

CONCEPTUALIZING AFRICAN-AMERICAN ART: THE MARKET, ACADEMIC  
DISCOURSE AND PUBLIC RECEPTION

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## ABSTRACT

SHAWNYA L. HARRIS:

Conceptualizing African-American Art: The Market, Academic Discourse and Public Reception

(Under the direction of Dr. Lyneise E. Williams)

The concept of an ‘African-American art market’ presents a new field of scholarly inquiry. However, objects labeled and fashioned as ‘African American art’ allude to a broader visual culture composed of objects, buyers, sellers and critics than previously acknowledged in scholarly literature. This dissertation will provide a nuanced picture of how an ‘African-American art market’ has been conceptualized and how this understanding reflects a complex web of tensions and relationships between objects, consumers, sellers and even scholars and critics of the work. Since the current literature on the field of African-American art provides only scant attention to the consumption of African-American art and virtually nothing about its place in the art market, this study will demonstrate how art historians could critically interpret African-American art in relation to market dynamics through an investigation of art related publications, oral interviews, public display venues.

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Galleries (Los Angeles, CA); George N’Namdi of G.R. N’Namdi Gallery (Chicago, IL and Detroit, MI); Ellen Sragow of Sragow Gallery (New York, NY) and Corrine Jennings of Kenkeleba House (New York, NY); several collectors including Jerome C. Gray, Dr. James Hill, and Bennie F. Johnson (all of Washington, D.C.); Robert E. Holmes (Los Angeles, CA); Walter O. Evans (Savannah, GA) as well as Robert E. Holmes, Esq. (Los Angeles, CA); artists Dr. Willie E. Hooker (Charlotte, NC); Juan Logan (Chapel Hill, NC); and Emma Amos (New York, NY); auctioneer Nigel Freeman of Swann Auction Galleries (New York, NY); and finally art fair producers Josh Wainwright of the National Black Fine Art Show (Cabin John, MD) and Evelyn and Mercer Redcross of the Philadelphia International Art Expo (Philadelphia, PA). For those not mentioned, I can only say to charge the error to my brain and not my heart.

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## INTRODUCTION

*Scholarship, patronage and infrastructure (institution building) have been three legs supporting the development of African-American art over the past 25 years. While one at first might see them as distinct entities, they are inextricably linked, interdependent.*

Floyd Coleman<sup>1</sup>

The concept of an ‘African-American art market’ presents a new field of scholarly inquiry. Objects labeled and fashioned as ‘African-American art’ allude to a broader visual culture, one composed of objects, buyers, sellers and critics, than previously acknowledged in scholarly literature. This dissertation will provide a nuanced picture of how an ‘African-American art market’ has been conceptualized and how this understanding reflects a complex web of tensions and relationships between objects, consumers, sellers and even scholars and critics of the work. Since the current literature on the field of African-American art pays only scant attention to the consumption of African-American art and virtually none to its place in the art market, this study will demonstrate how art historians critically interpret African-American art in relation to market dynamics through an investigation of art-related publications, oral interviews, and public display venues.

A market for art works by African Americans has been characterized by popular critics as one that is often overlooked and has gained momentum in recent years.<sup>2</sup> Major

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<sup>1</sup> Floyd Coleman, "25 Who made a Difference," *International Review of African American Art* 18, no. 1 (2001), 2-64.

<sup>2</sup> See Margery Gordon, "Eyes on the Prizes," *Art & Auction* 31, no. 5 (February, 2008), 108-17, 153. Also, Viv Lawes, "Market for African American Art Continues to Grow," *The Art Newspaper* (March 10, 2012, March 10, 2012).

exhibitions, art publications, art fairs and auctions have increased in visibility and stature as prices for some African-American artists' works have escalated. Buyers, particularly those of African-American heritage, have become more visible and their collections have generated interest among museums, auction houses and academics. An initial foray into this topic involves a discussion about the formation of the category called 'African-American art' in the late twentieth century and how scholars, art market middlemen and buyers have interpreted it and created their own standards for re-affirming their own definitions. The function of academic discourse around art by African Americans appears at times integral and at times peripheral to the visual categories created by buyers and sellers of the work. I argue that there are several conceptualizations of 'African-American art' in different market venues and that the intersection of these categories with current art historical scholarship has not been well-formulated or studied. This dissertation will focus on the visual material related to these taxonomies and corresponding visual strategies which signal varied notions about this body of work.

African-American art as an intellectual enterprise has been shaped by a variety of socioeconomic realities that affect art production, supply, demand, dissemination, consumption and reception. I argue that a core issue which seems to be obscured is the influence of art commerce on the conceptual framing of African-American art. When did African-American art, as a body of objects, "mean something" as a visual commodity in the context of history? How do aspects of commercial exchange in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century help to amplify or counter academic definitions of African-American art?

Currently, there is no substantive historical or scholarly literature regarding the market for work created by African-American artists. The scholarly literature on the history

of art markets is largely in the field of European art, examining markets for paintings in the Netherlands in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, France in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century and Great Britain in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>3</sup> Academic discussions about the art market in the United States and more specifically in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the location of this study, are non-existent. Discussions of auctions and other market outlets for art in the United States consists mainly of anecdotal entries in arts magazines about record-breaking sales, public advertisements for future sales and profiles of collectors, art dealers and other middlemen who appear to dominate this rarefied market.<sup>4</sup> Therefore systematic scholarly attempts to wed art and the economic markets that they occupy present new challenges and opportunities for interdisciplinary exchanges between art history and economics. More relevant to this study is the way in which the perceived relationship between economic markets and art objects are exploited in order to craft competing notions about where certain objects fall (or ‘should’ fall) hierarchically in the art world.

Art historical research focusing on African-American artists has been of interest to scholars for several decades, but it's the work of the last twenty years that has pushed the boundaries of the ‘Western’ canon. While many scholars posit some early pioneers such as Alain Locke and James Amos Porter as integral to the development of African-American art criticism, in the last three decades of the twentieth century in particular there was a marked increase in attention to various issues related to the work of African-American artists.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Mapping Markets for Paintings in Europe 1450-1750*, eds. Neil De Marchi and Hans J. van Miegroet (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Peter Watson, *From Manet to Manhattan: The Rise of the Modern Art Market*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 1992), 558. This account seems a bit more detailed with regard to price trends, yet as with most, Watson provides patchworks or stories of collectors, dealers and other art world personalities.

<sup>5</sup> Mary Ann Calo, “Alain Locke and American Art Criticism,” *American Art*, 18, no.1 (Spring 2004), 88–97. See also James Amos Porter, *Modern Negro Art* New York, The Dryden Press, 1943, 1943).

Following the black protest and civil rights movements of the 1960s and the parallel rise of black studies programs, African-American art history received another boost with the emergence of articles and survey publications by scholars such as Robert Farris Thompson, Elsa Honig Fine, Cedric Dover, Samella Lewis and David Driskell.<sup>6</sup> Jacqueline Francis suggests that these scholars in particular helped to plant the seeds of African-American art history with their emphasis on a rich, understudied and definitively “black” visual culture.<sup>7</sup>

The multicultural “inclusion” and re-insertion of the voices of women and minorities in the arts and cultural arenas in the 1980s proved fruitful for African-American artists as major exhibitions of their work were mounted and additional publications began to surface in the years that followed. Samella Lewis’ 1978 book, *Art: African-American*, which served as an academic survey text, would be re-published in 1984 as *African American Art and Artists*. More publications were produced in conjunction with survey exhibitions, such as the Studio Museum in Harlem’s exhibition *Harlem Renaissance: Art of Black America* (1987), the Newark Museum’s, *Against the Odds: African American Artists and the Harmon Foundation* (1989-90), and the Dallas Museum of Art’s *Black Art Ancestral Legacy: The African Impulse in African American Art* (1989). Artist Romare Bearden and author Harry Henderson published *A History of African-American Artists, from 1792 to the Present* (1993), a significant source of artist histories. Sharon Patton’s *African-American Art* (1998) explored more visual media, including photography and film and filled in prior historical gaps.

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit : African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984, 1983).; Cedric Dover, *American Negro Art*[Greenwich, Conn.] New York Graphic Society [1960], 1960).; Samella S. Lewis, *Art : African American* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978).; Elsa Honig Fine, *The Afro-American Artist: A Search for Identity* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), 310.; David C. Driskell, *Two Centuries of Black American Art : [Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Sept. 30-Nov. 21, 1976 ... Et Al.]*, eds. Los Angeles County Museum of Art. and Leonard Simon (Los Angeles; New York: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Knopf, 1976).

<sup>7</sup> Jacqueline Francis, "Introduction and Overview," *American Art* 17, no. 1 (Spring 2003), 2-10.

Richard J. Powell's *Black Art and Culture in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (1997) armed with more theoretical perspectives that were informed by other theorists such as Stuart Hall and Kobena Mercer were integral to pushing the discipline beyond a mere biographical approach to one which further contextualized art and artists in the international context.<sup>8</sup>

Strides were also made in 'mainstream' art historical scholarship, albeit at a much slower pace. Despite revisions of 'Western art' and American art survey texts, narrow interpretations of the scope of African-American artistic production remained the order of the day throughout the latter part of the twentieth century, which, for most part, limited academic exposure for African-American art to exhibition catalogues and a handful of survey publications produced by black scholars. When examples of African-American art did appear, the concept of black subjectivity sometimes overshadowed complex aspects of life and creative experimentation exercised by their white counterparts. Due to its isolation from the annals of art history, African-American art became an enterprise to be taken up by some historians on occasion to counter the breadth of Eurocentric achievement in the arts.

Kymerly Pinder, for example, reviews several survey texts produced as late as the 1990s by H.W. Janson, Robert Hughes, and Helen Gardner and suggests that most authors, in attempting to introduce African-American artists to the 'Western canon,' found it difficult to separate the prescribed subjectivity of the artist from their work.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See Kobena Mercer 1960-, *Exiles, Diasporas & Strangers* (Cambridge, Mass.;; MIT Press,; 2008).; *Stuart Hall : Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, eds. Kuan-Hsing Chen, Stuart Hall and David Morley (London ;New York: Routledge, 1996).; Kobena Mercer 1960-, *Welcome to the Jungle : New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> Kymerly N. Pinder, "Black Representation and Western Survey Textbooks," *The Art Bulletin* 81, no. 3 (September, 1999), 533-538.



A range of art catalogues focusing on private collections supplemented survey literature in their incorporation of scholarly essays. For example, art historians Sharon Patton and Alvia Wardlaw have provided short histories of African-American art patronage in private collector publications.<sup>10</sup> Patton and Wardlaw's essays, tailored for catalogues of two traveling exhibitions of African-American art, also positioned African American artists, business professionals, athletes and celebrities as significant to the development of private collections of African-American art. Other similar publications emerging in the last twenty years are filled with lavish color images of nineteenth and twentieth century African-American artworks by Henry O. Tanner, Romare Bearden, Jacob Lawrence, Charles White, and Elizabeth Catlett, among others.<sup>11</sup> These coincided with the growth of scholarly survey publications and exhibitions of African-American art. In such publications, private collectors viewed their role in the acquisition of African-American art not only as a tangible extension

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<sup>10</sup> See Sharon Patton, "A History of Collecting African American Art" in *Narratives of African American Art and Identity: The David C. Driskell Collection*, eds. Terry Gips and University of Maryland, College Park Art Gallery. (College Park, Md.; San Francisco: The Art Gallery and the Department of Art History and Archaeology, University of Maryland; Pomegranate, 1998), 45-54 and Alvia Wardlaw, "A Brief Look at the History of African American Collections," in Grant Hill 1972-, *Something all our Own : The Grant Hill Collection of African American Art*, ed. Alvia J. Wardlaw (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> See for example Harmon Kelley, *The Harmon and Harriet Kelley Collection of African American Art : Exhibition*, eds. Gylbert Coker and others (San Antonio, Texas: San Antonio Museum of Art, 1994). Tritobia Hayes Benjamin, "Walter O. Evans Collection of African-American Art," *American Art Review* 15, no. 3 (May/June, 2003), 122-131.; Hill, *Something all our Own : The Grant Hill Collection of African American Art*; Andrea Barnwell Brownlee, *Walter O. Evans Collection of African American Art*, ed. Tritobia H. Benjamin (S.I.; Seattle: Walter O. Evans Foundation for Art and Literature; Distributed by University of Washington Press, 1999).; *A Century of African American Art : The Paul R. Jones Collection*, ed. Amalia K. Amaki (Newark, DE; New Brunswick, N.J.: University Museum, University of Delaware; Rutgers University Press, 2004).

of their cultural pride, but also as one geared toward bringing attention to artists who were under-examined and under-appreciated by the public.<sup>12</sup>

Private collectors' amassing of African-American art attracted much more interest. Several African-American art collectors rose to prominence due not only due to what they had amassed, but also to their institutional collaborations and donations to museums and educational institutions. In 1996, the art dealer Thurlow Tibbs donated 34 pieces from the Evans-Tibbs Collection, his family collection begun by his grandmother Lillian Evanti, to the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. In 1998, Bank of America acquired John and Vivian Hewitt's collection of art.<sup>13</sup> NBA Star Grant Hill toured his collection of African-American Art from 2003 to 2005 while collector Walter O. Evans donated over 70 works from his collection to the Savannah College of Art and Design in 2006. Paul R. Jones (1928-2010) donated a portion of his collection to the University of Delaware in 2004 with the remainder, consisting of over 1,700 items, donated to the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa in 2008. As many of these donations were attached to with universities with educational missions, the didactic importance of African-American art often remained as critical as any aesthetic or financial investment potential the works may have had.<sup>14</sup>

Publications produced during the latter part of the 1990s also emphasized the cultivation of newer collectors of African-American art. For example, in 1998, *Collecting African American Art: Works on Paper and Canvas*, was written by art appraiser and

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<sup>12</sup> Lowery Stokes Sims, "Collecting the Art of African Americans at the Studio Museum in Harlem: Positioning the 'New' from the Perspective of the Past," *Collecting the New: Museums and Contemporary Art*, ed. Bruce Altshuler (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>13</sup> The Hewitt Collection is currently housed at Harvey Gantt Center in Charlotte, North Carolina.

<sup>14</sup> *Narratives of African American Art and Identity : The David C. Driskell Collection*, eds. Terry Gips and University of Maryland, College Park. Art Gallery. (College Park, Md.; San Francisco: The Art Gallery and the Department of Art History and Archaeology, University of Maryland; Pomegranate, 1998).

consultant Halima Taha. Taha's publication, filled with 200 lavish glossy color images of works by several African- American artists, has been described as a "much needed book" by reviewers who saw the work of African Americans as a fast-developing collecting area as evidenced by art journals such as *Art News*.<sup>15</sup> Taha's book also supplies the names of several dealers and venues for purchasing quality African-American art, thus replacing general academic narratives on works and artist histories with a primer on collecting and connoisseurship.

The discourse on the trade or market for art has been explored by scholars in terms of how it interrogates or re-situates 'Western' canon formation, thought to be the barometer for value in art. For example, Art historian Christopher B. Steiner, who has done extensive work on the trade in West African art, has discussed the ways in which African art has been re-negotiated into the canon of art history by the economic value placed on it by the art market. Steiner asserts that the canon's highly complex and hierarchical set of taxonomies have not changed but have instead "opened up" to allow previously ignored or undervalued forms, such as African art, for consideration. Steiner views the canon as "a structuring structure which is in a continuous process of reproducing itself, mediating its identity through market forces, and negating the social conditions of its production by covering the tracks of its arbitrary and subjective formations."<sup>16</sup> According to Steiner, this opinion counters the views of sociologists such as Pierre Bourdieu who view the canon as a fixed set of standards and

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<sup>15</sup> Opal Baker, "The Battle for a Much Needed Book," *The International Review of African American Art* 15, no. 3 (1998), 55.

<sup>16</sup> Christopher B. Steiner, "Can the Canon Burst?" *The Art Bulletin New York : College Art Association of America*, no. 2 (June, 1996), 213-217.

taxonomies into which artists and objects are placed.<sup>17</sup> If one were to use Steiner's framework in examining African-American art, it is then possible to view its increasing though late arrival in the competitive art market as an example of a previously marginalized category gaining visibility by way of a "bursting" 'Western' canon.

Anthropologist Fred Myers' study on the market for aboriginal art in Australia also provides some insight on the changing paradigms that affect its production, circulation and consumption. Myers contends that the creation of an aboriginal 'high art' is ironic since Aboriginal peoples were once despised and presumed incapable of upholding 'Western' standards of art production. Although the imposition of 'Western' art historical designations of 'high' or 'fine' art have transformed the meanings of some objects that have cultural import in private use, Myers contends that Aboriginal acrylic painters have been able to use this current elevation in status of their art to both construct and dismantle perceptions about their own culture. The multiple strands of discourse produced by interaction between Aboriginal painters, art dealers, collectors and the various 'art worlds' from local villages to New York City appropriates earlier ethnographic research done by anthropologists such as Myers since the early 1970s.<sup>18</sup> Although this study emerges from the field of anthropology, Myers' concern underscores the use of academic discourse in the trade for art as being a two-edged sword: on the one hand it provides some vital information about previously unknown producers, yet on the other hand it can be manipulated to suit various constituents.

As with many areas of art history, general surveys of African-American art have concentrated on the basic monographic and biographical accounts of artists with only minor

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Fred R. Myers, *Painting Culture: The Making of an Aboriginal High Art* (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002).

references, if any, to the economic history of their work.<sup>19</sup> However, some art market critics have initiated dialogue on the economic factors after noticing an upward swing in prices for African-American art. Eileen Kinsella has argued that within the last two decades the “surge of research and scholarship” in African-American art has encouraged museums to collect in this area to fill in major absences found in their collections.<sup>20</sup> She mentioned that New York art dealers such as June Kelly and Michael Rosenfeld, who represent several African-American artists, have also remarked that although many “group shows” are sometimes conceptually limited, sales in both auctions and private galleries have skyrocketed.<sup>21</sup> For example, auctions, notably recent sales at the department of African-American fine art at Swann Galleries in New York City, have not only raised price expectations but also set new records for artists such as Charles White, Elizabeth Catlett, Jacob Lawrence and Aaron Douglas.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the optimism, scholars differ in their opinions on these trends. Some art historians have often been skeptical about the category termed “African-American art” as it implies a process of ‘ghettoization’ that they believe has had harmful implications for the sale and appreciation of the work of artists of African descent. For example, art historian Judith Wilson views the “monolithic conception” of African-American art as being a result of

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<sup>19</sup> Several inroads have been made by contemporary scholars to expand the field beyond the mere biographical accounts of artists, ranging from in-depth discussion of artistic production to the application of critical race theory. For a concise overview of the field please refer to Jacqueline Francis, “Writing African American Art History,” *American Art* 17, no.1 (2003), 2-10.

<sup>20</sup> Eileen Kinsella, “The Rise of African American Art,” *ARTnews* 102, no. 8 (09, 2003), 118-123.

<sup>21</sup> Eileen Kinsella, “The Rise of African American Art,” 119-120.

<sup>22</sup> Swann Auction Galleries, “Swann Auction Galleries African-American Fine Art Department”<sub>2</sub>. *Swann Auction Galleries*, accessed 17 February 17, 2009, [http://www.swanngalleries.com/special\\_sales.cgi](http://www.swanngalleries.com/special_sales.cgi).

“individual and collective biases” of viewers and critics.<sup>23</sup> Artists who do not celebrate African-American history and culture or create work that does not protest injustices primarily affecting African Americans are often dismissed, leaving a conceptual black hole in the discourse.<sup>24</sup> Artist and art historian David Driskell, like Wilson, is ambivalent about the consistent grouping of African-American artists in shows (which extends into their marketability) as it furthers the segregation of these artists from that of the mainstream art world. Yet, in his estimation, the much desired dissolution of the practice does not appear to be on the horizon.<sup>25</sup> For the purposes of this dissertation, I argue that the term ‘African-American art’ not only represented inequities described by Wilson and Driskell but also a category which reflected these tensions and the potential for a newer emphasis on its place in art market.

Although commentators have discussed the presence of art world segmentation along racial lines, others have suggested, in a more positive sense, that “African-American art” has a particular appeal among African-American consumers as it reflects their cultural heritage. The actor Bill Cosby is a cultural icon who is frequently referenced by many of these collectors. Bill Cosby produced one of the most important contributions to popular culture in the 1980s and 1990s with his family sitcom, *The Cosby Show*. By prominently featuring the work of several African-American artists, including Varnette Honeywood, Ellis Wilson, and Archibald Motley, *The Cosby Show* positively portrayed the act of collecting art, but more

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<sup>23</sup> Judith Wilson, "Collectors' Resources: African American Art 1998-2001: Will the Monolithic Conception of "African American Art" be Losing Currency in the Early 21st Century?" *International Review of African American Art* 14, no. 4 (1998), 43.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.; For a deeper discussion of Driskell's relationship to this issue in relation to his own practice see Bridget R. Cooks 1972-, *Exhibiting Blackness : African Americans and the American Art Museum* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011).

<sup>25</sup> Margery Gordon, "Eyes on the Prizes," *Art & Auction* 31, no. 5 (February, 2008), 108-17, 153.

importantly the popularity of African-American art, among many upwardly mobile African-American art buyers.<sup>26</sup> The off-stage Bill Cosby and his wife Camille Cosby are avid collectors of furniture and fine art, but it's their interest and dedication to their collection of African-American art that has captured attention.<sup>27</sup> In addition, the notion of a black middle class collector as depicted in *The Cosby Show* was reinforced in the art world imagination by the appearance of several other high profile private collectors. For example, in 1986, Harmon and Harriet Kelley of San Antonio, Texas, began to collect African-American art after viewing another survey exhibition, also curated by David Driskell, entitled *Hidden Heritage*. Ten years later, their collection which was then 150 works became the first private collection of African-American art ever exhibited by the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.<sup>28</sup> Soon to follow were publications of other collections, such as that of Walter O. Evans, David C. Driskell, Grant Hill, John and Vivian Hewitt, and Paul R. Jones. These publications included essays written by art historians such as Andrea Barnwell, Richard J. Powell, Sharon Patton, Leslie King Hammond and Amalia Amaki, thus adding to the available literature and record of images produced by African-American artists.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Juliette Harris, "The Cosbys: From Grandma's Quilts to Sotheby's Grandeur," *The International Review of African American Art* 1 no. 1 (2002), 25.

<sup>27</sup> See David C. Driskell, *The Other Side of Color: African American Art in the Collection of Camille O. and William H. Cosby, Jr.*, eds. Bill Cosby, Camille O. (Camille Olivia) Cosby and René Hanks (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 2001).

<sup>28</sup> Jan Russell, "Harriet and Harmon Kelley," *Texas Monthly* 24, no. 9 (1996), 118.

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Evans-Tibbs Collection, *The Evans-Tibbs Collection: Selections from the Permanent Holdings: 19th and 20th Century American Art* (Washington, D.C.: Evans-Tibbs Collection, 1985); Guy C. McElroy et al., *African-American Artists, 1880-1987: Selections from the Evans-Tibbs Collection* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service, in association with University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1989), 125; Harmon Kelley, *The Harmon and Harriet Kelley Collection of African American Art: Exhibition*, eds. Gylbert Coker and others (San Antonio, Texas: San Antonio Museum of Art, 1994); *Successions: Prints by African American Artists from the Jean and Robert Steele Collection*, eds. Adrienne L. Childs and University of Maryland (College Park, Md.) Art Gallery (College Park, Md: Art Gallery, University of Maryland, 2002), Michael D. Harris and Walton Arts Center, *Images of America: African American Voices*

The coupling of art acquisition with ideas about collective consciousness is an interesting theme discussed by sociologists and others in the social sciences, yet the *emphasis* on art acquisition among African-American art collectors appears to be an important marketing strategy when examining the dialectic between academic scholarship and market success. Art historian and curator Lowery Stokes Simms stated that collectors have moved from a “cultural consciousness” to a “collecting consciousness.”<sup>30</sup>

Several social theorists have attempted to understand issues of taste, social positioning and their relationship to consumption patterns. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu produced one of the more notable studies in his book *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984). Bourdieu suggests that judgments of taste are related to social position or class but also unconsciously reproduce or reinforce social class ascent or descent in the process. Cultural capital, achieved through socialization, symbolic objects (such as fine art) or institutional assimilation and recognition, is, to Bourdieu, as important as economic capital and could be used in much the same way in delineating social class distinctions.<sup>31</sup>

Although Bourdieu’s study has been especially important in juxtaposing taste with class distinctions, it has also been critiqued for not considering the conscious ways in which the combination of class and race are reproduced through consumption. In her investigation of art collecting practices among African Americans, sociologist Patricia Banks suggests that

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(Fayetteville, Ark.: Walton Arts Center, 2003), 125, [collection of former NBA star, Darrell Walker]; *A Century of African American Art: The Paul R. Jones Collection*, ed. Amalia K. Amaki (Newark, Del; New Brunswick, N.J.: University Museum, University of Delaware; Rutgers University Press, 2004).

<sup>30</sup> Gordon, “Eyes on the Prizes,” 108-17, 153.

<sup>31</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction :A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984).



art acquisition factored into their concept of wealth building and social class mobility but that their preference for African-American art was tied to their concept of cultural connection.<sup>32</sup> This theoretical construct appears to suggest that for dealers and collectors, participation in art consumption is one that is both class-driven but also a deep expression of cultural heritage. African-American art is then appropriated by many African-American collectors to remedy not only traditional alienation from the art establishment, but also to help solidify notions about black economic advancement and social integration.

### *Terminology*

It is difficult to adequately describe contributions of artists of the African diaspora without dealing with the limitations inherent in the lexicon of racial difference as it has been construed in the United States and beyond. Such difficulties plainly illustrate the paradox of race in its historical context and the various forms of incorporation and resistance in their use and development over time. The majority of the dissertation will use the term “African-American” to describe artists, art production and other cultural ideas that are communicated. Terms such as ‘Colored,’ ‘Negro,’ ‘Black,’ ‘Black American,’ and ‘Afro-American’ were typical of certain time periods and related events or titles discussed. For example, the term “Negro” was generally used to describe African-American art and artists from the 1920s to the 1950s. From the 1960s through the early 1980s, the term “black” had both geographic and deeper ideological significance due to social, political and even conceptual changes. By the late 1980s, where the majority of this dissertation concentrates its themes, the term “African-American” had become commonplace due to the influence of political leaders such as Jesse Jackson, who embraced the direct relationship between those born in the Americas

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<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Patricia Ann Banks, *Represent: Art and Identity Among the Black Upper-Middle Class* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 121.

and those born in the Caribbean and the continent of Africa. The unhyphenated “African American,” which appeared in U.S. Census documentation around the year 2000 to describe individuals, will be used to refer to groups while the hyphenated version is used as an adjective.

Terms such as “art world” and the “mainstream” are equally difficult to define. In fact, I have yet to see them sufficiently critiqued for their ambiguity despite their frequent usage by art professionals and journalists. For the purposes of this dissertation, “mainstream” will typically describe characteristics which conform to a prevailing norm that is perceived by those documented as being on the margins of that norm. In the instances in which the term is used, I will contextualize its use based on the perspective of the various speakers who have used the term in a variety of ways. Ruth Fine, curator of the National Gallery of Art, for example, has problematized the notion of “mainstream” interpretations of African-American Art in relation to her work on the artist Romare Bearden.<sup>33</sup> Despite Bearden’s omnipresence in the American art scene from the 1940s to the present, Fine suggests that public reception has not awarded him the same iconic status of white-identified artists such as Andy Warhol or Jackson Pollock, who are remembered for their paradigm-changing ideas and technical virtuosity. Instead, Bearden’s legacy has been firmly rooted in a presumably shared “black experience,” rather than in the broader humanistic themes which are said to filter through his paintings. In addition, Fine intimates that there are multiple “mainstreams” in American art, yet these differing mainstream canons tend to be constrained by exclusions in academic art

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<sup>33</sup> Ruth Fine, "Expanding the Mainstream: Romare Bearden Revisited," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 149, no. 1 (March, 2005), 40-55.

history.<sup>34</sup> Mainstream criticism and acceptance here implies an invisibility of social issues or at least the social concerns of traditionally marginalized groups in the United States.

### *Chapter Structure*

Chapter 1 begins with an overview of patronage narratives for African-American art as it has been constructed historically. I argue that during what became an international art boom in the 1980s, market-centered constructions of African-American art begin a new chapter in the patronage narrative described in previous scholarly treatments. This newer orientation not only produced more visibility for African-American artists and their work but also added complexity to discussions about how art production by African Americans fits into the larger perception of a supposedly “mainstream” art world.

Chapter 2 revolves around of dealers and gallery owners who claim to specialize in the sales or market for African-American art. I argue that beginning in the late 1980s art middlemen fashioned their own constructions of ‘African-American art’ as a way of branding a distinct category of art for potential audiences. Their complex formulations of African-American art generated nuanced conceptualizations which influenced ideas about not only the forms but also the functions of this category in the grand scheme of the market for American art. Case studies focus on the practices of the following gallery owners or art dealers to illustrate these points: Michael Rosenfeld Gallery (New York), Avisca Fine Art (Atlanta), Bill Hodges Gallery (New York), and Fine Arts of Atlanta (Atlanta).

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<sup>34</sup> Fine discusses the examples of Wayne Craven’s survey text *American Art History and Culture* (1994), Robert Hughes’ *American Visions: The Epic History of Art in America* (1997), and David Bjelajac’s *American Art: A Cultural History* (2001) in relation to their marginal discussions of select African American artists such as Robert Duncanson, Romare Bearden, Jacob Lawrence, Henry O. Tanner and William H. Johnson. She lauds the attempts of Americanists such as Frances Pohl for broadening both the list of artists and discussion of American art as an intersection of various technical and sociocultural elements rather than subscribing to flat interpretations of modernism as one-dimensional and lifeless. See Ruth Fine, "Expanding the Mainstream: Romare Bearden Revisited," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 149, no. 1 (March, 2005), 40-55.

Chapter 3 draws on the setting of the art fair as a context for understanding yet more conceptualizations of African-American art and the development of patronage efforts. The National Black Fine Art Show, begun in 1997, was an annual fair in which several art dealers gathered to sell African-American fine art until 2010. In this chapter, I argue that show producers and participants negotiated and validated certain definitions of African-American art through images, literature, and programming efforts and established notions of quality which differed from other fairs, using the example of the Philadelphia International Art Expo. Further, the critical reception and internal dynamics of these fairs point to an unstable or non-cohesive adherence to imagined social and aesthetic norms as fair organizers struggled for public recognition and profit.

Chapter 4 discusses the definition of African-American art and its patronage by using the setting of the auction house as a focal point. Swann Galleries, an auction house in New York City, was the first to develop a specialized department for “African-American Fine Art.”<sup>35</sup> I argue that the Swann Galleries’ African-American Fine Art Department has generated conflicting notions about the economic and socio-cultural value of African-American art which became evident this auction setting. In addition this chapter includes an important set of statistical analyses derived from studying trends for objects and artists in approximately eight auctions occurring between 2007 and 2010. The analysis provides a quantitative basis for the categorization ‘African-American Fine Art’ constructed by Swann Galleries to complement its socio-historical significance.

