

## REVIEWS INDEX

### On View

Washington, D.C.  
by Curtia James ..... 26

### Washington, D.C.

John McQueen  
at Renwick Gallery ..... 28

### Pennsylvania

Gender Engendered  
at Community Education Center ..... 28

Bob Bingham  
at Chatham College Gallery ..... 29

### New York

Ursula von Rydingsvard  
at Storm King Art Center ..... 29

### North Carolina

Jon Meyer  
at Fayetteville Museum of Art ..... 30

### South Carolina

Painting Self-Evident: Evolutions in Abstraction  
at Gibbes Museum of Art ..... 30

### California

Chris Burden  
at Lannan Foundation ..... 31

### Chicago

Frances Whitehead  
at Dart Gallery ..... 31

Risa Sekiguchi  
at Chicago Cultural Center ..... 32

Patrick Tosani  
at The Art Institute of Chicago ..... 32

Liviu Mocan  
at Columbia College ..... 32

Bill Traylor  
at Carl Hammer Gallery ..... 33

Alfredo Jaar  
at Museum of Contemporary Art ..... 33

### Ohio

Alice Weston  
at Museum Center at the Union Terminal ... 34

Jane Berger  
at William Busta Gallery ..... 34

### Illinois

The American West  
at Lakeview Museum ..... 35

Dennis Oppenheim  
at Illinois State University ..... 35

### Michigan

Expressive Visions and Exquisite Images Part II:  
Michigan Artists  
at Meadow Brook Art Gallery ..... 36

David Fludd  
at Sherry Washington Gallery ..... 36

### Missouri

Archie Scott Gobber, Eric Lindveit  
at Gallery V and Associates ..... 37

### Washington

Roger Shimomura  
at Greg Kucera Gallery ..... 37

## ON VIEW

### WASHINGTON, D.C.

by Curtia James

In Washington, very often, things narrow down to black and white. I have found that the people, the politics, and the economics of this city, for all its cosmopolitan atmosphere, are very often defined and constrained by the factor of race. The arts—particularly the visual arts—are no exception.

So when given the opportunity to review the exhibitions here during the month of May, I felt compelled to devote my energy to the successes of black artists; the frequently invisible, neglected, and too often segregated group of achievers who struggle more than most to share their views. The city is, after all, 65 percent black, but visiting the many exhibition spaces in and around Washington, one would hardly know it. Yet, each month, thankfully, shows open that reflect a cognizant effort to open wider the doors of opportunity for black artists.

What I discovered, however, despite such glimmers of welcome enlightenment, were exhibitions devoted primarily to the works of nationally and locally recognized black artists; institutions and curators enamored with the successful but conservatively guarded in taking chances on their emerging counterparts. I found it disappointing that in a city so fertile in visual arts outlets, including a strong network of alternative spaces, that there were not more avenues in which both established and emerging black artists could thrive. The recent economic downswing hasn't helped. As financial woes have plagued various galleries, risks taken on newcomers, both black and white, have been curtailed. Yet I wonder, in good times and bad, must the presence of the heavily acclaimed, in D.C. or anywhere, overshadow or prohibit the rise of the largely unapplauded? How can the total health of a community of black artists be measured when its younger practitioners are so often excluded?

In all fairness, the past season has not been without its highlights: There was the show "Visions and Spirits: The Cosmic Dance in African-American Art" which appeared at the Ellipse Arts Center in Arlington, Virginia, and featured, among others, multimedia artists Viola Burley Leak, Al Smith, and Renee Stout, three local artists who are slowly, steadily achieving recognition. Also of note was Joyce Wellman and Stephanie Pogue's show of works on paper at Howard University's art gallery, which joined two printmakers for their expertise within the medium, not simply for their race. As I made the rounds of the May shows, my reaction to the black presence was mixed. While I felt the absence of work by lesser-known artists, I was inspired by the unparalleled vision and endurance revealed in the work on view.

