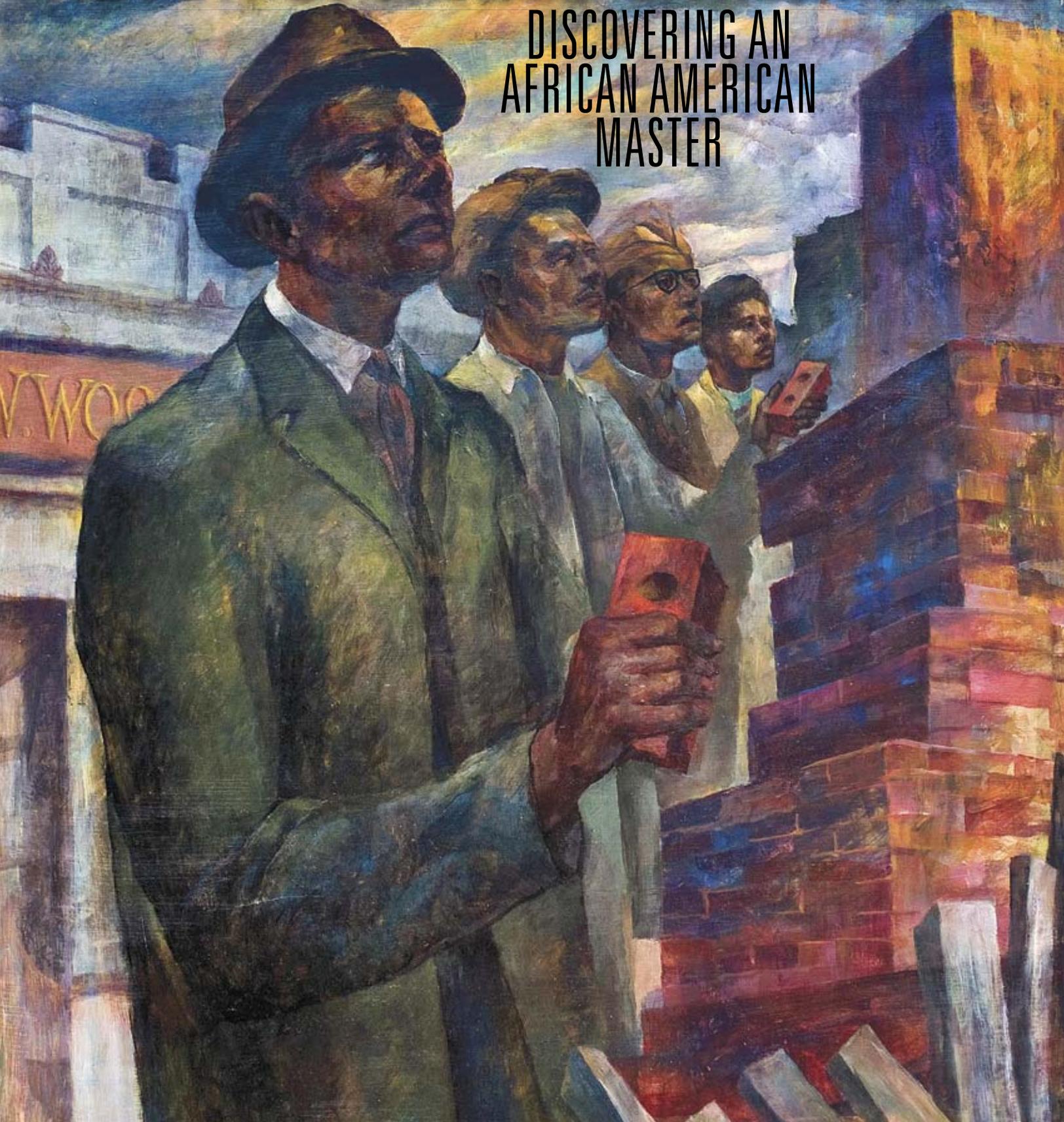


THE ART OF JAMES C. McMILLAN

DISCOVERING AN
AFRICAN AMERICAN
MASTER



FOREWORDS BY **DR. JULIANNE MALVEAUX**, PRESIDENT, BENNETT COLLEGE & **DR. ALMAS ADAMS**, DIRECTOR, BENNETT ART GALLERY

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ESSAY BY
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ROBERT E. HOLMES, ESQ.



PROLOGUE

The dawn of the 21st century has brought new light and fresh perspective to art created by African American artists of all generations. New interest, new museums, new curators, new scholarship, new auction house departments, new collectors, and new money have prompted a new examination of the work of African American artists. Most importantly, there have been discoveries of previously little-known, forgotten or wholly unknown treasures created by black women and men. This catalogue presents and honors the singular artistic genius of James C. McMillan (b. 1925). A classically educated and trained artist (Howard University, Catholic University, Syracuse University, Scowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture and the Académie Julian in Paris), McMillan's genius is not dominated by one particular medium.

The unrelenting excellence and breadth of James C. McMillan's art over six decades is a testament to his conclusive mastery. Even a cursory review of his work reveals an expert draftsman and technician across a diverse range of media: oil (canvas, paper, masonite), etchings, lithographs, traditional wood sculpture, found wood polychrome sculpture, drawings (pencil, pen, felt marker, pen and ink, conté crayon, charcoal), watercolor, photography, ceramics and woodcuts. McMillan has put these media to an impressive range of art styles: figurative, abstract, cubist, surreal, landscapes, still life and combinations of the foregoing. Equally diverse are McMillan's thematic choices: isolation, alienation, loss, redemption, tragedy, racism, the bucolic, the Civil Rights Movement, freedom and the universality of man. McMillan is a humanist at heart and his works are meant to evoke emotion, sometimes strong, other times subtle, but always intentional. From his Paris drawings of the 1960s, to the large oil works and southern drawings of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, to his 21st century found wood sculptures, all are impeccably rendered and attest to his devotion to experimentation in multiple media.

McMillan uses immaculate draftsmanship, line, shading, shape and color to depict, and most importantly to evoke, emotional connections and responses to his work. The aesthetic elements of his paintings, drawings and sculpture were formed from many sources. His art reflects the vast history of classicism of the 19th century French academy. McMillan's line and chthonic use of shading reflects his appreciation for Renaissance art. His knowledge of 20th century art is equally impressive and is reflected in many of his works. His body of work recalls Picasso's use of African art forms (*Afro-Thinker* and *Afro-Hera* [Figs. 1 & 2]), the cubism of Cézanne and the Post Impressionists (*Looking Back: Looking Over My Shoulder* [Fig. 4] and *Reclining Nude* [Fig. 42]); and Brancusi's semi-abstract figures (*Red Bird* and *I Will Survive* [Figs. 5 & 50]). McMillan also borrows from the school of abstraction (*Breaking Free* and *Holocaust/Apartheid* [Figs. 64 & 48]). His latest work is an oil painting on masonite, 24" x 32", that reflects the surreal school and is titled *Contemporary Precipice/60s Symbols* (2011). McMillan borrows and simultaneously creates something wholly original by fitting the media and style to the subject. Much of his work is wholly original (*IO Bird* and *Contemporary Cubical* [Fig. 74 and back cover]). At all times, McMillan is chiefly concerned with emotional truths about important and serious subjects, both historical and personal. His selection of media, style and form are brilliant because of the manner in which he deploys these elements to render his content.

Mr. McMillan is a former chair of the art department of Bennett College in Greensboro, North Carolina. He also taught art at Howard University in Washington, D.C. By showcasing his extraordinary artwork, we also mean to focus attention on the many former and present artist-professors of McMillan's generation at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Many of these academics often sacrificed highly promising artistic careers in pursuit of teaching excellence to new generations of black students. In some cases their choices were for personal reasons and in others their sacrifices were forced upon them by the realities of racial intolerance that unfairly compromised their artistic careers. Most were not left unscathed by the systemic racial exclusion of 20th century American life. As a result, the artworks of many of these stellar HBCU-affiliated academician-artists are unknown, or have largely been ignored or forgotten.

We trust that the discovery of the art of James C. McMillan will serve to introduce to a larger, national audience an artist whose work significantly contributes to American art and that its discovery will help prompt the unearthing of other master African American artists.



FIG. 1: AFRO-THINKER
carved wood
1953/56
27" X 6" X 6"
Collection of Patrick A. Bradford.

TIME, PLACE, & TALENT

DR. JULIANNE MALVEAUX President, Bennett College

In the winter of 1960, the artist-professor James C. McMillan found himself deep in the middle of social events that would forever change the direction of Civil Rights in America. With this brochure we celebrate his talent, which has provided us with an artistic vision of those historic struggles. Many of these events took place at Bennett College, where I am now fortunate to serve as President.

Bennett College women were in the forefront of the sit-in effort which led to the desegregation of previously all-white eating establishments throughout the South. They were joined by Professor McMillan as they were by several faculty members, who put themselves in the right place at the right time and in so doing contributed mightily to a legacy of leadership at Bennett that continues to this day.

James McMillan's artistic gifts have provided us with a visual memory of those historic struggles. During the turbulent Civil Rights years Bennett was fortunate to have on its staff a man who had served in the United States Navy during World War II, and who brought his broad artistic experience to the College. He graduated from Howard University, studied at the prestigious Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, and studied in Paris at the Académie Julian. In 1947 he became head of Bennett's Art Department, the first of three tenures he was to spend at Bennett.

McMillan is a man with a world vision. The horrors of war and the experience of living in a revitalized post-World War II Paris, the personal paths and suffering of individual human beings was seen through the eyes of a man who had also witnessed the suffering caused by racism in America. That universal theme of individual tragedy, loss and revitalized hope is manifested in the brilliant art of a man with a special vision. By taking time to discover this overlooked master artist, we offer hope that other exceptional black artists, now lost to history, may someday be found.

Greensboro, North Carolina
February, 2011



FIG. 2: AFRO-HERA
(Originally titled and displayed as **DIGNITY**, retitled **AFRO-HERA** in the 1960s during the Civil Rights Movement and in reference to the Greek classical goddess Hera.)
Carved wood
1956
25" X 7 1/2" X 5 1/2"
Collection of Bennett College.

VISION, STRUGGLE, & ART

DR. ALMA S. ADAMS Professor of Art & Gallery Director, Bennett College

Artists are visual storytellers who remind us daily of our humanity. What compels us as artists are usually some combination of creative thought, imagination and remembrance. James C. McMillan's imagery provides many opportunities for us to recapture and relate in very significant and personal ways to the suffering, struggle, joy and painful experiences of our times. He takes us to places both familiar and unfamiliar allowing us to interact with diverse people—confronting racism, facing tragedy and addressing other volatile situations of history.

His sensitivity and compassion are evident in his use of color, line and form and serve to communicate the importance and sacredness of family, community, country and culture.

McMillan finds particular strength and purpose when artistically responding to everyday genres while being well connected within those compositions. An icon in the local community of Greensboro, North Carolina, McMillan's work as an artist and teacher of multiple decades (with two colleges in our city) profoundly helped to shape many crucial events that undergirded social justice movements that impacted civil rights in America. As early as the 1930s, involvement in issues of social justice was always common practice for Bennett College students. Professor McMillan served the campus during three separate tenures and was a critical supporter and activist who helped guide Bennett student participation in the 1960 sit-ins at the Woolworth lunch counter.

Finally, when we celebrate Mr. McMillan, we remember the many other black artist-academicians of his generation. Many were outstanding artists who, like McMillan, deserve our belated acknowledgment.

Greensboro, North Carolina
February, 2011



FIG. 3: SHARECROPPERS
charcoal drawing
1950/51
25 X 18"
Collection of Patrick A. Bradford.

GOOD ADVICE

ROBERT E. HOLMES, ESQ.

When I was a young associate practicing at a large law firm in New York City many years ago, one of the firm's partners encouraged me and other members of the firm to come out and see his teenage son play tennis. "He's really very good," the partner would say. But I and the overwhelming number of the firm's lawyers found other ways to spend our weekend days in the great metropolis and never heeded his advice. The father's name was McEnroe. The son's name was John. And the rest is tennis history!

After three years at that firm, I relocated to Los Angeles to work in the music business. I had begun buying art in New York and took that interest with me to Los Angeles. One Saturday afternoon I went to an art exhibition in Hollywood and saw a large painting that I really liked. The price was ten thousand dollars, far beyond what I as a young lawyer wanted to pay for a piece of art. The young art dealer who was staging the exhibition tried in vain to convince me to buy the piece. "This guy is going to be really big," he advised. "I'll make it easy for you—give you good terms. You can take your time paying for it." But I would not budge—even though I loved the work. As it developed, the dealer's name was Larry Gagosian, who is today the largest and most important art dealer in the world. The artist's name was Jean-Michel Basquiat, whose work is included in the major museums of the world and whose large canvases routinely fetch prices in excess of ten million dollars at auction. And the rest, as they unfortunately say, is art history.