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<sup>35</sup> Adrian Dannatt, "Swann Holds First African-American Fine Art Sale," *Art Newspaper* 16 (03, 2007), 55.

Chapter 5 serves as a conclusion and summary of discussions in previous chapters. In addition it presents suggestions for further research into histories of art collectors and art middlemen in developing a market for African-American art. In addition, the increased attention toward auction data and price formation for works by African American artists is referenced as yet another critical area for further research.

## CHAPTER I

### OVERVIEW OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN ART PATRONAGE

For centuries, art patronage has been conceptually structured around developments in Western European art and its connection to the United States. Critical examination of this structure only began in the late 20th and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.<sup>36</sup> American art patronage, which includes private, public and corporate patronage, had been studied along with the topics of American nationalism and patriotic fervor following the Civil War. The private philanthropy of industrial capitalists, federal and state supported programs in the first half of the century, as well as a rising middle class and globally engaged consumer in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century also characterize American art patronage. However, the meanings and impulses related to art patronage have also been conceived of in terms of white male privilege, excluding the voices of racialized or gendered “others.” Even the terms, “African-American art”, “Black art” or “Negro art” suggest not only cultural distinctions but also the crucible of segregation which shaped the experiences of its creators and patrons.

Patrons of African-American artists appear in historical literature in a variety of guises, with their intentions bound to conflicting notions of social uplift, economic empowerment, and identity formation. For the most part, scholars have traced the beginnings of patronage of African-American art to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, during which the names of fine

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<sup>36</sup> See *Handbook of the Economics of Art and Culture*, eds. Victor Ginsburgh and C. D. Throsby (Amsterdam ;Boston Mass.: Elsevier North-Holland, 2006).

artists began to surface in the available documentation of their era, such as newspaper advertisements for furniture makers, portraitists and engravers. The hardships and oppressive structure of antebellum slavery did not afford other artisan slaves formal training in art. Therefore, knowledge about many individual creators has been obscured by their relative anonymity.<sup>37</sup> Early fine artists such as Joshua Johnston and Robert S. Duncanson, for example, found interest in their work through private patronage networks of local white merchants, African-American clerics and others who had abolitionist sympathies during the antebellum period.<sup>38</sup> Art venues such as museums or galleries generally excluded artists of color, and in cases where artists of color were not barred from participation, their identities may have been muted with the process of time. Social barriers aggravated by racism complicate the historical narratives of known artists and, by extension, our understanding of their patronage in relation to their white artistic contemporaries.<sup>39</sup>

In terms of 19<sup>th</sup>- century patrons who were African-American themselves, the names are scant, yet some examples surface in individual accounts of artists in studies of black bibliophiles rather than art collectors. Dr. John V. DeGrasse, an important military physician, was a collector of the work of Edward Mitchell Bannister, Edmonia Lewis, Patrick Reason

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<sup>37</sup> The contributions of slave artisans are summarized in surveys of African-American art such as . Patton, *African-American Art*.

<sup>38</sup> For more information of Joshua Johnson see Carolyn J. Weekley, *Joshua Johnson : Freeman and Early American Portrait Painter* (Williamsburg, Va.: Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center, 1987) and For an account of Duncanson see Joseph D. Ketner, *The Emergence of the African-American Artist: Robert S. Duncanson, 1821-1872* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1993).

<sup>39</sup> Regenia Perry, *Free within Ourselves: African-American Artists in the Collection of the National Museum of American Art*, eds. National Museum of American Art (U.S.) and Wadsworth Atheneum. (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution in association with Pomegranate Artbooks, San Francisco, 1992).

and Henry O. Tanner.<sup>40</sup> William Henry Dorsey (1837-1923), an artist, African-American bibliophile and member of the American Negro Historical Society, created a private museum in his home where rare portrait engravings done by Patrick Reason, and “oil and watercolor paintings by well-known artists such as Robert S. Duncanson” could be found.<sup>41</sup> In most instances, collecting among African Americans in this period remained a private enterprise that is, to date, understudied.

Toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some African-American artists did have opportunities for formal training or commercial acceptance in the American art community. One of the most successful African-American artists to have emerged in the latter part of the 20th century, Henry Ossawa Tanner, is an example of an artist who had the rare opportunity of acquiring formal education in art by studying at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art and subsequently achieved international renown after relocating to Paris in 1891. Tanner's accomplishment was viewed as a tremendous feat for “uplifting the race” by leaders such as W.E.B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington. In the literature on Tanner, we do find discussions about his various patrons. For example, philanthropist Robert Ogden purchased *The Banjo Lesson* in 1894 for Hampton Institute (now Hampton University). The French government purchased his paintings *The Resurrection of Lazarus* in 1897 and *The Disciples at Emmaus* in 1906.<sup>42</sup> Several private collectors in America and abroad patronized his work

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<sup>40</sup> Patton, *African-American Art*, 47. For Edward Mitchell Bannister, see *Edward Mitchell Bannister, 1828-1901*, eds. Juanita Marie Holland and others (Stamford, Conn.; New York: Kenkeleba House; Whitney Museum of American Art at Champion; Distributed by Harry N. Abrams, 1992). For artists in Philadelphia, see Steven L. Jones, *A Keen Sense of the Artistic: African American Material Cultures in 19th Century Philadelphia* (Hampton, VA: Hampton University Museum, 1995).

<sup>41</sup> Dorothy Porter Wesley, “Black Antiquarians and Bibliophiles,” *Black Bibliophiles and Collectors*, eds. Elinor Sinnette, W. Paul Coates, Thomas C. Battle (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1990), 10.

<sup>42</sup> Dewey F. Mosby, *Henry Ossawa Tanner*, eds. Rae Alexander-Minter et al. (Philadelphia, PA; New York, NY: Philadelphia Museum of Art; Rizzoli International Publications, 1991).



throughout his career, both for themselves and for museum collections such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the High Museum of Art in Atlanta. Tanner lamented, however, that patronage by African Americans was slow to non-existent for him, a factor that did not change until the mid-1920s, demonstrating that even sources of patronage were often construed racially and not simply economically.<sup>43</sup>

What typically is absent in these accounts is the nature and scope of the United States market for art during late 19<sup>th</sup> century and what exactly constituted broad patronage for any artist in that context. Most information regarding patronage resides in discussions about individual artists or perhaps the reception of certain exhibitions or artistic movements rather than discussions about art patronage in economic terms. When the few African-American artists were included in surveys of early American art, the discussion was often dominated by sociological interest about their lives rather than the value and perception of their work.

As the 20th century approached, African Americans became more aware of their need to develop a reformed view of themselves as they attempted to integrate into the wider American society. This period of re-conceptualization is often referred to as the New Negro Movement and its insistence on the functionality of the arts is significant to scholars.<sup>44</sup> As

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<sup>43</sup> Dewey F. Mosby, *Henry Ossawa Tanner*, eds. Rae Alexander-Minter et al. (Philadelphia, PA; New York, NY: Philadelphia Museum of Art; Rizzoli International Publications, 1991).

<sup>44</sup> Writings about the figures and the philosophies of the Harlem Renaissance and the New Negro abound as it is characterized by tremendous growth in the areas of literary, musical and visual arts and their intersection. See Henry Louis Gates Jr., "The Trope of a New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black," *Representations*, no. 24, Special Issue: America Reconstructed, 1840-1940 (Autumn, 1988): 129-155; David C. Driskell, David L. Lewis, and Deborah Willis, *Harlem Renaissance: Art of Black America* (New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem, 1987); Richard J. Powell and David A. Bailey, *Rhapsodies in Black: Art of the Harlem Renaissance* (London: Hayward Gallery, 1997); Mary Ann Calo, *Distinction and Denial: Race, Nation, and the Critical Construction of the African American Artist, 1920-40* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007).

early as 1921, the 135<sup>th</sup> Street Branch of the New York Public Library held major art exhibitions annually that included artists such as Laura Wheeler Waring, William Eduoard Scott and Meta Warrick Fuller.<sup>45</sup> As visual artists produced the image of a New Negro<sup>46</sup>, movement proponents W.E.B. DuBois and Alain Locke encouraged patronage efforts with special appeals for African Americans to assist.<sup>47</sup> For example, in the 1920s A'lelia Walker, heiress of the fortune of cosmetic giant Madame C.J. Walker, often hosted lavish receptions at her “Dark Tower” salon featuring the art of individuals such as Aaron Douglas.<sup>48</sup> Actor Paul Robeson, poet Countee Cullen, and musician Duke Ellington were also known to have patronized artists. Another celebrated collector, Arthur Schomburg, is remembered for his broad interest in collecting books, manuscripts and memorabilia, yet collecting fine art also characterized his efforts.<sup>49</sup> Although New York, more specifically Harlem, has been cited for the efforts of private patrons, collectors in other major cities such as Philadelphia, Chicago, and Washington, D.C. engaged in similar efforts.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Deborah A. Deacon, *Schomburg Center Issue: Bulletin of Research in the Humanities* (New York: Readex Books, 1981).

<sup>46</sup> The term “New Negro” did not necessarily emerge during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s or in Alain Locke’s 1925 publication of the same name as some may believe. Earlier evidence of this term can be found in newspapers and other publications. See, for example, John E. MacBrady et al., *A New Negro for a New Century: An Accurate and Up-to-Date Record of the Negro Race* (Chicago: American Publishing, 1900).

<sup>47</sup> Patton, *African-American Art*, 47.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> New York Public Library, “Art and Artifacts Division,” <http://www.nypl.org/press/schomburgbg.cfm>, Accessed 3/15/2008. The 135<sup>th</sup> St. Branch of the New York Public Library purchased all of his materials in 1926 through a grant from the Carnegie Foundation. The Art and Artifacts division of the Schomburg Center for Black History and Culture houses more than 20,000 examples of work from “Africa and the African diaspora.”

<sup>50</sup> Another notable collector was opera singer Lillian Evanti, whose home and collection were in Washington, D.C.

The New Negro Movement has also been characterized by the philanthropic support of wealthy, white industrial magnates whose patronage efforts emerged through private foundations. Visual art was often part of larger scheme among national business and political leaders to demonstrate the competence of blacks in the cultural realm and cooperation among races in achieving interracial harmony. In 1917, the Julius Rosenwald Fund was founded to support educational institutions or organizations dedicated to improving the plight of disenfranchised groups, with a special focus on African Americans. During its intentionally short existence (it was established for the duration of one generation and closed in 1948), the Julius Rosenwald Fund had supported several writers, musicians and visual artists with fellowships for travel, supplies and other needs related to creative endeavors.<sup>51</sup> The Harmon Foundation held annual achievement awards from the 1920s through the mid-1930s with special awards for “Negro” artists. These annual competitions traveled to major cities around the country and became a principal outlet for introducing African-American artists to mainstream American audiences.<sup>52</sup> Although sales were included in the exhibitions, the Harmon Foundation did not have a specific goal of promoting art sales. Therefore, many sales during this period may have been prompted by the philanthropic interests of the attendees or a sociological interest in African-American life rather than a true a desire to integrate them into the broader art scene dominated by white artists.

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<sup>51</sup> Artists who received funding from the Julius Rosenwald Fund include Augusta Savage, Aaron Douglas, Hale Woodruff, Eldzier Cortor, and Jacob Lawrence. See *A Force for Change: African American Art and the Julius Rosenwald Fund*, eds. Allentown Art Museum and others (Chicago, IL; Evanston, IL: Spertus Museum; Northwestern University Press, 2009)..

<sup>52</sup> The most extensive publication on the role of the Harmon Foundation in promoting African-American artists centers on a major exhibition at the Newark Museum in the late 1980s. See Gary A. Reynolds et al., *Against the Odds: African-American Artists and the Harmon Foundation* (Newark, N.J.: Newark Museum, 1989), 298.

The early efforts of organizations like the Harmon Foundation encouraged patronage of art by African Americans through philanthropy, yet federal patronage of African-American art became a significant force in encouraging and subsidizing artistic production during the Depression. The Federal Arts Project, administered by the Works Progress Administration (WPA), employed several American artists, including many African Americans from 1935 to 1943. Artists such as Aaron Douglas, Jacob Lawrence, William H. Johnson, Norman Lewis, Romare Bearden, Ernest Crichlow, Dox Thrash, and Archibald Motley were able to continue their artistic production with federal support, although such support was limited and at times situational forcing many artists to retreat to other occupations such as teaching rather than pursue full development of their artistic talents.

In the 1940s, New York began to emerge as a major international art center, a position previously held by Paris. In addition, governmental and cultural authorities also sought to further a truly national identity through visual art as World War II approached. The art market served this end as did special pleas for Americans to buy art. For example, “Buy American Art Week” was instituted in 1940, reinforcing a nativist thread in popular art buying.<sup>53</sup> Although American modernist painting was encouraged by critics and dealers, most African Americans, even those residing in the New York, were largely unable to take advantage of such attention due to entrenched racism. Beyond federal and private patronage received to produce work, many early 20th century African-American artists, like those of their 19<sup>th</sup> century predecessors, hardly, if ever, entered influential collections or generated significant sales for their work despite the success of some of their white contemporaries.

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<sup>53</sup> Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

One exception was Jacob Lawrence, a beneficiary of the earlier WPA artist workshops, who was the first African-American artist to be accepted into the stable of Edith Halpert of the Downtown Gallery in New York City. Lawrence achieved attention that resulted in Halpert arranging the 1941 debut of his *Migration Series* which appeared on the cover of *Fortune* Magazine and the subsequent placement of works in the series to both Phillips Memorial Gallery (now Phillips Collection) and the Museum of Modern Art. In the same year, Halpert also worked collaboratively with Alain Locke in arranging an exhibition of Negro artists at her gallery, *American Negro Art*. *American Negro Art* was formative for the careers of other artists such as Romare Bearden, Eldzier Cortor, Sargent Johnson and Elizabeth Catlett.<sup>54</sup> Despite the timing of this exhibition, the relationship between Halpert and Lawrence proved that a formula for commercial success for African-American artists, like any other American artist, required gallery representation as one of its hallmarks.<sup>55</sup>

Focused support for artistic work by African Americans was generated largely through culturally specific and/or regional galleries and organizations where artists lived or maintained community ties. Organizations such as the Southside Community Art Center in Chicago (1940-present), Karamu House in Cleveland and the Harlem Community Art Center (1937-1942), were founded during the era of federal funding from the WPA and continued to be central to artistic development. Museums and galleries that formed alongside art departments at historically black colleges such as Howard University, Hampton University

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<sup>54</sup> *Jacob Lawrence : The Migration Series*, eds. Lonnie G. Bunch and others (Washington, D.C.: Rappahannock Press in association with The Phillips Collection, 1993). Halpert's exhibition had a rival, *Negro Art, Contemporary*, offered by Mc Millen Interior Decoration and Art Gallery (also in New York City) two months before her exhibition. However, Halpert's exhibition of *Negro Art* ultimately became the more historically significant of the two.

<sup>55</sup> The opening took place December 8, 1941, the day after the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the entry of the U.S. into World War II. Attendance to the exhibition was lower than hoped for as a result.

and Atlanta University provided additional exposure through rotating exhibitions and programming. They also offered opportunities for art buying in the context of academic fundraising. In 1942, for example, artist Hale Woodruff, an earlier protégé of Halpert and Locke and a faculty member at Atlanta University, began an annual juried exhibition for the university's students and artists from all over the country. In 1943, the Barnett-Aden Gallery of Washington, D.C. was founded by Howard University professor James V. Herring and curator Alonzo Aden, creating the first gallery that was privately-owned by African Americans in the United States.<sup>56</sup> In 1941 the Pyramid Club, a civic organization developed by African-American business leaders in 1937, began a series of exhibitions in partnership with the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts to both showcase works of African-American artists and encourage acquisition of their works.<sup>57</sup> The Atlanta University's Annual Exhibition, the Barnett-Aden Gallery, and the Pyramid Club were among the few nationally-known venues through which African-American art was shown regularly in the 1940s and 1950s.

From the mid- to late-1940s into the 1950s, Abstract Expressionism occupied the public imagination as critics such as Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg championed its role in the development of modern art. In addition, commercially-driven art galleries and art dealers advanced the precepts of new artistic styles and artists, organizing structures of patronage to be more competitively market-driven than benevolent. As most American artists

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<sup>56</sup> The Barnett-Aden Gallery remained in existence in Washington, D.C. from 1943-1969. A good description of the Barnett Aden Gallery's early activities and role in Washington D.C. can be found in Keith Morrison, *Art in Washington and Its Afro-American Presence: 1940-1970*, (Washington, D.C.: Washington Project for the Arts, 1985).

<sup>57</sup> John W. Ittmann, *Dox Thrash: An African American Master Printmaker Rediscovered*, eds. Philadelphia Museum of Art and Terra Museum of American Art (Philadelphia; Seattle: Philadelphia Museum of Art; In association with the University of Washington Press, 2001).

and critics struggled with the evolution of this artistic movement and its rejection of the narrative function of social realism, African-American artists who aimed to distinguish themselves through the new abstraction remained ostracized from the New York gallery scene or simply maintained a status as the “token” African-American artist in the stable. Though not an Abstract Expressionist painter, Jacob Lawrence had the singular status of being a gallery-represented artist of African descent due to his representation by the Downtown Gallery.<sup>58</sup> Romare Bearden was the only African American represented by Samuel Kootz Gallery in 1946.<sup>59</sup> Norman Lewis, notably an original participant in the meetings with other American Abstractionists in 1950 at Studio 35, was, despite finding little in the way of commercial success, represented along with white Abstractionists such as Clyfford Still and Mark Tobey by the Willard Gallery.<sup>60</sup> Other black Abstract Expressionist artists such as Herbert Gentry, Edward Clark and Beauford Delaney spent the majority of their careers abroad, hoping to live and work in a more socially tolerant atmosphere, and their relationships with American art galleries did not occur until much later or were tenuous at best.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> The Downtown Gallery also represented folk artist Horace Pippin and other artists such as Hale Woodruff for a brief period of time.

<sup>59</sup> The Archives of American Art contains correspondence between Romare Bearden and the Samuel Kootz Gallery referencing their business relationship. In a letter dated 20 Feb 1946, the gallery agreed to be the sole representative of Bearden for two years “from the expiration of the current agreement” although their previous agreement was not actually stated. The agreement also stated that the gallery would receive a 40 percent commission for all work sold in the gallery or his studio, and would advertise and catalogue all of his work, but also stipulated that Bearden was responsible for photographing his work. See *Archives of American Art-Collections Online, Romare Bearden Papers, Correspondence, 1944-September, 1972*. (Box 1, Folder 3), <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collectionsonline/bearroma> (accessed 6 Sept.2008).

<sup>60</sup> Ann Eden Gibson, *Abstract Expressionism :Other Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 248.

<sup>61</sup> See *Explorations in the City of Light : African-American Artists in Paris, 1945-1965*, eds. Audreen Buffalo and Studio Museum in Harlem (New York, NY: Studio Museum in Harlem, 1996).

Art historian Ann Gibson suggests that prevailing assumptions by critics and galleries about African-American, Native American and women artists were overly-deterministic and cast them as being incapable of mastering full abstraction and its “universal” impulse due to a supposed predilection for social and cultural themes. The idea that minority artists were more emotional and at best more culturally- or sociopolitically-motivated cast them as being out of touch with the purely artistic ideals espoused by mainstream Abstract Expressionism, creating a fictional disparity in terms of their artistic quality and relevance. Artists such as Hale Woodruff and Charles Alston, both painting and teaching in New York City at the time, challenged the limiting effects of such assumptions, declaring their universal role as artists beyond their racial classification or background.<sup>62</sup>

As the decade of the 1960s approached, some traditional support of African-American artists began to wane as the major figures in their institutions aged and another generation of leadership assumed a role in guiding patronage efforts. The Harmon Foundation, which had been a significant philanthropic supporter of various African-American artists, ceased operations in 1967 and began a process of deaccessioning its collection of “Negro” art to the National Collection of Art (now the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American Art) and several historically black colleges including Hampton University, Morgan State University and Tulane University’s Amistad Research Center. The Barnett-Aden Gallery reduced its exhibition programming and activities following the death of Alonzo Aden in 1961, foreshadowing its ultimate demise in 1969 upon the death of his partner, James V. Herring. In 1970, Atlanta University hosted the final year of its national art competition, which had been a major venue for artists for twenty-eight years. Ideological

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<sup>62</sup> Ann Eden Gibson, *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 248.



changes in the social and political climate demanded a more radical approach to breaking boundaries in the art arena.

In the wake of the Civil Rights protests and organized demonstrations against injustice in the 1960s and 1970s, several African-American artists banded together to analyze their plight and develop solutions for making their work both relevant but also accessible for consumption by the masses. For the most part, artists were at a major crossroads in determining whether their relationship with the art establishment would be one that led to further integration or one that was specifically tailored to the African-American community and carried a specifically “black aesthetic.”<sup>63</sup> “Black art” was debated furiously throughout the next two decades as artists, theorists and even critics from popular media attempted to understand the role of African-American artists in relation to the turbulent era of protests against racial, sexual and socioeconomic injustice.<sup>64</sup>

One notable example occurred on July 5, 1963, on the eve of the historic March on Washington led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., when artist Romare Bearden was joined by artists Hale Woodruff, Charles Alston, Norman Lewis, William Pritchard, Richard Mayhew, Emma Amos, Ernest Crichlow, Reginald Gammon, Alvin Hollingsworth and others in his studio on Christopher Street in New York City to form the group, Spiral. Members of Spiral had varied interests and connections to the theme of black art. Therefore, their vigorous debates about the role of black artists and the merits of collective struggle both within the art world and throughout the larger society was both timely and relevant.

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<sup>63</sup> Addison Gayle, *The Black Aesthetic* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971).

<sup>64</sup> Mary Schmidt Campbell and Studio Museum in Harlem, *Tradition and Conflict: Images of a Turbulent Decade, 1963-1973* (New York, N.Y.: Studio Museum in Harlem, 1985), 99.

Individual artists used such forums not only to receive recognition for the quality of their work, but also to ensure that they would be considered on par with white artists in terms of developing newer patronage systems that involved gallery representation. In an interview with Jeanne Siegel, in which Bearden discusses his experiences working under the WPA, studying in Paris, and being represented by the Samuel Kootz Gallery, he notes that black artists had a particularly difficult time in achieving gallery representation in New York City despite the success of a few. Bearden's experience with Kootz Gallery, Norman Lewis' with Willard Gallery and even Jacob Lawrence's earlier representation by the Downtown Gallery would be the only examples that Bearden could reference. Therefore the importance of the Christopher Street space for creating networks of exposure for artists was not small or incidental.<sup>65</sup>

Although art galleries had been formed in some universities and social organizations years earlier, there were very few that were privately controlled by African Americans. In the late 1960s African-American artists staged protests for inclusion of their work in major museums such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Whitney Museum of Art. Many artists felt that their voices had gone unheard and that much of their work had been left out of critical exhibitions which would have given them national visibility. As a result, more artists looked to cultivate their own museums, art centers and community-oriented approaches to art appreciation. For example, in 1968 the Studio Museum in Harlem opened with innovative exhibitions for artists of African descent. In the same year, arts activist Elma Lewis founded the National Center of Afro-American Artists (NCAA) in Boston, which flourished under the curatorial leadership of its director, Edmund Barry Gaither. In 1969, Romare Bearden,

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<sup>65</sup> Jeanne Siegel, *Artwords: Discourse on the 60s and 70s* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992).

Norman Lewis and Ernest Crichlow went on to found Cinque Gallery, a gallery that primarily supported emerging artists of color.<sup>66</sup>

The development of alternative gallery spaces for African-American artists not only focused on addressing the ideological concerns of artists and the gallery owners, but also building commercially viable structures of economic patronage. Lisa Meyerowitz's study on alternative gallery spaces in New York City focuses on the efforts of gallery owners such as Corrine Jennings and Joe Overstreet of Kenkeleba Gallery and Linda Bryant of Just Above Midtown Gallery as examples of grassroots efforts to support African-American artists.<sup>67</sup> Although geographically restricted to the environs of the New York Metropolitan area, Meyerowitz's study underscores the notion that black-run operatives were important not only in providing venues for showing African-American art, but also in shaping the careers of several artists and resurrecting the careers of others. In many cases, the exposure led to the acquisition of work by private collectors as well as mainstream art museums. For example, artist Palmer Hayden's *Nous Quatre à Paris* was purchased from Just Above Midtown through funds of the Joseph H. Hazen Foundation for the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1975.<sup>68</sup>

Significant developments in the exhibition world were spurred by continued activism by artists and community members who demanded attention to the African-American visual arts tradition and diversity in the ranks of emerging curatorial projects. In 1970, the Boston

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<sup>66</sup> Sharon F. Patton, *African-American Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>67</sup> Lisa Ann Meyerowitz, "Exhibiting Equality : Black-Run Museums and Galleries in 1970s New York" (PhD, University of Chicago), .

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

Museum of Fine Arts, under the curatorial leadership of Edmund Barry Gaither, organized the exhibition, *Afro-American Artists: New York and Boston*. In the early 1970s, protests by Los Angeles arts activists regarding the lack of black artists shown at Los Angeles County Museum of Art resulted in solo exhibitions for artists David Hammons and Charles White.<sup>69</sup> In 1976, the Metropolitan Museum of Art organized the first-ever traveling exhibition of 19th century black artists in their collection based on the research of art historian Regenia Perry.<sup>70</sup>

A major breakthrough came in 1976 at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Members of the Black Arts Council, a museum advocacy group composed of African-American artists, collectors, scholars and others, encouraged the development of *Two Centuries of Black American Art* with the assistance of then Fisk University curator and art professor, David C. Driskell. *Two Centuries of Black American Art*, a groundbreaking traveling exhibition and identically titled publication, introduced the nation to an extensive survey of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century art by African Americans during the period of the nation's bicentennial celebration. This exhibition accompanied two other bicentennial exhibitions at the museum and reversed the exclusion of African-American artists from American art history. Driskell's encyclopedic coverage of over 200 artists, which concluded with artists active by 1950, gave credence to the notion of the presence of African-American art and African-American artists' participation in the American artistic tradition.

According to Bridget Cooks, reviews of *Two Centuries* mirrored the racial politics of the era. Although many praised the attempt to educate viewers on the neglected artistic

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<sup>69</sup> *Black Los Angeles: American Dreams and Racial Realities*, eds. Darnell M. Hunt and Ana-Christina Ramón (New York: New York University Press, 2010).

<sup>70</sup> Regenia Perry, *Selections of Nineteenth-Century Afro-American Art / [Exhibition]: June 19-August 1, 1976*, ed. Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.) (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1976).

legacy of American blacks, critics such as Harold Rosenberg and Hilton Kramer tended to focus on the presumed social relevance of the exhibition with only fleeting discussion of visual images. The exhibition was also criticized for the uneven nature of the quality of “major” and “minor” artists as well as Driskell’s failure to define a specific “black” aesthetic for its audiences.<sup>71</sup> Nonetheless, the press coverage of *Two Centuries*, its outreach and programming which included a well-researched catalogue, documentary film and national news coverage, was unprecedented for its time.

The timing of *Two Centuries* and other exhibitions paralleled other significant activities occurring in relation to the academic and critical reception of black artists. In 1970, Jeff Donaldson hosted CONFABA (Conference on the Functional Aspects of Black Art) at Northwestern University, at which visual and performing artists, art historians, and interdisciplinary scholars discussed aspects of black aesthetics, art history and patronage.<sup>72</sup>

In 1976, artist, collector and art historian Samella Lewis published two volumes entitled *Black Artists on Art* with Ruth Waddy. Lewis helped found the first and only scholarly periodical dedicated to African-American art, *Black Art: An International Quarterly* (now *The International Review of African-American Art*). Like Driskell’s earlier project, Lewis’ publications provided biographical entries on several black artists with color images, yet her text also included contemporary and virtually unknown artists working at the time of publication. Lewis’ new periodical not only ran articles about artists and reviews of exhibitions, it also served as an outlet for promoting black art galleries and artwork such as her own. She often featured advice columns on collecting written by other artists such as

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<sup>71</sup> Bridget R. Cooks, *Exhibiting Blackness: African Americans and the American Art Museum* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011).

<sup>72</sup> Coleman, 25 *Who made a Difference*, 27.

Benny Andrews and Alvin C. Hollingsworth alongside articles on contemporary artists and their predecessors. Other articles even featured entrepreneurs who were eager to help artists to meet the demand of collectors by developing strategies such as producing limited edition prints.<sup>73</sup>

Lewis' mission in creating the journal was to increase the visibility of black artists and the market for their work. Early volumes contain gallery ads for works of art, particularly lithographs, by artists such as Elizabeth Catlett, Romare Bearden, Joseph Holston and Varnette Honeywood, as well as several articles and tips on collecting African-American art. Figure 1.1 shows an example of a limited edition print created by Lewis' mentor and former teacher Elizabeth Catlett that was offered through Hancraft Studios in Claremont, California. Lewis also opened Contemporary Arts and Crafts Gallery on Pico Boulevard in Los Angeles with artist and actor Bernie Casey, where they produced and sold prints based on original artwork by several black artists.<sup>74</sup> Working as a collector, gallery owner and editor of the journal, Lewis was able to solidify her own importance as an art critic and provide a forum for regular discourse and documentation that had been ignored in popular art periodicals. Exhibitions of national significance and regular documentation of artistic activity by black artists provided necessary momentum for the collecting efforts that Lewis and others advocated. This enthusiasm was echoed by artists such as Benny Andrews, who encouraged opportunities to cultivate black patronage. In other words, artists' collective resistance against

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<sup>73</sup> One article describes the efforts of a company called L.D. International which was founded by Donald F. Greene and Lawrence R. Johnson with the aim of stimulating demand for work by black and other non-Western artists through sales of limited editions and "original print graphics." No further mention of their business has been identified. See "The Artist in the Marketplace," *Black Art: An International Quarterly* 2, no.1 (1977), 58-59.

<sup>74</sup> *Black Los Angeles: American Dreams and Racial Realities*, 256.

racism in the art world also emphasized and invigorated a culture of patronage among African Americans as a strategy for overcoming the disparities.

During the 1970s collecting and its ability to preserve one's heritage became a regular staple of the rhetoric for potential African-American art buyers, and such individuals were vested with a collective responsibility to do so. Some African Americans fulfilled their growing consciousness of the need to embrace a black cultural legacy through participation in the visual art arena. The notion of a "legacy" of creative expression in the visual arts was coupled with an emphasis on building a newer legacy of collecting. Art dealers such as Thurlow Tibbs reinforced the importance of black collectors by describing those who had already made commitments to the cause in 1970s: African-American corporations such as Johnson Publishing Company, African-American private collectors such as broadcast journalist Max Robinson (Chicago) and actor and comedian Bill Cosby (Los Angeles), and the growing number of black museums and art centers emerging in major cities such as Chicago, Boston, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, New York and Washington, D.C.<sup>75</sup>

The 1980s ushered in the occurrence of more scholarly literature, traveling exhibitions of significance to African-American art and a growing fine art consumer base. Irving Sandler notes that the 1980s art market boom occurred largely after the 1974-75 economic recession. The problem of inflation, caused by the looming oil crisis, motivated investors to move toward tangible assets such as precious gems, real estate and art as investment vehicles.<sup>76</sup> Art and financial magazines encouraged speculation on art as record-

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<sup>75</sup> Evans-Tibbs Collection, *The Evans-Tibbs Collection: Selections from the Permanent Holdings: 19th and 20th Century American Art*

<sup>76</sup> Irving Sandler, *Art of the Postmodern Era: From the Late 1960s to the Early 1990s* (New York: IconEditions, 1996).

breaking auctions and the evolution of art investment strategies began to develop in stock brokerage firms.

