale Polk.
- Listed in city directory as a "Free Householder of Color."
- Freed when 19 years old through manumission.
- Owns property. Very successful in his career.
- Advertised his work in Baltimore Intelligencer.
- Produced two portraits of black clergy.
- No limner painted more portraits of children than he did.
- How did he learn to paint? Several thoughts - he had talent and was allowed to perfect his craft. Practice made perfect in his case.

Richard John Cock painted in 1817

- One would never have known that it was painted by an African-American.

WILLIE COLE 1955

- Lithographer who utilizes imagery that is evocative of memories of the trials & tribulations of being African-American.
- Born and raised in New Jersey.
- Work centers around the transformation of domestic objects.
- Originally inspired by his son playing with Transformer toys.
- Work with steam irons began with finding a flattened iron in the street that was flattened by a car. Used patterns created by the iron as scarification patterns.
- Ironing board isn't abhorred for the female body.

Jonny Mae, intaglio and relief print, 2012

- Had an artist-in-residency in Minneapolis at Highpoint Printshop.

Ann Klein in Transit 2010 (not on view)

- Created with Ann Klein shoes to create a form of mother and child.

NICK CAVE 1955

- Born in Missouri. Director of the graduate fashion program at the school for the Art Institute of Chicago.
- Made first sound suit in reaction to Rodney King beating in 1992.
- Soundsuits are sewn by hand. Suits are reflective of African ceremonial rituals and costuming.
- A skilled dancer; studied with Alvin Ailey.
- Mixes disparate objects, hand-me-downs and domestic objects to create his suits of music. He learned to sew in graduate school in Kansas City.
- His mother was the eldest of 16; he, himself, is one of 7 boys.

Soundsuit, 2011

ELIZABETH CATLETT 1915-2012

- In 1962, declared an undesirable citizen (due to her "communist" leanings).
- Painter, drafts person and sculptor.
- Mentor was Grant Wood. Part of the American regionalist artists.
- Lived a very segregated life; Grant Wood was the first white person who was a friend and supported her emotionally throughout her artistic education and life. He pushed her to be her best. She became the first woman to earn a MFA in sculpture at Iowa in 1940. She later endowed the university with a scholarship.
- Attended Howard University after being denied entrance at Carnegie Mellon.
- Moved to Mexico in 1946. Joined Taller de Graphica Poplar.
- Held dual citizenship. Was married to Charles White and then to Francisco Mora.
- Did prints around workers.
- One of the most important women figures in art - totally.

Sharecropper 1952

what makes this print special is its dignity that this older woman shows. Its technical expertise is superior to many who made prints of this time.

Mother and Child 1940 (not Mia's collections)

Sculpted of stone 1940 (for Chicago expedition)

MARY LEE BENDOLPH 1935-present

- Quilt Artist
- Started working with random geometric designs to create quilts vs. the "classic" patterns that were in vogue and respected. In essence, modern painting with strips of cloth. Came to public attention in Pulitzer Prize winning story in the Los Angeles Time profile "Mary Lee: Crossing Over."
- Inspiration from watching people at church, on the street. She saw patterns in everything and everywhere. She loved color and how it appeared in all forms, and the

movement that was created by undulating colors. Most miraculous pieces of modern art made of common material of all time (of her show at the Whitney Museum of Art in NYC). Her approach to creating art from a utilitarian skill (quilting) allowed her to be unique and still approachable to many.

- The top of the quilt is done individually and then she pieces together as she was gathers the colors together.
- 2015 NEA National Heritage Fellow.
- Still active as a quilter, not as an artist.

Stings 2003-2004

- Diagonal cross-hatching of colors to create geometric patterns

HENRY BANNARN 1910-1965

- Sculptor.
- Nickname was Mike.
- Born in Oklahoma and moved to Minneapolis.
- He was Jacob Lawrence's teacher in Harlem (during Harlem Renaissance) In the most significant salon of the times, the "306"
- Studied at MCAD (actual name then: Minneapolis College of Art)
- He studied at the Art Students League in NYC.
- Won the top prize at the MN State Fair. This was how artists were recognized in Minnesota.
- Exhibition at the Hanley Gallery in 1945.
- Mentor to Gordon Parks, photographer.

The Smoker 1931(not on view)

- Watercolor

Cleota Collins 1949

- Sculpture

BEAUFORT DELANEY 1901-1979

- Painter
- Bi-Polar and an Alcoholic. Many accounts of him having extreme highs and deep lows. Poor and Gay - difficult to manage life. Very lonely and alone most of his life.
- When he first went to NYC, he left his suitcase in a boarding house and when he came back, all was gone. He never came back to Harlem - ever!
- Palmer Hayden was a good friend during those days. Took many disappointments in stride though he dealt with depression on a continually. If one had a smile, he thought they were his friend (very gullible). Very likable personality.

- Went to Paris to follow his dream of being an abstract expressionist painter and to be more free in his work; was about having the basic freedoms denied to him in America. Going to a club, living where he wanted; good friend of Henry Miller, James Baldwin and other expatriates who had "escaped" to Paris to do their own thing.
- He did do landscapes and portraits, however modernism was his love. Representation was caught up in how one's identity was. Was always being asked why abstraction.
- It was only about his expression and feeling. Criticism was that he should do work that related to his people and the conditions of the times.
- Loved jazz and music in general.