And so when an art professor named Bill Brooks approached me at an exhibition of work from my collection at North Carolina A&T State University in Greensboro in 2004 and advised me to seek out the work of a local artist named James C. McMillan, I was primed to not let unsolicited advice go unheeded again. The art and the artist that were revealed to me on that first of many visits to the home of Mr. McMillan came as an utter surprise and have enriched my life tremendously. How, I asked myself, could the work of this erudite and classically trained professor/artist have remained unknown to me and so many others? I met a young man of eighty whose classic and elegant strokes of brush and pen had produced art of beauty and power, often used to depict both the pathos and brutality of our times. And yet, as his art reflects so much of the social upheaval of the Civil Rights struggles of the 1960s, it also portrays the fragility and tenderness of love and spirituality inherent in the man named McMillan. And yet, Mr. McMillan's art remains something of a regional secret. The art world and Mr. McMillan deserved better. So I set myself on a mission, with the aid of colleagues and friends, to shout Mr. McMillan's name from the proverbial rooftops. So, I have some good advice for you: "Pay rapt attention to the brilliant art of Mr. James C. McMillan!"



FIG. 4: LOOKING BACK: LOOKING OVER MY SHOULDER
oil on paper
1952
20" X 12"
Collection of Robert E. Holmes.

ROBERT E. HOLMES is an attorney and a retired Executive Vice President of Sony Pictures Entertainment Music Group and the former President of Sony Pictures Entertainment Music Publishing Companies. Works from Mr. Holmes's collection of over 600 pieces of art have been exhibited at the California African American Museum in Los Angeles; California, North Carolina A&T State University in Greensboro, North Carolina, North Carolina Central University in Durham, North Carolina, the Vincent Price Gallery at East Los Angeles College, the Kansas African American Art Museum in Wichita, Kansas and Wichita State University in Wichita, Kansas; among other venues.

THE ART OF JAMES C. McMILLAN

DISCOVERING AN AFRICAN AMERICAN MASTER

SHAWNVA L. HARRIS

The life of James C. McMillan heralds an engaging history for those who admire the struggles of artists to attain skill, recognition and longevity in their creative contributions. Although many artists have long been lost to the annals of history, African American artists, particularly those born or working prior to the Civil Rights Movement, endured the peculiar effects of racism, with its systematic denigration and exclusions. In the intersection of life and art many African American artists such as McMillan, searched for both a physical and intellectual space for expressing artistic mastery while experiencing personal and collective loss primarily due to opportunities limited by racism. When finally uncovered, the complex, individual histories and narratives of artistic challenges and accomplishments will inspire the viewing public. Discovering the art of James C. McMillan reveals a humanist. His life portrays artistic intelligence, grace under fire and perseverance against the odds. His artistic achievements are a tribute to the many mentors who gave him a lifetime of encouragement. As one of many black artist-professors whose prodigious talent has been underappreciated, he is a bellwether for other black master artists of his generation also deserving of recognition. Finally, by discovering the art of James C. McMillan a rich and textured narrative, his individual artistic mastery, and the power of the human spirit to endure are uncovered.

James Carroll McMillan was born in Sanford, North Carolina on December 23, 1925. McMillan was one of three siblings born to Sadie Jane McRae McMillan and Rev. Dr. James Ernest McMillan. Both parents were educators in the public school system with his father also serving as a minister in the Blandonia Presbyterian Church in Sanford. Both parents were college educated, graduates of Johnson C. Smith University, representing a small minority of African Americans of their generation who had the means and opportunity to attend college. The Rev. Dr. McMillan also served as president of the local chapter for the National As-



FIG. 5: RED BIRD, oil on masonite, 1960, 34" X 20", Collection of Arthur Primas.



FIG. 6: JAMES C. McMILLAN IN PARIS STUDIO, 1950.

Photo courtesy of the artist.

sociation for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and was a visible and active defender of racial justice in North Carolina, laying the foundation for young James's racial pride and sense of civic responsibility.

As a child, James loved to draw and his parents supported and nurtured his talent. Early on, he dreamed of attending an influential art school where he could nourish his passion. However, the opportunity to pursue adequate training as a painter in any North Carolina university was unthinkable in the 1940s. The prevailing notion of black inferiority was dominate among intolerant whites, and the academy reflected the prevailing sentiments of society. Historically black colleges in North Carolina, such as Johnson C. Smith University, North Carolina Central University or North Carolina A&T State University, lacked educational art programs in the early 20th century. If his artistic aspirations were to become reality, all roads led North.

HOWARD UNIVERSITY

In 1941, at the age of fifteen, young James McMillan graduated as valedictorian of his high school class in Sanford and won a scholarship to attend Howard University in Washington, D.C. In the 1940s, Howard was both literally and symbolically the center of the "Negro" intelligentsia, therefore young James would be immersed in a rich cultural milieu of the powerful black elite. His migration to Washington, D.C. was met with some apprehension about leaving home at such a young age. However, he was welcomed in the home of his uncle, Dr. Clarence Neal McMillan, a dentist, and his wife. Despite the segregation of the nation's capital, Dr. Clarence McMillan's thriving dentistry practice was situated in the heart of the capitol's black bourgeois culture where prominent doctors, lawyers, and educators resided. Like the elder James McMillan, Dr. McMillan was an example of success. Although reared in a large family of thirteen siblings, he obtained his education using funds earned working as a Pullman porter.¹ Despite the geographic distance, young James McMillan had maintained a close relationship with his uncle and considered him a "second father" making his decision to live with him an easy one. Dr. McMillan did not have children of his own. Nevertheless, he proved to be a doting father figure and a great mentor for his nephew James.

McMillan was nurtured by the Howard University community. His academic scholarship required him to work in the library with archivist and librarian Dorothy Porter. There he created illustrations of important Negro historical figures, such as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman, for display on campus. Thus began his early concentration on portraiture. His artistic abilities earned him several campus "commissions" including the design of the annual Howard-Lincoln Thanksgiving football game poster. In the art department, McMillan met several well-known instructors including Dorothy Porter's husband, painter and art historian James Amos Porter; painter and printmaker James Lesesne Wells; and art department founder and chairperson, James Vernon Herring. He also encountered other luminaries such as historian John Hope Franklin, and Harlem Renaissance icon and philosopher Alain Locke. McMillan recalls Locke as a "very petite man" whose required freshman philosophy class in Douglas Hall caused him to ponder the

Locke encouraged
McMillan to use
African art as
a source of
inspiration.



FIG. 7: PROFESSOR JAMES LESESNE WELLS WITH WIFE AND SON AT DAUBER'S CLUB ANNUAL PICNIC, 1946.

Photo courtesy of the artist.

meaning of his own life. Once Locke gave an assignment to prepare a written statement of one's life experience. After reading McMillan's essay, Locke promptly returned it to him with the words "See me," written on the front page. At the following meeting, Locke praised McMillan's intelligence but urged him to retake the course after he had experienced more of life. Then Locke told McMillan that his colleague, Prof. Lois Mailou Jones, had praised McMillan's artistic talent and potential. Locke encouraged McMillan to use African art as a source of inspiration in his work. It is a lesson reflected in many of McMillan's major works.



FIG. 8: HOWARD UNIVERSITY FACULTY AND FRIENDS, DAUBER'S ART CLUB ANNUAL PICNIC, 1946. (PICTURED: CELINE TABARY, PROFESSOR BIAS, MRS. WELLS, PROFESSOR LOIS MAILOU JONES)

Photo courtesy of the artist.

James McMillan's most memorable relationship at Howard University was with his "beloved teacher and mentor," Lois Mailou Jones, who nurtured his talent and desire to study abroad in Paris. Figure 8 is an early photo of Jones with other Howard professors and her good Parisian friend Celine Tabary. Jones, a renowned artist who had studied at the Boston Museum School and at the Académie Julian in Paris in 1938, originally taught McMillan watercolor techniques. She arranged several art projects for him, on and off campus, after recognizing his skill in painting and draftsmanship. For example, she helped McMillan secure a position as an illustration assistant under the tutelage of painter and photographer Ralston Crawford. Crawford was commissioned by *Fortune* magazine in 1946 to provide documentation for the atomic bomb detonation at Bikini Atoll on the Marshall Islands.² Jones, who had taught briefly in Sedalia, North Carolina, understood McMillan's need to leave the segregated South's limitations and fully explore his creativity. Her support and affirmation continue to inspire and encourage McMillan's artistry.

OFF TO WAR: WORLD WAR II

McMillan's education was temporarily curtailed when he was drafted into the United States Navy in 1943, his junior year in college. During McMillan's wartime service he continued to pursue artistic assignments to keep his skills sharp. In 1945, while stationed at Barber's Point Naval Air Station in Hawaii, he acquired a teaching position through the United States Armed Forces Institute. A natural teacher, he gave art instruction to naval personnel awaiting discharge following the war. McMillan gained commercial art experience as a contributing illustrator for the *Barbarian*, a base monthly periodical. He also became quite popular on the naval base as a "portrait artist," and charged \$25 for each commission. Working in pastel on sandstone paper, McMillan did as many as five portraits a week, usually for service men who commissioned him to do portraits of wives and girlfriends from wallet-sized photos. He also created a pastel mural of a tropical scene for his base commander's sunroom.

In 1946, McMillan was honorably discharged and returned to Washington, D.C. to complete his final year of study at Howard University. McMillan immediately returned to extracurricular activities at Howard, serving as president of the Dauber's Art Club, from 1946 to '47. Similar to many military personnel returning from war, his education was funded by the G.I. Bill, which was inaugurated in the year of McMillan's return to Howard University, and which



FIG. 9: JAMES McMILLAN IN HIS U.S. NAVY UNIFORM, 1943.

Photo courtesy of the artist.



FIG. 10: EXHIBITION OF PASTEL AND OTHER DRAWINGS BY McMILLAN AND OTHER NAVAL PERSONNEL, BARBER'S POINT NAVAL AIR STATION, HAWAII, C. 1945.
Photo courtesy of the artist.

supported many veterans at historically black colleges.³ McMillan was among about thirty Howard art students who had returned from serving in the armed forces, many attended James Herring's evening course for government war workers.⁴

SKOWHEGAN

Upon graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in Art in 1947, James McMillan won a nine-week art fellowship to the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Skowhegan, Maine. Skowhegan selected only fifty students nationwide to participate in fashioning a new, intensive summer art school. Skowhegan was originally founded in 1946, making McMillan's entry historically significant. The Sanford, North Carolina native was one of the first African Americans admitted to the program, pre-dating other notable graduates such as David C. Driskell and Sylvia Snowden.⁵

Skowhegan proved to be a fertile ground for learning. McMillan viewed the opportunity as his "grand introduction to the professional art world."⁶ Located in rural Maine, McMillan and other students were able to study artistic trends and methods without interruption and under the tutelage of internationally known artists. McMillan was a capable audiovisual technician and coordinated slide presentations for several visiting artists. This position helped him establish contact with visiting artists and lecturers. McMillan remembers the setting vividly.

The site, approached via a dirt lane off the main highway, consisted of a "lower campus" by the lake, with dorm cabins for men and women and a dining facility with a live-in cook. Through the trees and up the hill was the "upper campus" which consisted of a huge, magnificent early 20th century, hand-hewn timber barn that served to house a central open space for lectures, group critiques, and slide projections. . . . The barn also served as an art supply store, film strip and slide storage, and preliminary art library, all in enclosed separate rooms with the exposed inner timbered wall serving as student fresco spaces.⁷

Skowhegan's President and co-founder, Henry Varnum Poor, a world renowned fresco painter and former head of the American Academy of Art in Rome, became a mentor to McMillan. McMillan completed a large fresco, *Black Miners* (now destroyed), in the barn next to a Poor's art work which depicted life-size miners (Fig. 12). McMillan's mural, enclosed by an inner timber wall of the barn, became a focus of political contention among some of his fellow students. In an era of the Red Scare and McCarthyism, some students believed that McMillan's fresco conveyed a pro-communist sentiment. This reaction caught McMillan by surprise. He came to appreciate the political and emotional response that art can generate. Through his art he could address social inequities affecting himself and other similarly disenfranchised people before and during the Cold War.



FIG. 11: McMILLAN AND OTHERS WORKING IN ART CLASS AT SKOWHEGAN, 1947.
Photo courtesy of the artist.

TEACHING AT BENNETT COLLEGE

After an intense period of learning and growth at Skowhegan, McMillan prepared to move to Paris to live the "artist's life."

Before he could leave, McMillan received a phone call that proved pivotal to the direction of his artistic career. In the fall of 1947, David Dallas Jones, president of Bennett College for Women in Greensboro, North Carolina, called and asked him to interview for the position as chair of the art department at Bennett College. At first McMillan was ambivalent about teaching. He wanted desperately to live and to study art in Europe. But, considering his financial limitations as a 21-year-old artist, McMillan interviewed and accepted the post as a new and exciting challenge. He would complete the first of three tenures at Bennett, from 1947 to 1950. McMillan was instrumental in the early planning of a student exhibition gallery and opened the first student exhibition in the basement of Hologate Library. However the art department consisted of few instructors, leading McMillan to teach a range of courses from basic drawing to painting and design. These circumstances led McMillan to develop mastery across a variety of media. He felt that an instructor should make art before teaching it.