Art historian Judith Wilson described a “bullish market” for black art in a December 1980 issue of *Black Enterprise*, a monthly periodical devoted to providing business news and economic empowerment tools to the African American community.<sup>77</sup> It reported on the increasing value of work by African-American artists in the midst of the U.S. art boom. The value of African-American art apparently lagged behind art of white contemporaries, but its future was viewed in optimistic terms due to patronage by the African-American middle class.

The choice of the image for the issue (Figure 1.2) was by no means accidental, but instead evocative of the theme. An image of the painting, *The Cardplayers*, by artist Hale Woodruff, had been contributed by art collectors John and Vivian Hewitt, who had been collecting work by African-American artists such as Woodruff for some years. Woodruff, who had died only months before the publication of this issue, had had a long and prolific career as a painter and teacher in Atlanta and New York City. *The Card Players* (Figure 1.2) is a modern Cubist-inspired painting of two figures engaged in a game of cards. Its angular compositional elements and tilted picture plane demonstrate the influence of European modernists such as Cezanne who were major influences on the artist’s style. The faces of the figures resemble African masks of West Africa and are suggestive of the modernist debt to African art. Woodruff did a series of paintings based on this theme and compositional strategy, beginning in 1930 with a painting of the same name which won a Harmon

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<sup>77</sup> Judith Wilson, "The Bullish Market for Black Art," *Black Enterprise* 11, no. 5 (1980), 35-36; 39-40.



Foundation award in 1931 and critical recognition by Alain Locke for this and eleven other works in the anthology *Negro Art Past and Present*.<sup>78</sup>

*The Cardplayers*, which served as a replacement to its badly deteriorated predecessor, is dated 1978, meaning that it was created and purchased during the same year in which the Hewitts sponsored a private sale of the artist's work in their home. The private sale was due in part to a suggestion by artist Al Hollingsworth that the Hewitts exhibit his work at their home. Later the exhibits and sales included not only Woodruff and Hollingsworth's work but also that of others such as Eugene Grigsby and Ernest Crichlow.<sup>79</sup> In addition, as one exhibition in its *Black Masters Series*, the Studio Museum in Harlem assembled a major retrospective exhibition of Hale Woodruff's work in 1979 where *The Card Players*, among other paintings, was exhibited.<sup>80</sup>

The use of Woodruff's painting as the *Black Enterprise* frontispiece to the issue highlights two interesting facets of this booming market. First, Woodruff's painting resonates artistically with experiments in 20th century modernism, and second, an interest in African-inspired modernism is connected with a tradition of patronage among intimate networks of artists and collectors of African-American art. The interrelationship between works by artists such as Hale Woodruff and the emergence of African-American corporate patronage signals a strategic departure from the dominant narrative of white philanthropic support such as the

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<sup>78</sup> Richard A. Long, "Afterword: Remembering Hale Woodruff," *Hale Woodruff, Nancy Elizabeth Prophet and the Academy* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2007), 95.

<sup>79</sup> Todd D. Smith, *The Hewitt Collection : Celebration and Vision : The Hewitt Collection of African-American Art*, eds. Band of America Corporation. and Mint Museum of Craft + Design. (Charlotte, N.C.: Bank of America Corp, 1999).

<sup>80</sup> Hale Woodruff 1900-1980., *Hale Woodruff : 50 Years of His Art, April 29 Thru June 24, 1979, the Studio Museum in Harlem*, ed. Studio Museum in Harlem. (New York, N.Y. (2033 5th Ave., New York 10035): The Museum, 1979).

Harmon Foundation as the primary driver. In 1949, a little over fifty years earlier, Woodruff and painter Charles Alston had completed a mural entitled the *The Negro in California History* for the Golden State Mutual Insurance Company. Golden State Mutual Insurance Company, formed in 1925, was one of the few companies to offer life insurance to African Americans during the era of segregation and was a visible and active promoter of civic and cultural engagement with its constituents, most notably through its patronage of the visual arts. In 1949, a concerted effort was begun to build its corporate art collection with works by African Americans such as Richmond Barthé, Henry O. Tanner and others via donations and direct purchases from artists or art exhibits. At the company's fortieth anniversary celebration in 1965, 36 works by artists such as Charles White, Beulah Woodard and Hughie Lee Smith were shown to the public.

With more than 100 paintings, drawings, sculptures and collages, the Golden State Mutual Insurance Company was considered to have the “largest public collection of Black art west of Chicago.”<sup>81</sup> Tours were given regularly in the lobby and various areas of the Golden State Mutual Insurance headquarters, and educational brochures and pamphlets were provided to visitors. As another way of displaying the work, the company produced a calendar with reproductions of its art; the calendar doubled as a way to show the collection but itself became collectible and “suitable for framing.”<sup>82</sup> Such efforts were now resurrected through a collaboration between black media outlets, historians, and artists who sought to frame African-American art as a continuing legacy that needed continual support in an age of marketplace competition for fine art. Interventions by African-American-owned corporations

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<sup>81</sup> Francine Carter, "The Golden State Mutual Afro-American Collection," 1, no. 2 (Winter 1976, 1976), 14-15.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

such as the Golden State Mutual Insurance Company and even *Black Enterprise* magazine's publisher, Earl Graves, were indicators of the importance of collecting African-American art as both an investment strategy and a marker of cultural pride.

A major event in this world of black art buying came when celebrity comedian Bill Cosby purchased the *Thankful Poor* by Henry Ossawa Tanner from Sotheby's auction house in 1981. Cosby's purchase spurred fascination and interest as it set an auction record for any African-American artist at the time. David Driskell, who became Cosby's family curator and consultant in 1977 following the *Two Centuries* exhibition, placed the successful bid of \$250,000 for the Cosbys, drawing headlines and broader interest in such extant works. Cosby's visibility as an elite entertainer who collected significant works from his own cultural heritage became an inspiration for other collectors. Although Bill Cosby has been noted for his collection of African-American art, since 1964 he has also been a collector of major works by European and American artists such as Reginald Marsh and Thomas Hart Benton as well early American furniture. Cosby's interest in African-American art began in 1967 when he purchased two Charles White ink and charcoal drawings entitled *Nude* and *Cathedral of Life*.<sup>83</sup>

David Driskell's involvement in shaping the Cosby collection is significant. Driskell's curatorial endeavors began while he was an art student at Howard University and worked at the nearby Barnett-Aden Gallery. After teaching at several historically black institutions such as Howard University and Talladega College and studying abroad in Europe and Africa, Driskell became sought after for his knowledge of African-American art

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<sup>83</sup> Driskell, *The Other Side of Color: African American Art in the Collection of Camille O. and William H. Cosby, Jr.*

traditions. Collectors Harriet and Harmon Kelley cite Driskell's *Hidden Heritage* exhibition, another survey building on the success of *Two Centuries*, as an impetus for their collecting journey which began in 1987.<sup>84</sup> The formulation of nationally-touring survey exhibitions of African-American art also helped to institute a canonical focus for African-American art history, which not only reinforced the notion of a visual arts tradition among blacks but also a field of interest for potential collectors looking for untapped offerings in American art.

Projects such as Driskell's *Two Centuries* and related scholarship can be viewed in the context of a growing desire for historical revisionism and critique of American art history and practice. Many historians in the field of American art, largely defined as work created in the United States prior to 1945, were largely ignorant of the contributions of African Americans or Native Americans. The lack of knowledge mirrored a lack of visibility in the public arena as well as the halls of academia. In addition, American art scholarship as a whole continued to struggle to find its voice in a patronage system in the United States that had a preference for traditions in French or British art. One could argue that as the field itself struggled to build a legacy of "American" painters and sculptors, internal divisions based on race or gender inequities persisted beneath the surface, diminishing the diversity of an American visual arts tradition.<sup>85</sup> Commercial galleries increasingly took on the role of compiling and publishing *catalogue raisonnés* for artists, which disturbed some art historians who objected to what they believed was marketing rather than scholarship.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Kelley, *The Harmon and Harriet Kelley Collection of African American Art: Exhibition*.

<sup>85</sup> Wanda M. Corn, "Coming of Age: Historical Scholarship in American Art," *The Art Bulletin* 70, no. 2 (Jun., 1988): 188-207.

<sup>86</sup> Mary Ann Calo, *Critical Issues in American Art: A Book of Readings* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997), 328.

While American art scholars continued to grapple with thematic and methodological changes in their field in the wake of post-structuralist intellectual discourse, art dealers also attempted to articulate the position of African-American art in the dominant discourse in the art market. For example, in a publication produced by art dealer Thurlow Tibbs, he suggests that African-American art produced between 1930 and 1960 fell into three categories: “Mainstream,” “Traditionalist,” and “Neo-Primitive.” “Mainstream” is described as “styles accepted by historians as most representative of tastes popular at a particular time and in a particular place.”<sup>87</sup> He cites Joseph Delaney’s works as being consistent with the style of artists such as Thomas Hart Benton and Reginald Marsh, and Norman Lewis’s work as to some degree comparable to Franz Kline and Jackson Pollack. “Traditionalists” are those employing studio practices found in the academy, such as those by sculptor Richmond Barthé, painters Lara Wheeler Waring and Lois Mailou Jones, and draftsman and lithographer Charles White. “Neo-Primitives” would include the work of self-taught artists or those who had less formal training, such as Jacob Lawrence, Horace Pippin, Bill Traylor, Clementine Hunter and Marion Perkins.<sup>88</sup> Such definitions demonstrate a desire on the part of art dealers to craft their own definitions about the role and place of work by African Americans that responded to their own needs but also ‘mainstream’ perceptions of art which were seemingly fixed and highly categorical in the public imagination.

Toward the end of the decade, the inclusion of some minority artists in the broader art world of museums and galleries was met with a significant amount of cynicism, particularly

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<sup>87</sup> Evans-Tibbs Collection., *The Evans-Tibbs Collection : Selections from the Permanent Holdings : 19th and 20th Century American Art* (Washington, D.C.: Evans-Tibbs Collection, 1985): 9.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid.

among contemporary artists. Howardena Pindell's indictment of the art world in the June, 1987 *Agendas for Survival* conference at Hunter College was summarized in the *New Art Examiner* in 1989. Filled with statistical data on the paucity of exhibitions of artists of color at major museums and galleries in New York City, it refuted the art world's inflated claims of inclusion. Pindell's activist stance was in part inspired by her participation in groups such as Guerilla Girls and PESTS, which criticized racism and sexism in large museums like the Museum of Modern Art as well as supposedly progressive alternative spaces.<sup>89</sup>

In response to claims of multicultural exclusion in museums and galleries, other periodicals began to examine the issue with articles written by a variety of individuals who were conversant with the issues of African-American artists. For example, in a 1988 *Art News* article, Patricia Failing interviewed 38 artists, dealers, art historians, and collectors and subsequently published an exposé on the exclusion from exhibitions that many of those artists had experienced. In addition, it highlighted ongoing stereotypes about the content and quality of a supposedly monolithic "black art." For example, curator Lowery Stokes Sims emphasized how the role of discriminatory judgments about African-American art had economic consequences for artists in the marketplace in the form of unfair assessments of 'quality.'<sup>90</sup> Kellie Jones lamented that the work of alternative spaces such as the Studio Museum in Harlem and El Museo del Barrio were virtually ignored as legitimate spaces for viewing art.<sup>91</sup> Unlike Pindell's article, this article by Failing does expose readers to a loosely

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<sup>89</sup> Howardena Pindell, "Art World Racism: A Documentation," *New Art Examiner* 16 (March 1989), 32-36.

<sup>90</sup> Patricia Failing, "Black Artists Today: A Case of Exclusion," *ARTnews* 88 (03, 1989), 125.

<sup>91</sup> Patricia Failing, "Black Artists Today: A Case of Exclusion," 129.

affiliated group of scholars, curators, and art dealers whose perspective and presence countered the overall sense of artistic neglect.

In viewing images of various individuals featured in Failing's article, it is interesting that the majority of the participants are themselves people of color or African American, further projecting "black art's" association with black people and cultural specificity. Although several interviewees described their desire to acquire equal footing in a white-dominated art scene (particularly in the art capital of New York), their perspective might appear to reinforce polarization rather than the aim for exposure for the artists they represent. Art dealer June Kelly addresses such a conundrum by asserting that "there is no such thing" as a definitively "black" art and that her gallery was "about art, not color."<sup>92</sup> Other gallerists such as Isobel Neal (Chicago) and Liz Harris (Boston) pointed to the reluctance of many museum curators to educate themselves on active African-American artists and to the fact that not all art production by African-American artists could be pigeon-holed as representational or descriptive of black life. Nonetheless, others such as George N'Namdi of Detroit and Ernestine Brown of Shaker Heights, Ohio found that it was much more profitable and politically significant to encourage upwardly mobile African-Americans to collect art.<sup>93</sup>

These differing ideas on the functionality (or lack of functionality) of racialized monikers such as "black art" or "black artists" would continue to be a point of contention as arts professionals struggled to rationalize their relative position toward an imagined

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<sup>92</sup> Patricia Failing, "Black Artists Today: A Case of Exclusion," 131.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

“mainstream” art world. However, artists, art dealers and collectors continued to build strategies for refining networks of patronage.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Patricia Failing, "Black Artists Today: A Case of Exclusion," *ARTnews* 88 (03, 1989), 124-131.



## CHAPTER II

### **TURN YOUR HAND AND MAKE FASHION: DEALERS OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN ART**

Although criticisms of art world racism prevailed among certain artists and critics, the number of art dealers representing African-American Artists basically doubled in the 1980s and into the 1990s.<sup>95</sup> The activities of art dealers and middlemen, whether through private art dealing, brick and mortar galleries or even e-commerce increasingly gained visibility as change agents in a nascent movement for parity in the art world and art market recognition. As more galleries appeared in major cities such as New York, Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, and Atlanta, art dealers navigated mainstream interpretations of African-American creative expression to court new audiences and to eventually cultivate patrons through varied narratives about the importance of African-American art. This chapter will provide examples of how some dealers fashioned their own definitions of ‘African-American art’ as an evolving yet desirable area of patronage. I will examine the practices of several art dealers in order to determine their use and understanding of the category of works called ‘African-American art’ and what business strategies they used to develop a newer consumer base for those works. The galleries and art dealers examined or cited for examples include Michael Rosenfeld gallery (New York, NY); Bill Hodges Gallery (New York, NY); Lamar Wilson of Fine Arts of Atlanta (Atlanta, GA); and Avisca Fine Art (Marietta, GA). The special role of dealers of African-American heritage, the use of dealer literature in building visual

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<sup>95</sup> Patton, *African-American Art*, 308.

documentation of African-American artists, and the existence of multiple categories of African-American art in the marketplace are some of the ideas that I consider.

In 1997, Pindell commented on her earlier study of art world racism in New York City highlighting significant changes that she perceived. Still ambivalent about the range of options, she notes that many galleries in New York City were no longer “100% white”, however, she remarked that the artists most likely to be embraced by the curators of major museums for exhibitions are those endorsed by the limited pool of major commercial galleries.<sup>96</sup> Increases in traditional sources of support of African-American artists – alternative galleries, philanthropic organizations, university museums (particularly those with curators of color), and private African American art collectors and entrepreneurs such as Bill Cosby and hip hop mogul Russell Simmons- were cited as positive changes.<sup>97</sup> Although the actual numbers were not given by Pindell, her belief that things had improved could also be ascribed to an increase in the visibility of patronage and new found interest for artists of color.

Clearly, between 1987 when Pindell originally published her findings in the *New Art Examiner* and 1997 a great deal of activity occurred. Several traveling group exhibitions solidified surveys of African-American artists and their place in specific art historical moments and styles. For example, Mary Schmidt-Campbell, then director of the Studio Museum of Harlem and then University of Maryland art professor, David Driskell, co-

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<sup>96</sup> One artist in particular that became a cause for concern by Pindell and others was contemporary artist, Kara Walker. For more on this, see, Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw, *Seeing the Unspeakable :The Art of Kara Walker* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 195.

<sup>97</sup> Howardena Pindell and Lowery Stokes Sims, *The Heart of the Question :The Writings and Paintings of Howardena Pindell* (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 1997), 139.

curated, *Harlem Renaissance: Art of Black America* which toured several cities after its origination at the Studio Museum in 1987. In 1989, works from the private Washington, D.C. Evans Tibbs Collection also toured with venues at the Hood Museum of Art (New Hampshire), the Vassar College Art Gallery (Poughkeepsie, NY), and the Afro-American Cultural Center (Charlotte, NC). *Black Printmakers and the W.P.A.*, curated by Leslie King Hammond, became one of the first exhibitions to explore the formative period of the Depression era for the medium of printmaking. In addition to exhibitions which focused on traditional media such as painting, printmaking and sculpture by late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century artists, other important exhibitions such as *Art as Verb: The Evolving Continuum: Installations, Performances and Videos by 13 Afro-American Artists* (1988-89) which exhibited at the Maryland Institute College of Art and the Studio Museum in Harlem showed developments in video and installation art of the mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>98</sup>

Several contemporary artists were rewarded with both recognition in art publications such as *ARTNews* and *Art in America* as well as representation by major galleries that propelled their status. Works by artists such as Robert Colescott and Martin Puryear were viewed by critics as transcending, expanding or critiquing notions of a race and its pluralist content offered an antidote to the Formalist and Minimalist impulse in postwar American art.<sup>99</sup> In 1988 Martin Puryear became the first African American to exhibit at the Sao Paulo Biennale and in between 1987 and 1989 Robert Colescott's works became the subject of a major traveling exhibition.<sup>100</sup> Despite his untimely death in 1988, artist Jean Michel

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<sup>98</sup> *Black Arts Annual [Serial]* (New York: Garland Pub, 1989).

<sup>99</sup> Michael Brenson, "Black Artists: A Place in the Sun," *New York Times*, (Mar 12, 1989): H1.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

Basquiat, for example, remained a darling of the art world since the early 1980s being represented by Annina Nosei and finally Mary Boone Gallery in New York City. Following his death, Basquiat was both mythologized and sensationalized, however, his posthumous success was viewed as anomaly in most settings, including the systematically compartmentalized terrain of discussions on African-American artists collectively.<sup>101</sup>

Although some mainstream galleries increased their stables with more African-American names, the vast majority of galleries specializing in African-American artists' works were only beginning to surface in the larger arts community. The prevailing attitude of many critics was that the historical omissions of a white-dominated art world could not be corrected with a few exhibitions or occasional tokenism.<sup>102</sup> In other words, a continuous stream of activity and educational efforts to ameliorate inequities in the art market had to be pursued by not only artists but through curators, collectors and networks of art middlemen.

In addition, art dealers and commercial gallery owners, armed with new historical information and newer inventory found the prospect of specialization around African-American artists to be both timely and profitable.<sup>103</sup> Cultural historian Mary Jane Hewitt describes one of many attempts to connect art dealers, historians and artists of African descent to discuss the evolution of patronage systems for African-American artists. In 1990, a group of twelve gallery owners, art dealers, and art professionals conducted a retreat at the home of famed *Roots* author Alex Haley in Tennessee. The group discussed everything from

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<sup>101</sup> Lorraine O'Grady, "A Day at the Races," *Artforum International* 31 (April, 1993), 10-12.

<sup>102</sup> *Black Arts Annual [Serial]*

<sup>103</sup> Ingrid Sturgis, "The Art of the Dealers," *Black Enterprise* 20, no. 12 (07, 1990), 62.

marketing techniques to issues with adjusting to emerging information technology options.<sup>104</sup> Although it is not clear who the full roster of attendees were, the article continues with a study of twentieth century patronage for African-American art and ends with names and brief descriptions of the specialties of several art dealers from around the country and images from their inventories interspersed. Among the dealers included were George N’Namdi (G.R. N’Namdi gallery, Birmingham, MI); Stella Jones Gallery (New Orleans, LA); Lithos Gallery (St. Louis, MO); Malcolm Brown Gallery (Shaker Heights, OH); Black Gallery (Los Angeles, CA); Parish Gallery (Washington, DC); Bill Hodges Gallery (New York, NY); June Kelly Gallery (New York, NY); M. Hanks Gallery (Santa Monica, CA) and Samjai Gallery (Los Angeles, CA).<sup>105</sup> It is clear that Hewitt viewed the activities of the retreat’s participants and their cohorts as important in the patronage narrative for African-American art rather than simply relegating them to the periphery. Hewitt also concludes the announcement of the availability of a directory of these and additional dealers that would be created by the journal in a subsequent issue. Further, Hewitt also suggests that the directory would have a significant or at least exclusive focus on promoting African-American art dealers which she suggests had been traditionally dominated by white art dealers.<sup>106</sup> Patronage and profit infused with cultural pride were a clear reverberation.

The press weighed in on the presence of dealers of African-American art, particularly those of African descent, and their important role in cultivating interest and the economic and social challenges they faced as they navigated the art industry. Ingrid Sturgis writes, for

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<sup>104</sup> M. J. Hewitt, "Vital Resources," *The International Review of African American Art* 14, no. 2 (1997).

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 40.

example, that art dealers, and collectors stood to benefit over the long haul from the demand for art by African-American consumers as black art held “the best value for the money in the 1990s.”<sup>107</sup> An emphasis on black artists, black dealers and black collectors of African-American art by the press reinforced the notion that they function as cultural agents whose economic engagements with art reflect a racialized counter-strategy to the larger ‘mainstream art world.’<sup>108</sup> In other words, black self-determination in the economic realm and black artistic success were inextricably linked for many dealers. The overt political stance of artists for inclusion in mainstream institutions is then supplemented by the rhetoric of art dealers which encouraged the integration of financial systems which fueled the art market. On the one hand, dealers of African-American art could profit from an allegiance to works of art that formed a new horizon for the art world; on the other hand a strategy could be in place for those who simply found satisfaction in supporting African-American economic agendas.

The cooperation among art dealers who specialized in selling African-American artists was reinforced through other collaborations as well. In 1998 art advisor and appraiser Halima Taha's book *Collecting African American Art: Works on Paper and Canvas* was published (see Figure 2.1). The book, composed of 200 color illustrations of art by various African-American artists, was conceived by Taha as means of informing both novice and experienced collectors of works by African-American artists. The information in the book was based on input from interviews of over 300 art dealers and 40 art collectors and the

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<sup>107</sup> Ingrid Sturgis, “The Art of the Dealers,” *Black Enterprise* 20.12 (July 1990), 62.

<sup>108</sup> *Mapping Markets for Paintings in Europe 1450-1750*

images were submitted by art collectors and museums, in some cases, but mainly art dealers and for profit galleries.<sup>109</sup>

Although not the only publication of its kind, Baker mentions that Taha described her publication as one remedy to the ignorance that she observed in the art market after working in the 1980s as a gallery assistant at Onyx Gallery, a contemporary New York art gallery owned by Belgian jazz aficionado Laurent Enckell.<sup>110</sup> As evidence of the lack of interest in black artists, Onyx Gallery's investment of full page advertisements of works by African-American artists in major art periodicals such as *Art in America* and *Art News* was viewed as anomaly by Taha.<sup>111</sup> Taha viewed the 1980s as a period of intense art buying overall but as one of great confusion about the value and significance of African-American art and its absence in the history of American art. Therefore, her publication, only a decade or so later, marked solid progress in the nebulous terrain of the art market.

Taha's publication includes chapters that served as a general overview of African-American art history, descriptions of the different media available such as prints, paintings and photography; price negotiation techniques; bibliography; glossary of art terms and a discussion about the care and conservation of art. Taha also includes a variety of comments and quotes from artists such as Romare Bearden and E.J. Montgomery, art historians and curators such as Samella Lewis and Deirdre Bibby, gallery owners such as June Kelly, and

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<sup>109</sup> Opal Baker, "The Battle for a Much Needed Book," *International Review of African American Art* 15, no. 3 (1998), 55.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.; Although collecting resources for ethnic art and collectibles exist, ones which are specify the category of "fine art" are rare or limited in distribution. For example, see Ana M. Allen, *The Beginner's Guide to Collecting Fine Art African American Style*, (Washington, DC: Positiv!, 1998) which was self-published by the author.

<sup>111</sup> Al Loving was featured in the January 1985 edition of *Art in America*. In the same month *Art News*, carried a full-page color ad for an exhibition of his, *Mercer Street Series* (1984), featuring handmade paper works produced at Exeter Press.

even famous authors such as Ntozake Shange, reinforcing its cross-disciplinary appeal. The back pages of the publication include a state-by state directory of galleries and dealers, photography resources, and a listing of African-American museums and historical associations. In relation to the venues for buying art, symbols were affixed to differentiate between galleries or dealers that specialized in African-American art, those that were African American owned, and those that simply represented African-American artists. By all means not comprehensive, the listing does provide a range of locales of varying sizes, origins and personnel, the largest numbers found in New York.<sup>112</sup>

Taha's insistence on the creation of this book may have underscored her individual commitment as an arts professional in educating buyers, yet her inclusion of both a directory of dealers and images of objects available in their galleries also signaled the importance of professional dealers or gallery representation in mediating the relationship between buyers and art. Taha states that the images in her publication were important in showing the diversity of works by African Americans that rarely are shown in books on American art and suggests that these works contribute to the cadre of important works of art in which had not been included in museums.<sup>113</sup>

Another factor to consider when examining *Collecting African American Art* is its emphasis on 'fine' art galleries. In an article on the importance of appraisals for art collectors, art appraiser and consultant Halima Taha describes three sub markets of 'African-American art': 1) the international market 2) the popular market and 3) the academic market.

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<sup>112</sup> Halima Taha, *Collecting African American Art : Works on Paper and Canvas* (New York: Crown, 1998).

<sup>113</sup> Opal Baker, "The Battle for a Much Needed Book," *International Review of African American Art* 15, no. 3 (1998), 55.



She describes the ‘international market’ as one which is “based on the collective activity of artists, dealers, curators, collectors, auction houses, critics, and academia.”<sup>114</sup> African-American artists who have received critical acclaim, are exhibited in major galleries, are included in the collections of major museums and are documented in the histories of American art fall into this category. Romare Bearden, Benny Andrews, Betye Saar, Jacob Lawrence, Henry O. Tanner, and William H. Johnson are a few of the artists named for this category.<sup>115</sup> She does not define the “academic market” but it is clear from the preceding definition that “international” and “academic” markets apparently occupy the same circles.

Conversely, the popular market is comprised of artists working outside of the established white mainstream. They are entrepreneurial artists who produce, market, and sell their work directly to collectors via galleries, frame shops, art fairs, and the Internet. She suggests that the ‘popular market’ lacks the larger infrastructure of representatives and agents which has both complicated and shaped the careers of some more renowned artists.

According to Taha, this market was created due to the innate elitism within the art world which allows only a few “stars” to dominate. Instead, these artists found validation from direct sales to consumers directly versus critical acceptance in mainstream and academic criticism. Some of these artists include William Tolliver, Charles Bibbs, Paul Goodnight and Annie Lee.<sup>116</sup> Taha’s “popular market” is an interesting classification in that it indicates that segmentation in the work of African-American artists had less to do with materials or any

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Halima Taha, “African American Art: Basics to Appraising an Asset & Commodity,” *Black Art in America* Blog, April 30, 2011, <http://blackartinamerica.com/profiles/blogs/african-american-art-basics-to>.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

stylistic deviation but rather imposed notions of exclusivity which accompanied access to their work.

Although one could argue that all modern markets are dependent on capital to sustain their operations, Taha describes the activities of the ‘popular market’ as being more revenue driven and that academic and scholarly consideration resides in a separate sphere. In other words, Taha intimates that scholarly consideration of African-American art becomes a barometer for mainstream success and the absence of approval from the privileged centers of influence, such as museums and academic institutions, leaves many artists to their own devices. The idea of “international” and “academic” art markets then becomes less an issue of price difference, as one would expect in a discussion of art appraisal, but one of public reception through intellectual discourse and its influence on ‘mainstream’ acceptance.

In light of these discussions by Taha, the retail success of many African-American artists cannot be fully understood unless one considers developments in “popular art” or what has been called the “commercial art” world by some art dealers. Although linking art with commerce is not a new notion, the idea of commerce being the main motivation of artistic production by artists has been largely overlooked by scholars. For African-American artists, the elusive nature of commercial success has been a predominant idea due to the economic restraints posed by systemic racism. ‘Nevertheless, popular’ or ‘commercial art,’ defined by repeated retail success, was viewed in a disparaging way by dealers of ‘fine art’, who commanded larger price tags and presumably better quality or more reliable pedigree. Despite the ambivalence, several middlemen and artists who sought to develop a collective presence for African-American artists in the realm of economic patronage created their own

markets for African-American art that included among other things, ‘popular art’ geared toward attracting new buyers.

Former owner of the Fine Arts of Atlanta (Atlanta, GA), Lamar Wilson, understood such dichotomies as early as the 1970s when he began to sell reproductions of works by African-American artists who failed to connect with or appeal to art dealers in major cities such as New York for gallery representation.<sup>117</sup> Wilson also found that a consumer base of African-American buyers, largely inspired by the renaissance of black solidarity and associated imagery during the Black Power Movement, sought affordable visuals which may or may not fit in the fine art world. Wilson believed that mainstream art galleries such as Michael Rosenfeld Gallery and major auction houses such as Sotheby’s or Christie’s dictated both price and standards of quality for African-American art. Therefore, in reference to the work that he sold, Wilson remarked that such galleries “would not touch that stuff” since populist-oriented art was kitsch and could not possibly hold the legitimate historical and financial value of “fine art.” Fine art, which he defined as possessing provenance, acquired through major exhibitions at mainstream venues and major collectors, could be acquired by roughly .5% to 1% of the African-American population with the money and knowledge for locating it. Therefore, alternative visual art, designed for the masses was an important development in the 1980s and 1990s.

Lamar Wilson originally operated an antiques shop with his mother, Dorothy Thompson in Washington, D.C. Dolae Gallery, as it was originally called, sold pottery, china and other objects in addition to art. Clients included several business people and politicians

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<sup>117</sup> Interview, April 4, 2011. Entries concerning Wilson’s practice emanated from this interview, except where otherwise noted.

working on Capitol Hill. However, Wilson's early success as an art middleman came through his association with gallery owner June Kelly of June Kelly Gallery in the early 1980s. Kelly, who at the time acted as agent for artist Romare Bearden, published reproductions of original prints by the artist, not only creating a profitable print market, but also offering opportunities for individuals such as Wilson to become distributors to galleries and private collectors in other major cities outside of New York. One example was Bearden's *Jammin' at the Savoy*, a color etching and aquatint originally printed in an edition of 180 by printmakers Khalil Mohammed and Joseph Kleineman of J.K. Fine Arts in New York in commemoration of Romare Bearden's retrospective at the Brooklyn Museum of Art (see Figure 2.5).<sup>118</sup> Wilson recalls that he was forbidden from encountering the artist directly for inventory, as Bearden was becoming ill and was known to give away various works of art undermining possible sales efforts of Kelly. Although other distributors such as Ed Robertson (Washington, DC) and Malcolm Brown (Shaker Heights, OH) were competitors for Wilson, he became one of Kelly's fastest sellers, selling one hundred Bearden prints at a time allowing her to focus on selling Bearden's original works at more substantial prices to museums and other galleries.