At the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (Independence Ave. at Seventh St. SW, 202/357-2700), I was entranced by a retrospective exhibition honoring Washington, D.C.-born sculptor Martin Puryear; an eloquent survey of two decades of the artist's freestanding and wall-mounted abstrac-

## REVIEWERS

Mary McCoy is an artist and the Washington, D.C. editor of the *NAE*. Donald Chant Bohn is the Philadelphia editor of the *NAE*. Christie Strub is a painter living in Pittsburgh. Tom Cszasz is a Philadelphia-based artist and writer. Clarence Morgan is a painter and professor of art at University of Minnesota. Mark Packer is associate professor of philosophy at Wofford College, South Carolina. Daniel Veneciano is a Los Angeles-based artist, writer, curator, and advisory board member of the Vietnamese-American Photography Association. Deborah Wilk is the Midwest editor of the *NAE*. Nancy H. Zwick is an artist living in Chicago. Jason Edward Kaufman is an art historian living in New Jersey. Edward McCullough is an artist and writer. Kristen Brooke Schleifer is a freelance writer living in Chicago. Marcelo Lima is an artist and writer. Maureen Bloomfield is a freelance writer living in Cincinnati. Douglas Utter is a painter and writer living in Cleveland. Karl Moehl is the Illinois editor of the *NAE*. Elaine Klein is a freelance arts writer. Gilda Snowden is a Michigan artist. Peter von Ziegesar is a freelance writer living in Kansas City, Missouri. Bruce Barcott is a staff writer for *The Seattle Weekly*.

tions. The retrospective originally opened at the Art Institute of Chicago last fall, and is scheduled to continue on to Los Angeles and Philadelphia following its extended stop at the Hirshhorn. Here, slightly abridged, it included 38 of Puryear's works—expansive, poetic assemblages of various woods, steel, and rawhide, among other media—that earned him both the Grand Prize at the São Paulo Biennial and a MacArthur Fellowship in 1989. The sculptures, subtly reminiscent of plants and animals, chronicle his post-Minimalist training and devotion to craftsmanship and are charmingly personified by such understated titles as *Bask*, *Dream of Pairing*, *Lurk*, and even *Sharp* and *Flat*.

A few blocks away at Zenith Gallery (413 Seventh St. NW, 202/783-2963) painter Robert Freeman's show included several scenes from his "After Nine" series of an inviting garden party where many black couples, elegantly adorned for a night out, converse and effervesce and move seductively, it seems, toward some undisclosed source of entertainment. Through these figurative, heavily impastoed paintings, Freeman, a native Washingtonian and artist-in-residence and painting instructor at the Noble and Greenough School in Dedham, Massachusetts, epitomizes the mores of his sociable hometown, where such engagements are so common. Yet, Freeman also unmasks his subjects, subtly revealing the self-consciousness, awkwardness, and mute uncertainties that, like conversation, circulate amongst them. This discomfort is evident as a woman shyly braces herself against her escort, as a cigarette quivers between carefully manicured fingers, or through the almost audible twitter of nervous laughter that plays on a passerby's lips. Freeman's show deftly balanced the shimmering, albeit awkward, opulence evident in these paintings with samplings from his "10,000 Shields and Spears" series, which depicts armed, semi-nude warriors, their weaponry, like the jewels in "After Nine," serving as a formidable defense.

Washington's suburbs often play host to an array of artists at all points in their careers. Reflective of this, just outside the city the Emerson Gallery (1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean, VA, 703/790-0123) advanced recognition of Washington-based painter Sylvia Snowden, whose emotive, aggressively impastoed works were afforded a loving moment in the sun. The artist's first solo show in the area in five years included 25 recent abstractions, single- and multi-paneled paintings on unprimed canvases and burlap she slathered with acrylics, their primary colors

both intermixed and left pure in a combusive brew. The gutsiness unleashed in these works is rooted in a series of quilt paintings Snowden completed in 1989 and 1990, where squared, raked fields of color emerge from sultry backgrounds, commemorating the security and memory of her family and her grandmother's handmade quilts. Reflecting physical prowess and spirituality, adventuresomeness as well as fundamental humanness, the show bridged Snowden's interest in the intricacies of life's struggles and aptly connected her work with the tradition of colorist expansion that has reigned in the District since the emergence of the Washington color school in the early 1960s.

Vital to an overview of the city from a black viewer's perspective was a trip to the Anacostia Museum (1901 Fort Pl. SE, 202/287-3382), the Smithsonian's branch dedicated to preserving the African-American experience in the South. I was enthralled by "To Achieve These Rights: The Struggle for Equality and Self Determination in the District of Columbia, 1791-1978," an emotional tribute to the fight blacks in the city have waged for freedom from slavery, the right to vote in national elections, and to end segregation. The exhibition included a register recording blacks incarcerated in the city from 1848 until after the Civil War began, in which slaves were categorized either as runaways or to be held for "safe keeping," and a recording of opera singer Marian Anderson's 1939 performance at the Lincoln Memorial to an integrated audience after the Daughters of the American Revolution barred her use of Constitution Hall. Amid a Ku Klux Klan hood and petitions calling for a boycott of department stores accused of discriminating at their lunch counters were reminders of persistent defiance and the dignified fight that the residents of the capital have waged to conquer Jim Crow and to topple resistance to the city's efforts to achieve home rule and statehood, more contemporary struggles that were also, appropriately, depicted.