In addition to teaching, McMillan coordinated several campus-related projects to help promote the visibility of the art department and bring an understanding of art in general to the campus culture. For example, his guidance was sought for a student drama performance entitled "Living Madonnas," which mimicked traditional imagery of the Holy Mother and the Nativity. This collaboration between the art, drama and home economic departments engaged the talents of several Bennett women as well as important faculty: namely, Clarence Whiteman, organist, and Fred Eady of the drama department.

PARIS AND THE ACADEMIE JULIAN

In 1950, James McMillan arranged a sabbatical from Bennett College to study at the Académie Julian in Paris, France. Lois Mailou Jones, a former student of the Académie, nominated McMillan for the prestigious opportunity to study abroad, an honor he has always cherished. Because he was unfamiliar with the city layout and did not know the language, when he arrived McMillan used Parisian landmarks as points of orientation. He completed many felt-tip drawings in 1950 that reflected his fascination with the City of Light, its places and the personalities of its inhabitants (Figs. 21-28, 37, 39-40). McMillan easily made friends with classmates and

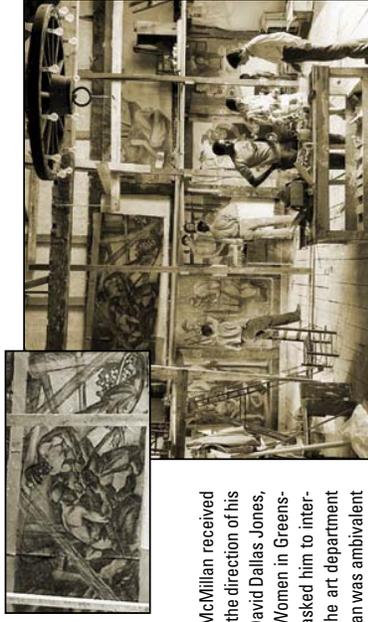


FIG. 12: McMILLAN WITH STUDENTS AT HENRY VARNUM POOR'S BARN STUDIO, SKOWHEGAN, 1947.
INSET: McMILLAN'S FRESCO, "BLACK MINERS."
Photo courtesy of Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture.



FIG. 13: JAMES McMILLAN TEACHING ART CLASS AT BENNETT COLLEGE, C. 1948.
Photo courtesy of the artist.



FIG. 14: McMILLAN STANDING IN FRONT OF WILBUR STEELE HALL, BENNETT COLLEGE, C. 1948.
Photo courtesy of the artist.

locals. His generous, thoughtful and easy going professorial personality was an asset, as were his tall, dark and handsome looks. In Paris, he encountered greater racial tolerance regarding social relations, which rarely existed in the United States. Exploring humanity became central to his artistic purpose as Parisians and others he met tried to move beyond the horrors of World War II. McMillan appreciated the visceral thematic connection between the war and American's ongoing racial conflicts. His art was forever affected by both.

As one of about twenty-five international, advanced-level students, McMillan could choose to attend classes or use resources at the Louvre, the Sorbonne and other art institutions under the jurisdiction of the École des Beaux-Arts. He worked intensively, completing hundreds of academic studies of nude models, historical architecture, and the scenes and sights of Paris [Figs. 35-42]. As did many artists who studied in Paris before him, including Henry O. Tanner, Hale Woodruff, Aaron Douglas and Lois Mailou Jones, McMillan used his studies as exercises in draftsmanship. For example, McMillan's ink wash drawing, *Paris Suburb with Trees* [Fig. 40], was typical of the kind of sketches McMillan produced while at the Académie, documenting his ability to convey emotional intensity through scale and tonal emphasis. McMillan's tree branches are thick but rhythmic and pronounced in the foreground of the composition, while the buildings and people-like figures in the background appear thin and shadowy. His study for *The Weepers* [Fig. 41] displays bowed bodies, mournful faces, furrowed brows and contemplative postures. McMillan's ability to develop an emotional vocabulary embodied a determined, humanistic approach to his art making.

Paris provided relief from the restricted lifestyle of the segregated South McMillan experienced in North Carolina. He frequently visited cafes and clubs, such as Chez Inez, which was owned by an African American woman. He heard live jazz and participated in the ebullient social life of Paris, free from the obstacles of segregation and acts of overt racial hatred. He was embraced as an artist and an individual. Still, McMillan continued to reflect on his life in segregated America. As he titled a 1952 oil painting, McMillan (metaphorically speaking) was "looking back over his shoulder" to Howard, the Navy, Skowhegan, Bennett and his family, in order to draw strength and devise survival strategies. His creativity and art were fueled during this period and focused on personal memories and the experiences of those of his racial heritage. They represented emblems of the human condition: struggle, suffering and loss. McMillan, like several black artists during the post-World War II period, such as John Wilson, Hale Woodruff, Elizabeth Catlett, and Charles White, embraced social realism as a critique against societal injustices, especially lynching.⁸ McMillan also greatly admired the social realist works of Hughie Lee-Smith, an African American artist of McMillan's era, because they often incorporate themes of isolation and alienation, and depict black subject. For McMillan, black males figure prominently as key protagonists whose centrality is cut down by the horrors of lynching. Despite the freedom he enjoyed in Paris, McMillan's "looking back" sensitized him to an existential view of himself as a black man in the larger discourse of national and

Paris provided relief from the restricted lifestyle of the segregated South McMillan experienced in North Carolina.



FIG. 15: McMILLAN WITH FRANCO-AMERICAN FELLOWSHIP IN PARIS, C. 1950. (LEFT TO RIGHT: WILLIAM PARKER, UNKNOWN, UNKNOWN, COLLETTE RIVIERE, JAMES McMILLAN, GERARD SEKOTO)
Photo courtesy of the artist.

depicts Christ in tears, a thorny, bloody crown atop his head, standing between a traditional image of three blood-stained crosses at left, and a lynched victim, bleeding heavily, at right. In both compositions McMillan sets a lone male figure foreground, perhaps a primordial black-male Adam, or a Christ-like figure. Each gazes at a modern lynching, at the suffering of others. *Mother and Child* [Fig. 49] shows a partially clad mother with her young son in a sharecropper's shack viewing a tree in the near distance outside the window. The young boy stares intently at the tree with dismay. What or who is he looking for? Perhaps he seeks an abducted and crucified father. On the wall, at left, an old horseshoe is turned upside down, which, according to the artist, represents the presence of "bad luck" in some southern communities.

McMillan showcased many of his works in an exhibition at Raymond Duncan Galerie in 1951. Duncan was the brother of Isadora Duncan, an innovator of modern dance. The gallery was located on the famous Left Bank, a bohemian center that was a magnet for many artists, writers, and musicians. McMillan also exhibited with the Franco-American Fellowship in an exhibition on 32 Avenue L'Opera which placed his work in an international context alongside artists such as Gerard Sekoto of South Africa. Founded by the African American writer Richard Wright in the fall of 1950, the Franco-American Fellowship sought to combat racism on an international level.¹⁰ The group provided another social and intellectual outlet for McMillan, beyond the classroom and the locales he visited with his colleagues [Fig. 15]. McMillan not only came into contact with other artists, writers and intellectuals but he also met activists and members of the French Forces of the Interior (FFI) Resistance such as his friend Josette Riviere who killed six Nazis defending Paris during the occupation. The heroism exhibited by war survivors deeply touched McMillan. He began drawing close parallels between his experiences as a black American and those of others fighting injustice throughout the world.

RETURN TO THE UNITED STATES

McMillan returned to Bennett in 1951, but the contrast between the creative freedom and cosmopolitanism of Paris, and the realities of virulent racism in



FIG. 16: McMILLAN STANDING ON THE EIFFEL TOWER, 1950.
Photo courtesy of the artist.

segregated Greensboro, North Carolina, compelled him to rethink his choice many times. As the founding chair of the art department at Bennett College, McMillan was accorded respect and was considered a diligent administrator and instructor, teaching classes in various media, guiding students and shaping the cultural environment on campus. However, he longed for the uninterrupted artistic life of Paris.

Despite a busy teaching and administrative schedule, McMillan continued to produce exceptional works of art. He also continued formal study. He arranged a sabbatical and moved to Washington, D.C. to attend Catholic University where he earned a Master of Fine Arts degree in Sculpture. In the program he participated in several sculptural commissions Catholic University received from churches around the country. He was quite popular and his dignified demeanor impressed nuns at the University so much that they said he reminded them of

St. Martin de Porres, a 17th century black man who worked to improve race relations in Peru. While attending Catholic University McMillan learned how to carve freestanding sculpture, evident in such works as *Afro-Thinker* (Fig. 1), a work that blends African art influences with themes drawn from his Paris days.

After completing his MFA in 1952, McMillan worked at Bennett College for another year, then returned to Washington, D.C. to work as a commercial artist. He became a co-owner of a gallery, Ger-Mac Art Studio, between 1954 and 1955, with Ernie Geran, a Philadelphia artist and former Howard University student.

Their studio was located on top of the original site of his uncle's dental office, located off DuPont Circle at 18th and Swan Streets, N.W., Washington, D.C. McMillan would reluctantly close the gallery in 1955, but it provided him an opportunity to create art and to sell works that he and Geran made. During this period McMillan also taught classes at Howard University when James Lesesne Wells was on a sabbatical. He was able to re-establish contact with former professors and other faculty members. In addition, he participated as an artist-in-residence with "Little Paris," a twelve-member group of amateur artists and Howard art students organized by Lois Malliou Jones and Celine Tabary.¹¹

Although McMillan's time at Howard University engaged him as an art instructor again, he was conflicted about remaining in academia or pursuing a career as a full-time artist. A major transition occurred when McMillan fell in love and married in 1955. Soon after he and his wife, Margaret, welcomed their first child, Eric Wesley. New family responsibilities encouraged McMillan to accept commercial art assignments from private clients to supplement his income from teaching. He directed the Arts and Crafts army post-facility for a

short time in northern Virginia, but returned to Greensboro in 1956 to teach full-time at Bennett College. After returning to Greensboro, his daughter Frances Lynn was born. McMillan refocused on the needs of his growing family. He chiefly divided his time between teaching and family life, with much less time for independent artistic pursuits.

Nevertheless, McMillan took advantage of limited opportunities to produce and refine his work, drawing strength and support from his family in accord with his parents' earlier example. In 1958, he was awarded a Danforth Teaching Fellowship grant that allowed him to pursue doctoral study in painting through summer study. He did so at Syracuse University. Although he did not complete the program, he remained a fellow until 1961, and completed seminal works such as *Dark Corner* (Fig. 54) and *The Prisoner* (Fig. 51).

CIVIL RIGHTS

McMillan's figurative work progressed but evidenced more skepticism about Cold War politics, censorship and a continued focus on the plight of black Americans trying to secure equality in employment, housing, education, and public accommodations. Instead of seeking asylum in Paris or another European city as his artistic contemporaries Herbert Gentry, Ed Clark, Harold Cousins, and Beauford Delaney did,¹² McMillan decided not to move his family abroad. He elected to remain in the U.S. and to engage in domestic protest through his art. In the provocative painting, *Cold War* (Fig. 45), McMillan makes a statement that alludes to the stalemate of both international politics and domestic race relations. In the foreground of the painting, a black woman is depicted engrossed in reading a bible; in the background, three white people are depicted equally engrossed in reading newspapers. Perhaps the group in *Cold War* exemplifies the irony of white Americans who engaged Cold War politics abroad while denying their contradictory behaviors and racial animus towards their fellow black citizens at home. Or perhaps the woman's singular presence resembles Rosa Parks's legendary act of civil disobedience in 1955.

McMillan participated in the Greensboro sit-in movements in the 1960s, and was involved with several non-violent demonstrations with students from Bennett College and North Carolina A&T State University. He marched with many people including black and white Bennett colleagues and a young A&T student body president named Jesse Jackson (Fig. 18). McMillan was jailed with students and other nonviolent protesters. His empathy for fellow faculty at Bennett who were survivors of the Nazi Holocaust; his family's long-standing NAACP affiliation; his sympathy for members of the FFI Resistance in Paris; and his active Civil Rights efforts at home, worked to further transform his world view. These realities endowed him with a deeper, profoundly human, universalistic understanding of tragic loss in its many variations. His political involvement and the turbulence that erupted on America's campuses in the 1960s had a powerful impact on his art. Several works from the mid to late 1960s depict a bleak atmosphere and were deliberate political statements focused on dehumanization in the U.S. and abroad. (Figs. 57 and 65).