Wilson's affiliation with June Kelly is important to understand in light of the quickly developing stratification of the market for African-American art in the late 1980s. Kelly, although not the first African-American owned gallery to become visible in mainstream art publications, was fast becoming a central figure following the opening of her SoHo Gallery in 1986. Described as the "first commercial African-American art dealer to penetrate the tony

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<sup>118</sup> J.K. Fine Arts was renamed Mojo Portfolio in 1993. The printmaker has continued to publish limited edition prints by Romare Bearden as well as other African American artists such as Ernest Crichlow, Jacob Lawrence, Hughie Lee-Smith, Johnathan Green, Louis Delsarte, Samella Lewis, and Synthia St. James among others.

echelons of the clubby and rarefied mainstream art world,"<sup>119</sup> Kelly eventually became the first African-American art dealer to become a member of the Art Dealers Association of America (ADAA) in 1996.<sup>120</sup> Curator Lowery Stokes Sims recalled that Kelly's business evolved from her private dealing of Bearden's work at the downside of the art boom when the financial markets began to tumble in the late 1980s. However, it only continued to grow as her shrewd knowledge of the art market became more refined and she began to develop more collectors. Sims goes on to suggest that June Kelly Gallery was an anomaly for becoming "mainstream" and that June Kelly's ability to develop an African-American collector base was also key to the marketability of African-American art.<sup>121</sup> Art historian Leslie King Hammond suggests that with Kelly's careful use of timing, audience development, and networking that she was able to create standards for buying and selling works by artists of color."<sup>122</sup>

In addition to Wilson's connection to Kelly his description of competing distributors is consistent with other descriptions of what was becoming a robust, popular market for photographic reproductions of African-American imagery. Around 1987 several distributors sprung up in Washington, D.C. which created a one-stop shop for other distributors who had operated individually. The idea of publishing and distributing prints of African-American artists' on a national and international level was gaining popularity among other entrepreneurs. Things Graphic was founded in 1984 by Ed Robertson in Washington, D.C.

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<sup>119</sup> Ingrid Sturgis, "Her Works of Art," *Emerge* 7, no. 8 (June 1996), 40.

<sup>120</sup> See June Kelly Gallery official website, <http://www.junekellygallery.com/gallery.htm>, (last accessed 3/29/2012).

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

Robertson was able to publish and to function as a major wholesaler of art posters by several artists such as LeRoy Campbell, Charles Bibbs, Joseph Holston, Verna Hart, and James Denmark. Robertson offered them a mechanism for popularizing their images not only through reproduction but also by ensuring that visible artist signatures appeared. Robertson also distinguished himself among other distributors by attending larger and more diverse art trade shows, and conventions to promote his brand beyond regional outlets and also by appearing regularly in African-American periodicals such as *Ebony* and *American Visions* magazine.<sup>123</sup>

Wilson recalled that the 1990s proved to be a real explosion of commercial art by and targeted to African-American art.<sup>124</sup> Following early successes as a co-owner in a family business and print distributor, Wilson migrated to Atlanta, Georgia in 1988 and in 1990 opened a commercial art gallery and store, The Fine Arts of Atlanta, in the Five Points shopping district called Underground Atlanta. His business was preceded by that of Marianne Langley of Frames and Fine Art as well as Sam Mahone of Ancestral Arts Gallery who represented artists such as William Tolliver. One innovation in particular noted by Wilson to have emanated from Marianne Langley's business was that of the "mini-prints," 10 ½ X 12 ½ in. reproductions of popular works by artists, which were sold for approximately \$12 and note cards that sold for \$2 to \$4. Beginning as a "pushcart vendor" in 1988, Wilson's sales of affordable art prints won the admiration of retail operations in

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<sup>123</sup> Interview with Byrma Braham, October 14, 2010.

<sup>124</sup> Interview with Lamar Wilson, April 4, 2011.

Underground Atlanta and he was able to acquire a full retail space in its lower mall and expand his inventory.<sup>125</sup>

Although broadly described as a gallery in this dissertation, Wilson stated in a review of his business that "this is not a gallery; this is an art store."<sup>126</sup> In doing so Wilson sought to emphasize the direct commercial appeal of art versus its aesthetic or intellectual underpinnings. Although the store offered paintings, books, and photo montages of such prominent historical figures as Martin Luther King Jr., Harriet Tubman, Marian Anderson, Billie Holliday, Dick Gregory and Mahalia Jackson, he states that 60 percent of his earnings came in selling "prints" and that most of his customers were women. Wilson opened other businesses in the form of mall kiosks for locations in Augusta, DeKalb and Peachtree Center. With a mailing list of over 35,000 people, he was also able to advertise through sales catalogues, newsletters and free calendars sent to current or potential customers.<sup>127</sup>

Notions of affordability and customization were also at the heart of strategies employed by Wilson. Monthly sales promotions drove customers in the door as did the support of a professional window dresser in staging works in the gallery for passersby. In 1993 after becoming a certified auctioneer, he began a series of auctions for "affordable black art" in his storefront as well as strategic areas of the mall where he could gain more visibility and garner excitement for his wares. In addition Wilson generated excitement for visitors to the gallery, particularly tourists, by allowing them to take souvenir pictures in front of art work that they found exciting. A painting by Wadsworth Jarrell became what he

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<sup>125</sup> Ernest Holsendolph, "Moving Up in Underground- it's no More Pushcart for Proprietor - Fine Arts of Atlanta Gets Space to Grow," *The Atlanta Journal and the Atlanta Constitution* 1992.

<sup>126</sup> C. R. Gibbs, "Dolae: On the Hill," *The Hill Rag*, September 28, 1984.

<sup>127</sup> Interview with Lamar Wilson, April 4, 2011.

described as a major tourist trap. Despite his success, however, Wilson was unable to sustain his business due to a rise in rental costs at the Underground Atlanta and he closed his business in 1995.<sup>128</sup>

In addition to activities at the malls, Wilson suggests that most sales and accompanying education took place in the form of “home shows.” “Home shows” were described by Wilson as events where dealers traveled to homes of hosts who planned parties geared at selling art to networks of friends and interested acquaintances much like the Tupperware craze of the 1950s through the 1970s. The development of home shows targeting African Americans demonstrated that a demand for visuals was accommodated through a variety of strategies that made art appear accessible and affordable. Jan Madori, CEO of Personal Preference, an art sales company which garnered revenue through private home shows, internet sales and fundraising events found that there was a “pent up demand” in the African-American community for visuals.<sup>129</sup> Madori found that her African-American clientele was interested in images of peoples of African descent which reflected their norms and imagination.

Although the commercial art market lacked the scholarly viability of the fine art market, several artists linked to this market gained a following that placed certain works as almost ‘canonical’ in the eyes of customers and dealers like Wilson. Wilson suggests that there was a known yet undocumented “top 5 black prints of all time”: 1) Gilbert Young’s *He Ain’t Heavy* 2) Carl Owens’ *Little Flower*; 3) Cornell Barnes’ *Last Supper*; 4) Paul

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<sup>128</sup> Wilson mentioned that the increase in rental costs was brought on by the Olympic Games which took place in Atlanta during that period.

<sup>129</sup> Christina Royster-Hemby, “Supply and Demand: Private Shows Bring Underrepresented African-American Art To Underserved African-American Patrons,” *Baltimore City Paper*, Jun 22, 2005, <http://www2.citypaper.com/arts/story.asp?id=10094>, Accessed 4/11/2011.



Goodnight's *Floral Arrangement, Senegal*; and 5) Ellis Wilson's *Funeral Procession*. For Wilson, the image itself and its affordable price, rather than fine art provenance is what established its quality base and its level of importance for buyers. To a large degree genre scenes which included representations African or African-American life were the guiding principle and further interest in the artist historically or otherwise had secondary importance. In other words, Wilson's business and others like it served as an antidote to the exclusion and pretensions of an unattainable and even undesirable mainstream art world which was unable to satisfy the vast majority of African-American art consumers to which Wilson supposedly catered.

Like Lamar Wilson, Byrma Braham, owner of Avisca Fine Art in Marietta, Georgia understood that her own reckoning with African-American art would be borne out of market pressures and the gradual evolution of her business.<sup>130</sup> In 1985 she originally founded Savacou Gallery (1985-2009) with Loris Crawford in the East Village. Having grown dissatisfied with lack of depictions of African Americans in museums and galleries, Braham, newly arrived from her native Jamaica and a graduate student, began researching the history of imagery by and about African Americans in her spare time. She began collecting what she perceived to be "black art" in the form of reproductions of works by Romare Bearden, Henry O. Tanner and Hale Woodruff produced by museums such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Impressed with her finds, visitors to her home would inquire about how they could get access to similar works. Braham and her college friend, Loris Crawford saw a business opportunity if they could buy the prints wholesale and resell as distributors.

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<sup>130</sup> All entries concerning Avisca Fine Art emerge from an interview with Byrma Braham on October 14, 2010 unless otherwise noted.

Simultaneously, Braham and Crawford discovered the work of artists Varnette Honeywood and Ernie Barnes, who were what she termed successful “commercial artists”- artists who marketed their work heavily through mail order businesses, sold their work at business and cultural events, and advertised in African-American periodicals such as *Ebony* magazine. For example, artist Varnette Honeywood (1950-2010), who founded Black Lifestyles, an art and greeting card company, attracted the attention of many collectors and celebrities such as Bill Cosby as early as the 1970s. Honeywood’s products, available by mail order were quite recognizable, often showing images of African-American daily life. Cosby later featured her work in episodes of the sitcom the *Cosby Show* and in several of his children’s books.<sup>131</sup>

Braham found that Savacou’s earliest competition was in the form of what she termed “non-black” print and framing shops in Manhattan. Braham described some of these “Non-black” business owners as “Arabs” or those from “Turkey” or the “Middle East.” According to Braham, there was a proliferation of “black art” galleries that sold everything- sculpture, posters, figurines, etc. in addition to chain stores such as H&M that also sold such images. In 1986, Braham started an organization called the Association of African American Black Owned Galleries (AABOC) which sought to put expose or put an end to non-black gallery owners and to introduce potential buyers to black gallery owners.

Savacou Gallery’s development of networks of “black” gallery owners is interesting, yet complex. Its emphasis on African-American gallery owners and sales of work by

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<sup>131</sup> William Grimes, "Varnette Honeywood, 59, Narrative Artist of Black Life," *The New York Times*, September 16, 2010, accessed September 23, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/16/arts/design/16honeywood.html>.

African-American or Caribbean-American artists suggests a wedding of cultural identification with commerce that became quite contentious as more competitors emerged. In addition, the turf that she describes indicates a form of self-imposed exclusion from the broader art community and some might argue, racial chauvinism resembling the white mainstream. Nevertheless, Braham and Crawford felt duty bound to act as spokes(wo)men for African-American artists since their own heritage provided the necessary authenticity for their African-American buyers.

In addition to posters and reproductions, Braham and Crawford found that their prestige would come by establishing a niche in “fine art” which consisted of original paintings and limited editions prints. Braham suggested that the “fine art” category was reinforced by earlier acquisitions or “poster art” or open edition prints since repeat customers could be cultivated as “fine art” buyers over time. According to Braham, it was the role of the gallery to encourage this practice through seminars and newsletters which provided clients criteria for choosing “quality” art at reasonable prices. In this context, Savacou Gallery had a role in establishing not only collectors but discriminating connoisseurs.

By 1995, Braham and Crawford would undergo a business change when Braham decided to migrate to the Atlanta, Georgia area. Once there, Braham continued to act as a private art dealer and also opened Avisca Art ([www.avisca.com](http://www.avisca.com)) in 1998 as an online marketplace for purchasing African-American “commercial art.” As she achieved more capital, she later developed a separate “fine art” presence in Marietta, GA called Avisca Fine Art. Braham found that despite the real estate boom and affluence of some of her clients in the Atlanta area, New York continued to be the stronger market for original works of art

versus “commercial art.” Therefore, she maintained a mix of original paintings, limited edition prints and inexpensive posters and other reproductions to suit a variety of buyers.

For both Savacou Gallery and Avisca Fine Art, Braham defined her audience as new and oftentimes, younger buyers who were willing to take a chance on emerging artists rather than what she describes as “old master black artists.” For Braham “master” black artists such as Romare Bearden and Jacob Lawrence were defined by the volume of years they had worked, exhibitions, awards and “general consensus” in the mainstream art world. Braham also suggested that the market for African –American art required redefinition in the current era since its origins were largely commercial and that deep and powerful galleries had “taken” the hot contemporary artists such as Kehinde Wiley, Kara Walker and Iona Rozeal Brown from galleries dedicated to African-American art. One reason for the disparity felt by Braham was the amount of critical literature produced for contemporary artists earlier in their careers, an asset not acquired by several African-American artists, particularly those who produced work in the earlier part of the twentieth century.

The issue of documentation and art historical research was of paramount concern for dealers of African-American art as they attempted to create more outlets for artistic exposure and historical integrity which could appeal to ‘mainstream’ audiences. In a sense, many dealers became primary educators for both emerging and more established artists that were not recognized in scholarly publications. Such an emphasis on expanding the American art historical narrative is found in the example of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery. Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC was founded in 1989 by Michael Rosenfeld and is located in the New York Gallery Building which is located on West 57<sup>th</sup> Street in New York City. The gallery is described on its website as specializing in American art, however it also cites that

their core mission is “to promote important movements within the history of art in the United States while also increasing the visibility of under-recognized American artists.”<sup>132</sup> Rosenfeld’s wife, business partner and director, halley k harrisburg joined the gallery in 1992 and since that time has contributed her training in academic art history to “expand the canon of American art” by organizing several exhibitions and scholarly exhibition catalogues. Their exhibitions and accompanying publications range from thematic interests of several artists such as abstract expressionism, social realism and surrealism to solo exhibitions featuring artists that they represent such as Jay Defeo, Charles Seliger, Romare Bearden, Beauford Delaney, Irving Norman, Bob Thompson, Betye Saar, William H. Johnson, Norman Lewis, Charles White and Alma Thomas.<sup>133</sup>

Michael Rosenfeld Gallery produced several exhibitions and publications a year, integrating African-American artists in their vision for both group and solo showings. The gallery’s more than seventy publications included a series called *African-American Art: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Masterworks*, a series of ten color catalogues of works done by artists of African-American descent which include essays by notable art historians including, Richard J. Powell, Alvia Wardlaw, Robin G. Kelley, Leslie King-Hammond and Lowery Stokes-Sims. Although publications for Michael Rosenfeld Gallery exhibitions and group or thematic publications were common, an American art category designated by race or ethnicity was unique to this grouping. The African-American artists found in their exhibitions come from a range of disciplines, styles and time periods; however, the lion share represented artists born prior to World War II. Many of these exhibitions have toured nationwide to museums and

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<sup>132</sup> See, “About Us,” Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, accessed 1/23/2012, <http://michaelrosenfeldart.com/about/index.php>.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

others arts institutions such as the Detroit Institute of the Arts, the Columbus Museum of Art, the New Orleans Museum of Art and the Tubman African American Museum in an attempt to expose a variety of audiences to the works of African-American artists.

Michael Rosenfeld's first exhibit of *African-American Art: 20th-Century Masterworks* was held November 18, 1993 through February 12, 1994. A small 32-page catalogue was produced in conjunction with the exhibit and it included short essay by art historian and then associate curator of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, Beryl Wright along with 27 color illustrations (see Figure 2.2). The first page of the catalogue listed the artists exhibited including Charles Alston, Benny Andrews, Richmond Barthe, Romare Bearden, Elizabeth Catlett, Eldzier Cortor, Allan Crite, Beauford Delaney, Joseph Delaney, Aaron Douglas, William H. Johnson, Lois Mailou Jones, Jacob Lawrence, Hughie Lee-Smith, Norman Lewis, Archibald J. Motley, Jr., Hayward Oubre, Augusta Savage, Henry Ossawa Tanner, Bob Thompson, Charles White, Ellis Wilson, and Hale Woodruff. After a brief historical review of the works produced by artists in the catalogue, Wright underscored the problem of American art history and the exclusion of several black artists from the American art 'canon.' She cited the examples of Bearden, Johnson, Lawrence and Tanner as artists who had been allotted solo exhibitions during the 1980s, but that the remainder of African-American artists had been grouped together only by race and not by any unique aspects found in their works.<sup>134</sup> She writes:

“To a large extent, the perceived need to simply establish the historical presence of African-American artists has taken precedence over the kind of in-depth research to which so many European-American artists have long been privy. The undeniable

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<sup>134</sup> Beryl J. Wright, Halley K. Harrisburg and Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, *African-American Art : 20th Century Masterworks* (New York, NY: Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, 1993), 4.

presence of political and biographical issues common to African-Americans which surface in the work of many of these artists had indeed defined particularities that differentiate them. The assumption that these issues are part and parcel of American art history per se and not marginalized concerns will be necessary before “cross over” visual art is recognized.”<sup>135</sup>

Wright’s commentary points to the struggle in both historically defining works by African-American artists within and outside of a presumed American art canon. Her use of the terms “marginalized” and even “cross over” implies that the rigid boundaries that are seemingly in place in the academy when discussing the American artistic tradition run counter to a fluid or at least heterogeneous one which is hoped for in the future. Michael Rosenfeld Gallery’s catalogue then is not so much a remedy as it is a temporary bandage for addressing this concern by coupling exposure via the exhibition with documentation and scholarship in the form of Wright’s essay and the series of reproductions that follow.

The second exhibition in the *Masterworks* series expanded its geographical reach by adding a traveling exhibition component. The exhibition, *Exultations*, was shown at the Long Beach Museum of Art in Long Beach, California from June 2 to August 20, 1995 not long after its initial showing at Rosenfeld’s New York gallery from February 1 to April 8, 1995. The catalogue included a short essay by art historian Richard J. Powell which underscored the idea of spirituality in the works of the exhibition. However, Powell, like Wright in the previous catalogue, critiqued the practice of those, including Rosenfeld, who grouped artists of African descent together in such exhibitions. He also suggested that, historically, exhibitions which only featured white artists were seldom questioned for their racial

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<sup>135</sup> Beryl J. Wright, Halley K. Harrisburg and Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, *African-American Art : 20th Century Masterworks*, 5.

exclusivity.<sup>136</sup> In short, Powell suggests the paradox for exhibitions centered on monolithic groupings based on racial or national identity: on the one hand they call attention to marginalized artists yet, on the other hand, they suggest a form of segregation which exists in exhibitions.

Michael Rosenfeld Gallery continued its work in bringing the work of unsung African-American artists into the public eye when, for example, it mounted works by modernist William H. Johnson in 1995. The exhibition, *William H. Johnson, Works from the Collection of Mary Beattie Brady* showcased paintings originally owned by Mary Beattie Brady, former Director of the Harmon Foundation, a major source of African-American art patronage and promotion from the 1920s until its closing in 1967. Designed as a “tribute” to the important personality of Brady as well as the Harmon Foundation and the artist himself, the exhibition featured several paintings, watercolors and silkscreens from Brady’s personal collection that were acquired by Rosenfeld from her estate following her death in 1988. A full color catalogue was produced to accompany the exhibit with a short essay by Rosenfeld (Figure 2.3). The show yielded not only attention to Johnson’s work but sales to major institutions such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Whitney Museum of Art.<sup>137</sup>

Although Rosenfeld described his show as “the first gallery exhibition of works by William H. Johnson in over fifty years,” Johnson’s images were the subject of a steady stream of various group and solo exhibitions as well as art historical interest. In 1991, the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American Art mounted one of the most ambitious

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<sup>136</sup> halley k. harrisburg, *Exultations : African-American Art, 20th Century Masterworks, II* (New York: Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, 1995), 5.

<sup>137</sup> Judd Tully, “Artist’s Heirs Sue Smithsonian, Ownership of Paintings by William Johnson Challenged,” *Washington Post*, September 11, 1997, D1.



retrospectives of Johnson's work entitled, *Homecoming: The Art and Life of William H. Johnson*. Accompanied by a catalogue capturing a sizeable amount of hundreds of works in the Smithsonian's collections and extensive scholarship by art historian Richard J. Powell, *Homecoming: The Art and Life of William H. Johnson*, was a major traveling exhibition. The works in the exhibition, which visited museums such as the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Studio Museum in Harlem, was posited by Powell to be indicative of a "blues aesthetic" found in the work of many African-American artists. Johnson's work also became synonymous with the art of the Harlem Renaissance, and had appeared in numerous exhibitions such as *Harlem Renaissance, Art of Black America*, which features the work *Man in a Blue Vest* as its cover image. Such exposure solidified Johnson's connection to that important period in African-American art history.<sup>138</sup>

Despite the potential of the Johnson exhibit for Rosenfeld's gallery, controversy soon ensued in relation to the provenance of the works in the Brady collection as well as the historical narrative which surrounded Johnson's relationship with the Harmon Foundation and Mary Beattie Brady. In 1999 the Montclair Museum of Art in Montclair, New Jersey organized *William H. Johnson: Truth Be Told*, an exhibition of 54 objects owned by Los Angeles art dealer, Steve Turner. Turner's exhibition, which focused on works previously unseen in the United States and owned by several of Johnson's European collectors in Denmark and Norway, was accompanied by a lengthy catalogue featuring color plates and the customary discussion of his work. Co-researched and written by Turner and art writer Victoria Dailey, the catalogue departs from the research done by Powell and previous

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<sup>138</sup> *Harlem Renaissance : Art of Black America*, eds. David C. Driskell and others (New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem : Harry N. Abrams, 1987).

scholars in its inclusion of an investigation of the provenance of Johnson's other paintings, insinuating that many of Johnson's paintings were mismanaged by Mary Beattie Brady and curator David Driskell following the artist's death.<sup>139</sup>

Turner alleged that several paintings said to be in the collections of Fisk University were missing. David Driskell had worked as director of the Fisk University Art Gallery and acted as custodian for many Harmon Foundation works, during an exhibition and subsequent storage period which took place at Fisk. In short, Turner suggested that, after close examination, chaotic record-keeping caused several works to end up in both the private art collections of Brady and Driskell. Some of the works by William H. Johnson which appeared in Rosenfeld's catalogue that were said to be sold to Brady, yet Turner asserted that Rosenfeld's works were also among those disputed. Rosenfeld responded that perhaps Turner confused works since many of Johnson's works were of similar subject matter.<sup>140</sup> David Driskell countered that Turner's accusations were "market-driven" since the works were now in Turner's possession. According to Driskell, the assessment of the late Mary Beattie Brady was "unkind" in light of the concessions that she made for artists such as Johnson with little or no financial reward.<sup>141</sup>

The case of controversy around William H. Johnson's work in the Mary Beattie Brady collection is interesting in that it points to a new form of currency that work by African-American artists had gained in the marketplace. In addition, issues of provenance

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<sup>139</sup> Steve Turner, *William H. Johnson : Truth be Told*, eds. Victoria Dailey, Louisiana Arts and Science Center. and Steve Turner Gallery. (Los Angeles, CA; Seattle, WA: Seven Arts Publishing; Distributed by The University of Washington Press, 1998).

<sup>140</sup> M. G. Lord, "A Wrangle Over a Rediscovered Artist," *The New York Times*, January 3, 1999, AR34.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

that surfaced indicates an intersection between growing scholarship in African-American art and its implications for improving the fate of artists not traditionally embraced in the art market. Turner stated that his “goal was to correct myths perpetuated by careless scholarship,” yet his record lent more attention to the fate of objects in the hands of middlemen than it did any artistic innovation generated by Johnson during his lifetime. In addition, by highlighting Johnson’s international audience of Scandinavian collectors, Turner acknowledges that the existence of multiple narratives and markets for African-American artists such as William H. Johnson were prevalent on both domestic and international fronts.

Returning to the series, *African-American Art: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Masterworks*, for their third publication, Michael Rosenfeld re-iterates the importance of this series in providing gallery exposure to under-recognized African-American artists. He briefly recounts the histories of Bearden, Pippin and Lawrence and their relationships with art dealers such as Edith Halpert and Samuel Kootz and their consistent representation in mainstream galleries, eclipsing many of their counterparts in the 1930s and 1940s. In making this analogy Rosenfeld aligns his efforts as belonging to the tradition of African-American art patronage in the early twentieth century rather than describing his practice as one which is unique to his gallery’s mission. In parallel fashion, Rosenfeld states that since many artists were absent in mainstream gallery exhibitions that they “did not have the possibility to enter the canons of art history” which further suggests the place of commercial galleries in expanding the material of contemporary art history.<sup>142</sup> In addition, Rosenfeld acknowledges the role of philanthropic organizations such as the Harmon Foundation in holding exhibitions but

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<sup>142</sup> *African-American Art : 20th Century Masterworks, III : [Exhibition] February 1-April 6, 1996*, ed. Michael Rosenfeld Gallery. (New York: Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, 1996), 3.

suggests that such venues were “outside of the mainstream.”<sup>143</sup> Such statements imply that “the canon” and “the mainstream” are stable, understood entities whereas artwork by African-Americans is “under-recognized” or even invisible in contrast. In many ways the dichotomy between a presumably definitive “mainstream” art world and an elusive “African-American” art world appears to predetermine the fate of these works. The customary color plates and short biographies of each artist are included in the rear of the publication and each color plate was complimented by quotes from each artist, indicating their visual influence, technical concerns or their personal aspirations. Frequently these quotes indicated racial pride or issues related to the problem of or celebration of a definitive “Negro” or “black” art standard. As the catalogue does not include a scholarly essay which situates the work and the included quotations in a historical sequence for the life of the artists or the era in which the work was created, it is difficult to assess the function of the quotes in relation to individual works of art. For example, under the color plate for Charles Alston’s *Palaver #1*, 1946, Oil on canvas, 24” X 30”, Alston refutes the notion of a black art standard and aesthetic differences based on racial difference yet he does acknowledge “there’s certainly been a Black experience” as well as an “American experience.”<sup>144</sup>

The fourth exhibition in the *Masterworks* series originally showed at Rosenfeld’s gallery between January 24 and March 26, 1997 and traveled to Fisk University Galleries from April 1 to June 1, 1997. Visually and organizationally, the *Masterworks IV* exhibition’s catalogue set a stylistic precedent for future catalogues. As with the previous three exhibitions, the catalogue was small and consisted of approximately forty-five images with a

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> *African-American Art : 20th Century Masterworks, III*, 21.

short essay or foreword remarks, yet it now included biographical information and a small black and white photograph of each artist. Each page in the biographical section consists of four black and white, thumbnail-sized headshots of the artists. To the right of the picture, some showing artists in the act of creating art, others simply in a frontal portrait pose, there is a biographical sketch composed of seven sentences that included a short description of the works in the catalogue. Although on the surface such an addition would tend to be viewed as crucial art historical information, the catalogue's arrangement and the insertion of the photographs does two things: 1) it gives the artists a distinct visual identity *isolated* from their works and 2) it links the artists by grouping their photographs and the documentation about their lives and works together. In other words, the layout of the biographies in the catalogue reinforces the notion that the artists belong together even as the works themselves are grouped together for the exhibition. Since the only commonality between these artists was a shared cultural heritage, it is clear that despite the misgivings of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, racial identity would maintain its centrality in the *Masterworks* series.<sup>145</sup>

Although Michael Rosenfeld Gallery's presentation continued to evolve in terms of venues and potential new audiences, it is apparent that continued ambivalence about the category of 'African-American art' haunted the series. In the catalogue for the fifth exhibition in 1998, held at the Michael Rosenfeld Gallery as well as at the Newcomb Art Gallery at Tulane University in New Orleans, Rosenfeld discusses the rationale for mounting the series as one that came about through the "urging and support of collectors and museums" who viewed this as a rare opportunity to gather together the works of lesser-

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<sup>145</sup> *African-American Art : 20th Century Masterworks, IV* : eds Michael Rosenfeld Gallery and Carl Van Vechten Gallery of Fine Arts (New York: Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, 1997), 3.

known African-American artists.<sup>146</sup> Similarly, in the sixth exhibition, which traveled to Flint Institute of Arts in Flint, Michigan, Rosenfeld's brief introduction established that such a "trend" of all black shows has a historic legacy that should not be forgotten. He even listed a short timeline of major exhibitions of African-American art beginning with one organized by the Harlem Branch of the New York Public Library in 1921 and ending with the internationally touring exhibition of *Rhapsodies in Black: Art of the Harlem Renaissance* in 1997. Rosenfeld re-iterates his previous belief that, in spite of the many inroads which had been made for African-American artists "the categorization of African-American art" was a necessary ingredient and institutionalized strategy for generating much needed attention.<sup>147</sup>

The seventh exhibition in the *Masterworks* series also subtitled "*Educating Our Children*" traveled to the Appleton Museum of Art at Florida State University and Central Florida Community College where an exhibition was held between March 18 and April 30, 2000. The subtitle emerged from a partnership between Michael Rosenfeld Gallery and inner city students at Margaret Douglas School in New York City who frequented the gallery as an enhancement to their arts curricula.<sup>148</sup> According to the checklist, the exhibition featured 56 works including those by the artists Palmer Hayden, Alma Thomas, William Artis, Benny Andrews, Charles Alston, Ellis Wilson, Laura Wheeler Waring, Romare Bearden, Beauford Delaney, Joseph Delaney, John Biggers, Elizabeth Catlett, Harold Cousins, Jacob Lawrence, Hughie Lee-Smith, Horace Pippin Henry Ossawa Tanner, Betye Saar, Bob Thompson,

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<sup>146</sup> *African-American Art, 20th Century Masterworks, V: Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, New York, NY*, eds. Michael Rosenfeld Gallery and Newcomb Art Gallery (New York: Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, 1998), 3.

<sup>147</sup> *African-American Art, 20th Century Masterworks, VI: Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, New York, NY, January 14-March 6, 1999 : Flint Institute of Arts, Flint, MI, April 30-June 20, 1999*, eds. Flint Institute of Arts and Michael Rosenfeld Gallery. (New York: Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, 1999), 3.

<sup>148</sup> *African-American Art : 20th Century Masterworks, VII : Educating our Children*, eds. Appleton Museum of Art (Ocala, Fla.) and Michael Rosenfeld Gallery. (New York: Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, 2000), 4-5.

Norman Lewis, Jacob Lawrence, Sargent Johnson, Bill Traylor, William H. Johnson, James Van Der Zee, Charles White and Hale Woodruff. The cover of the catalogue featured the image Hale Woodruff's study for *The Art of the Negro*, a mural located in Trevor Arnett Hall at Clark Atlanta University where the artist was a professor for several years.