Another important view of the black experience was "Songs of My People" (Corcoran Gallery of Art, 17th St. and New York Ave. NW, 202/638-3211), a show I unfortunately missed in Washington but was able to see later this summer in Atlanta at the Atlanta College of Art Gallery during the city's annual National Black Arts Festival. The show gathered 50 black photographers from around the country to unveil contemporary images of the African-American community, from fathers and their children to black cowboys, performers, and common folks. Despite my anticipation, I found that



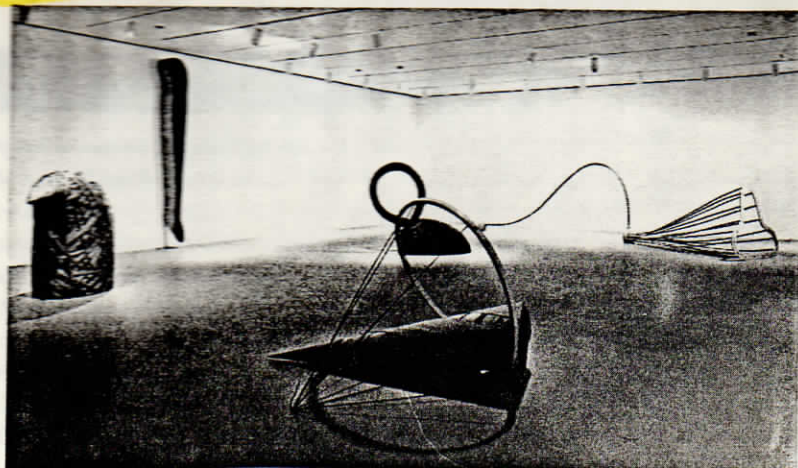
SYLVIA SNOWDEN, "J.M. Burns III," acrylic on canvas, 78" x 60", 1991. Photo by Jason Horowitz.

the exhibition unfortunately relied too heavily on predictable, even neatly compartmentalized portrayals of the black experience in America. Photographic experimentation and innovation yielded to seemingly safe approaches or more traditional narratives. Abstract interpretations of definitions of blackness bowed, painfully, to the mundane. I left the exhibition, which was virtually mobbed with anxious viewers, feeling, as perhaps some of them would as well, that despite the stunning variety of talent assembled, somehow the show had let me down. Such a proliferation of black imagery in a city so eager to identify with its own, however, somewhat assuaged my disappointment.

The Art Barn Gallery (2401 Tilden St. NW, 202/244-2482), nestled in Rock Creek Park in the northwest quadrant of D.C., featured a group show that displayed the beauty of turning against the exclusionary tide and exemplified the benefits of taking a multicultural approach to the arts. The show, entitled "The Golden Touch," was sponsored by the Jewish Council for the Aging of Greater Washington and mingled the works of printmaker Lou Stovall, painter Lois Mailou Jones, and mixed-media artist Sam Gilliam with those of Lily Spandorf, William Christenberry, and other local heavyweights. Race, for once, appeared irrelevant in a context defined by simple technical and conceptual prowess, from the idyllic peace Jones evokes in *A Shady Nook* and the uncharacteristically subdued coloring Gilliam employs in *For Xavier* to all the sophisticated refinement Stovall imparts in . . . *Comes Waning*. There were no bells or whistles announcing the participation of these three artists, just a blurring of racial differences and a refusal to segregate creative ingenuity and potential in a web of political divisiveness.

In all, May showed Washington's relationship with black artists for what it is, faithful to the famed yet wary of rising aspirants, particularly within commercial galleries. I'm looking forward to a more daring season this fall. The quality of the black artists who were featured in various exhibitions over the past year amply indicates the absurdity of so few younger ones being on the rise at once. ■

Curtia James is a freelance writer living in Virginia.



MARTIN PURYEAR, Installation view, Hirshhorn Museum, 1992. Photo by Lee Stanworth; courtesy of the Hirshhorn Museum.