McMillan's...work progressed but evidenced...a continued focus on the plight of black Americans....



FIG. 18: McMILLAN (AT RIGHT) MARCHES WITH THEN A&T COLLEGE STUDENT GOVERNMENT PRESIDENT JESSE JACKSON AND BENNETT COLLEGE TEACHER DR. ELIZABETH LEZNER IN MAY 1963. *Greensboro Daily News* (May 23, 1963).



FIG. 17: NUNS WITH McMILLAN IN THE "HABIT OF ST. MARTIN DE PORRES," CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY, 1951.

Photo courtesy of the artist.

McMillan's imagery during the Civil Rights Movement continued to reflect humanistic themes of loss. Yet his art also incorporated abstraction during this period. Ann Gibson notes that the use of abstraction by many African American artists in the 1950s such as Norman Lewis, Romare Bearden, and Hale Woodruff could be interpreted as a strategy toward integration and a protest against societal injustice just as it was an expression of their own expanding visual repertoire.¹³ Like many other artists, McMillan had difficulty reconciling emotional depth with exercises in pure abstraction. The threat of nuclear war occupied the minds of many Americans and McMillan took on themes such as genocide and violent warfare in *Holocaust/Apartheid* and *Red Bird* [Figs. 48 and 5], for example. The human body, emaciated and disfigured, peers through layers of paint and color, recalling his earlier figurative studies. Chaotic lines and ghostly forms unite to realize stark visual commentaries on human isolation and destruction.

GUILFORD COLLEGE

By 1989, McMillan was invited to assume a post as a professor and chair of the art department at Guilford College in Greensboro. This transition from the all-black Bennett to the predominantly white Guilford represented racial progress in Greensboro. Despite Bennett College's reluctance to lose a well-respected colleague to a neighboring institution, the increase in salary made the opportunity impossible for McMillan and his family to resist. McMillan was the first African American chair of Guilford College's art department. He was responsible for co-organizing several European study-abroad trips, which included visiting museums and private studios with contemporary artists. Winning certain teaching awards, McMillan appeared in several publications, and his works were added to institutional collections such as North Carolina Central University, Guilford College, and Virginia State University [Figs. 34, 58, and 68].

During brief retreats from teaching, McMillan created smaller drawings and landscape paintings, capturing the serenity of the North Carolina countryside [Fig. 67]. Although painting and drawing remained the centerpiece of his oeuvre, McMillan began creating sculptures, polychromic constructions composed of found objects, and later driftwood, collected during his travels. *IO Bird* [Fig. 74] is an example of a smaller, abstract wood construction McMillan created in an earlier experimental stage. The unusual shapes of driftwood, its antique, weathered look, fascinated McMillan. He started experimenting with driftwood sculpture more frequently since it is durable and can resemble human limbs. In the painting *Am I My Brother's Keeper?* [Fig. 71], the driftwood is held by a young man on a beach. The artist delineates ocean from beach, establishing a clear divide between them despite the cascading water. A hand and partial forearm of the drowning man stand in glaring contrast to the beach figure whose hands appear clenched. The clenched fist suggests force and resistance to reaching out. His other hand holds the driftwood tightly going in the opposite direction. By giving the drowning man a fist instead of a "helping hand," McMillan leaves open interpretation of the title question: "Am I My Brother's Keeper?" The driftwood resembles the



FIG. 19. McMILLAN WITH STUDENT AT GUILFORD COLLEGE. C. 1970.
Photo courtesy of the artist.

hand of the drowning man, perhaps depicting a choice between the value of saving life in the present and salvaging remnants of the past.

LIFE AFTER GUILFORD COLLEGE

McMillan retired from Guilford College in 1988, which gave him more time to create art. He participated in local group exhibitions and community arts activism. In 1990, McMillan joined Virginia State University's department of fine and commercial art as an artist-in-residence where he taught two advanced art courses. He was a co-founder and first president of the African American Atelier, Inc., a public art gallery, that first opened its doors at the Greensboro Cultural Center in 1991. Although exhibitions outside of Greensboro were rare for the artist, McMillan had exhibited at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. in 1953 and 1983; the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C. in 1954; and a Boston museum in 1971. He also participated in a group show of African American artists at the National Arts Club in New York City in 1994. This exhibition also included works by McMillan's beloved Howard University mentor Lois Mailou Jones. McMillan's recollection of seeing his teacher after almost forty years was one of delight as in many ways it marked a cycle of completion for his own teaching career. Although there were plans for McMillan to visit her in Washington D.C., the New York exhibition would be the last time they saw each other before Jones's death in 1998.¹⁴

McMillan continued to show his work in several invitational and retrospective exhibitions in North Carolina. He gained more local recognition from portrait commissions he received from the Greensboro Public Library [Fig.61] and the Guilford County Courts. A notable example of his commissioned works is *Four Dream Builders* [inside front cover], a large oil masterpiece completed in 2001. In this work, McMillan depicts Joseph McNeil, Franklin McCain, Ezell Blair, Jr. and David Richmond (known as the A&T Four), students who helped initiate the sit-in movement in Greensboro, North Carolina on February 1, 1960 when they demanded equal treatment at an F.W. Woolworth lunch counter. Following the efforts of the A&T Four, other citizens and students from area high schools, such as Dudley High School, and colleges, such as North Carolina A&T State University and Bennett College, actively staged more sit-ins which helped to dismantle Jim Crow segregation. In *Four Dream Builders*, McMillan depicts the A&T Four rebuilding the city from the rubble. A red Woolworth sign with gold lettering appears faintly in the background. In the foreground blood-stained notes among the ruins read "I have a dream" alongside others that read "A&T Feb. 1, 1960" and "Bennett College." These heroic figures rebuild the city symbolically, brick by brick, contemplating a vibrant blue sky.

THE ART OF JAMES C. McMILLAN

The aesthetic elements of the paintings, drawings and sculpture of this master artist were developed from many sources. Inherently he came forth as



FIG. 20. OUTDOOR PAINTING LESSON, McMILLAN WITH GUILFORD COLLEGE STUDENTS, C. 1970.
Photo courtesy of the artist.

Yet his art
also incorporated
abstraction
during this period.

My art seems to reach backward, forward, and primarily inward for meaning and expression, including immediate family and ancestral references, "primitive" cultures and issues affecting the human condition.

By the time McMillan retired from teaching at Guilford College in 1988, he had traveled the world, both domestically and internationally, all in connection with his art teaching and education. While France had come first in his foreign travels, he also visited Austria, Czechoslovakia, England, Germany, Scotland, Italy, Switzerland, Belgium, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, and Mexico. His art was his ticket to the world and was, accordingly, influenced by a great range of both domestic and international art.

In 1999 McMillan was asked if he considered himself solely a "southern artist," and he responded:

I have some difficulty in defining myself regionally, let alone as a "southern" artist per se. Though, I confess a pervasive saturation of emotional recall throughout those years, that filter ideas and issues of esthetic consideration. I have the impression, too, through broad contact with fellow artists of national and international persuasion, that there is considerable concurrence. Needless to say, with such an amalgam of experience coupled with diverse formal exposure, I am uncomfortable with the "southern" label. My art seems to reach backward, forward, and primarily inward for meaning and expression, including immediate family and ancestral references, "primitive" cultures and issues affecting the human condition. In my own work I feel quite comfortable in the use of natural imagery, though my professional evolution has moved toward abstraction. Regarding post-modern ideologies and imagery, I have reacted with a sense of euphoric relief, and a breath of fresh air, to the whole of visual art.¹⁶

DISCOVERY BY NEW COLLECTORS

James McMillan continues to create important works of art. While his reputation among regional collectors continues to expand, in recent years a group of collectors from outside the South have taken a keen interest in McMillan's art. Their "discovery" of McMillan has led to solo exhibitions and a deeper inquiry into his life and art. McMillan has strong advocates, most notably his representative Charlotte Sherman, co-founder of the renowned Heritage Gallery in Los Angeles. Founded with respected gallery owner Benjamin Horowitz in the 1960s, Heritage Gallery was one of the first mainstream galleries to feature works by artists of color. By way of example, the gallery helped cultivate the careers of the African American artists Charles White and Ernie Barnes. After learning of McMillan in 2004 from her client Robert E. Holmes and viewing many of his art works, Sherman was determined to expose this master artist's work to a wider national audience. She began with certain longstanding African American clients.

Sherman has remarked that the discovery of McMillan's work by African American collectors in particular was the realization of a dream she and Horowitz held that such important work be more widely acknowledged and available. Los Angeles-based collector Robert E. Holmes "discovered" James McMillan's work for the first time during a trip to Greensboro in 2004. Holmes, an attorney and former executive vice-president of Sony Pictures Entertainment Music Group, has a collection of over 600 art works. Portions of his collection have been exhibited nationally and won glowing reviews from the

a very young man with great talent and a ability to see, and then transformed that vision into brilliant art that came forth from his heart, eye and hand.

His paintings and drawing reflect the vast history of the 19th century academy. In *The Weepers* [Fig. 41], a drawing in red conté, is found his ability to form the human figure, transforming the two dimensional sheet into three dimensional forms. The line and the chiaroscuro use of the conté crayon forming the bodies, reflects his knowledge of Renaissance art. He molds and forms the bodies as after Leonardo.

In the painting, *Looking Over My Shoulder* [Fig. 4] from 1952, is found the elements that he discovered in both, the cubism of Cezanne and the Post Impressionists. The colors vibrate with the juxtaposition of the cool and warm colors. These brilliant colors of green against the red pull the viewer into the painting. The artist knew well just how to maneuver the space. The eye is pulled into the picture plane as it moves up the spade handle, to the large hands of the African American man. He is looking back to his land, to his history or even to the promising future that he may hope is there.

It was Picasso who in 1907 with *Les Femmes d'Alger* transformed the art of the Western world. Picasso drew, in the women's faces and bodies, from African sculpture. James McMillan speaks of his admiration for Picasso's art, including its African influences. McMillan references African art with the quasi cubist forms in his sculpture. *Afro-Thinker* [Fig. 1] transforms Rodin's *Thinker* into an African sculpture. His carving uses the angular cubist forms. The incredible large hands are almost independent living forms, as the sculpture moves from each angle.

In 1970, McMillan curated an exhibit at Bennett College titled "Invitational Exhibit" hosted by the Afro-American Studies Institute of Bennett and dedicated to the late James A. Porter and James V. Herring, both former chairmen of the Howard University art department, and McMillan's college professors. In the foreword to the exhibit brochure, McMillan wrote of his view that black art is both specific and universal.

For some the emergence of the Afro-American artist is a recent phenomenon. For others more acquainted with history the Black artist has contributed significantly to the evolving American culture concurrently with his arrival on these shores. Since the 18th Century his achievements have been documented nationally and internationally as he met the rigorous esthetic standards at home and abroad. More recently it can be said the Afro-American artist is well-entrenched in the "contemporary manner." He is concerned with many things seen, felt, heard and smelled - with textures, colors, space, the quality of light and air - with LIFE in its most diverse forms (the microcosm; the macrocosm) and with death too! He is concerned with relationships - of objects and ideas, philosophies and revolutions, peoples and places. He takes cues from the recesses of the mind, as surrealistic as well as realistic imagery, he explores the realms of intuition and reason as a continuum of past, present, and future. Joy, sorrow, love and hate, being and becoming are all a part of his themes.¹⁵

The redemption is always present. It is inherent in McMillan's biography and preserved by his art.

I have attempted
to impart through
these forms, as
altars and totems,
a sense of mystery
and awesomeness
that speak to a
collective imagery
meant to evoke
the ultimate.

press including the *Los Angeles Times*. In addition to Sherman, Holmes's enthusiasm for McMillan's art was imparted to friends, including fellow art collector and New York City attorney, Patrick A. Bradford, also a Sherman client. Finally, Texas-based art collector Arthur Primas, also a Sherman client, became a McMillan collector. Each have added several works by McMillan to their expanding collections. Primas's extensive collection was featured in 2010 and 2011 in a major exhibit at the Dayton Art Institute in Dayton, Ohio and titled "100 Years of African American Art: The Arthur Primas Collection." These men represent a new focus in art patronage among African Americans: to move beyond art appreciation, using a bond of shared heritage to promote artists like McMillan in order to win them the acclaim their mastery demands. To his many supporters James McMillan is not only a master artist of historical significance, but a contemporary *griot* able to reach new audiences with his moving depictions and enthralling life story.

BUILDING A NATIONAL PRESENCE

The collaboration between McMillan, Sherman, Holmes, Bradford and Primas yielded a major exhibition at the Bakersfield Museum of Art, in Bakersfield, California in 2009 titled *Loss and Redemption: The Art of James C. McMillan*. A large body of McMillan's artwork produced over the last sixty years was exhibited for the first time on the West Coast. McMillan attended his Bakersfield exhibit and this marked the first time he had been on the West Coast since his Navy service more than fifty years earlier. Although the exhibition at Bakersfield was displayed concurrently with other solo shows at the museum which focused on themes of homelessness and despair, McMillan's work demonstrated a "redemptive" quality in his vivid depictions of human perseverance amidst unrelenting struggle. Sherman has remarked that the featured works offer "present stark and unyielding brutal reminders of the psychological damage caused to individual sufferers of intolerance and injustice." However, the redemption is always present. It is inherent in McMillan's biography and preserved by his art.