In the catalogue's foreword, Jeffrey Spalding, professor of art and Director of the Appleton Museum of Art, related the importance of the *Masterworks* series in featuring the works of artists that had been under-recognized and of the catalogues in providing rare instances of written and visual documentation.<sup>149</sup> Curiously, Spalding emphasized the philosophical questions surrounding the racialized grouping of previous exhibitions and that race was not the rationale for the interest of the Appleton Museum. Instead, it was an opportunity for learning about and exposure to little known American artists and their artistic achievements. However, Spalding unintentionally reinforces the grouping of artists in the show by race by insisting that "the works of African-American artists are less known, less frequently presented to art museum audiences and less likely to figure prominently in school curricula." This is in contrast to his earlier statement that some artists in the exhibition such as Romare Bearden, Beauford Delaney, Jacob Lawrence, Hughie Lee-Smith, Horace Pippin Henry Ossawa Tanner, Betye Saar, Bob Thompson, Jacob Lawrence, Charles White and Hale Woodruff were "perennial highlights."<sup>150</sup> Spalding's comments point to the difficulty by some curators and critics in articulating the place of African-American artists in the broader art community. It is evident that the 'special' status of African-American artists had

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<sup>149</sup> *African-American Art : 20th Century Masterworks, VII : Educating our Children*, eds. Appleton Museum of Art (Ocala, Fla.) and Michael Rosenfeld Gallery. (New York: Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, 2000), 3.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

both a constructed narrative that was consistent with the attitudes of galleries such as Michael Rosenfeld Gallery and notions about African-American art that it sought to overcome.

By 2001 the aspect of private patronage by African-American art collectors was elevated in terms of public reception. The *Masterworks VIII* catalogue, dedicated to the memory of the late Jacob Lawrence, for example, queried living artists about the source of their own success. Among the responses was one by Benny Andrews which reflected on the legacies of Jacob Lawrence, Norman Lewis and Richard Mayhew, not in terms of the skill but instead as being pioneers for mainstream gallery representation. In addition, he acknowledged the historic patronage of African-American museums and art departments in developing institutionally based support.<sup>151</sup> Although he notes that some institutional discrimination was on the wane in mainstream arenas, Benny Andrews commented that the moral and financial support of African-American collectors would continue to be crucial.<sup>152</sup>

This sentiment is echoed by Leslie King Hammond in the catalogue for the next exhibition of the series in 2002 which traveled to the Tubman African American Museum in Macon Georgia. Leslie King Hammond's discussed the topic of black art patronage within a tradition of cultural preservation rather than conspicuous consumption. Hammond naturalizes the idea that African-American collectors are primarily interested in preserving their historical importance in the United States, since much of it had been compromised or destroyed via the transatlantic slave trade.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> *African-American Art : 20th Century Masterworks, VIII*, eds. Michael Rosenfeld Gallery. and Texas Southern University. Museum. (New York: Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, 2001).

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> *African-American Art : 20th Century Masterworks, IX*, eds. Michael Rosenfeld Gallery. and Tubman African-American Museum. (New York: Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, 2002), 7-10.



The *Masterworks* series would continue until 2003, yet Michael Rosenfeld Gallery's pattern of developing special exhibitions and catalogue series for the work of African-American artists gained currency with other for profit gallery owners. Bill Hodges Gallery, located a floor below that of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery in The Gallery Building on 24 West 57 Street in Manhattan, began a series of catalogues entitled *African-American Artists* in 1999. The catalogues, designed by Hodges and his gallery staff, many of whom were volunteers, include a short, personalized forward describing his years as a dealer and color plate images with some object analysis for artists in his collection such as Jacob Lawrence, Benny Andrews, Romare Bearden, Edward Bannister, Lois Mailou Jones, Elizabeth Catlett, Reginald Gammon, and Richard Dempsey.

Bill Hodges, professing to be an avid collector, adopted the mantra A.F.T.U. (Art for the Totally Uncontrolled) to describe his appetite for acquisition which he eventually turned into a for-profit business. He began collecting Picasso and Miró prints in 1976 while he was a student at Rutgers University when, according to Hodges, the market for limited edition prints by Picasso and Miró was affordable at prices under \$500. In 1979 Hodges decided that he would begin to sell many of his prints in order to begin collecting drawings and watercolors, an area of collecting that he considered more interesting to him by this time, yet more expensive. He described the market for prints as a lucrative one for modern European masters. Therefore, he could easily make good profits to fuel his new interest in original works of art.<sup>154</sup>

Bill Hodges continued to aggressively acquire works at auction and from private individuals and reselling works to private clients to support his own collecting habit therefore

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<sup>154</sup> Interview with Bill Hodges, February 4, 2011.

becoming a dealer came almost by accident. Living in nearby Newark, New Jersey at the time, he visited several galleries and museums in New York City and was able to build confidence in the type of art he acquired and also his eye for quality works of art.<sup>155</sup>

The evolution of Hodges' business really began when Hodges partnered with Tarin Fuller, the stepdaughter of the late artist Norman Lewis in managing and selling works from Lewis' artist estate soon after his death in 1979. Although he was principally interested in Norman Lewis' oeuvre, Hodges also began visiting the studios of several living African-American artists such as Romare Bearden and Benny Andrews and began collecting their work during the 1980s. He had been encouraged to meet these artists by Camille Billops who had taught a class at Rutgers University while he was a student.<sup>156</sup> These relationships prompted friendly business arrangements with Hodges who realized that there was a marked absence of works by African Americans overall in museum collections. In 1993 he opened his current location on 57<sup>th</sup> Street to further promote Lewis in addition to other African-American artists in his collection.

The catalogues by Bill Hodges Gallery are informative not only for their inclusion of art historical information and unique works, but also for the degree of commentary they include on issues faced by dealers such as Hodges in terms of public reception of African-American art. For example, the *African-American Artists II* catalogue (see Figure 2.4) was produced by Hodges in connection with a gallery show which occurred between February 12 and March 18, 2000. In the foreword of the catalogue, Hodges asserted that the catalogue was done for "museums and the general public" and the importance of the works by artists in

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

the catalogue receiving recognition in American art history. Hodges mentioned that Romare Bearden, Jacob Lawrence and Benny Andrews had begun to be collected by museums but in a slight rant, he mentioned that despite these inroads, white artists of lesser skills still surpass African-American artists in terms of recognition and price. Referring to artist Jacob Lawrence he states,“ ‘Jake’ still struggles to received [sp] \$68,000 for his important paintings ...a travesty to say the least.”<sup>157</sup>

Hodges’ commentary continues with tragically comic incidents he had experienced with staff, art historians and buyers as well as his uneasy engagement of being both a dealer and a collector. One finds that he does engage the help of researchers when he indicates that Susan Inniss, a student who originally came to his gallery to gather information on artist Norman Lewis, helped to prepare the artist biographies and object descriptions in this catalogue. Later, in his “great finds” section, he mentions that he recently acquired an important work, *The Psychiatrist*, by Jacob Lawrence which he believed to have been created at the time Lawrence produced *The Hospital Series*, a group of panels done during his time in a mental health hospital between 1949 and 1950.<sup>158</sup> He also describes his pursuit of the work of art by Norman Lewis which serves as the cover image *Street Scene, (African Dance)* of 1947 from a private collector as well as another untitled Lewis painting, both of which he considered to be worthy of “museum consideration.”<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> *African-American Artists - II : An Exhibition, February 12th to March 18th, 2000*, ed. Bill Hodges Gallery. (New York: Bill Hodges Gallery, 2000), 1.

<sup>158</sup> For more information on Lawrence’s work see, Jacob Lawrence et al., *Over the Line :The Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence* (Seattle: University of Washington Press in Association with Jacob and Gwendolyn Lawrence Foundation, 2001), 336.

<sup>159</sup> *African-American Artists - II : An Exhibition, February 12th to March 18th, 2000*, 1.

Conveniently, Hodges' catalogue also includes a price list of all objects in the exhibition and catalogue. With many items sold, the prices of several objects are unclear, however, its inclusion does indicate yet another mode of transparency provided to potential buyers. The translation of these works as "special" ones of contemplation, collection and art historical inquiry suggested in Hodges' foreword to listed objects available for sale is important to consider in light of Hodges practice as a dealer and his offerings. By engaging potential buyers in multiple ways – as a collector interested in important works of art; as a student of art history interested in the diversity of public collections; and as an aggressive art dealer – Hodges demonstrates his ability to present both his business and his collection of works in a variety of guises.

Despite both Rosenfeld and Hodges' fear of the reluctance on the part of mainstream museums and the academy to embrace historically significant or 'master' African-American artists, it became clear that some institutions understood the value of such work. The Smithsonian American Art Museum, under the leadership of guest curator Gwendolyn Everett, organized a traveling exhibition of works from their own collection, *African American Masters* from 2003 to 2005 while its main exhibition building underwent renovation. One of five exhibitions in a series which introduced audiences to "highlights" from their collection, the exhibition included examples of paintings, photography, sculpture and mixed media compositions that were produced in the twentieth century. Full color reproductions were accompanied by essays which contextualized the objects and their makers in a companion catalogue. Museum director, Elizabeth Broun, commented that the importance of the exhibition had less to do with celebrating under-recognized African-American artists or correcting historical exclusion, and more with exposing their tremendous

artistry.<sup>160</sup> Broun's comment underscores the problem of exposure for African-American artists and their historic exclusion from 'mainstream' art venues. However, her mention of their historical under-representation also intimates that insufficient documentation was a corollary consequence.

Despite the importance of dealers and museums in elevating works by African-American artists, it remained a matter of debate as to the true impact of such measures for the art market. In the Spring 2004, *The International Review of African American Art* editor Juliette Harris, dedicated an issue to questions related to the market for African-American master artists. By way of an internet survey, visual arts professionals (dealers, appraisers, historians, and curators) and noted collectors were asked to give their expert opinion on how African-American artists were able gain to critical acclaim for their work and corresponding success in the broader art market. In addition, the relevance term 'African-American art' was also discussed in relation to other art categories. Interspersed between responses to these and other questions were visual examples of 'successful' artists such as Jean Michel Basquiat, Jacob Lawrence, Romare Bearden William H. Johnson, Kerry James Marshall, Horace Pippin, Robert Scott Duncanson, Robert Colescott, Henry O. Tanner and Sam Gilliam among others.

Although the term 'master' was not qualified for the reader, it is clear from the responses that the range of choices were diverse. However, the presence of artists in elite galleries remained significant. Art appraiser Michael Chisolm placed high importance on

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<sup>160</sup> Gwen Everett and Smithsonian American Art Museum, *African American Masters : Highlights from the Smithsonian American Art Museum* (New York; Washington, D.C.: H.N. Abrams; Smithsonian American Art Museum, 2003), 108.

gallery affiliation in both the promotion and placement of artists' works in collections that would gain them the most visibility. In addition, he viewed critical literature in art journals, exhibitions catalogues and newspaper reviews as important indicators of success. He cites Jean Michel Basquiat and Martin Puryear's broad popularity among both public and private art collectors as the key to the increase in prices for their work. In addition equally robust auction records provided another index of price appreciation.<sup>161</sup>

Halima Taha also emphasized the importance of both mainstream and alternative and non-for-profit gallery spaces in drawing attention to African-American artists. She cited the alternative space of Kenkeleba Gallery operated by Corrine Jennings and Joe Overstreet for their experimentation and openness. She reminds readers that although few in number, white mainstream galleries such as ACA Galleries, Terry Dintenfass, and Sid Deutsch represented some African-American artists and helped to propel their careers irrespective of the restricted norms of their era. Taha also mentions Michael Rosenfeld and halley harrisburg's *African American Art: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Masterworks* series as important in growing the appeal, a point that Rosenfeld re-iterates in a later part of the article.<sup>162</sup>

Collectors Harmon and Harriet Kelly also agreed that gallery exposure as the key to artistic success in the art world, using the example of Horace Pippin, an artist proudly represented in their own collection.<sup>163</sup> The Kelleys also related the names of Jacob Lawrence, Romare Bearden, Norman Lewis, Beauford Delaney, Bill Traylor and Bob

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<sup>161</sup> Michael: Chisolm, "A Conversation about Masters and their Markets: The Right Gallery," *The International Review of African American Art* 19, no. 4 (2004), 4-6.

<sup>162</sup> Halima Taha, "A Conversation about Masters and their Markets: Full Court Press," *The International Review of African American Art* 19, no. 4 (2004), 14-18.

<sup>163</sup> Harriet Kelly, "A Conversation about Masters and their Markets: Knowing the Right People," *The International Review of African American Art* 19, no. 4 (2004), 7-9.

Thompson as other examples of artists who have been inserted into important public and private collections. Despite achievements in this area, they added that artists such as Basquiat and Lewis still did not achieve success commensurate with their peers due to racism in both the museum and academic worlds. In reference to the category ‘African-American art’, the Kellys remark that such nomenclature was and still would be necessary in the foreseeable future until curators learn about African-American artists in the academic environment.<sup>164</sup>

Nicole Gilpin Hood questioned whether there is an intrinsic notion of ‘style’ as a contributing factor in the success of certain African-American artists. She noted that artists such as Romare Bearden and Jacob Lawrence, for example, had highly recognizable imagery that may have provided a level of accessibility for collectors. Valerie Mercer begins her response to the questionnaire by highlighting the importance of patronage as a separate but related concept to consider. Mercer describes patronage as the “reliable financial, professional, and occasionally emotional support of a patron or patrons for the artist and his or her work.”<sup>165</sup> In terms of the effects of racism in the art world, Mercer does not differ substantially in her claims that the term ‘African-American art’ would remain and, in fact, celebrates the suggestion of cultural difference.

Richard Powell uses the example of William H. Johnson to explain the importance of timing in understanding why certain artists are not recognized or appreciate in value. Jacqueline Serwer’s position mirrored Powell and Chisolm’s position about gallery recognition, timing and the inevitability of the term “African American” is referenced, yet she does so with a nod toward museum audiences. Due to her position as chief curator at the

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<sup>164</sup> Harriet Kelly, "A Conversation about Masters and their Markets: Knowing the Right People," 7-9.

<sup>165</sup> Valerie Mercer, "Patronage and the “Sure Thing”," *International Review of African American Art* 19, no. 4 (2004), 10.

Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C., she highlights the influence of audience feedback on museum decisions and suggests that some visitors preferred clear cultural distinctions be made on labels and installations while others prefer the absences of such markers. Serwer's point underscores the disconnect between the sensibility of formal art world participants such as dealers, curators and critics in the construction of African-American art from lay audiences.

The remaining respondents answered with full statements on areas of their own conceptualizations of 'master' artists rather than individualized answers to the questions posed by the editor. Sande Webster of Sande Webster Gallery in Philadelphia challenged the commitment of both black and white patrons of African-American artists (particularly abstractionist painters) in elevating its public reception. Art dealer George N'Namdi emphasized the link between a 'master' artist and artistic innovation of abstract artists in his own gallery stable such as Ed Clark, William T. Williams, Howardena Pindell, Nanette Carter, Al Loving and Frank Bowling. Ironically, N'Namdi makes a distinction between the abstractionists as the artists of "today" and many artists who at least have partial figuration as "historical". In doing so, he sets up a chronologically sensitive separation between abstract and figurative concepts in the work of many artists without acknowledging the ongoing use of both in the work of contemporary artists. Artist Sam Gilliam countered that the notion of a 'master' artists is an imaginary one that obscures the synergistic function of media attention and sales that really propels artists in the art world.<sup>166</sup>

The variety of responses to the question of masters and markets illustrates the

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<sup>166</sup> "A Conversation about Masters and their Markets," *International Review of African American Art* 19, no. 4 (2004), 3-27.



complexity of analyzing the development of market(s) for African-American art and the at times inconsistent road to ‘mainstream’ success. However, through the anecdotes and examples used, there still appeared to be an uneasy relationship with the category ‘African-American art’ and its continued usage in relation to the perceived benefits inherent in the ‘mainstream’ art world. ‘Master’ artists in this context not only appear to be artists who have overcome the technical barriers of their chosen craft but the social obstacles of a historically segregated art world.

### *Conclusion*

The collaborative activities of art middlemen devoted to African-American art became an important conduit in increasing visibility to its associated artists, institutions and commercial success. During the late 1980s and forward, several art dealers mounted more intentional efforts to brand ‘African-American art’ as a viable niche for achieving art market appreciation among art collectors. Some of these efforts included the production of historical literature through new alliances with specialist art historians and critics, culturally based marketing strategies, and a diversification of art media and products to satisfy customers at different economic levels. Despite efforts to establish African –American art for multiple audiences, I argue that some dealers continued to have some ambivalence about the use of the term ‘African-American’ art, its target audience and the kinds of artists and media to be associated with this niche market. It is evident that the growth of a market-centered approach to encouraging patronage carried with it many tensions about levels of mastery believed to be achieved by certain artists and what qualities held value for scholars, art middlemen, museum professionals and collectors. The gaps in critical mainstream literature and exhibitions were

supplemented by dealer literature and shows, yet the gaps also fueled a counter-strategy for of populist-oriented art production that also became profitable for some.

### CHAPTER III

#### FAIR COMPARISONS? NOTIONS OF QUALITY AT BLACK ART FAIRS

Although “brick and mortar” art galleries continued to provide important venues for attracting new audiences and buyers for African-American art, fine art specific fairs proved to be an attractive venture as well. In 1997 fine art audiences were introduced to a new opportunity: the National Black Fine Art Show (NBFAS), a three day art fair, which has been touted as the first major African-American fine art fair.<sup>167</sup> However, other fairs such as the Philadelphia International Art Expo (PIAE), begun earlier, differed in their appeal to ‘mainstream’ and culturally specific markets for art. I argue in this chapter, the NBFAS and the PIAE represent contested spaces composed of often contradictory discourses on ‘quality’ in African-American art.

Contemporary art fairs grew exponentially as an important venue for art dealers and potential fine art buyers since the mid-1980s and becoming commonplace by the 1990s. Although art fairs have existed for centuries, they have evolved not only in their role as destinations for the acquisition of art but also in elevating the centrality of art middlemen or dealers since the early modern era.<sup>168</sup> For example, the Armory Show of 1913 has been situated historically as central to the ascendance of the modern art movement in the United

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<sup>167</sup> Felicia R. Lee, "Black Art show's Goals: Recognition and Buyers," *New York Times* (01/31, 1998), B7.

<sup>168</sup> Michael North and David Ormrod, *Art Markets in Europe, 1400-1800* (Aldershot; Brookfield: Ashgate, 1998).

States but also the subsequent development of commercial galleries.<sup>169</sup> Subsequent international art fairs, biennials and even travelling exhibitions developed during the latter part of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first century have not only influenced artistic movements but also the growth of art markets.

Scholarship has begun to examine the characteristics of art fairs which can be defined as industry trade shows in which several dealers collectively participate in selling specialized work at a venue their normal place of operation.<sup>170</sup> Economist Don Thompson, who has explored contemporary art fairs, has characterized the twenty-first century as the “decade of the art fair” due to its importance in conferring value on both art and those dealers who sell it. He asserts that dealers found it difficult to maintain a competitive advantage over the successful branding of large auction houses such as Sotheby’s and Christie’s who were well-capitalized and universally respected by elite, high-net worth art collectors. He notes that many art fairs served as strategic venues with the “market being the medium” (rather than the art objects) and a “tournament of values” in which of artistic relevance was overshadowed by the economic concerns of their purveyors.<sup>171</sup>

Thompson states that four major art fairs dominate art world discourse on modern and contemporary art: Maastricht or the European Fine Art Foundation Fair (TEFAF) held in

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<sup>169</sup> Peter Watson, *From Manet to Manhattan :The Rise of the Modern Art Market*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 1992), 558.

<sup>170</sup> Don Thompson, *The \$12 Million Stuffed Shark : The Curious Economics of Contemporary Art and Auction Houses* (London: Aurum, 2008).

<sup>171</sup> *Negotiating Values in the Creative Industries : Fairs, Festivals and Competitive Events*, eds. Brian Moeran and Jesper S. (Jesper Strandgaard) Pedersen (Cambridge ;New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011): 71.

Maastricht, Netherlands; Art Basel in Basel, Switzerland; Art Basel in Miami Beach, Florida, USA; and Frieze in London, England.<sup>172</sup>

Hundreds of smaller fairs also take place throughout the year. On January 30, 1997 one such fair, the National Black Fine Art Show (NBFAS) opened at the Puck Building in New York City's SoHo district with over 10,000 attendees. Joscelyn ("Josh") Wainwright, a Brooklyn native and former New York City detective was the producer of the show under the aegis of Sanford Smith and Associates. Forty-one dealers participated in the show, which followed another fair produced by Sanford Smith and Associates, the Outsider Art Fair, happening a week earlier. The NBFAS, typically held on the last weekend in January or the first weekend in February, was composed of dealers who both claimed to specialize in the sale of African-American art and those who simply had representative examples of work by African-American artists. Art dealers and other representatives of African-American artists were eligible to participate in the show by invitation only. Dealers were required to send an email or other correspondence to the show organizers with a history and other details about their galleries as well as a list of African-American artists that they represent. Artists who represented themselves were not allowed to participate but were encouraged to find representation among the dealers who were selected to participate in the show.<sup>173</sup>

Wainwright recounts that the concept for the NBFAS evolved from experiences he had working for Sanford Smith and Associates between 1981 and 1997. Wainwright's frustration at the absence of African-American artists in the world of fine art sales prompted a three and a half year investigation of artists, dealers and galleries who actually did promote

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<sup>172</sup> *Negotiating Values in the Creative Industries : Fairs, Festivals and Competitive Events*, 170.

<sup>173</sup> See "NBFAS NYC Exhibitors," <http://www.blackfineartshow.com/Exhibitors.html>, Accessed 11 February 2011.

and sell their work. He also derived several contacts from Gary Puckrein, the founding editor of *American Visions*, an important magazine documenting African-American history and culture and the flagship publication of the African American Museums Association.<sup>174</sup> Wainwright's canvassing of contacts and networks related to work by African-American artists occurred in tandem with the increased responsibility he had at Sanford Smith and Associates, moving from security detail to operations manager.<sup>175</sup>

Wainwright's vision was met with the support of optimistic sponsors in the business community. Souvenir catalogues reviewed for the show from 1997 to 2007 and other promotional materials contain ads of publishers such as *Black Enterprise* magazine, *American Visions* magazine, firms and corporations such as Stedman Graham and Associates, Merrill Lynch, FedEx, the Urban League, galleries such as June Kelly Gallery and Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, and auction houses such as Swann Galleries. In some promotional literature, notable celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey, Cicely Tyson and Danny Glover are pictured or referred to as being in attendance at opening activities of the fair. Such references broadened its popularity as not only a show of significance in New York City but also nationally.<sup>176</sup> A charitable fundraiser typically preceded the show, with past charities

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<sup>174</sup> Interview with Josh Wainwright 25 April 2011. *American Visions* was a magazine which focused on news and events related to African American history and culture which circulated between 1986 and 2000. It was independently published by the American Visions Foundation and received support from the Smithsonian Institution.

<sup>175</sup> Sara Pendergast and Tom Pendergast, eds., *Contemporary Black Biography*, Vol. 46 (Detroit, MI: Gale Research Inc, 2005).

<sup>176</sup> The tie between celebrity art collectors and fine art is an interesting that would be examined in further research.

like the Boys and Girls Clubs of America, The New York Urban League, The Studio Museum in Harlem, and the Jack and Jill Foundation, becoming the eventual beneficiaries.<sup>177</sup>

The NBFAS catalogue, which acted as souvenir and guide for locating booths at the show also provided visual and textual references to the character of dealers and their inventory of works. Descriptions of dealers and artists represented give a decent sampling of typical offerings although not every dealer returned in subsequent years. Outside of corporate advertisers, the exhibitor information consisted of a half-page ad which included one image of the a representative work of art from their gallery collection for gallery, the gallery name, address, telephone number, fax number, owners and staff members, e-mail address or website and a tagline which indicate the type of art sold. Underneath this information is a list of artists represented by the gallery. For example, a typical format can be found in the 2003 catalogue (see Figure 3.1). The 70<sup>th</sup> Art Gallery which is located in New York City, described their business as “works by African-American artists” and artists included were Charles Alston, Edward Mitchell Bannister, Romare Bearden, Grafton Tyler Brown, Beauford Delaney, Robert S. Duncanson, Richard Hunt, Norman Lewis, Charles Ethan Porter, and Hughie Lee-Smith. Underneath, in an ad for Aaron Galleries in Chicago Illinois they indicate that their specializations include “American paintings from 1800 to the present, social realism, regionalism, modernism and abstraction by under-recognized artists. The artists listed are Ernest Alexander, Irene Clark, Eldzier Cortor, Beauford Delaney, Joseph Delaney, Aaron Douglas and Frederick D. Jones, Jr. and Aaron Douglas. Joseph Delaney’s *Portrait of a Woman* (1960) juxtaposes this description and features the image of a brown-

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<sup>177</sup> Keeling Wainwright Associates, (New York, N.Y: Keeling Wainwright Associates, 1997-2009).

skinned woman seated on a chair in a domestic setting.<sup>178</sup> The advertisements that follow feature works by several African-American artists reflective of different eras and categories such as portraiture, still life painting and abstraction.

The Philadelphia International Art Expo (PIAE) which began in 1987 under the direction of the husband and wife team Evelyn and Mercer Redcross III in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania offers yet another model of a ‘black’ art fair. The PIAE, which charges no admission, describes itself as “an art expo of popular African-American art like no other.”<sup>179</sup> This distinction as a purveyor of “popular” African-American art may seem to suggest that no other comparative analysis need to be made between this fair and that of the NBFAS, however, their website claims that this fair has a “deeper resonance” with its attendees.<sup>180</sup>

Much extant information about the PIAE comes from newspaper articles, their online presence at [www.octobergallery.com](http://www.octobergallery.com), and their own publication, *Connecting People with Art: Contemporary African American Art* (2006).<sup>181</sup> Evelyn and Mercer Redcross own October Gallery, a Philadelphia-based gallery which sells African-American art and has operated since 1985. After opening the business, the Redcrosses also created traveling art shows where they ventured to major cities such as Washington, D.C., Chicago and vacation areas such as Martha’s Vineyard to attract new customers. By 1996 the show no longer

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<sup>178</sup> Keeling Wainwright Associates, (New York, N.Y: Keeling Wainwright Associates, 2003), 16.

<sup>179</sup>October Gallery, “Philadelphia International Art Expo,” <<http://www.octobergallery.com/page4.html> > (19 February 2007).

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> *Connecting People with Art : Contemporary African-American Art*, October Gallery (Philadelphia, Evelyn Redcross and Mercer Redcross III. (Philadelphia, Pa.: October Gallery, 2006).



traveled and the Redcrosses concentrated their efforts on developing the large Philadelphia based production of the PIAE.<sup>182</sup>

The PIAE, which began as “The Black Art Show and Sale,” traditionally occurred one weekend annually around mid-November. For many years the event took place in hotel conference rooms in locations such as the Dunfy Hotel, the University Sheraton Hotel, the Wyndham Franklin Plaza and the Adams Mark Hotel in Philadelphia. However, by 1998, the popularity of the fair has amassed so many exhibitors and visitors that they made a longer term move to the Liacouras Center, Temple University’s ample sports arena.<sup>183</sup> According to one source, the PIAE attracted approximately “150 artists and 50,000 patrons and collectors from across the country” with artwork ranging from “\$5 to \$50,000” and grossing dealers (many of whom are artists) approximately \$2 million in sales.<sup>184</sup> It is also interesting to note that dealers are not readily emphasized as the primary sellers of art but instead, self-representing artists are encouraged to apply for participation in the show through an open application system done online. The types of products sold at the fair could be anything from clothing and household accessories, small crafts such as jewelry and small pottery to paintings and larger sculpture. The open admission guidelines and available products and craft items suggests that this expo has become more than an outlet for traditional ‘fine’ artists but a major enterprise for exposing black visual culture with variable criteria.

Like the NBFAS there is a targeted audience that is addressed in the PIAE’s literature, however this audience is specifically listed as being interior decorators, home

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<sup>182</sup> Redcross, *Connecting People with Art: Contemporary African-American Art*, 58.

<sup>183</sup> *Connecting People with Art*, 193.

<sup>184</sup> Larry Muhammad, “Louisville artists, Gallery Owners Get National Attention in Book,” *The Courier-Journal.com*, September 24, 2006, accessed February 19, 2007.

décor consultants, architects, art dealers, gallery owners, or corporate art buyers. There is no mention of museum professionals, students of arts or collectors who are emphasized in NBFAS literature. An undated demographic survey compiled by the Dohring Company of Los Angeles provides general information about the PIAE participation levels. The survey gives viewers a snapshot of participants by gender, age, marital status, educational attainment and income levels taken over one three-day event. Based on the snapshot, the expo attracts mainly women (71%), more than half of which are between the ages of 30 to 49 (55%) and single (59%), with educational levels above high school (96%) but some above graduate school (19%). The mid-range income level is between \$40,000 and \$79,000 (48%) with only 10% above \$80,000. Many of these attendees have come to the art expo more than once and the vast majority expressed satisfaction with the expo (95%).<sup>185</sup>

While no similar statistical data appears to exist for the NBFAS, one can learn much from examining reviews and perspectives for it in the press. The press emphasized two major points: its arrival time being long overdue in introducing African-American art to newer audiences; and the ‘beauty’ of the works themselves.<sup>186</sup> Other reviews of the first NBFAS were mixed often praising the variety and quality of works available yet questioning the relevance of a seemingly exclusive display of works by African-American artists. *New York Times* reviewer, Grace Glueck described the fair as “showing everything from African tribal art to very contemporary paintings, prints and photographs,” yet was disappointed in its overt attempt at ethnic merchandising.<sup>187</sup> The ambivalence toward the fair’s racial inflection is

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<sup>185</sup> See “Expo Ads and Press Kit,” accessed Nov 29, 2011, <http://www.octobergallery.com/expo2007>.

<sup>186</sup> See for example, Khephra Burns, “Reframing Black Art,” *Essence* 28, no. 3 (07, 1997), 102.

<sup>187</sup> Grace Glueck, “Art in Review,” *New York Times* (01/31, 1997), 28.

evident among dealers such as June Kelly who refused to participate in the show due to its racial specificity, but advertised her business annually in the show catalogue.<sup>188</sup>

Despite the NBFAS' attempt to satisfy a wide range of interests, some critics argued that the show did not have an even appeal in terms of scope and quality. For example, art critic Ken Johnson credited the show for its range of styles and subject matter. However, he described the quality as being, "from very good to junky."<sup>189</sup> A year later, Johnson again suggested that the show producers, "ought to raise its standards to appeal to people interested in what goes on at the Studio Museum in Harlem, the Whitney Museum of American Art and the elite galleries of Chelsea and 57th Street."<sup>190</sup>

What is interesting about Johnson's comments is that they point to differences between not only the works themselves but also the diverse tastes and audiences for contemporary art production by African Americans. The Studio Museum in Harlem, under the curatorial leadership Thelma Golden and Lowery Stokes-Sims had been reviewed by other journalists frequently for its examination of 20<sup>th</sup> century modernism and its robust and at times provocative display of younger 21<sup>st</sup> century artists in its artists-in-residence program.<sup>191</sup> Other artists Kara Walker and Kerry James Marshall, both MacArthur genius grant awardees, had made major splashes in the contemporary art world.<sup>192</sup> They were

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ken Johnson, "Art in Review, National Black Fine Art show," *New York Times* (01/30, 2004), 39.