Untitled 1954

Untitled (Washington Square Park 1952)

WILLIAM EDMONDSON 1883-1951

- Sculptor
- Born in Nashville. Felt that God spoke to him to become an artist.
- Highly religious and had visions from God. Called his work "miracles." He felt the Lord showed him the way of what to carve.
- His sculpture was fashioned using old railroad ties and a flat chisel to care.
- Born on the same plantation where his parents were slaves. Louise Dahl-Wolfe (photographer) became acquainted with him and shot all the film of him in his workshop. She knew that MOMA was looking for primitive, unspoiled work. So she passed along her photos of his work.
- He became the First African-American artist to have a one-man show at The Museum of Modern Art in 1949. William did not go to the show as it was God's work. Based on the show, he was hired by the WPA as part of the Federal Art Project.

Ram 1938-1942

- William Edmondson (photo by Louise Dahl-Wolfe; 1937)

JAMES VAN DER ZEE 1886-1983

- Photographer
- Born in Lenox, Massachusetts
- Wanted to set images that showcased African-Americans as middle-class people.
- He felt he had an ideal childhood, always food and good clothing; his father was a gentlemen's gentleman; father was "in service" to the JP Morgan family. Family eventually went to NYC to work.
- A certain lifestyle that shaped his character. Wants everyone to look a certain way; composed his portraits. People are the focus, not the "endgame" of the picture. The people are the center of attention.

The VanDerZee Men 1908

The Actor,

Kate and Rachel 1908 (wife and daughter)(not on view)

VanDerZee Women 1909 (not on view)

JACOB LAWRENCE

Rock star of the 940's with his narrative series.

The 1950's time of great struggle (depression)

1953 his long-time representation with the Downtown Gallery sours and by 1955 he is no longer with them.

In 1958 he joins Pratt Institute. Produces more individual paintings during his time there.

Subway Acrobats 1959

BOB THOMPSON 1937-1966

- Painter
- Father died when he was young. His dad was the largest owner of dry cleaning businesses in Kentucky.
- Began painting in 1957. Extremely prolific (painted over 1000). Anyone who ever met him never forgot him.
- Was part of the Avante-Garde movement. Sam Gilliam was a good friend. German Expressionism and Abstract Expressionism was explored deeply.
- In 1958, goes to the artists' colony in Providence. He becomes incredibly interested in figurative expressionism. He became one of the movers within the group. Became involved with narrative painting. Was interested in the Old Masters and married their figurative composition with German Expressionistic colorations.
- Big figure in the Beat Generation and mingles with the Beat poets and musicians. A lot happening with performance art which he participated in; at the forefront in the late '50's. Enjoyed Leroy Jones.
- Married in 1960. Moved to Europe in 1961. Spent two years in Paris.
- Was extremely popular among collectors; did very well right away. Had many influential collectors who spread the word. Myron Kunin Collection has 7 pieces.
- Died in 1966 from a combination of a drug overdose and a surgical procedure in Italy.

Nude Reflection Naught 1960

Homage to Nina Simone 1965

Funeral of Jan Muller 1958 (not on view)

Yellow Crouching Nude 1960 (not on view)

- Note - Hard to find a modern, contemporary artist who was not into jazz. Was seen as essential to modern art!

RENEE STOUT 1948-present

- Lithographer-Printer
- She creates art from her own personal experience and her ancestors from her African past. She wants to be known for more than that. She has branched out to work that is has more spiritual and religious aspects to it. She is infusing aspects of Voodoo and other primitive African religions into her work. Work is a reaction to stories told to her; work is very "of her" and her family. Work is a new discovery into her deepest self.

A Vision I Can't Forget 1999

- Female protection from the ancestors (small Punu Mask) ... Distillates her mother's trauma of watching the Ku Klux Klan hanging a man ... 1938 is the year. The numbers is a metaphor for the passing of time.

Fetish #2 1988

- In the Dallas Museum. Contemporary life-size sculpture (actually her body) that is a woman's body fetishized.

Erzulie Dreams 1992 (not at Mia)

Another fetish sculpture (not at Mia)

Fatima Mayfield 2014

Performance Piece (incorporates a short film)

MITCHELL SQUIRE 1958-present

- Lithographer & Architect
- Teaches architecture and is interested in social issues at Iowa.
- Work centers around creative issues of the day.

Gladiators 2013 (and Young Gladiators 2013)

This work (Gladiators) looks, at first glance, like perfume bottles. What the images are are the sheaths from target practice. The point is that folks do all this practice at ranges so that they can kill well. Young Gladiators (detail) also shows the explosion of the objects though he has placed "brains" layered under.

Annunciation of Johnny Trice 2013 (not at Mia)

This young man was murdered. His response to the tragedy. Made of pipe, lighting material.

KARSTE. CREIGHTNEY 1976-present

- Printer and Painter
- Teaches in New Mexico at IAIA. Has studied to be a master printer at Tamerline Institute.

Roadside Gambler 2013

Garden 2007 (not at Mia)

HENRY BOZEMAN-JONES 1889-1973

- Full participant in the Harlem Renaissance movement.
- Taught school in Pittsburgh. Was a children's book illustrator.
- Part of the Myron Kunin Collection.

Jazz Quartet 1935