McMillan's supporters, including this author, have joined together to sponsor a major retrospective of 100 of the artist's works, made over a sixty year period from the 1940s through the present, in his hometown of Greensboro, North Carolina, from March to May of 2011. The retrospective, hosted by two institutions, Bennett College and the African American Atelier, Inc., will allow the public an unprecedented opportunity to personally discover this important American artist.

THE MASTER ARTIST STILL AT WORK

The new-found national attention has James C. McMillan busily continuing to make art in the modest studio behind his Greensboro home. His most recent work is a large oil that borrows from the school of surrealism and is titled *Contemporary Precipice/60s Symbols* (2011). In recent years McMillan has also continued to fashion his unique, found wood sculptures such as *ID Bird* [Fig. 74]. He has described this part of his art portfolio as follows:

These pieces are not about "pleasing things of beauty." They are foremost about sculpture and a search for unique sculptural form: An arrangement of elemental and related shapes, textures, and weathered color to define a unique three-dimensional space, in varying configurations of asymmetry and balance while, hopefully, imparting, through their imagery, some of the mystery of the primeval past....Structurally speaking, the forms represent an intuitive but, yet introspective search for a formal synthesis of contrasting and unlikely elements: formal versus intuitive, organic versus architectonic, old versus new. They also reflect and identification with the landscape idiom--its cyclical analogy to the life and time/space continuum. Other pieces refer to the primeval human predisposition to erect edifices at hallowed sites for divination and worship. I have attempted to impart through these forms, as altars and totems, a sense of mystery and awesomeness that speak to a collective imagery meant to evoke the ultimate.¹⁷

Ever the professor-artist, in 2010 McMillan wrote some reflections on his art.

As I review this broad-ranging collection of work, I am reminded of a basic tenet of my studio teaching, that drawing is a fundamental preparatory process for really seeing well--seeing to know and to understand. A re-discovery of the natural sense of looking. Drawing, in this context, intensifies the act of discovery and transference of graphic images to paper, and with character. In effect, the empathetic identification of the subjects rendered, whether animate or inanimate, bestows a life of its own. Does it shrug? Does it stand tall and defiant, or slump in resignation? A still-life set of bottles, books, fruit, drapes, become unique individual characters of uplifting shoulders, or squat masses, or dangling fabric on stage, exhibiting their unique presence as expressive forms. These drawings (spanning decades) represent, too, my personal learning and discovery, a motivational search for meaningful graphic images, sometimes caught at a casual glance, sometime more studied and analyzed. And sometimes carried over to be a potent metaphor in the finished canvas. The process I discovered generated an automatic interest in natural forms, found objects, unusual plant foliage, gnarled roots and tree trunks, weathered and discarded driftwood, a cove of tree-groupings along the roadside, tidal flatsam or sea-oats on sand dunes, ocean clouds, and of course, the human figure. All are demanding in their portrayal.¹⁸

Some have described McMillan as a master artist specifically because of the range of media styles he has mastered or the volume of work preserved over sixty years. Some view him as a master because of his ability to adapt varying styles, including abstraction, to support his stark artistic vision, one rooted in social realism. Others cite individual master works, several of which are reproduced in this catalogue. All would likely agree that McMillan's artistic mastery incorporates impeccable technique and superior skill, extensive training and education, pride in his family and his heritage and a willingness to see the humanity in others. In this light, James C. McMillan is a great humanist whose art will continue to engage those fortunate enough to discover him.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Interview with James McMillan, January 2011 and Larry Yip, *Rising from the Ruins: Pullman Porters and the Making of the Black Middle Class*, (New York: Henry Holt, 2004).
- 2 Marjorie B. Seapl, *Seeing America: Painting and Sculpture from the Collection of the Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester*, Rochester, N.Y.: U of Rochester Press, c2006), 244.
- 3 In the fall 1946 academic semester, Howard University enrolled 2,274 veterans. See Martin D. Jenkins, "Enrollment in Institutions of Higher Education for Negroes, 1946-47," *Journal of Negro Education* 16.2 (Spring 1947), 226.
- 4 Scott W. Baker, "From Freedman to Fine Arts," *A Proud Continuum: Eight Decades of Art at Howard University* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Gallery of Art, 2005), 80.
- 5 David Driskell attended Skowhegan in 1953 and Sylvia Snowden in 1964.
- 6 Interview with James McMillan, January 2005.
- 7 Interview with James McMillan, January 2005.
- 8 Stacy L. Morgan, *Rethinking Social Realism: African American Art and Literature, 1930-1953*, Athens and London, University of Georgia Press, 2004).
- 9 *Strange Fruit* was originally a poem written by Abel Meeropol in 1936 in reaction to the well-publicized lynching of Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith in Marion Indiana in 1930. Jazz and Blues singer Billie Holiday performed a musical rendition of *Strange Fruit* based on the poem.
- 10 Nina Kressner Cobb, "Richard Wright: Exile and Existentialism," *Phylon*, 40.4 (4th Qtr., 1979), 366-67.
- 11 "Washington's Little Paris," *Hue* (May 5, 1954), 58-62.
- 12 Ann Gibson, *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), 71.
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 Interview with James McMillan, January 2011. Lois Mailou Jones (1905-1988); see www.loismailoujones.com.
- 15 Brochure for 1970 exhibition, Invitational Exhibit, April 15-18, 1970, Bennett College.
- 16 Private correspondence of James C. McMillan, August, 1995.
- 17 Private correspondence of James C. McMillan, May, 1989.
- 18 Private correspondence of James C. McMillan, January, 2010.

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PORTRAITS IN PARIS

A February 2011 interview with artist James C. McMillan of Greensboro, North Carolina by his representative, Charlotte Sherman, co-founder of the Heritage Gallery in Los Angeles, California
CS: It is 1950 and you are in Paris, France. You just spent the last three years establishing the art department at Bennett College in Greensboro, North Carolina. What brought you to Paris then?

JM: I intended to go right after my summer study at the Skowhegan School in Maine, for which I was selected in the summer of 1947. One of 50 students from across the country, I had been recommended by my teacher and mentor, Lois Mailou Jones, at Howard University, who was an artist, too. This was Skowhegan's inaugural year and being the first African American to attend I didn't know what to expect. I studied with some of the most talented and respected teachers and students nationally and internationally, and I was able to develop independent relationships with them. I learned a lot about Paris from contacts I made there, and vowed to go.

CS: But you decided to teach instead?

JM: It was not my intention to return to North Carolina to live or to teach. While I was at Skowhegan I received a surprise call from President Jones of Bennett College for Women in Greensboro. He asked me to interview for the new position of art teacher and leading a new art department on campus. The short story is that although I was eager to go to Paris, I didn't have any money, any real contacts there, or a place to stay. During the interview he proposed a three-year commitment and I accepted. I had never taught before but I saw this as an unusual opportunity for a new graduate like me. And I felt I would be better situated for a sojourn to Paris later on. I would wait three years.

CS: What was the particular attraction of Paris for you?

JM: Professor Jones at Howard had attended Académie Julian in Paris previously and she nominated me for study there. You could only attend that academy with a formal invitation from the school, which required a recommendation. From my time in the Navy I had met veterans who knew about living in Europe and I decided if I wanted to be the best artist possible I would have to leave the U.S. I intended to live in Paris and leave North Carolina because of the intense racism in this country.

CS: What kind of environment did you expect and how did you manage? What kinds of encounters and different attitudes did you experience?

JM: I arrived in Lutezia, one of the original names for Paris, on the 200th anniversary of its birth. The city was celebrating and everyone was excited. I was left off the bus in front of Notre Dame. I didn't know anyone and I didn't have a place to stay. But I met strangers at every corner who directed me to the little hotels and lodgings. Everyone was very welcoming and I was enthralled. I was going to make the best of any opportunities and be open to the experiences that came my way.

CS: What about this city of light? The sounds—the artistic nightlife?

JM: Absolutely. This was a time of wonder and discovery, not only of Paris but of my new self. I lived on the Left Bank near the Sorbonne. I went to the popular cafés and coffee houses at night, such as Chez Inez, owned by an African American woman, and Café Dupont. Other artists and musicians—American expatriates, European newcomers, and French nationals were magnets to Paris.

I met the legendary clarinetist and saxophonist Sidney Bechet, who relocated to Paris the same year I arrived and was adopted by the French. I had a show at Chez Inez when Eartha Kitt was traveling with Orson Welles. She almost bought one of my paintings but she called me at the last minute to say she was leaving unexpectedly for Italy to start filming and could not stop at the café. I have many sketches of people I met in my personal collection.

The architecture and history amazed me. I made dozens of studies in ink and felt marker—actual exercises made on the spot called “quick drawings” of recognizable landmarks including Montmartre, L'Hotel de Ville, St. Germain des Pres, Moulin de Galette, and Notre Dame.

CS: Did you know what you wanted to focus on in Paris? Were you settled on being a painter?

JM: My summer at Skowhegan expanded my insights. I was so inspired that I wanted to explore everything anew through my advanced study at Académie Julian. I wanted to build on the



FIG. 21: LE CONCIERGE
felt marker drawing
1950
16" X 14"
Collection of the artist.



FIG. 22: ST. GERMAIN DE PRES, PARIS
felt marker drawing
1951
15" X 18"
Collection of the artist.

well-rounded art skills. I learned from my professors Lois Mailou Jones and James Porter at Howard: printmaking, block printing, photography, painting, drawing, even ceramics. I was introduced to the work of WPA artists at Howard. Teaching students so early in my career made me eager to extend myself in terms of materials and approaches to different styles. As I moved into more advanced study my abilities expanded and my enjoyment of different media increased.

CS: Did you feel isolated in North Carolina? How did Paris resonate with you, as an African American, or as an artist?

JM: Adding to my education and research and throughout my first years teaching, I learned about the work and activities of artists who were either based in or migrated to New York City, such as Charles Alston and Elizabeth Catlett. My professors and mentors Lois Mailou Jones and James Porter kept me informed about what was happening. And I was a mainstay at the Howard University library, where I also worked.

But Paris was the expansion of my acculturation in America. I realized that the work I had been doing up to that time was not acceptable in my own country. This was also during the time when across the South there was no such thing as an African American artist. The emergence of the Harlem Renaissance was an important part of my education at Howard as I learned from Jones and Porter. And black artists were trying to legitimize their role in American arts production. Living in Paris made me look at these factors and my background with new understanding and awareness.

CS: What would be your focus for expression, in terms of artistic form and style?

JM: After my experiences in the U.S. Navy, I knew that portraiture was the direction in which I wanted to go. I wanted to combine that form with my experience and others in America. That was a part of my drive in Paris. What I began to understand most clearly about my life, especially returning from the service, was the impact of racism. My two years in Paris, from 1950 to 1952—where I was accepted as an individual and as a black artist, marked the first time I was able to meet many others from different parts of the world. I learned about their living conditions and hardships. And my views about injustice and the place it occupied in a larger scope of universal humanism, was born.

I was drawn to portraiture early on as a student. But in Paris I became committed to portraying the human figure centrally in my art. The variation in Michelangelo's use of the human form in his classical portrait drawings, in contrast with his celestial paintings like *The Last Judgment*, where his forms were maturing over six years, helped to ground my perspective.

I have worked in many media—including drawing, painting, printmaking, sculpture, photography, mixed media, and illustration, throughout my career as an artist and teacher. This way I can accommodate the human figure in a variety of tones and textures for emotional effect. It represents humanity to me.

In Paris I worked from models and group figure studies for the nude drawing *The Weepers* (Fig. 41), where my distinct approach to figurative imagery is more apparent. I was introduced to comé crayon—the rich colorings deepen shading. I used comé for these drawings and several later works in the 1970s.

CS: *Racism Condemned*, a charcoal drawing (Fig. 40), portrays an arresting figure in the foreground, a lynching in the background. Tell me what factors decided the imagery, and your intentions.

JM: I was in the Café Dupont with a friend, Karen Heiberg—I did a quick pen and ink drawing of her knitting at the table that day (Fig. 37).

CS: That's a fun drawing. I know you do not consider it a portrait but the complex patterns of lines give it a two-dimensional look.

JM: Perhaps. One of my basic drawing principles is that lines move in and out of space continuously and drawings should reflect that and build on detail.

That day Karen was reading the back page of *The Herald Tribune*. Three black people had been lynched in Mississippi and Alabama. This was referred to in the European press as an American atrocity and was the impulse for several drawings. I drew the charcoal early during my stay in



FIG. 23: NOTRE DAME, PARIS
felt marker drawing
1951
15" X 18"
Collection of the artist.