<sup>190</sup> Ken Johnson, "Art in Review; National Black Fine Art show," *New York Times* (02/04, 2005), 39.

<sup>191</sup> See for example the review for the exhibition, *Freestyle* in Cathy Byrd, "Is there a "Post-Black" Art? Investigating the Legacy of the "Freestyle" Show," *Art Papers* 26 (2002), 34-39.

<sup>192</sup> The MacArthur Fellows Program (also called the MacArthur "genius grant") annually awards creativity and innovation their professional fields. Potential fellows cannot apply but are nominated. Each fellowship comes with a stipend of \$500,000 to the recipient, paid out in equal quarterly installments over five years. For more information see, <http://www.macfound.org>.

represented by major contemporary art galleries in New York such as Brent Sikkema Gallery and Jack Shainman Gallery suggesting a shift from traditional structures of cultural and economic patronage to mainstream acceptance and support. Therefore, for critics such as Johnson the question of the NBFAS' relevance to contemporary art audiences and buyers translated into issues of quality although the fair serviced a broad range of interests.

Wainwright was cognizant of the NBFAS's ability to draw African-American audiences, yet remarked about the currency that such a show had for this seemingly monolithic community. It was Wainwright's feeling, however, that African-American art had not been a victim of a "conspiracy" to exclude it from mainstream acceptance, but rather, a victim of deficient public exposure.<sup>193</sup> Many of Wainwright's statements consistently suggest that not only did African-American artists lack the necessary exposure to mainstream validation and sales, but that African Americans themselves remained untutored in their knowledge of art and their own artistic legacy.<sup>194</sup> Despite, Wainwright's strategic intervention, artist Nanette Carter cautioned that the NBFAS could be problematic in that it served as yet another "umbrella show" for black art, further essentializing African-American artistic creation as monolithic in both concept and quality. Nevertheless, the promise of higher prices for work by African-American art and a growing base of collectors of color were seen as encouraging.<sup>195</sup>

In subsequent years of the NBFAS' productions, recognition from news organs was relatively repetitive and their coverage was purely informational in terms of the show's

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<sup>193</sup> Glueck, *Art in Review*, 28.

<sup>194</sup> "Joscelyn Wainwright," Pendergast and Pendergast, *Contemporary Black Biography*.

<sup>195</sup> Richard Leslie, "Racism in the Art World: A Report on a Report," *New Art Examiner* 25 (September, 1997), 44-45.

purpose and offerings. The *New York Times* and *Art Business News*, in their regular calendars, consistently included the annual show, which took place at the end of January or early February, in its regular calendars and provided general critique of highlights. Josh Wainwright was able to successfully part from his original business partnership with Sanford Smith and Associates and to expand his own enterprise. He opened his art and antiques management company, Keeling Wainwright and Associates, in partnership with his wife Sandy Keeling-Wainwright.<sup>196</sup> In addition Wainwright even attempted to add another art fair to his repertoire, however the NBFAS continued to draw more attendees and attention.<sup>197</sup> Chicago Tribune writer, Connie Lauerman described Wainwright's productions as "a marriage of commerce and consciousness-raising," which echoed similar reports about the NBFAS's dualistic purpose.<sup>198</sup>

### *Perceptions of Quality*

The NBFAS's continuous aim for excellence among other contemporary art fairs was characterized by a desire to address issues around quality in terms of selection. This is not an uncommon marketing technique for art fairs, yet Wainwright's commitment to enhancing the

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<sup>196</sup> Wainwright also added another major show to his roster, the Philadelphia Antiques Show, which had originally been organized by Sanford Smith and Associates' firm.

<sup>197</sup> A similar fair was organized by Wainwright at the Navy Pier in Chicago and hosted by nationally renowned talk show host and media magnate Oprah Winfrey. *Color: The Chicago Black Fine Art Exposition* opened Friday, May 19, 2000 as a three day art fair on the Navy Pier showcasing works by approximately 40 galleries from United States and Canada. Local Chicago Galleries included Richard Gray Gallery, Robert Henry Adams Fine Art, Aaron Galleries, and G.R. N'Namdi Gallery, many of whom had participated in the NBFAS in New York City. The show ended after one attempt.

<sup>198</sup> Connie Lauerman, "Show Aims to Get Works by Artist of Color into the Mainstream," *Chicago Tribune*, May 16, 2000, accessed September 27, 2010. [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2000-05-16/features/0005160026\\_1\\_black-artists-art-institute-art-chicago](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2000-05-16/features/0005160026_1_black-artists-art-institute-art-chicago).

quality of dealers and their offerings suggests an awareness of negative or second class assessments of African-American art historically. Ironically, many of the same artists who had struggled for aesthetic parity in shows such as those held by the Harmon Foundation and forty years before in protests at the Whitney and the Metropolitan Museum of Art were now becoming acknowledged historically. Yet Wainwright's goal of introducing new audiences to the works of African-American artists through exposure to well-selected fine art dealers and gallery owners served to validate their aesthetic and commercial viability, particularly in the major art metropolis of New York City.

Wainwright's opinion about the importance of the New York show continued to emphasize his company's commitment to elevating the visibility of works by African-American artists. He believed that the potential of these productions far exceeded criticisms of racial exclusivity. He remarked that "the idea of these events is to put ourselves out of business" and that the successful insertion of works by African-American artists into the larger pantheon of artists in the 'mainstream' art world would be the eventual result.<sup>199</sup> Apparently, this 'mainstream' art world that he imagines includes an audience that has been denied the opportunity to both view and buy works by black artists due to social and economic inequities leading to their absence at major sales venues.<sup>200</sup> For Wainwright, productions such as the NBFAS not only magnified the value of multiculturalism or difference as an asset to visual art, but it also guaranteed African-American art entry into the 'mainstream' art market.

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Margaret Hawkins, "Overlooked Gems - Navy Pier Show Opens Art World to Black Works," *Chicago Sun-Times*, May 17, 2000, 53.

What was significant about the nature of advertising for the NBFAS in both its web presence, pamphlets and other promotional literature was its air of exclusivity. Images, for example, on the NBFAS website were kept to a minimum and pretty much limited to a collage of at least six or seven different works which grace their web home page, promotional postcards and finally, their show catalogue (see Figure 3.2). When perusing the “About Us” section of their homepage, the language emphasized strategies for casting themselves and their “unique” contribution to art fairs is clearly evident:

“We are a Show that is dedicated to the exclusive presentation of ORIGINAL art produced by artists of African and African-American descent. If you are in the market for poster art, then this show is NOT for you. If you are in the market for ORIGINAL art at affordable prices or a serious collector looking to add to a serious collection, this IS the show for you.”<sup>201</sup>

The preceding paragraph distinguishes this show as unique not so much because it has decided to market the work by African and African-American artists, but instead because it refuses to make itself an outlet for posters and other reproductions. Since this language precedes other information about the fair and certain aspects are textually emphasized through capitalized letters, it is evident that a market for reproduced images by African-Americans must have preceded the conception of the fair. The text does not direct readers to outlets for reproduced work, but makes a point of excluding those who indeed prefer such work.

In contrast “serious” collectors are encouraged to expand their collections and are encouraged to participate. Later in another section of this introduction, the producers of the show emphasize that they are interested in “keeping the Bar high” in terms of the choices of

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<sup>201</sup> National Black Fine Art Show, “About NBFAS,” <<http://www.nationalblackfineartshow.com/about.html>> (19 February 2007).

galleries and dealers invited to the show. What “Bar” they are referring to (gallery representation, price, art historical relevance, overall popularity, etc.) remains undefined. However, the “Bar” is suggestive and it may indeed point to Wainwright’s concern for addressing the kind of quality issues mentioned by critics of the show. In response, the notion of a growing art market for the work of emerging artists and other African-American “master” artists would, in part, be determined by the success of the NBFAS.<sup>202</sup>

The categories of artists who appear at the NBFAS were meticulously constructed by Wainwright and I would contend that they represent his own specific interests and his understanding of the constituent dealers represented there. The short list of artists and their ‘categories’ evident on the website and promotional literature is the following:

- “Early African American masters as Edward Bannister, Robert Duncanson, Henry Tanner;”
- “Harlem renaissance masters like Aaron Douglas, Palmer Hayden, Ellis Wilson, Charles Alston, Hale Woodruff, and William Johnson;”
- “Modern masters such as Romare Bearden, Eldzier Cortor, Benny Andrews, and Elizabeth Catlett;”
- “Young giants like, Danny Simmons, Cheryl Warrick, Francks Deceus, Carrie Mae Weems and Frank Morrison.”

The categories listed above (although the last one, “young giants,” referring to contemporary artists, seems atypical) bear resonance to popular themes and periods outlined by academic surveys and museum exhibitions of African-American art, but also ones produced by art dealers such as Michael Rosenfeld (see discussion in Chapter 2), particularly with the use of the term, ‘master.’ The categorical approach connotes that the aforementioned artists are not only well-known but are a part of the dominant art historical discourse, a factor which apparently increases their validity and subsequently, their potential value in the larger art market place.

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<sup>202</sup> Keeling Wainwright and Associates, *The National Black Fine Art Show: 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Black Fine Arts Show*, (Cabin John, MD: Keeling Wainwright and Associates, 2006), 5.



The NBFAS continued to describe itself as not only as being a vehicle for acquiring great art at great values due to its appeal to a diverse and growing audience and due in part to its emphasis on quality and education about art. In an effort to remedy the issue of art historical and collecting knowledge, the educational component of the fair incorporated tours of the show and mini-seminars on general art appreciation, the role of museums and galleries, collecting methods, art conservation, and other issues specific to African-American artists. In 2003 the Educational Series was formally organized by Laurie Cumbo Blake Kimbrough, the Director and board member respectively of MoCADA (The Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Art) in Brooklyn.<sup>203</sup> Under their leadership, the educational series expanded with lecture panels held at the Puck building and other venues including galleries and cultural institutions within walking distance.<sup>204</sup> For example, panel discussions for the 2004 NBFAS were held at the June Kelly Gallery located one block away from the Puck Building. Special panels were composed of an array of appraisers and consultants (Halima Taha, Mark Dabney), art historians (Leslie King Hammond), gallerists (Peg Alston, Camille Billops, Michael Rosenfeld, Sande Webster), collectors (Robert Steele, Darrell Walker) artists (Howardena Pindell, Richard Mayhew, Danny Simmons, Nanette Carter, Al Loving), and museum professionals.

Although the producers of the show have acknowledged their responsibility in “raising the Bar,” perhaps based on the aforementioned criticisms, they firmly hold to their goal of creating a venue for selling African-American art that not only affirms African-

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<sup>203</sup> The MoCADA was founded by Laurie Cumbo in 1999 and officially opened in Brooklyn in 2006.

<sup>204</sup> Laura Andrews, "National Black Fine Art show Augmented with Charity Series," *New York Amsterdam News* 93, no. 4 (01/24, 2002), 17.

American visual expression but also crosses the color line. In a response to critics and those uneducated about the importance of the show, the producer, Josh Wainwright comments:

“White America, for the most part, when they think of black art they think of Afro-centric images, things they wouldn't necessarily feel comfortable with in their homes and offices. There is black art, however, that is not even readily identifiable as black.”<sup>205</sup>

Wainwright's remarks to white mainstream critics of African-American art bespeak not only a reaction to traditional patterns of racial discrimination and exclusion practiced in the art world, but it also sheds light on another issue: the definition of African-American art. Wainwright's assumptions about white reactions to “Afro-centric images” points to the notion of African-American or ‘black’ art as one which consists of visually identifiable codes which link back to a radically inspired construction of Africa or African ancestral linkages. In other words, art emerging in a particular cultural and historical context is presumed to fix a certain visual taxonomy that is recognizable in the context of this art fair.

Although the discourse around ‘black’ fine art defined by Wainwright links to assumptions about a more culturally specific form of imagery, references to its relationship to the ‘mainstream’, was not uncommon and not necessarily attributed to race. The Outsider Art Fair, begun by Wainwright's former business partners, Sanford Smith and Associates, was also composed of dealers who specialized in ‘marginalized’ artists. The Outsider Art Fair concentrated on “self-taught’ artists, whose work lay outside of the dominant mainstream. Reviewers commented on the Outsider Art Fair's “unmanageable variety” and its need for “quality” offerings.<sup>206</sup> Wainwright was keenly aware of Sanford Smith's formula

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<sup>205</sup> Lee, *Black Art show's Goals: Recognition and Buyers*, B7.

<sup>206</sup> Roberta Smith, "The Outsider Art Fair," *New York Times*, Jan 28, 1994, C19.

for generating commercial interest around the artists who had been collectively relegated to an underdog status in the dominant art world and the need to effectively translate newly forming niche markets to the public. However, the historical exclusion of African-American artists from mainstream venues had been one in which evoked an elusive notion of ‘quality’ which preceded Wainwright’s development of the NBFAS.

Although historically situated in the late twentieth century, the NBFAS’s rhetoric and the criticism around its rationale for being, is clearly rooted in the early twentieth century attempts to promote African-American artists. Ironically, in viewing the many works available, many emphasized are those by early 20<sup>th</sup> century artists. The marked difference between Wainwright’s assertions and those of, for example, Alain Locke, could be found in terms of the level of competition in the overall market, the quantity and variety of work, and networks, for moving art through the marketplace. This 21<sup>st</sup> century fair, composed primarily of art dealers rather than “race” leaders of the 19<sup>th</sup> century demonstrated the rising significance of African-American art as a commodity in its own right rather than a mark of race-based achievement only. In other words, for Wainwright, the desire for acceptance from the dominant art world begun in the early part of the twentieth century remained important; however, what was now at stake was the perception of African-American art in a more complicated, global art market. This globally competitive art market offered more artists, more artistic options, more available commercial outlets and seemingly diverse consumers to attract.

The attempt to articulate a specific term or barometer for assessing quality took place among the organizers of the PIAE. In *Connecting People with Art: Contemporary African American Art*, Evelyn and Mercer Redcross describe the October Gallery and its related

Philadelphia International Art Expo as espousing a “blackstream” focus. The book provides basic background information on the role of the October Gallery and the art fair in developing the “blackstream” movement among art buyers and this is reinforced heavily throughout its 502-page compendium of images of artistic works which they have promoted, artists, historical news clippings and pictures of past art shows.

The term “blackstream,” was used to describe the predominantly African-American audience that makes up their clientele along with accompanying beliefs about a more collective response to choices in visual art buying. The Redcrosses mention that according to Edward S. Spriggs, the founder of Hammonds House Galleries and Resource Center in Atlanta, Georgia, the term had been used since the early 1900s to describe the plight of African-American artists who had not been accepted in the mainstream art world.<sup>207</sup> In other words, for Redcross, “blackstream” means buying from black artists with recognizable themes that are meant to be directed toward black people. The Redcrosses note that content, inspiration and even the financial stability of African-American visual expression is based on support from this “special community.”<sup>208</sup>

Ironically there is no reference to art historian Elsa Honig Fine’s use of this term “blackstream” although in academic circles her name would typically come to mind. It is important to note that in scholarly circles, Fine’s publication, *The Afro-American Artist: A Search for Identity*, originally published in 1973, uses the term blackstream among three categories which she establishes for black artists. “Black arts movement” described artists whose work was aligned with the politics of Black Nationalism. “Mainstream” artists

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<sup>207</sup> *Connecting People with Art : Contemporary African-American Art*, 19.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

included those such as Sam Gilliam, Richard Mayhew, Bob Thompson, and Al Loving whose work reflect an evolving engagement with abstraction, minimalism, Op art kinetic art and conceptual art as it was understood in the “mainstream” art world. The term “Blackstream” on the other hand connotes a more humanistic approach to art:

“The Blackstream artist reaches into the depths of the Black experience and relates it to the human experience. By working figuratively and in some cases incorporating the symbols or techniques of African art, the Blackstream artist is attempting to universalize the Black condition in America-but within generally accepted aesthetic standards.”<sup>209</sup>

In some ways, Fine’s reference to the incorporation or at least influence of African art in the works of artists echoes the legacy of Alain Locke and his admonitions for the embrace of the ancestral arts as a means of linking black artists to larger, more universal aims and an insertion into the canon of modern art. Honig frames Blackstream art as pre-modern and less experimental or *avant garde* in technique compared to advances in what she describes as “mainstream” art. Further, the overtly political and personal outlook of the Black Arts movement is defined as being more populist in orientation with its examples of public murals, revolutionary posters and references to historical figures and upheaval occurring during the Black Power Movement.

The use of the term Blackstream by the Redcrosses, whether influenced by Fine’s assessment or not, essentializes the lived experiences of African-Americans and these experiences are supposedly captured by the art itself. The implication that Blackstream art conforms to monolithic values of the African-American community is a defining characteristic of their use of the term. Blackstream art asserts a construction of a nostalgic or

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<sup>209</sup> Fine, *The Afro-American Artist: A Search for Identity*, 310 .

romanticized black experience which serves to create group solidarity in the arena of art buying.

Although both fairs boast strong attendance from African-American consumers, the PIAE assumes that a collective taste exists for these consumers in terms of their choices for visual imagery. African-American consumers are a “special community” with an art market that is tailored to their culturally specific norms which can be addressed through the work of African-American artists. The NBFAS has a similar sense of pride in the cohesive nature of the African-American visual aesthetics which is based on a shared history of discrimination. Their ultimate goal, however, for the NBFAS, is integration into the mainstream art world, with the fair providing a circular means of intervention. In contrast, the PIAE’s literature, with its preponderance of images of people enjoying art at the fair and in their home as well as the testimonials and choices in visual imagery, suggests that art is about and for the community, specifically an African-American global community. People are “connected” to art which implies community in addition to “collecting” art which implies a focus on its place as both cultural artifact and commodity.

Both the PIAE and NBFAS offer a variety of images and media, yet the biggest difference is in the artists. PIAE artists are contemporary African-American artists who tend to be actively creating work and may or may not have had strong exhibition records at museums and mainstream commercial galleries. The NBFAS dealers represent, for the most part, the works of artists who represent previous decades and are considered “master artists.” “Master artists” tend to fall chronologically in the category of nineteenth century portrait and landscape painters, Harlem Renaissance and New Deal period artists (1920s-1940s), modern

painters and printmakers (post-1950s), and contemporary artists who have achieved success in the eyes of art critics across the board.

Another major difference between the “master” artists that predominate the NBFAS and the “popular” artists who show at the PIAE is that NBFAS artists typically appear in major surveys of African-American art and in art historical literature. Although the last twenty years has shown an increase in art historical writing concerning African-American art in the form of exhibition catalogues, monographs, etc., many of the names of the PIAE artists do not show up at all or rarely in canonical literature. As art historical literature often helps to establish provenance, works by PIAE artists would most likely lack sufficient documentation to determine value as in the case of auctions.

Quality is assessed by the NBFAS standards in terms of more traditional art making categories whereas the PIAE focuses less on materials and art-making parameters but on commercial interest and accessibility to wider audiences (volume). The producers of the PIAE did not emphasize price or originality as the determining factor of value in artwork. They measured their success through their ability to showcase works that are variable in style and have a sliding price scale to draw more visitors. They explain:

“Exhibiting all original artwork or art with extremely high price tags is not what brings in the biggest crowd. The Expo is not a show for the elite. The Expo succeeds by the means of a wide representation of art styles, mediums and concepts, and prices ranging from moderate to high.”<sup>210</sup>

One way in which fair organizers reached consensus on issues of ‘quality’ was in the realm of price appreciation for certain works for art and related artists. The term “poster,”

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<sup>210</sup> *Connecting People with Art : Contemporary African-American Art*, 221.

referred to disparagingly by Josh Wainwright in NBFAS literature was also a way of distinguishing himself from other art fair producers that were believed to disseminate such products.<sup>211</sup> The PIAE, with its array of visual products, which included “posters,” could be interpreted as one of Wainwright’s discredited competitors. However, in a more economically competitive market for African-American art, the overlapping appeal of certain artists demonstrated that the two art worlds were not always significantly different. For example, gallery owner and appraiser Eric Hanks notes that limited edition prints have always maintained importance among collectors of African-American art for its affordability and the originality of the hand of the master printmaker. He notes that Elizabeth Catlett’s *Sharecropper* (1968) has had appraisal values of \$25,000 and that galleries selling versions of this print have done so for approximately \$15,000.<sup>212</sup> Similarly, the Redcrosses, in their description of the market for African-American art, mention the sale of Catlett’s *Sharecropper* at a Swann Galleries auction in February 2006 for \$8500 as well as other prices for artists such as John Biggers and Romare Bearden alongside images and references to examples of more “popular” artists such as Charles Bibbs, Brenda Joysmith, and William Tolliver.<sup>213</sup> William Tolliver, for example, rivaled Catlett’s price for a serigraph published in 1994 entitled, *Pas de Deux*, which the Redcrosses suggest is now \$13,000.<sup>214</sup> Clearly, both the NBFAS and the PIAE fair organizers understood the importance of price appreciation for works of art, yet the importance of documentation via the tertiary or auction market became a

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<sup>212</sup> Eric Hanks, "Dollars and Prints," *International Review of African American Art* 19, no. 4 (2004), 18-21..

<sup>213</sup> *Connecting People with Art: Contemporary African-American Art*, 440-447.

<sup>214</sup> <sup>214</sup> *Connecting People with Art: Contemporary African-American Art*, 440.



crucial indicator of market success for all artists and a key tool in advancing their individual missions among their audiences.

The weighty issue of ‘quality’ in African-American art continued to take place among scholars, curators and art dealers as both a barrier to mainstream access not due to impoverished aesthetic sensibilities but to a difference in perspective among many African-American artists. In a 2001 interview with gallery owner, Eric Hanks of M. Hanks Gallery in Santa Monica, California, David Driskell discusses his view of quality in relation to ‘Western canon.’<sup>215</sup> Driskell related that his connoisseurial standards emerge from the ‘Western canon’ and that a separate African-American canon does not exist, but that “one may be in the making.”<sup>216</sup> Driskell cites color, for example, as a variable in which many African-American artists tend to be accused of “violating” Western canon in favor of a different aesthetic preference, despite the common training among artists in their training, which tends to be governed by traditional Western models.

Driskell’s reference to distinctions in the use of color is a provocative one. He suggests that difference in the use of color by many African-American artists is not due to lack of skill, but, rather, a deliberately transgressive act that counters the hegemonic ‘Western’ norms of beauty found in mainstream society. In other words, Driskell challenges the ‘Western canon’ for its apparent exclusion of a variety of cultural differences that exist

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<sup>215</sup> The interview took place in conjunction with a book signing held at the gallery for Driskell’s book, *The Other Side of Color*, a 240 page coffee table publication of images and essays about the collection of African-American art owned by Bill and Camille Cosby. Eric Hanks, the brother of Camille Cosby, has owned his gallery since 1998.

<sup>216</sup> Eric Hanks and M. Hanks Gallery (Santa Monica, Calif.), *Masterpieces of African American Art : An African American Perspective, January 25 to March 30, 2002, M. Hanks Gallery, Santa Monica, California* (Santa Monica, CA: M. Hanks Gallery, 2002), 57.

between groups, color being one example in this regard. Therefore, determination about ‘quality’ can be incomplete or inaccurate if artists of differing backgrounds are held to that standard.<sup>217</sup>

Although Driskell admits to an adherence to traditional ‘Western’ art standards and norms, his other writings are clearly more consistent with contemporary postmodern thinking on difference. In *African American Visual Aesthetics: A Postmodernist View* (1995), Driskell indicates that notions of postmodernism espoused in the latter part of the twentieth century by Euro-American artists were not a recent development among African-Americans. The contemporary focus on autobiographical and cultural system of aesthetics was one that could be located in the history of African-American scholarship. Driskell draws from the writings and activities of figures such as Alain Locke, James Amos Porter, and to a lesser degree James V. Herring to define the central questions espoused by the discipline of an African-American art historical philosophy. Howard University’s centrality in defining the discipline both for Driskell and for future historians of what was then ‘Negro art’ is also important to consider as a space for both black artists and thinkers in a time of *de jure* segregation and limited educational opportunities for African Americans. He relates Locke and Herring’s desire for racially inspired aesthetic based on deep understanding of an African ancestral past in conjunction with a rigorous program of aligning such ideas with ‘Western’ art historical tradition.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> David Driskell, “The Progenitors of a Postmodernist Review of African American Art,” *African American Visual Aesthetics : A Postmodernist View*, ed. David C. Driskell (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995).

By its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2006, the NBFAS would not be challenged by continuous interrogations about quality perceptions linked to their efforts of mainstreaming of African-American art, but instead more internal concerns. As a strategic venue with annual visitation increasing, space became paramount concern for dealers. In addition, renovations of the Puck Building rationalized the need for a move to a newer location. In 2009 the location of the 13<sup>th</sup> Annual National Black Fine Art Show fair changed to a more spacious location at the 7 West Building on West 47<sup>th</sup> Street and Fifth Avenue. Described in a press release as both “elegant and convenient,” the 7 West Building was situated near the Empire State Building and major department stores such as Macy’s in midtown Manhattan which and represented a more valued position among physical venues.<sup>219</sup> Despite the seemingly auspicious move, changes in the United States economy would threaten its economic potential and in 2010 the fair was placed on hiatus by Wainwright. At the time of this writing in 2012, the hiatus ended but so too did the NBFAS, according to its website.<sup>220</sup> The PIAE continued to maintain its ties to community via its highly interactive website which includes videos, blogs, and information about local and national events related to African-American art throughout the year.

In addition, competition from other segments of the art show and auction world began to emerge. For example, gallery owner, Mark Karelsen of Mason Murer Gallery organized another dealer-based fair called “Embrace” in Atlanta, Georgia in 2006.<sup>221</sup> However, efforts by auctioneers to connect to the particular tastes of art fair attendees such as those of NBFAS

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<sup>219</sup> Keeling Wainwright Associates, “National Black Fine Art Show Announces New Home,” Press release, 2009.

<sup>220</sup> See main home page, [www.blackfineartshow.com](http://www.blackfineartshow.com), accessed 3/19/2012.

<sup>221</sup> Catherine Fox, “Public Attendance Low, but Dealers Laud NBAF Fine Art Fair,” *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, July 30, 2006, sec. L6.

signaled the beginning of another form of mainstream recognition for African-American art:  
special auctions for African-American art.

## CHAPTER IV

### SWANN GALLERIES AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN ART AT AUCTION

In February of 2007, Swann Galleries, a New York based auction house, known for selling rare books, manuscripts and works on paper, introduced its first African-American fine art department by initiating the first of several bi-annual auctions and a significant milestone in the development of a niche market.<sup>222</sup> In this chapter I will argue that although these special auctions for African-American fine art advanced the belief that associated works of art by African Americans had now entered the broader art market, emphasis on economic value also unveiled additional tensions about its historical value among patrons and scholars and the role of auctions alongside other patronage strategies. The example of the Swann Galleries African-American fine art department and auctions raise important questions about the critical reception of African-American art as these works of art both shape and are shaped by economic considerations.

Seeds for Swann's African-American fine art department were planted years earlier as African-American artists names began to emerge in both major and minor auction houses. Several artists began to fetch impressive sums at auction houses such as Sotheby's and Christie's prompting discussion about the importance of price as a barometer for charting the progression of African-American art as a distinct field of collecting and historical interest. Jean Michel Basquiat, Jacob Lawrence, Romare Bearden, Martin Puryear, David Hammons

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<sup>222</sup> Dannatt, *Swann Holds First African-American Fine Art Sale*, 55.

and even late 19<sup>th</sup> century artist Henry O. Tanner were among those who attracted attention for price appreciation, however, concern arose among long time collectors and dealers who felt that other African-American artists' prices had not shown demonstrable improvement.<sup>223</sup>

The African-American Fine Art department at Swann is headed by Nigel Freeman, the Associate Director of the Prints and Drawings Department. Swann Galleries, which was founded in 1941 and named for antiquarian book dealer Benjamin Swann, is an auction house specializing in works on paper divided into several departments: autographs, photographs, posters, maps, books and prints and drawings. Prior to coming to Swann, Freeman began his career as an artist and acquired his MFA in painting from Columbia University and a BA in history and visual arts from Brown University. Freeman was acquainted with African-American art as an auctioneer and student of American art but also through auctions at Sotheby's and Christie's.<sup>224</sup> It had become apparent to Freeman that there was a market for this work, as evidenced by the frequent auction-related successes of works by modern artists such as Romare Bearden, Jacob Lawrence, Alma Thomas and Charles White. For example, in a 2006 auction at Christie's Jacob Lawrence's tempera on board painting, *Subway Acrobats* (1959), sold just shy of the \$ 1 million mark at \$968,000. A year later, another Jacob Lawrence painting, *The Builders* was purchased by the White House acquisition trust for \$2.5 million at another Christie's auction to be included in the collection

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<sup>223</sup> Interview with Bill Hodges, February 4, 2011. Also, Quashelle Fannie Curtis, "African American Art in the Marketplace: The Path to Inclusion" (Master's Thesis, Seton Hall University, 2003).

<sup>224</sup> Interview with Nigel Freeman, August 17, 2007, Also see Shawnya L. Harris, "The Swann African American Fine Art Auctions: Conception, Achievement and Response," *International Review of African American Art* 22, no. 1 (01, 2008), 30-39.

which hangs in the Green Room (Figure 4.1).<sup>225</sup> However, Freeman noted that for the most part, prices fetched by other modernist artists such as Rothko and De Kooning continued to eclipse that of African-American artists, suggesting that there was still considerable growth needed to equalize the playing field.<sup>226</sup> According to art critic Daniel Grant, many art dealers and collectors felt that the general ignorance of auction houses to the historical or critical information about artists of color and their audiences was a prevailing theme and, perhaps, one explanation for the lack of value applied to such works. Therefore, specialized sales for ‘African-American’ art would seemingly provide the necessary focus that would build the market for lesser known or sold artists.<sup>227</sup>

Fine art by African-American artists such as Romare Bearden and Jacob Lawrence frequently appeared in earlier Swann auctions of modern and contemporary American and European prints and drawings as well as their African-American auctions. However, the idea for developing specialized auctions and a corresponding department was sparked in 2005 when Freeman had been called upon to appraise the estate of late journalist Harry Henderson who had co-authored the publication *A History of African-American Artists: from 1792 to the Present* (1993) with late artist Romare Bearden. Bearden and Henderson’s text, a ubiquitous, compendium and survey text for African-American artists was viewed with reverence in the academic community for its copious entries and detail. Eleven works by Bearden from Henderson’s collection were later included in an auction of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century prints and drawings conducted by Swann on September 15, 2005. The works included highly visible

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<sup>225</sup> Jacqueline Trescott, "Green Room Makeover Incorporates a Colorful Past," *The Washington Post*, September 20, 2007, sec. C01.