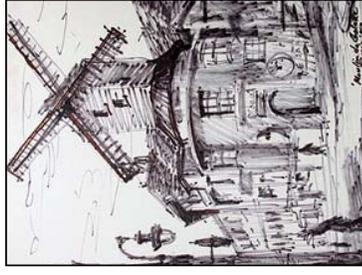


FIG. 24: MOULIN DE GALETTE
felt marker drawing
1951
14" X 16"
Collection of the artist.



FIG. 25:
L'HOTEL DE VILLE, PARIS
felt marker drawing
14" X 16"
Collection of the artist.

Paris. It was a certain thing I saw in a retrospective way as part of my Paris acclimation and expanded sense of humanity.

I have never seen a lynching. But annihilation is a constant factor in the back of the African American mind. I learned about lynching through reading newspapers and illustrations when I was a boy. My parents insisted I have a paper route. I was an avid reader and nothing escaped my notice. I learned more about lynching and the horrors of American life by lying on the bed unseen listening to my father, a Presbyterian minister, and my grandfather, a devout Baptist, argue on the front porch. Along with the graphic details of lynching appeared Jesse Helms's daily segregationist articles published before he became a Congress member. From the newspapers I was able to chart the invasions of Normandy and Poland as well, and I kept a map of their progress.

Of course, a charcoal drawing would naturally have dark and light shadows and tones that have nothing to do with racial categorizing. The foreground figure represents an attempt to compose an international face of humanity, with recognizable African qualities.

CS: *A psychological portrait, too. The head represents the mind, the intellect.*

JM: It is being dehumanized. This is an outburst against extreme exploitation, symbolized by lynching. I learned in Paris you could never be sure of anyone's origins. I was curious about one of my classmates, who was brown-skinned, and asked her where she was from. She said, "Georgia." And I replied, "I know Georgia." She stopped me abruptly, saying she was from Georgia, in Russia, not America. I was amazed because I never knew there were brown-skinned people in Russia. Any human can be a condemner of racism.

The humanist is holding a sphere representing the world. Racism is worldwide and the focus is the world. Imprinted on the world is a portrait of Africa, where the system of dehumanization began, with slavery.

CS: *You mentioned the racism you left behind and the new acceptance you embraced in Paris.*

JM: I grew up in the South, but not in a rural, stereotyping environment—as many believe characterizes black southern existence at any period. In Sanford, North Carolina, my parents were educators and activists in the 1930s and 1940s. I had little interaction with whites and no direct confrontations. The community focus was on vigilant protection. But my father was head of the NAACP. The Ku Klux Klan regularly threatened him so he always kept a hunting rifle nearby.

I attended a two-room schoolhouse with able black teachers who cared. But the township swimming pool was reserved for whites. We only had the rock quarry, which was dangerous, and I was not allowed to go there. But older boys were defiant and tried to swim. Once, one of them jumped in and died. These walls of protection marked rigid segregation that I have experienced deeply. This is part of what I call the overlay—even with integration and diversity—the effects and impact of racism are indelible for African Americans in the U.S., and for other minorities. The same kind of overlay affects artistic expression—an inevitable, categorical racialism of artistic production.

Remember, I came to Paris during a time of optimism. World War II had been over for a few years. The French people, newly liberated, were trying to reclaim their livelihoods and invent their future. And their commingling with expatriates, especially artists, was a key factor then. We influenced them as much as they influenced us. Regardless of race, many refused to return to a dehumanizing America, where their production was perceived as without merit. Famous or unknown, they resisted and stayed.

CS: *Reclining Nude is a dynamic charcoal drawing. And it has a cubist dimension. Was cubism a style you embraced?*

JM: *Reclining Nude* [Fig. 42] reflected my growing interest in African sculpture and form, and was brought to light by my immersion in new ideas. As a trained artist I paid special attention to perspective. But in this composition I was experimenting with planar aspects, trying to resolve light, shadow, and space, in relation to the figure. I needed to incorporate my own designs

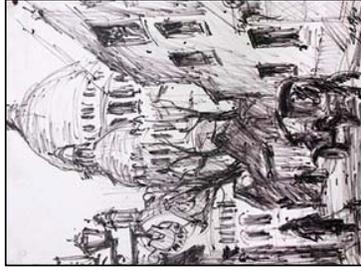


FIG. 27:
MONTMARTRE W/SACRE COEUR, PARIS
felt marker drawing
1951
16" X 14"
Collection of the artist.

about what a figure could be. I was pleased with how it turned out.

I was impressed with the artists who were experimenting in Paris at that time. As a young artist I would spend time studying many of the works left in the Académie by noted artists, like Cézanne. But several shops and cafés away from the Académie displayed enormous African sculptures, and there was occurring what I would call a rediscovery in cubism. Picasso was living in Paris then and so was Matisse, who was producing cut-outs. We knew what they were involved in from small newsletters circulated by artists, and at newsstands. I remember one had a statement by Matisse. He encouraged artists to know themselves, not to mimic anyone but develop individually. This got my attention and made me think more about cubism as an element.

CS: *Did you ever connect with Picasso there?*

JM: An invitation from Picasso arrived—I don't know how it found its way to me. He actively sought meetings with African American artists and was known to be interested in our views, although we were few in number. This was about the same time that African American expatriates were engaging Europeans about emerging civil rights activities gaining momentum in the U.S. I was glad to be invited but I didn't respond. My French was not at the level I wanted. But many times I wished I had gone to meet him. I did meet the writer Richard Wright, who I would find in the cafés with other artists. He lived near me, as did James Baldwin, and Wright would bring his daughter sometimes.

CS: *You were exposed to so many new ideas and possibilities. Did you consider adopting any one style for your art making, in Paris or in the future?*

JM: In Paris I realized that my associates and contemporaries had been caught up in what I describe as the new stylistic aspects that were popular—abstract expressionism. That was an important focus for many of my colleagues in Paris, especially other Americans. I appreciated abstract expressionism and felt that Jackson Pollock's work, especially, expressed strong humanistic values in the emotional qualities of his brushwork.

But I felt that I needed to learn and advance myself in as many of the styles afforded me. I didn't believe that any one style or movement could fully define the subjects that I was interested in, or the methods and techniques that I wanted to express. And I resolved to become as proficient in and knowledgeable of as many styles and movements as I could. That included abstract expressionism. I was very attracted to surrealism, and studied Salvador Dalí and (Giorgio de) Chirico, and cubism, as I mentioned before.

I related to social realism. One of the artists I admired for his consciousness and portrait expressions was the painter Hughie Lee-Smith, who was ten years older. I met him during his major exhibition at Howard University.

His direction was inspirational and I identified with his main theme— isolation, in all the natural and surreal aspects. But my art has been about understanding all the styles and movements.

CS: *You were there sixty years ago. Is there any memory that has stayed with you?*

JM: I had found new lodging in a high-rise overlooking the Boulevard St. Michel—it was one of my first felt marker quick drawings. I noticed that everyday, townspeople and some of my student colleagues going to and from work, would leave flowers along a massive stone wall. I did not know why. I saw patterns of black pockmarks covering the entire wall. They looked like machine gun shots. I was told that this was where fighters for the liberation of Paris were hunted down, lined up, and shot during the Nazi occupation. Many were young people, massacred in retaliation for their resistance. Their deaths were to serve as an example. Now hundreds of townspeople were placing flowers as markers of remembrance for their bravery.

I felt deeply how injustice spread far beyond my own experience of racism in America. It was simply the human condition, reflected in everyday occurrences throughout the world.

I was a young man of twenty-five when I arrived in Paris. It was a real opening of my mind, and I felt reborn: my senses, ideas, and way of being in the world were transformed forever. As a result, I left Paris with a radically different portrait of myself and my art.



FIG. 28:
LUXEMBOURG PALACE, PARIS
felt marker drawing
1951
14" X 18"
Collection of the artist.

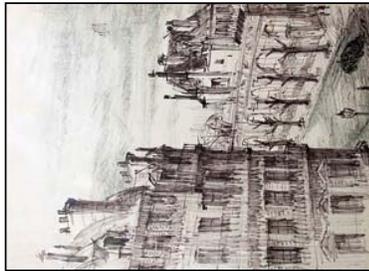


FIG. 26:
LUXEMBOURG GARDENS FROM WINDOW
felt marker drawing
1951
30½" X 24"
Collection of the artist.

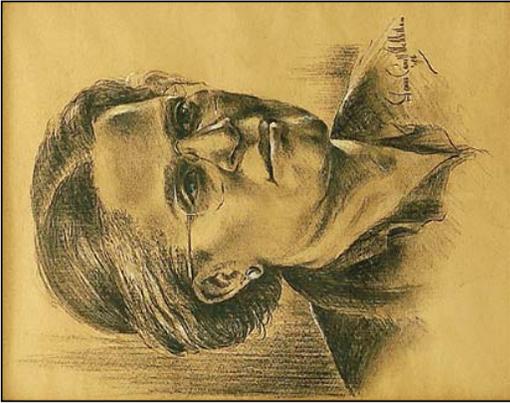


FIG. 29: PORTRAIT OF MOTHER, charcoal drawing, 1946, 24" X 19 1/2", Collection of Patrick A. Bradford.



FIG. 31: SELF-PORTRAIT AS AN ARTIST, oil on canvas, 1948, 16" X 12", Collection of Robert E. Holmes.

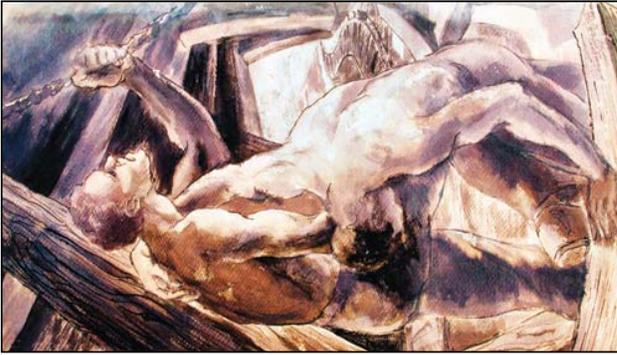


FIG. 30: RESCUE, ink wash and pastel, 1948, 22" X 12", Collection of the artist.



FIG. 32: HILDA, BENNETT STUDENT, charcoal drawing, 1949, 21 1/2" X 16 3/4", Collection of Patrick A. Bradford.



FIG. 33: STUDY FOR AFRICAN SCENE, pencil drawing, 1947, 10 1/2" X 10", Collection of Patrick A. Bradford.



FIG. 35: HAND STUDY, pen and ink wash, 1951, 15" X 13", Collection of the artist.



FIG. 34: NATIVITY, Ceramic, 1952, 9 3/4" X 13 1/4" X 2", Collection of Virginia State University.



FIG. 36: LITTLE ANNIE WITH MOTHER, charcoal drawing, 1951, 24" X 18", Collection of the artist.

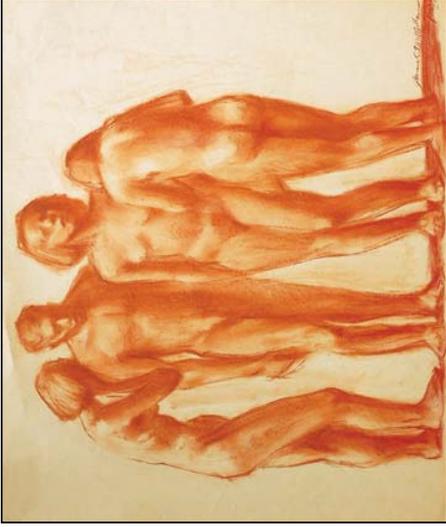


FIG. 41: THE WEEPERS, red conté crayon, 1950/51, 19" X 20", Collection of Patrick A. Bradford.



FIG. 42: RECLINING NUDE, black conté crayon, 1950, 18" X 24", Collection of the artist.

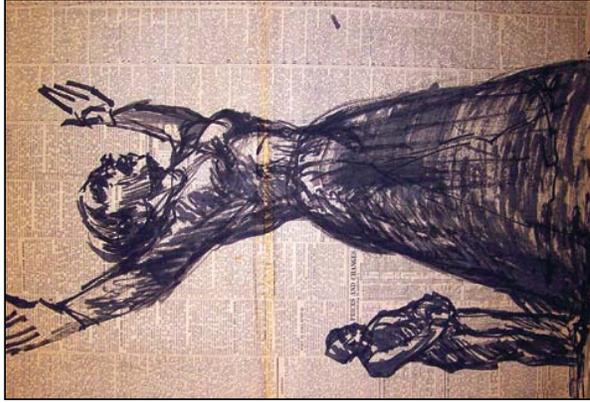


FIG. 38: HALLELUJAH, brush and ink on newsprint, 1950, 14" X 24", Collection of the artist.