<sup>226</sup> Harris, *The Swann African American Fine Art Auctions: Conception, Achievement and Response*, 30-39.

<sup>227</sup> Daniel Grant, "African-American Art Captivates Both Black and White Collectors," *The Christian Science Monitor* 93, no. 146 (2001): 19.

works such as the collages *Pittsburgh* (1965) and *Family* (1970) which had recently toured in the National Gallery's major traveling retrospective of Bearden's work in 2003.<sup>228</sup> Although the sale was dominated by works on paper by modern artists such as Pablo Picasso, Paul Cezanne and Marc Chagall, several African-American art luminaries including painters Lois Mailou Jones, Norman Lewis, and printmaker Dox Thrash also appeared. Following this "modern masters" sale, and a sale on March 7, 2006 (where two more Bearden collages appeared from another estate), Swann began to receive several inquiries by other collectors who were eager to establish a more aggressive secondary market for works by African Americans to accompany the growth in gallery representation. Freeman proposed the idea of a department of African-American fine art to Swann Galleries' CEO Nicholas Lowry who agreed to its creation.

The first auction of the newly formed African-American Fine Art Department was held on February 6, 2007. The timing of the auction corresponded with celebrations of Black History Month and other major events and announcements related to African-American art. New York City's Mayor Bloomberg declared that the prior week, which coincided with the 11<sup>th</sup> annual National Black Fine Art Show, to be Black Fine Art Week.<sup>229</sup> Freeman noted that it was one of the best attended exhibitions and auctions for Swann and that there "was a great buzz" among artists, artist families, and consigners as well as both novice and experienced

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<sup>228</sup> The two collages included in the Bearden retrospective were *Pittsburgh* (1965), and *Family* (1970), and were estimated to bring \$30,000 to \$50,000. Bearden abstract oilacrylic painting, *Blue Is the Smoke of War, White the Bones of Man*" (1960), featured in Sharon Patton's textbook *African-American Art* (1998) and exhibited in 1991 at the Studio museum in Harlem and Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art fetched 70K. See <http://swanngalleries.rfcsystems.com/asp/search.asp?pg=8&ps=10> (accessed 10/6/2007).

<sup>229</sup> Keeling Wainwright and Associates, Inc. *1st WEEK OF BLACK HISTORY MONTH DECLARED "BLACK FINE ART WEEK" BY MAYOR BLOOMBERG'S OFFICE*. Jan 25, 2007, accessed Dec 19, 2007, <[http://www.nationalblackfineartshow.com/PR/NBFAS\\_press\\_release\\_3.pdf](http://www.nationalblackfineartshow.com/PR/NBFAS_press_release_3.pdf)>.



collectors. According to Freeman, typical auctions consisted of 100 lots per hour.<sup>230</sup>

However since there were close to 200 lots to be auctioned that day and a large number of bidders participating, much more time was required.<sup>231</sup>

In terms of the preparation for the first auction, Swann's promotion corresponded with other auctions which they typically run. Swann's produces printed catalogues, and the full catalogue is also available online with full color images and written descriptions about the work including any known provenance. Each object has a reserve amount which typically ranges from half of the low estimate to a preset low estimate established by the consigner and the auction house. Bidders are allowed to ask questions during the bidding process; however they are able to receive detailed condition reports and even some buying advice in the weeks prior to the auction, particularly if they plan to participate in online bidding. In terms of the starting bid for certain objects, absentee bids often functioned as the starting point.

Top lots were impressive at this initial auction generating a certain degree of optimism about the African-American Fine Art Department at Swann Galleries. The auction itself earned \$2.3 million in sales with an 87% sell through rate.<sup>232</sup> Elizabeth Catlett's *Nude Torso*, a carved mahogany sculpture, believed to be the first of her sculptures to be sold at auction, fetched the sum of \$120,000 (Figure 4.2). Jacob Lawrence's print series, *The Legend of John Brown*, which graced the cover of the inaugural catalogue, sold for \$156,000 (Figure 4.3). Norman Lewis' abstract painting *Untitled* sold for \$67,200 (see Figure 4.4).<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> Interview with Nigel Freeman, August 17, 2007. In the typical auctions described by Freeman offerings are divided as discrete elements which are termed 'lots' which are generally one or more physical items but considered to be a unit. Auctioneers announce each lot by an assigned number and description.

<sup>231</sup> Interview with Nigel Freeman, August 17, 2007.

<sup>232</sup> The sell through rate is the percentage of works sold relative to works available at a given auction.

<sup>233</sup> Dannatt, *Swann Holds First African-American Fine Art Sale*, 55.

Another important aspect of interest to collectors was, of course, the estimates listed in the catalogues. Although Swann Galleries attempted to gauge good estimates for what each object will finally be sold by looking at the broader art market for comparable objects selling privately or through dealers, it was not always a precise exercise. In many cases, the works were purchased directly from artist studios decades earlier or by other undocumented means. There was little in the way of reliable price documentation. Freeman remarked that since accurate pricing measures could be difficult to construct in isolation, considerable experience in auctioning comparable works was necessary in determining the estimates. Therefore, actual auction results were critical for the art market in developing accurate appraisal valuations.<sup>234</sup>

In terms of where the demand lay chronologically, Freeman noted that work or imagery by African-American artists from the WPA/New Deal or Depression era (1930s-1940s) through the 1950s remained popular. Artists with longer careers or recognizable styles such as Jacob Lawrence, Elizabeth Catlett, Romare Bearden and Charles White remained favorites as well. In the February 2007 sale, Freeman followed a chronological approach intentionally instituting a “coattail effect” for many popular works by lesser known artists of similar periods (e.g. Depression-era artists) or similar genres (e.g. Social Realist content) in order to set first time records. Freeman saw another major growth area in the work of first and second generation African-American abstractionists as well as 1960s protest era art from individuals such as Mel Edwards, Betye Saar, and David Hammons as he anticipated the second sale from the fine art department.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> Interview with Nigel Freeman, August 17, 2007.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

The second auction held by Swann Galleries took place on October 4, 2007 for the historic corporate art collection owned by the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company, one of the oldest African-American owned insurance companies in the country (see Chapter 1). In an effort to quickly liquidate its collection to offset the company's many debts, the prized art collection, originally begun in 1965, was slated to be put up for public auction rather than private sale. The sale, which earned \$1.54 million, auctioned 94 works which emanated from the Golden State Mutual Insurance Company's art collection and included more well-known artists such as Henry O. Tanner, Hughie Lee Smith, Romare Bearden, Elizabeth Catlett, David Hammons, and Charles White, as well as lesser known yet well-regarded artists from California and elsewhere such as Varnette Honeywood, John T. Riddle, Beulah Woodard, Richard Wyatt, and William Pajaud.<sup>236</sup>

The auction had several notable attendees and like the first, eager buyers. Recording artist and entertainer Béyonce Knowles was in attendance as was her mother, Tina Knowles. Charles White's, *General Moses (Harriet Tubman)* (1965), which was featured on the cover of the auction catalogue (Figure 4.5), earned \$360,000 from an anonymous phone bidder, a figure that was believed to be at least ten times higher than White's previous auction record. Hughie Lee-Smith's surrealist *Slum Song* (1944) was purchased by inventor and entrepreneur Ken Hakuta and earned \$216,000 which far exceeded the modest high estimate of \$60,000 established by the auctioneer (Figure 4.6).<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> See "The Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company Collection," Swann Galleries website, accessed March 7, 2012, [http://www.swanngalleries.com/full.cgi?index\\_id=347&sch\\_id=375](http://www.swanngalleries.com/full.cgi?index_id=347&sch_id=375).

<sup>237</sup> Lindsay Pollock, "Floating Fair, L.A. Black Art, NYT Garage Sale: Auction Roundup " *Bloomberg News*, October 5, 2007, accessed April 23, 2008, <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=a0VmnOPnR.QE> .

Although the Swann Galleries auctions achieved a favorable response in its first auction, the second one generated more emotional sentiment due to Golden State Mutual Insurance Company Collection had for the Los Angeles community. Art historian, Samella Lewis, was among those outraged at the sale, arguing that its historic importance in the Los Angeles community in particular far outweighed the profit to be made from the sale. Lewis remarked, “It's one of the finest collections in the West in terms of African-American culture and art. It's like a museum. It's going to be a great loss to California if it leaves because we need that information.”<sup>238</sup> Artist William Pajaud, the original art director for Golden State Mutual commented that since there were few venues for African-American artists, the value of the collection lay in its patronage of artists who would otherwise be ignored or unknown to the viewing public.<sup>239</sup> Retired Los Angeles County Museum of Art preparator and activist, Cecil Ferguson, stated that the decision to sell the collection was unnerving to him, and that the struggling insurance company was “putting out its hand for pennies,” for a collection worth so much more than what he believed could be achieved at auction.<sup>240</sup> Charmaine Jefferson, executive director of the California African American Museum, expressed concern that the company had not taken the time to discuss the possibility of selling pieces to a museum or similar institution such as theirs so that it could remain a community and educational resource.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Lindsay Pollock, "Historians Angered by Auction of Black Art," *Los Angeles Times*, August 17, 2007, accessed March 7, 2012, <http://articles.latimes.com/2007/aug/17/entertainment/et-blackart17>.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Cecil Ferguson, "Selling the Dream," *Los Angeles Times*, October 03, 2007, accessed March 12, 2012, <http://articles.latimes.com/2007/oct/03/news/OE-FERGERTON3>.

<sup>241</sup> Pollock, *Historians Angered by Auction of Black Art*.”

The Golden State Mutual sale marked a pivotal crossroads for the reputation of Swann Galleries' African-American Fine Art Department. On the one hand, their emergence as a secondary market venue compromised the demise of the Golden State Mutual Insurance Company as a symbol of black economic and social empowerment and traditional patron of African-American art. On the other hand, the sale reinforced Swann's contemporary role in brokering equal economic opportunity and exposure for works by African-American artists through the machinations of the auction house. Despite its detractors, the prospect of selling pieces from the Golden State Mutual Art Collection was viewed by some such as gallery owner, Michael Rosenfeld, as a step in the right direction considering the rising value and historical currency of some works by African-American artists available on the market.<sup>242</sup> Auctioneer Nigel Freeman echoed similar sentiments adding that the opportunity for new records to be set for well-known artists such as Elizabeth Catlett, Charles White and Jacob Lawrence as well as lesser-known California artists, for example, far outweighed the disappointment of what was once a cohesive corporate art collection.<sup>243</sup>

Outside of the particular case of the Golden State Mutual Insurance Company, others in the fine art community waged complaints about the effects of the Swann Galleries African-American art auction in terms of price inflation. Art dealer and gallery owner Ellen Sragow (Sragow Gallery, New York) remarked that it was disheartening to find bidders aggressively bidding for work that was available elsewhere at lower prices. Another gallery owner, Thelma Harris, (Thelma Harris Gallery, Oakland, CA) suggested that some price estimates were entirely too high to begin with and that more galleries should have been

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<sup>242</sup> Ferguson, "Selling the Dream."

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

consulted first by the auction house.<sup>244</sup> Ironically, the arbitrary nature of dealer pricing was not considered problematic and art dealers found that their centrality in determining price and reputation of many artists whom they represented was dismissed. Sragow, for example, commented that it was not uncommon for her to now find herself bidding against her own former clients for works of art.

### *Statistical Analysis*

In order to understand the function of the auction setting at Swann Galleries and how the African-American Fine Art department's emphasis on price performance has been achieved, I co-developed a statistical methodology for quantitatively analyzing price performance and correlation.<sup>245</sup> I argue that a further analysis about auction prices for objects sold at Swann Galleries underscores some actual determinants for price formation and the complex factors involved in assessing the value of African-American art in the discourse of the art world. The statistical analysis was based on the following themes or questions: 1) How can the relative popularity of specific African-American artists whose work sold at auction be measured? 2) Does the relative age of the artists sold have an impact on their prices? 3) What is the effect of medium on auction prices at Swann Galleries? 4) Did the timing of a particular auction effect prices for works of art?

The statistical sample or population was composed of 933 data points and 203 unique artists from a series of eight semi-annual auctions occurring in the African-American Fine Art department at Swann Galleries between 2007 and 2010. Each data point represents one

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<sup>244</sup> Cheryl "Liv" Wright, "The Boom: What does it Mean?" *International Review of African American Art* 22, no. 1 (2008), 36-39.

<sup>245</sup> The following statistical analysis was done compiled by Pu (John) Dongqiuye, a graduate student in the Statistics department at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and myself in 2011 and early 2012.

auction lot, or art object sold and was originally compiled in a spreadsheet generated by this author from auction catalogues and online price data offered through the Swann Galleries website in their archived price data section.

Information on unsold lots was not included. The spreadsheet differentiated each lot using the following fields: lot number, auction date, artist's name, artist's birth date, artist's death date, title of the art work, and date of creation, medium of the art work, low estimate, high estimate, size (height, width and depth in inches) and sold price. Thirteen lots were composed of more than one work of art and the analysis does take into account individual items in terms of size, medium and quantity for each lot. In cases where individual lots were composed of various artists (this occurred in two instances for an artist's portfolio), the respective artists were not individualized as it would not be deemed statistically significant in relation to other lots. All prices included the hammer price as well as a 20% buyer's premium or commission earned by the auction house.<sup>246</sup>

#### *The popularity of artist by various different measures*

Popularity of the artist was evaluated in terms of price performance. In other words, the correlation between the demand for works by certain artists among the offerings in the set of auctions being examined was initially considered by the total dollars earned per artist. The statistical evaluation considered the "top 20" artists emerging from the set of eight auctions from Swann Galleries' African-American Fine Art department only (see Table 4.1). In other words "popularity" is relative to the limitations imposed by the available price data found in the aforementioned auctions rather than other concepts such as the relative fame of

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<sup>246</sup> The hammer price is the winning bid announced by the auctioneer at a public auction. "Hammer" refers to the strike of gavel when the auctioneer announces that the bidding has ended.

the artists, available documentation, etc.<sup>247</sup> The different measures that were used to rank the popularity of the artists include a) the total dollar amount earned by individual artist's works; b) the average dollar amount earned per auction; c) the median price; d) the total number of items sold; e) the percentage of over-estimation (i.e. their prices tended to fall below the low estimate listed in the illustrated catalogue); and f) the percentage of under-estimation (i.e. their prices tended to far exceed higher estimate listed in the illustrated catalogue). The numbers were plotted using the variables of price and individual artist name Figure 4.7 (a-f). The same data was arranged in table format in Table 4.1 with the ranking of each artists based on the parameter examined (total or average dollar amount earned, median price, etc.) in parentheses in each column.

The "top 20" ranking of artists shows some interesting trends. Most artists in the list have sold frequently or in some cases more than once at certain auctions meaning they provide several offerings. Therefore, there may be a correlation between the frequency at which an artist's work appears at auction and their ability to sell in future ones. In addition, average prices, which at times were on the lower side for some artists, do not appear to be consistent with total dollar figures, further suggesting some correlation with frequency. For example, Charles White was the most "popular" artist if one were to examine his total dollar amount achieved (\$1,414,518), yet he only ranks 22<sup>nd</sup> in terms of average price per item (\$18,860.24). White ranks number three in terms of his frequency at auction, following artists Jacob Lawrence (#1) and Romare Bearden (#2) with 75 objects appearing at auction. Although Jacob Lawrence had more objects available at auction (104) he lagged behind in average price compared to other artists achieving on a rank of 50. There were some artists

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<sup>247</sup> The examination of popularity using these and other variable will be examined in future research.



that did achieve both higher total or average dollar figures, yet they only offered few works at auction at high prices. Two paintings, Malvin Gray Johnson's, *Swing Low Sweet Chariot* (1929) and Robert Colescott's *A Legend Dimly Told* (1982) were sole offerings by each artists selling at the higher prices of \$228,000 and \$132,000 respectively.

The median prices for the artists considered in this top performer list differs greatly in most cases from the average.<sup>248</sup> This indicates that there must be outliers or prices that are extremely high or extremely low in some cases. For example, Elizabeth Catlett's average price (\$20,280.88) was significantly higher than her median price (\$3,960). Since she had 48 works which ranked her high in auction offerings, one could assume that she had high and low extremes in terms of price ranges for her work. Catlett did, in fact, have sculptural works available (two works above \$200,000 and one above \$100,000) yet the majority of her works, which were prints, fell closer to the median figure. However, for most of the artists in the list, the average price and median price are consistent indicating that the price of art works is in many ways predictable.

Bar plots shown in Figure 4.7 (e-f) also provide information about the degree of over-estimation or under-estimation made by Swann Galleries in setting high and low estimates before their auctions. The percentage of over-estimation was calculated by subtracting the final auction price from the low estimate in the auction catalogue and dividing it by the final auction price (Figure 4.7e). The percentage of under-estimation was calculated by subtracting the high estimate from the final auction price and then dividing it by the final auction price. The names listed on these plots vary greatly from some recurring names on the previous plots

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<sup>248</sup> The median is the number which is the middle number or equivalent to the sum of a population divided by two.

(Figure 4.7 (a-d) or Table 4.1. For example Gerald Jackson was overestimated in price by over 65% (see Figure 4.7e). In terms of under-estimation, Delilah Williams was undervalued by over 80%. In both cases, the artists had only appeared once in the series of auctions examined. Since Jackson and Williams had not appeared in the Swann Galleries auctions or perhaps any other auctions where public price records could be generated, it may have been difficult for the auctioneer to set up reliable estimates. These results harken back to the earlier discussion of Nigel Freeman's use of a "coattail effect" for other artists in order to set up more accurate estimates. However, several artists such as Jackson and Williams were hard to forecast in terms of price performance.

#### *Age range of artists*

To determine the general age groups of artists which appeared in this series of auctions from Swann Galleries, the distribution of artists' ages was investigated. There are several different ways to measure the age of the artists. First, the age of the artist at the time in which a work of art was created was generated and was distributed in the histogram or plot in Figure 4.8a. The remaining histograms arrange the age of artists by the following parameters:

- the amount of time elapsed since the birth of artist and 2011 (Figure 4.8b); and
- the amount of time elapsed since the death of the artist and 2011 (Figure 4.8c).

The related histograms offer the variable of age as one parameter for defining the more popular artists in Swann Galleries' auctions for African-American Fine Art. Each histogram displays the number of artists which fall in the given age range on the top of the individual bar. The horizontal or x-axis displays the age ranges and the vertical or y-axis

illustrates the number of artists corresponding to each. The variable “n” underneath each figure corresponds to the number of observations used to produce the distributions (for example, under Figure 4.8a, there were 905 objects observed to generate the histogram). In reviewing the age distribution, it appears that most of the art works at the auction were made by artists who were between the age of 30 and 60 at the time of creation with only a few artists known to be below the age of twenty and ten who happened to be above the age of eighty.<sup>249</sup> Figure 4.8b shows that of those artists, the very mature artists, who were between perhaps 60 and 100 were among those most sought after. The death of the artist also creates a change in status. Figure 4.8c, shows the distribution of popular artists following their death ( $n=183$ ) to be in continuous decline on the auction market, despite a temporary increase at the initial time of an artist’s death. Whether the decline in popularity was due to a general lack of interest in certain artists as years passed or simply a lack of promotion by auctioneers for those artists was unclear from the data. Finally, in Figure 4.8c a few artists are calculated as being above 100, yet in most cases this is doubtful and may reflect a discrepancy in the birth or death date collected.<sup>250</sup>

#### *The effect of medium on the auction price*

Although Swann Galleries’ catalogue descriptions of artistic media varied widely in terms of materials and technique in some cases, the following categories were established as representative of most works: 1) 2D (Two Dimensional) Originals- one of a kind works which have not been mechanically reproduced and are two dimensional in nature, normally

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<sup>249</sup> Artists are assumed to be alive if no death date is provided.

<sup>250</sup> There were eight instances in which data for age at time of death was inconclusive since a death date or birth date were unknown after correspondence with both auction specialists at Swann Galleries or other art historical sources.

framed and meant to hang on a wall; 2) Photography; 3) Multiples (limited edition prints, etchings, etc.); and 4) Sculpture (three dimensional objects). In terms of the relationship between artistic medium and auction price, the information collected suggests that 2-D Originals brought in the top dollars (\$8,305,579) and had the most items (504) available. Multiples constituted second place in terms of the number of items (493) yet the total dollars earned (\$ 2,705, 297) was approximately one third of that of 2 D Originals. Therefore, 2-D Originals and Multiples are the most numerous items at these auctions and therefore have the potential for more scrutiny.<sup>251</sup>

Photography ranked the lowest in terms of total dollar amount, average dollar amount, and number of sold items suggesting that photography is the least popular and less likely to appear at auction. Sculpture, which was observed in 35 instances, ranked third in total dollar amount but its average dollar amount (\$33,538) was much higher than all media examined, yet the exact reason is unknown and may warrant future examination. The total dollar amount, average dollar amount and number of items sold are listed in Table 4.2 for these four media types, respectively.

Clearly, medium needed to be examined to determine how much significance different types had on price. The p-value or probability values of preliminary statistical tests became the primary indicator of the degree of uncertainty or randomness in the data. The p-value is a numerical value ranging from 0 to 1 which reflects the level of significance from the evidence that we should reject or accept the null hypothesis.<sup>252</sup> The smaller the p-value is,

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<sup>251</sup> Note that the total number of items is higher than the number of lots (933). This is due to the fact that some lots had more than one item.

<sup>252</sup> The null hypothesis is the assumption is that whatever is proposed as a cause has no effect on the variable being measured.

the stronger the evidence pointing against the null hypothesis. Traditionally, the threshold for reaching a conclusion of rejecting the null hypothesis is p-value of 0.05. Therefore, if a p-value from any statistical test is less than 0.05, then we should reject the null hypothesis made by that statistical test.

Following two normality tests (see results in Tables 4.3 and 4.4), an F-test was done to determine whether the null hypothesis would show that the average price for the four media types would be equal.<sup>253</sup> The null hypothesis showed that the media types were not equal. The price was logarithmically transformed so that the prices would distribute normally as opposed to linearly to avoid “noise” or outlying data that would obscure the graphical depiction of price trends.<sup>254</sup>

The result for the F-test, listed in Table 4.5, showed that the p-value was around 0.001. For 2D Originals and photography, the average price far exceeded both the low and high estimates. For the multiples and sculpture, however, the total dollar amount exceeded expectations on the average price for the low estimate but underestimated expectations on the average price for the high estimate. In cases of photography and sculpture, the data conformed to normal distribution after transformation indicated by greater p values ( $> 0.05$ ). A p-value of  $9.777e-12$  indicated that the average prices for originals and prints were significantly unequal. A pairwise t-test was performed to find out the degree to which two of the media groups were different in average price. The two groups selected were 2D originals

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<sup>253</sup> An F-test is a statistical test done to test a hypothesis on two or more groups of a variable. In this case since there were four media types, the four were compared.

<sup>254</sup> Normal distribution typically refers to distribution pattern of data graphical shown in the form of a bell curve. Data is said to be normally distributed if it produces less extreme values and is balance on opposing sides of the center of the curve.

and prints. The t-test was adjusted to account for heterogeneity of the two groups since the numbers of objects in each group were of unequal sizes and unequal variances (see Table 4.7).<sup>255</sup>

*The effect of auction date on auction price*

Since Swann Galleries African-American Fine Art Department held two auctions on the same months each year, February and October, data was collected for four consecutive years on these two dates.<sup>256</sup> If one month was more popular than another, the assumption was that there may be some significance attached to certain times of the year and that the auction house may have gained additional leverage for attracting attention. Since the National Black Fine Art Show (discussed in Chapter 3), for example, took place in the same month, February, as the Swann Galleries auctions, and were often advertised in their promotional catalogue, it is clear that the two events attempted to attract the same or similar audiences.<sup>257</sup>

The average dollar amount was established for these two Swann dates, and it is summarized in Table 4.8. Since only a 1:1 comparison of the auctions months of February and October were in question, a t-test was performed to compare average dollar amounts for the two auction dates each year. The prices were logarithmically transformed to bring the distribution closer to normal distribution.<sup>258</sup> The population variances were not the same for the two groups since all objects were unique ones with different attributes. Therefore, a t-test

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<sup>255</sup> Before performing the t-test, a Bartlett test was used to determine how homogeneous the two groups were (see Table 4.6).

<sup>256</sup> There was one exception to this pattern. On June 4, 2010, a jazz theme based auction, *Out of the Blue: Modern Art and Jazz* occurred.

<sup>257</sup> See for example, the back matter in Keeling Wainwright Associates, *National Black Fine Art Show*, 2007.

<sup>258</sup> Prior to the t test and logarithmic transformation, a Bartlett test (see Table 4.9) was also done to refine the data since the number of objects for each date were different .

with unequal sample sizes and unequal variances was performed and the result is summarized in Table 4.10. The results suggest that the average dollar amounts for the two auction dates are indeed unequal warranting an investigation of the effects of auction dates on average price.

It appears that the time of the auction has some effect on prices. In order to determine whether the degree to which auctions of one month were consistently more popular than the others, auction data for four years was examined. In order to answer this question, we performed a t-test regarding total dollar amount, number of items sold and average dollar amount for the two dates. Table 4.11 and 4.12 summarize the relevant auction information for four years at the two dates. A test of homogeneity for all these variables (Table 4.13) indicates that variances are not equal. Therefore, a t-test with equal sample size but unequal variances was performed. The results shown in Table 4.14 indicate that we should reject the null hypothesis and conclude that the auctions at the two dates are equally popular for four consecutive years. However, by visual inspection, the auction held in February seems more popular than the one in October by total dollar amount and number of items sold. By increasing the number of data points for testing, we may achieve more robust statistical result in checking the difference between these two dates. For a P value of  $>1$ , the auction would be considered statistically significant. However the P value here is .245 indicating that the time of year when the auction takes place has no major influence on price statistically speaking.

#### *Regression analysis for predicting the auction price*

To predict the auction price for each art work on the market, initial regression analysis was attempted using the following independent variables: 1) age of artist at the time of creation; 2) the status of the artist as alive or dead; 3) media of the art work; and 4) the

auction date. For each variable, missing or abnormal values were appropriately handled. For example, for the age of the artists, there are 8 data points with missing either the date of birth or the date of creation and thus were removed from further analysis. In determining whether the artist was alive or dead, if the date of death was left blank, then that artist was assumed to be alive. Otherwise, he/she was denoted as dead. Therefore, 925 data points were used for this round of regression analysis.

Art medium and the auction date seem to have been relevant to the auction price and have statistical significance, yet the age of the artist at time of creation does not contribute much to the model. Distribution of the dependent variable (auction price) was checked before regression analysis using different-tests, including the Shapiro-Wilk test and the Box-Cox method.<sup>259</sup> The Shapiro-Wilk test shown in Table 4.15 confirmed this observation by having a p-value of  $< 2.2e-16$ . The linear regression analysis before transformation gives rather poor results (shown in Table 4.16) reflected by the small  $R^2$  value. Therefore, a transformation would be needed to improve the linear fitting since normality assumption typically serves as basis for linear regression and many follow-up analytical procedures. Linear regression analysis after Box-Cox transformation shows improvement over the initial attempt (shown in Table 4.18).

There was no clear explanation as to what caused price fluctuation in the Swann Galleries art auctions surveyed. The question which arises is what aspects of art objects cause price fluctuation or how more of the variability can be explained. In order to be able to interpret a larger proportion of variability in the dataset, more explanatory variables would

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<sup>259</sup> The Shapiro-Wilk test and Box- Cox test are two tests used in statistics to achieve normal distributions in highly skewed data.



need to be included in the model. Despite the improvement of linear fitting after transformation of the auction price, only 12% of the original variability which existed in the dataset is explained by the current linear model (shown by the  $R^2$  value of 0.119). To achieve this more data regarding the size of the art work, including height and width for 2D originals, photography, and prints as well as the additional dimension of depth for sculpture. After cleaning the data, 12 data points with missing values of either height or width were excluded from further regression analysis. Since the depth variable was only associated with sculpture, it was decided that it too would be removed from regression analysis.

Although age was included in the final mathematical model, Table 4.19 summarizes the linear regression analysis results with the addition of size variable. It shows improvement in terms of proportion of variability explained by the model ( $R^2$  of 0.227 versus  $R^2$  of 0.119). Variable selection procedure was then performed to select the best model based on both the predictive error and model complexity. A stepwise selection algorithm was applied and the Akaike information criterion (AIC) was used as the target function. The AIC measures the goodness of the fit of a model by taking into account both the predictive error and model complexity. In the stepwise procedure, starting from the current model, it will either drop or add variables if AIC decreases when doing so. This process continues until the AIC no longer drops. By applying this method to the data, we found out that  $\text{age} \times \text{age}$ <sup>260</sup> and height variables were dropped out from the model, yet date of auction was re-introduced despite seeming

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<sup>260</sup> This variable refers to the age of the artist squared.

irrelevant in early testing. The final mathematical model<sup>261</sup> is below:

$$Y = 3.05 - 0.047 \times I\{\text{artist\_alive}\} - 0.024 \times I\{\text{medium} = \text{prints}\} - 0.02 \times I\{\text{medium} = \text{photo}\} - 0.081 \times I\{\text{medium} = \text{sculpture}\} - 0.022 \times I\{\text{date} = \text{october}\} + 0.000039 \times \text{area}$$

$$\text{Where } Y = -\frac{\text{price}^{-0.3} - 1}{0.3}$$

$$\text{And } R^2 = 0.23$$

### *Conclusion*

Swann Galleries' conception of its African-American Fine Art Department offers important insight on the formulation of a specific tertiary market for elevating African-American art into the mainstream art market. The development of the department and specialized auctions was viewed by Swann Galleries' personnel and some art professionals as an important step in establishing parity in the art market by creating price records for several African-American artists. However, their approach was not without tensions, particularly by many artists, art historians and art dealers who viewed the creation as a troublesome one since its separate classification of African-American art constituted yet another form of exclusion in the art market. Some art dealers and gallery owners who had represented the work of African-American artists found that this development in the secondary market threatened their positions as specialists in this niche market as well. Tensions surrounding the

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<sup>261</sup> The symbols  $I\{ \}$  represent an indicator function, the value of which is 1 if the statements inside curly brackets are evaluated to be true and 0 otherwise. If 0, the variable is not applicable.

Swann Galleries auctions suggest differences in the economic and cultural values attached to African-American art as well as the negotiation of these values as the demand for works of art increased in the art market.

Since many African-American artists, appeared less often at major auction houses, like Sotheby's and Christie's they achieved low public visibility on the auction market, and, as a result, low or non-existent prices. This chapter demonstrates that the development of a strong tertiary or auction market for African-American art was pursued through an emphasis on special auctions that would highlight many of those artists and give them the necessary exposure which could establish or augment price records. The case of Swann Galleries is important in that it introduced such an auction series on a continuous basis providing more targeted price data for African-American artists at auction.