FIG. 40: PARIS SUBURB WITH TREES, ink wash drawing, 1951, 20" X 12", Collection of Robert E. Holmes.



FIG. 37: AU CAFÉ, PARIS ("KAREN"), pen and ink, 1950, 13" X 11", Collection of the artist.



FIG. 39: PARIS SIDEWALK CAFÉ, pen, ink and marker, 1951, 14" X 16", Collection of the artist.

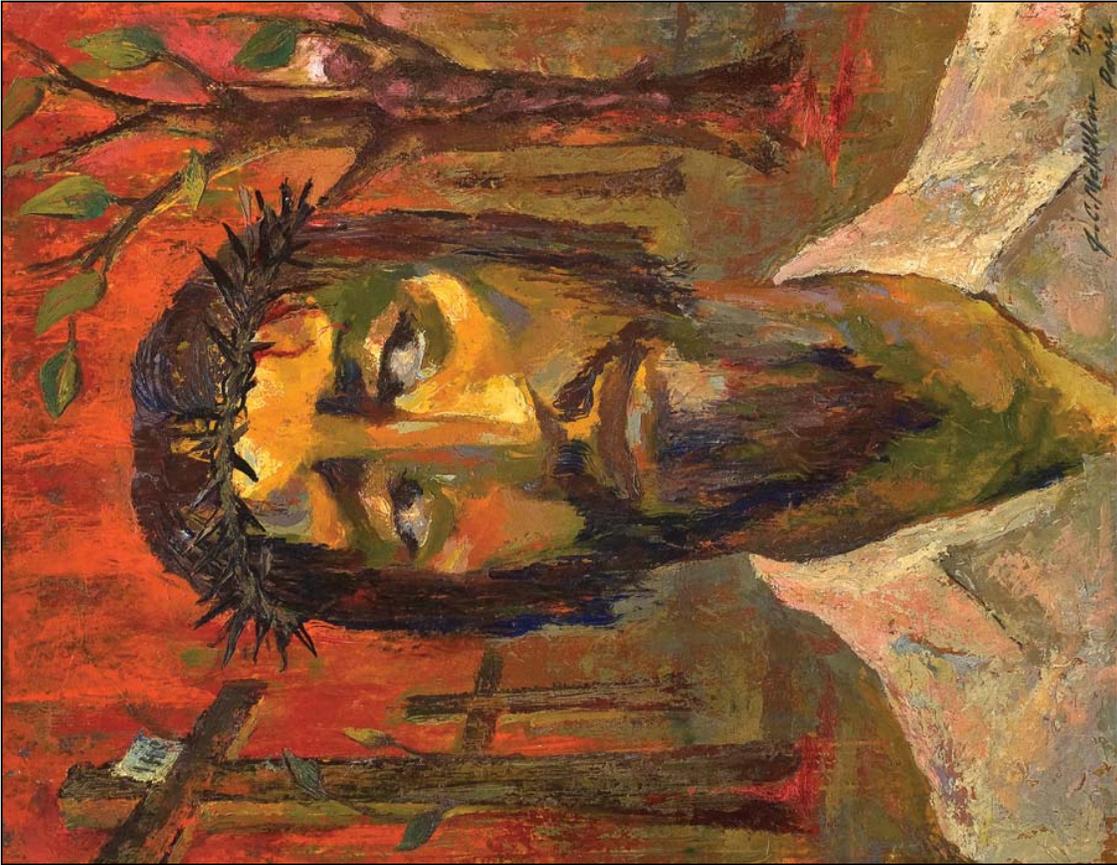


FIG. 43: WEEPING CHRIST, (originally titled **WEEPING CHRIST AS MODERN MAN**), oil on board, 1951, 25" X 18", Collection of Robert E. Holmes.



FIG. 44: RACISM CONDEMNED, charcoal drawing, 1951, 24" X 19", Collection of Robert E. Holmes.

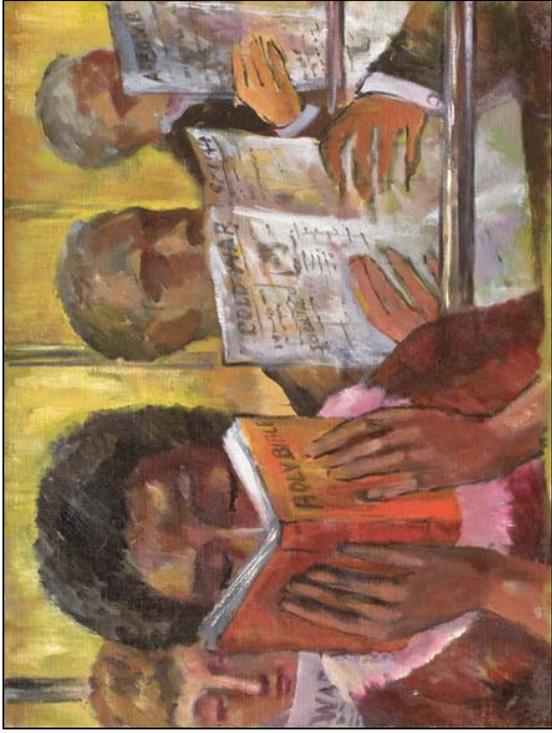


FIG. 45: COLD WAR, oil on canvas, early 1950s, 18" X 24", Collection of Robert E. Holmes.



FIG. 46: BROKEN DOLL, pen/ink wash drawing, 1954, 9½" X 7½", Collection of Robert E. Holmes.



FIG. 47: HOME-YARD VISTA, oil on canvas board, 1957, 20" X 16", Collection of Robert E. Holmes.



FIG. 48: HOLOCAUST/APARTHEID, oil on canvas, 1957, 24" X 50", Collection of Arthur Primas.



FIG. 49: MOTHER AND CHILD, oil on masonite, 1952, 27" X 21½", Collection of Patrick A. Bradford.



FIG. 50: I WILL SURVIVE, oil on masonite, 1959, 36" X 24", Collection of Arthur Primas.



FIG. 51: THE PRISONER, charcoal drawing, 1958, 31" X 23", Collection of Arthur Primas.



FIG. 52: SELF PORTRAIT, sepia ink/wash drawing, 1958, 18" X 12", Collection of Robert E. Holmes.

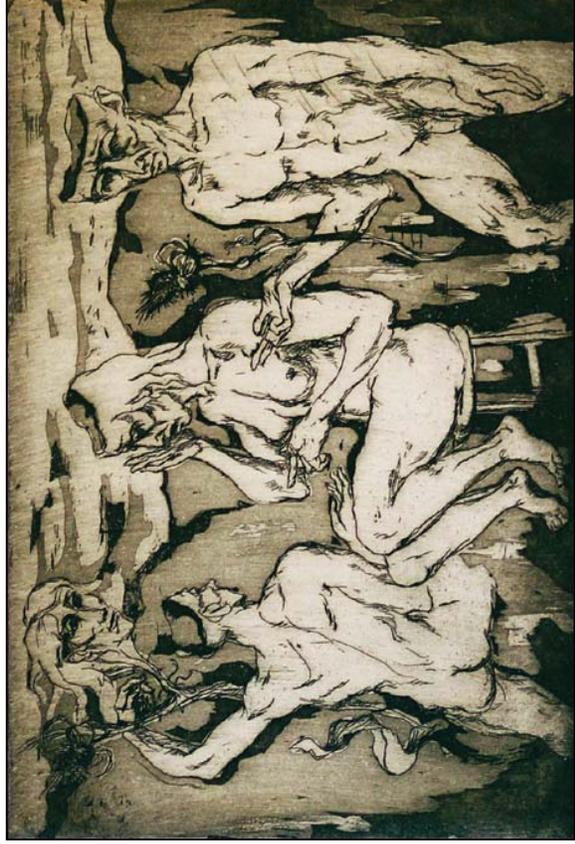


FIG. 53: POLITICOS, etching, 1961, 16 1/2" X 12", Collection of Patrick A. Bradford.



FIG. 54: DARK CORNER, oil on canvas, 1961, 36" X 28",
Collection of Patrick A. Bradford.



FIG. 55: COMPLEX INTERCHANGE, lithograph, 1961,
18" X 13", Collection of the artist.



**FIG. 57:
CONDEMNED
INNOCENCE**,
black conté
crayon,
1967, 25" X 19",
Collection of
Robert E. Holmes.



FIG. 56: HOUSE CRANE, etching, 1960, 9½" X 6½",
Collection of the artist.



FIG. 58: TENEBROUS VOICES, acrylic on canvas, 1968, 57" X 42½", Collection of North Carolina Central University Art Museum.



FIG. 59: THE JUGGLER, watercolor and ink wash, 1961, 24" X 14½", Collection of Robert E. Holmes.



FIG. 60: RACISM UNLEASHED, pen and ink wash, 1960, 16" X 20", Collection of the artist.

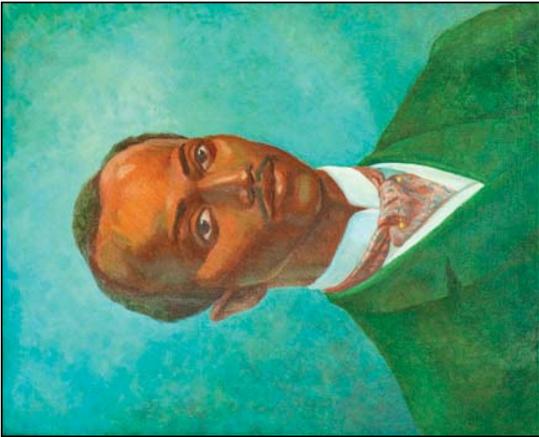


FIG. 61: PORTRAIT OF JAMES EPHRAIM MCGIRT (1874 - 1930), oil on canvas, 1990, Approx. 36" x 28".

African American poet, editor and short story writer.

This commissioned work is displayed in the McGirt-Horton branch of the Greensboro, N.C. Public Library.



FIG. 62: FRUIT TREES, ink wash and pastel, 1968, 22" X 27", Collection of the artist.



FIG. 63: NATURE EMBRACED, woodcut, 1960, 20" X 16", Collection of the artist.

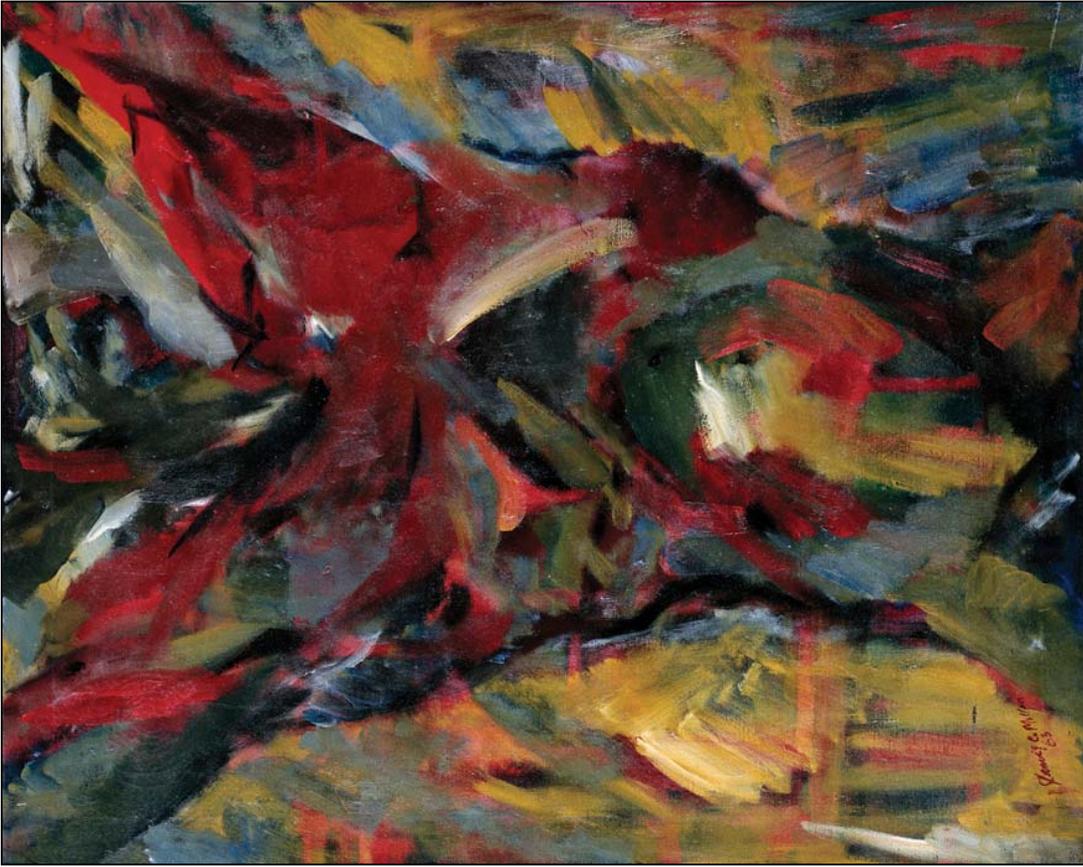


FIG. 64: BREAKING FREE, oil on masonite, 1963, 30" X 24",
Collection of Arthur Primas.



FIG. 65: THREE SOUTH CAROLINA STUDENTS, sepia ink/wash drawing, 1968, 19" X 23½",
Collection of Robert E. Holmes.



FIG. 66: CAROLINA DUNES, black conté crayon drawing, 1977, 28" X 32", Collection of the artist.



FIG. 67: CEDAR LANE, black conté crayon, 1977, 27" X 32", Collection of the artist.

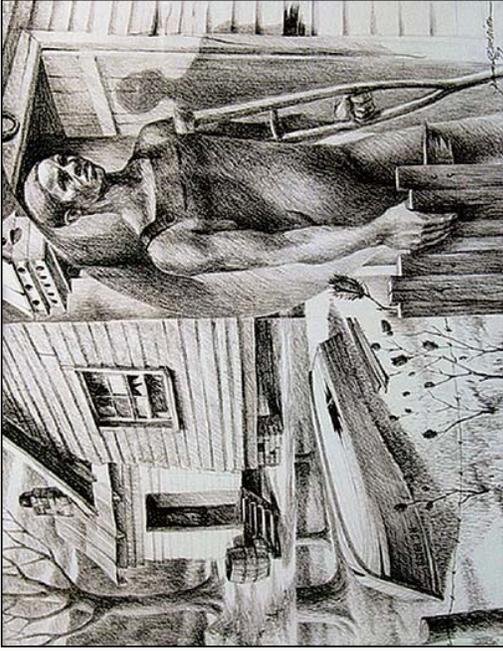


FIG. 68: WINDSOR COMPOSITE, conté crayon, 1977, 19" X 23½", Collection of Guilford College Art Gallery.

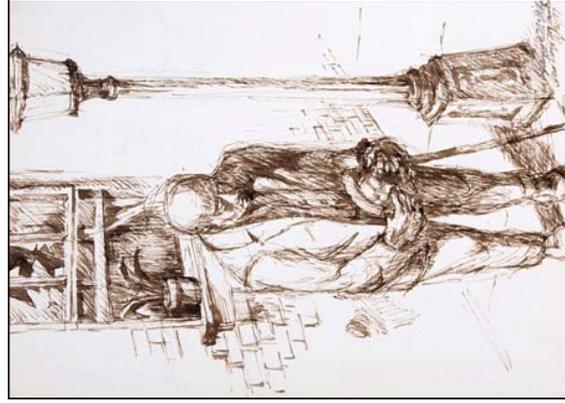


FIG. 69: OUR DAYS ARE NUMBERED, pen and ink drawing, 1977, 10½" X 13¾", Collection of the artist.



FIG. 70: TIME, sepia/pen and ink drawing, 1979, 6" X 4", Collection of Robert E. Holmes.

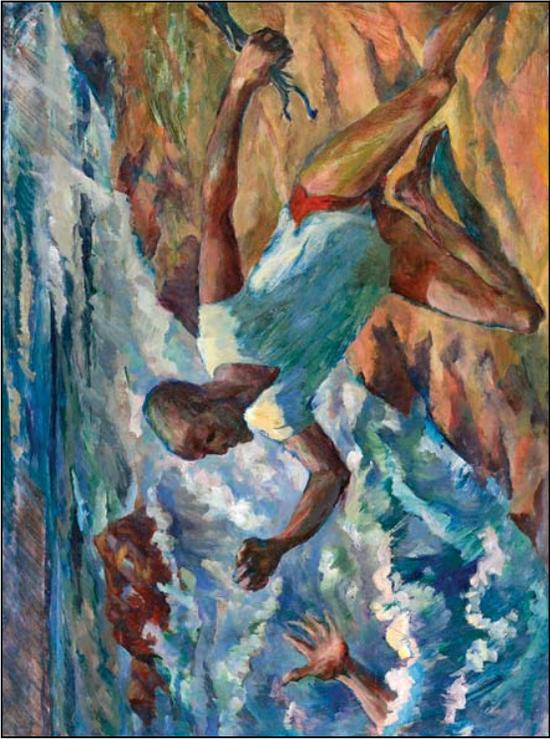


FIG. 71: AM I MY BROTHER'S KEEPER? oil on canvas, 1986, 30" X 38", Collection of Arthur Primas.



FIG. 72: RUBBER PLANT WITH BROKEN VASE, conté crayon, 1979, 32" X 27", collection of the artist.



FIG. 73: FIGURE COMPOSITION (THE ADMIRER), conté crayon, 1979, 32" X 27", Collection of the artist.



FIG. 74: IO BIRD polychrome wood construction, 1991, 20" X 13" X 31", Collection of Robert E. Holmes.

JAMES C. McMILLAN (b. 1925)

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2011 The Art of James C. McMillan: Loss and Redemption - A Retrospective, African American Atelier, Inc. Greensboro, NC
 - 2011 The Art of James C. McMillan: Elegance and Line - A Drawing Retrospective, Steele Hall Art Gallery, Bennett College Art Gallery, Greensboro, NC
 - 2009 Loss and Redemption: The Art of James C. McMillan, The Bakersfield Museum of Art, Bakersfield, CA
 - 2006 James C. McMillan: Retrospective Images and Impressions, H.C. Taylor Gallery, North Carolina A&T State University, Greensboro, NC
 - 1996 Eye, Hand, Mind Spirit, the Art of James C. McMillan, Hége Gallery, Guilford College, Greensboro, NC
 - 1981 Landscape Paintings/Drawings, Guilford College, Greensboro, NC
 - 1977 Lyceum Series, Winston-Salem State University, Winston-Salem, NC
 - 1977 Solo Exhibition, Guilford College Art Gallery, Greensboro, NC
- ### SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS
- 2009 23rd Annual African American Arts Festival, African American Atelier, Inc., Greensboro, NC
 - 2008 Living African American Artists of North Carolina, Greenville Museum of Art, Greenville, NC
 - 2002 Three Perspectives on 20th Century Black American Family Life: Art by James C. McMillan, Alex Smoot and Isabelle Lutteroft, Green Hill Gallery, Greensboro, NC
 - 1989 Recent Afro-American Art in North Carolina, Chapel Hill Preservation Society, Chapel Hill, NC
 - 1987 Know Thy Art, NC Central University Art Museum, Durham, NC
 - 1986-89 Outdoor Sculpture Invitational, Green Hill Gallery, Greensboro, NC
 - 1985 Contemporary African American Art: A Celebration, Greensboro Artists League, Greensboro, NC
 - 1985 23rd Annual Competition for NC Artists, Fayetteville Museum of Art, Fayetteville, NC
 - 1983-85 Triad Black Artists Invitational, Milton Rhodes Gallery, Winston-Salem, NC
 - 1984 Beyond Africa: Cultural Influences in American Art, Greensboro Cultural Center, Greensboro, NC
 - 1984 Center for Creative Leadership Group Show, Greensboro, NC
 - 1984 African Art Show 1980-1984, National Arts Club, New York, NY
 - 1983 Echoes of Africa, Virginia Beach Art Center, Virginia Beach, VA
 - 1981 6th Annual Afro-American Show, Theater Gallery, High Point, NC
 - 1981 Two-Man Sculpture Show, Univ. of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, NC
 - 1980 2nd Annual Black Artists/Piedmont Triad Show, Greensboro College, Greensboro, NC
 - 1980 1st Annual Black Artist Invitational, Milton Rhodes Gallery, Winston-Salem, NC
 - 1987 Guilford Art Faculty Show, Green Hill Gallery, Greensboro, NC
 - 1984 Boniforth Regional Conference, Oneil 1984-stox, Wigginsville Beach, NC
 - 1984 Retrospective Show/Lecture, Black History Week, Guilford College, Greensboro, NC
 - 1983 District of Columbia Art-Association Show, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC
 - 1982 Group Show, Sawtooth Gallery, Winston-Salem, NC
 - 1980 Weatherspoon Gallery, Art on Paper Annual University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Greensboro, NC
 - 1971 Black Artists in New England I & II, Museum of the National Center of Afro-American Artists, Boston, MA
 - 1968 Salute to the Barnett Aden Gallery, Murphy Fine Arts Center, Morgan State College, Baltimore, MD
 - 1964 Corcoran Area Show, Washington, DC
 - 1963 Smithsonian Institution Regional Exhibition, Washington, DC
 - 1961 Raymond Duncan Galerie, Paris, France
 - 1961 Salon de l'Armeé, Paris, France
 - 1961 Franco-American Fellowship International Group Exhibition, Paris, France
 - 1961 Showing at Chez Inez, Paris, France

- 1947 Graphic Arts and Drawings by Negro Artists, Howard University Gallery of Art, Washington, DC

COLLECTIONS (selective)

- Bennett College
- North Carolina Central University Art Museum
- Guilford College Art Gallery
- Virginia State University

COMMISSIONS

- 1996 Portrait of Judge Erita Alexander-Ralston, Guilford Co. Court House, Greensboro, NC
- 1991 Portrait of James McGill, Greensboro Branch Library, Greensboro, NC
- 1977 Mural Commission, Providence Baptist Church, Greensboro, NC
- 1952 Catholic University Master of Fine Arts Sculpture Commission, Winesboro, VA

SPECIAL COMMITTEES

- 1998-99 Member, Greensboro Library Arts Commission for Sculpture & Murals
- 1995 Member, Selection Committee of NC Asheville Zoo Sculpture Competition

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- 1990-91 President/Co-founder, African American Atelier, Inc.
- Greensboro Cultural Center, Greensboro, NC
- 1980 Eminent Scholar in Fine Arts/Visiting Artist, Virginia State University, Petersburg, VA
- 1976-1988 Professor of Art, Art Department, Guilford College, Greensboro, NC
- 1969-76 Chair, Art Department, Guilford College, Greensboro, NC
- Summer 1972 Director, London Fine Arts Seminars Program (European Tour), Guilford College, Greensboro, NC
- 1970-75 Director, New York Fine Arts Seminar, New York, NY
- Summer 1968 Co-Director, Seminars Abroad Art Study (European Tour) Guilford College, Greensboro, NC
- 1966-68 Chair, Associate Professor, Art Department, Bennett College, Greensboro, NC
- 1955-56 Special Services Dir. Arts/Crafts, Headquarters, Army Security Agency, Arlington, VA
- 1954-55 Co-Owner, Ger-Mar, Art Studio, Washington, DC
- 1954 Commercial Artist, Art Designers Studio, Washington, DC
- 1952-53 Chair/Associate Professor, Art Department, Bennett College, Greensboro, NC
- 1947-50 Chair/Associate Professor, Art Department, Bennett College, Greensboro, NC
- 1946-48 Art Instructor/Illustrator, U.S. Navy, Naval Air Station, Barbers Point, HI

AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

- 2006 Betty Cone Medal of Arts Award, United Arts Council of Greensboro, Greensboro, NC

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

- Fousheer, Ola Maeie, Art in North Carolina: Episodes and Developments, 1958-1970, 1972
- Spradling, Mary Mace, In Black and White: A Guide to Magazine Articles, Newspaper Articles, and Books Concerning More Than 15,000 Black Individuals and Groups, Detroit, Mich: Gale Research Co, 1980
- African American Arts Directory, Raleigh, NC: North Carolina Arts Council, 1986
- Regional Black Arts Directory 1983, Atlanta, Ga.: Southern Arts Federation, 1983
- Who's Who in Black America (since 1979)

EDUCATION

- 1947 Bachelor of Arts (Art), Howard University, Washington, DC
- 1947 Summer Fellow, Skowhegan School of Art, Skowhegan, ME
- 1950-51 Certificate, Académie Julian, Paris, France
- 1952 Master of Fine Arts (Sculpture), Catholic University, Washington, DC
- 1958-61 Dantforth Fellow, Doctoral Study (Painting), Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY



WWW.JAMESCMCMILLAN.COM

I have some difficulty in defining myself regionally, let alone as a "southern" artist per se. Though, I confess a pervasive saturation of emotional recall throughout those years, that filter ideas and issues of esthetic consideration. I have the impression, too, through broad contact with fellow artists of national and international persuasion, that there is considerable concurrence. Needless to say, with such an amalgam of experience coupled with diverse formal exposure, I am uncomfortable with the "southern" label. My art seems to reach backward, forward, and primarily inward for meaning and expression, including immediate family and ancestral references, "primitive" cultures and issues affecting the human condition. In my own work I feel quite comfortable in the use of natural imagery, though my professional evolution has moved toward abstraction. Regarding post-modern ideologies and imagery, I have reacted with a sense of euphoric relief, and a breath of fresh air, to the whole of visual art.

Private correspondence of James C. McMillan, August, 1999.



\$8.00