In the accompanying study of auctions which occurred at Swann Galleries between 2007 and 2010, I examined how price actually correlates with other aspects of the works of art sold and if any trends could be detected. Although it is doubtful that any future prices could be predicted due to the relative uniqueness of each work of art, the final model did explain 22.7% of the variability in price in the original dataset. The final model included the variables of age of artist at the time of creation, whether the artist is alive or dead, media of the art work, auction date and the size of the art work (area of the art work). However, in order to truly explain auction prices several other variables needed to be considered. The preliminary statistical tests results showed that the average prices for the four media types are different, and this difference was particularly evident in the case of two media: 2D Originals and Multiples. In addition, it was found that auction date did have some bearing on price where October sales tends to depress values in relation to February, yet the reasons for this

are not clear. Another important question for future research is the whether size of art works matter for different media or simply the imagery alone when evaluating demand. When examining prices for works grouped by different medium and different auction dates, unequal population sizes were used, yet each work was also unique in both imagery and size.<sup>262</sup> Based on the p-values recorded in Tables 4.7, 4.10, 4.14, I posit that size must have had some significance. In addition the area or size of the artwork did appear in the final mathematical model following the AIC test, suggesting some correlation. In a prior interview, auctioneer Nigel Freeman asserted that that size of individual artworks did not appear to be as relevant for buyers as the imagery in catalogues and other promotional materials in their purchasing decision.<sup>263</sup> This corroborates with other studies which have determined that the use of visual imagery from auction catalogues did correlate with prices.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> In his study of auctions for oil paintings by 16 African American artists over a 30 year period, economist Richard Agnello determined that African American artists had only a 47% chance of appearing in major auctions versus their white contemporaries which had a 68% likelihood of doing so. See Richard Agnello, "Race and Art: Prices for African American Painters and their Contemporaries," *Journal of Black Studies* 41, no. 1 (2009), 24 Jun 2011.

<sup>263</sup> Interview with Nigel Freeman, October 18, 2011.

<sup>264</sup> Kathryn Graddy and Orley Ashenfelter, "Auctions and the Price of Art" University of Oxford, Department of Economics, Economics Series Working Papers: 131, 2002).  
<http://www.economics.ox.ac.uk/Research/wp/pdf/paper131.pdf>.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **CONCLUSION**

In the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the struggle for broader recognition in the art world for African-American artists proved to be not only an intellectual one, but a pecuniary one in which credibility in the art market was an important theme. Art historical discourse has considered the philosophical constructions of African-American art; however, the ways in which it became a nomenclature specifically designed to satisfy perceptions developed through the art market had not previously been considered. This dissertation has examined several strategies for incorporating a category of African-American art into mainstream discourse by emphasizing its place in the art market. I have argued that the public reception to a newly formed category of ‘African-American art’ was a nuanced one which has been defined in part by changes in art markets and that such assessments should become a part of critical discourse. These perceptions were fraught with complications and competing notions about which artists, artworks and constructed narratives of African-American art would have significance.

The demands for a more inclusive and global art community through the multicultural wars of the 1980s brought with it renewed interest, scholarship, and exhibitions of previously overlooked artists such as women and ethnic minorities. African-American artists and their supporters had experienced some reprieve for their activism against systematic injustice and exclusion in the white-dominated institutions of museums, academia and the commercial art

world. A late 20<sup>th</sup> century art boom along with multicultural activism prompted more dialogue and strategies about incorporating marginalized groups such as African-American into ‘mainstream’ art discourse.

In Chapter 1 I traced the patronage of African-American art from the philanthropic and private support beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the rise of market-based considerations which evolved by the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. I argued that the latter was defined by diverse activities: the expansion of non-profit and for-profit gallery spaces emphasizing works by African-American artists and the growth of scholarly literature and knowledge about the lives and production of several African-American artists. Scholarly and economic worlds collided in ways that require a re-investigation of patronage narratives for African-American art.

Incorporating the perspectives of art middlemen, collectors, and auction professionals, are critical in helping to frame an analysis on meanings assigned to works of art and their makers. In Chapter 2, I argued that as the number of art middlemen and dealers of African-American art grew, and so too did the strategies and potential markets for incorporating African-American art into dominant ‘mainstream’ culture. Part of the difficulty for many dealers was reckoning with the variety of audiences and markets which either subscribed to or resisted to the contributions of African-American artists. This study identified inconclusive assessments about ‘quality’ and an acknowledged yet obliquely defined ‘canon’ of works in the discourse of African-American art and its markets- one based on academic art criticism and another based on populist interest. Art dealers navigated the terrain by stratifying ‘fine art’ from ‘popular art’ and also by engaging in essentialist notions about values held by the African-American community to establish a broader patron base.

The union of cultural consciousness and ‘mainstreaming’ efforts gained further importance as art fairs and auctions devoted to African-American art arose. In Chapter 3, I examined the attempts of National Black Fine Art Show (NBFAS) organizer, Josh Wainwright, to utilize the platform of an annual art fair to build new audiences for African-American art and compared his event with the Philadelphia International Art Expo (PIAE), another fair located in Philadelphia and organized by Evelyn and Mercer Redcross. I argued that the NBFAS and PIAE differed in their efforts to define aspects of ‘quality’ in African-American art. Some of these differences were related to the ways in which the two fairs engaged their audiences: through the integration of African-American artists into a dominant ‘mainstream’ art scene or through the cultivation of black pride among their African-American audiences.

Finally, in Chapter 4, I examined the case of special auctions for African-American art developed by Swann Auction Galleries in New York City. I argued that the newly developed African-American Fine Art Department both reinforced the notion of a category for African-American art, but it also introduced other tensions about how African-American art related to definitions of the ‘mainstream’ via the mechanism of documented price valuation. Swann Galleries not only helped to create new price records for several African-American artists, but it also pointed to the presence of a distinct tertiary market for their art.

Chapter 4 also explored actual price data derived from eight auctions of African-American fine art at Swann Galleries through a quantitative analysis. Using quantitative analysis, I developed a model or index for evaluating many of the variables that affect the market for African-American art. Although variables such as size, medium and auction date provided some interesting correlations, further statistical and economic analysis would

require many more variables to understand the behavioral aspects involved in auctions involved. For example, the number of bidders or identity of bidders (if they can be recovered) could provide more information on the appeal of specific auctions or the inventory in those auctions. However, even quantitative surveys leave additional questions as they are considered in isolation and only tell part of the story, since it assumes an intact construct of ‘African-American art.’

### *Future Research*

It is hoped that future art historical scholarship will begin to incorporate more critical interdisciplinary approaches which will cross-examine the economic, sociological and historical evolution of art markets and our knowledge of objects. This study has determined that additional rigor is required in unpacking the diverse levels of meaning of art historical classifications or categories and their variability over time. More research into the study of art markets as not only an instrument of wealth creation but also its inter-relationship with social constructions and social hierarchies could yield more strategies for understanding the meaning of works of art.

One way in which further research in this area could be facilitated is the study of more private collectors of African-American art. In one sense this has begun in the form of collector-based catalogues and similar narratives which have created dialogue about the growth of African-American art. However, the impact of private collectors on a larger narrative for work by African-American artists has only been summarily referenced in popular articles. For example, the name “Bill Cosby” is still invoked as a major contemporary patron of African-American art in the popular imagination, yet a study of



Cosby's collecting practice in relation to other lesser known collectors is warranted. Much of the work to accomplish this will involve oral interviews and even investigations of the private archives generated by collectors. In addition museums that have featured specific private collections or have acquired them as later donations can be important sources for scholars to consider. The developing archives of David C. Driskell at the University of Maryland at College Park and Samella Lewis at Hampton University are examples of ones that may provide substantive information that would be invaluable to scholars about collectors.

In addition to private collector records, dealer records are now developing in major archival repositories such as the Archives of American Art. For example, the records (for the year 1962-1988) of Heritage Gallery in Los Angeles, contain copious articles, price lists, and correspondences with clients related to the careers of Charles White and other artists represented by their gallery and such information has not been analyzed. In my correspondence with some art dealers such as George N'Namdi and Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, their galleries maintain substantial archival records which could be eligible for use by scholars.<sup>265</sup> By reviewing such records in tandem with published accounts on art dealers or gallery owners, it may be possible to reconstruct the relationships and ideas referenced in this dissertation.

Another possible direction for future inquiry is an investigation of the role of museum curators in situating debates about the character of African-American art in relation to art markets. The unconventional melding of seemingly disparate art worlds- one which is

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<sup>265</sup> Interview with George N'Namdi, February 5, 2012; interview also halley harrisburg, April 5, 2012.

endorsed by dominant mainstream discourse and its markets and one that is dependent on the norms of some members of the African-American community- is an interesting one which deserves further research. For example, the ubiquitous nature of ‘popular’ African-American art has already been explored in the exhibition world and related criticism when in 2002, the Studio Museum in Harlem exhibited *Black Romantic: the Figurative Impulse in Contemporary African-American Art*.<sup>266</sup> Although the show aimed to unearth the continuing significance of figurative realism in the work of several African-American artists, the major focus of the media was its incorporation of artists unknown to ‘mainstream’ art criticism. Art critic Jerry Saltz described the content of *Black Romantic* as being “a world apart” from the mainstream art world.<sup>267</sup> The artists in the exhibition such as Alonzo Adams and Kadir Nelson, represented the paradox of a ‘mainstream’ art world existing almost exclusively in many African-American communities. This dispelled the myth of a singular art world ‘mainstream’ controlled by the aesthetic and intellectual interests of the larger dominant white institutions such as the Whitney Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art. It also debunked the notion that ‘African-American art’ had a uni-linear appeal or emphasis among all African-Americans. The notion of multiple, yet co-existing art worlds which make up the definition of ‘African-American art’ is a compelling one that deserves more attention.

The place of art fairs as a site of both contention and reward in patronage schemes for African-American art is of importance as well. Even using the example of the *Black Romantic* exhibition, there is evidence in the biographies located in the catalogue that several

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<sup>266</sup> Studio Museum in Harlem, *Black Romantic :The Figurative Impulse in Contemporary African-American Art* (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 2002), 124.

<sup>267</sup> Jerry Saltz, "A World Apart," *The Village Voice* 47, no. 19 (May 14, 2002, , 65.

artists who were featured had not excelled not in ‘mainstream’ exhibition venues, but instead through smaller community based venues and culturally specific outlets where they resided. A few of these artists list the October Gallery or the Philadelphia International Art Expo as one of the few venues for showcasing their work as well as the National Black Fine Art Show in New York City and the Black Arts Festival in Atlanta, Georgia among others. Therefore, the inclusion of art fairs as exhibition venues highlights their relevance as outlets for African-American visual production.

Analysis of other auctions of African-American fine art should also be done to determine the ways in which African-American art has been characterized beyond the paradigm offered by Swann Galleries. Swann Galleries is not alone in emphasizing “special sales” for African-American art although they stood alone in developing a department for that purpose. Other major and minor auction houses have begun to put emphasis on special African-American art sales or at least the African-American art “stars” that broke records in more comprehensive ones. For example, on June 30, 2008 Christie’s *Open House* auction for post-war modern and contemporary artwork included works from the private collections of collectors Peggy Cooper Cafritz and Alitash Kebede featuring works by artists such as Iona Rozeal Brown, Romare Bearden, Norman Lewis, Alma Thomas, Bob Thompson, Jacob Lawrence and Glen Ligon.<sup>268</sup> Leslie Hindeman Auctioneers in Chicago also announced plans to hold bi-annual auctions of African-American art, with its first one having taken place on March 1, 2012.<sup>269</sup>


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<sup>268</sup> "Exceptional Contemporary African American Art on Sale at Christie's Open House," *Art Daily*, July 27, 2008, accessed 2/22, 2012, [http://www.artdaily.com/index.asp?int\\_sec=11&int\\_new=24910&int\\_mod=1](http://www.artdaily.com/index.asp?int_sec=11&int_new=24910&int_mod=1).

<sup>269</sup> Daniel Grant, "Are Sales of African American Art Picking Up Or in Decline?" *The Huffington Post* (March 1, 2012), accessed March 15, 2012.

**FIGURES**

ELIZABETH CATLETT  
*Limited Edition Original Prints*



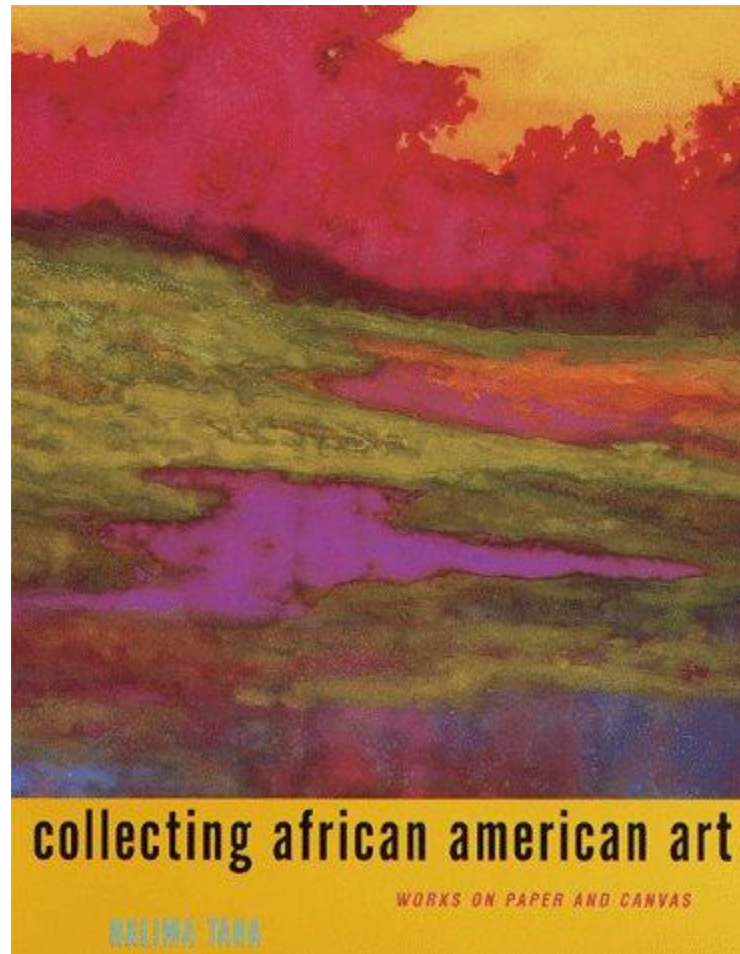
*MADONNA, 1982, lithograph, 30" x 22"*  
*[Arches cover], edition of 180,*  
*signed and numbered....\$450.00*

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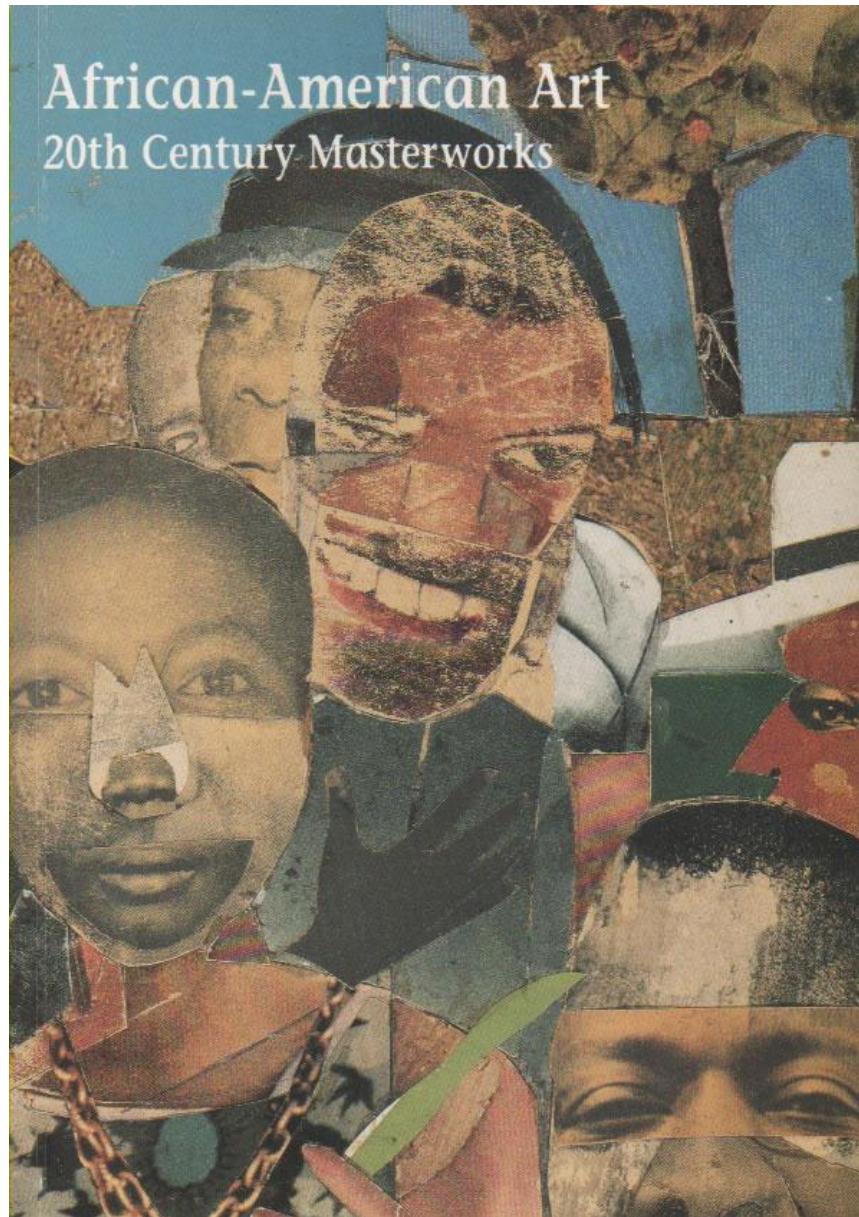
**Figure 1.1 Elizabeth Catlett Print Ad, *Black Art: An International Quarterly*, c. 1976.**



**Figure 1.2 Hale Woodruff, *The Card Players*, Oil on canvas, 1978. Hewitt Collection, Bank of America Collection.**



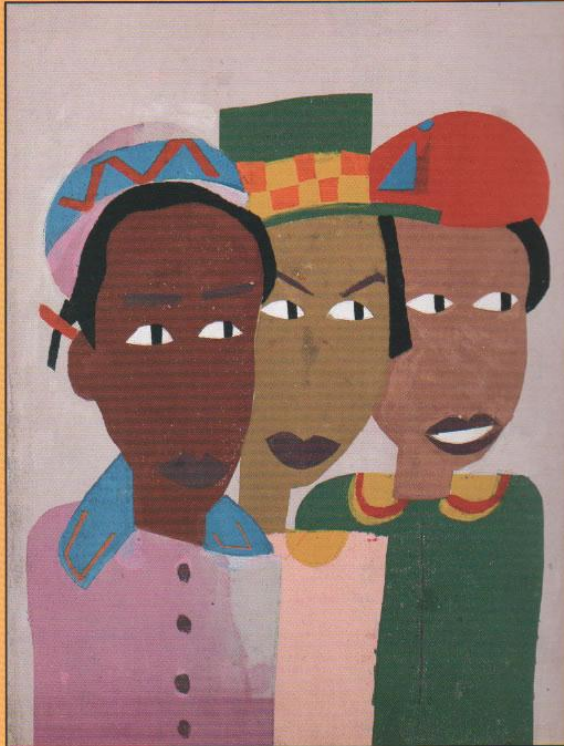
**Figure 2.1** Cover of Halima Taha, *Collecting African American Art : Works on Paper and Canvas*, New York: Crown Publishers, 1998.



**Figure 2.2** Cover of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery. *African-American Art: 20th Century Masterworks*. New York: Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, 1993. Courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery

# WILLIAM H. JOHNSON

Works from the Collection of  
Mary Beattie Brady  
Director of the Harmon Foundation




**Figure 2.3** Cover of *William H. Johnson : Works from the Collection of Mary Beattie Brady, Director of the Harmon Foundation*, [exhibition] September 14-November 11, 1995. New York: Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, 1995. Courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery





**Figure 2.4** Cover of Bill Hodges Gallery, *African American Artists II*, New York: Bill Hodges Gallery, 2000.

# ROMARE BEARDEN



*Jamming at the Savoy*  
9-color etching on BFK Rives  
20½" x 28⅞"  
edition 180  
price \$800

poster available at  
\$25 plus shipping

dealer inquiries invited

(published for the retrospective  
"Romare Bearden 1970-1980"  
at the Brooklyn Museum)

**J.K. FINE ARTS**  
June Kelly 1779 Second Avenue New York, New York 10028 212/860-5586

**Figure 2.5** Ad for Romare Bearden, *Jammin' at the Savoy*, 1981-1982, Color etching and aquatint. *Black Art: An International Quarterly* 5, no 3, (1981): 64.



**ROBERT S. DUNCANSON**  
 "Untitled"  
 Circa 1841  
 Oil on canvas  
 18" x 12"

### 70th Art Gallery, Ltd.

130 East 70th Street  
 New York, NY 10021  
 Tel: 212-472-2234 Fax: 212-472-2368  
 art70th@yahoo.com

*Works by African American artists*

**STAFF:**  
 Juan Rodriguez, Jim Eskew, Ann Smith

**ARTISTS:**

C. Alton	R. S. Duncanson
F. M. Bannister	R. Hunt
R. Bearden	N. Lewis
G. T. Brown	C. E. Porter
B. Delaney	H. Lee-Smith

**BOOTHS 11 & 12**



**JOSEPH DELANEY (1904-1991)**  
 "Portrait of Woman"  
 1960  
 Oil on board  
 35" x 27"

### Aaron Galleries

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 Chicago, IL 60611  
 Tel: 312-943-0660 Fax: 312-943-9839  
 aarongal@interaccess.com • www.aarongalleries.com

*American paintings and prints from 1800's to the present, specialties include Social Realism, Regionalism, Modernism and Abstraction by under-recognized artists.*

**STAFF:**  
 Patrick L. Albano, Director; Irene Falconer, Assistant Director

**ARTISTS:**

Ernest Alexander	Joseph Delaney
Irene Clark	Aaron Douglas
Eldzier Cortor	Frederick D. Jones, Jr.
Beauford Delaney	

**BOOTH 22**

16
NBFAS 2003

**Figure 3.1 Example of Exhibitor ad, Seventh Annual National Black Fine Art Show catalogue (2003):16. Courtesy of Keeling Wainwright and Associates.**

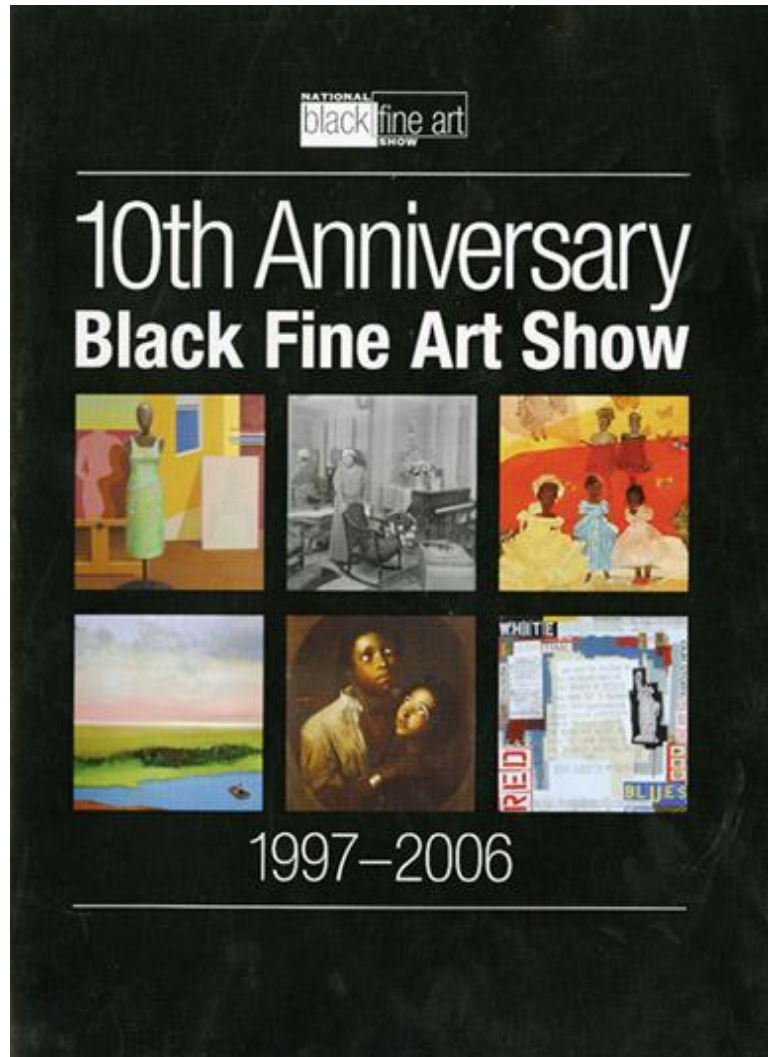


Figure 3.2 Cover of 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary National Black Fine Art Show catalogue, 2006.



**Figure 4.1** Jacob Lawrence, *The Builders*, Tempera on board, 1947

**Source:** The White House Historical Association (White House Collection), Accessed 3/30/2012.



**Figure 4.2 Elizabeth Catlett, *Nude Torso*, Carved mahogany wood, 1969**

**Source: Swann Galleries online catalogue, (Accessed 3/25/2012)**



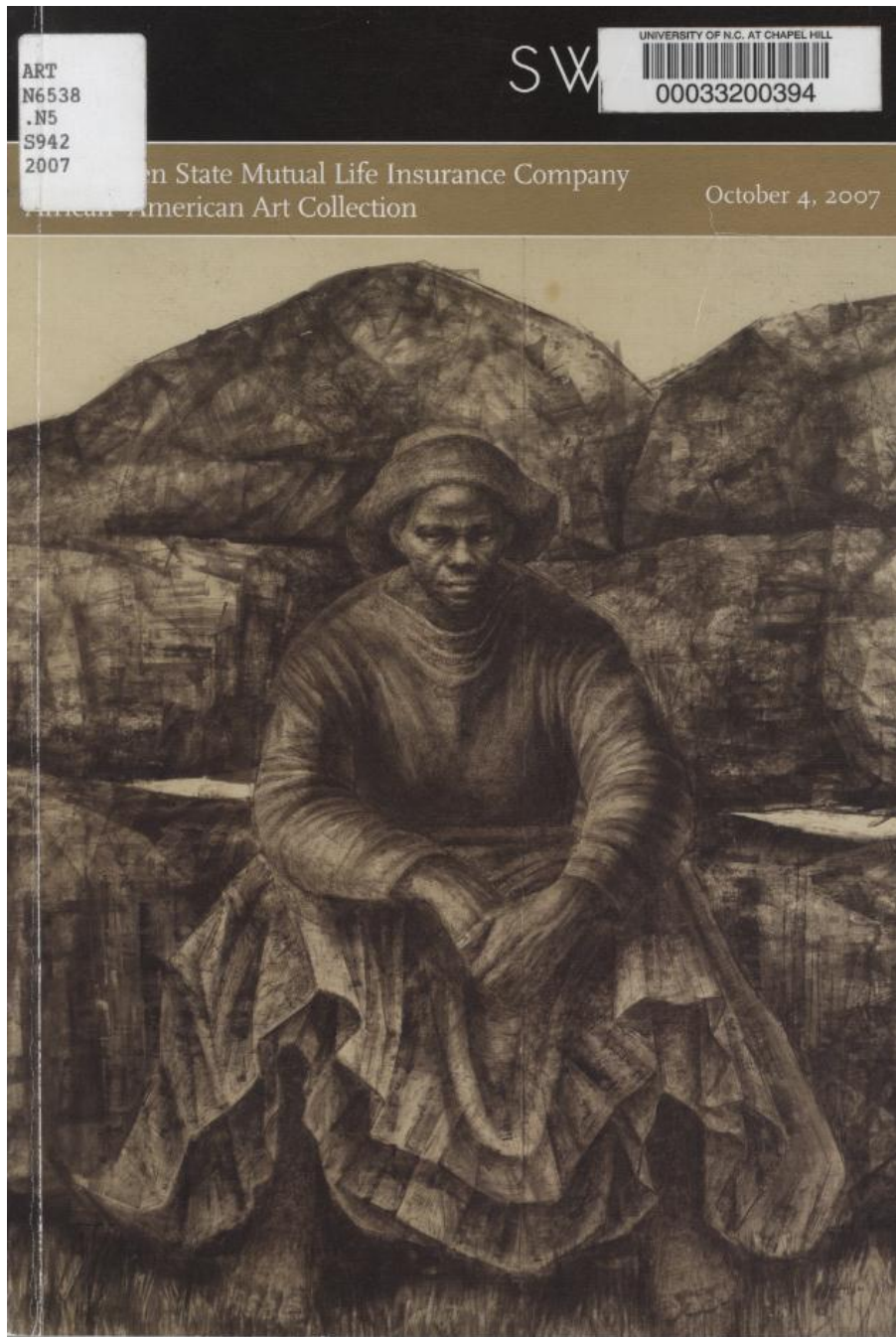
**Figure 4.3** Cover of auction catalogue *African-American Fine Art*. New York: Swann Galleries, 2007.



**Figure 4.4** Norman Lewis, *Untitled*, Oil on Canvas, 1960-64, Collection of the Boston Museum of Fine Art

**Source:** Swann Galleries online catalogue, (Accessed 3/25/2012)

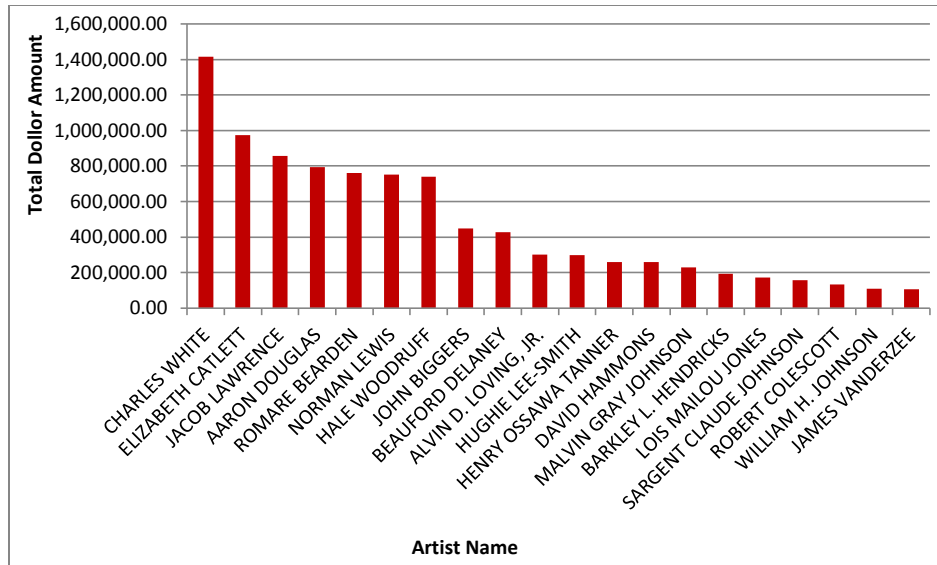




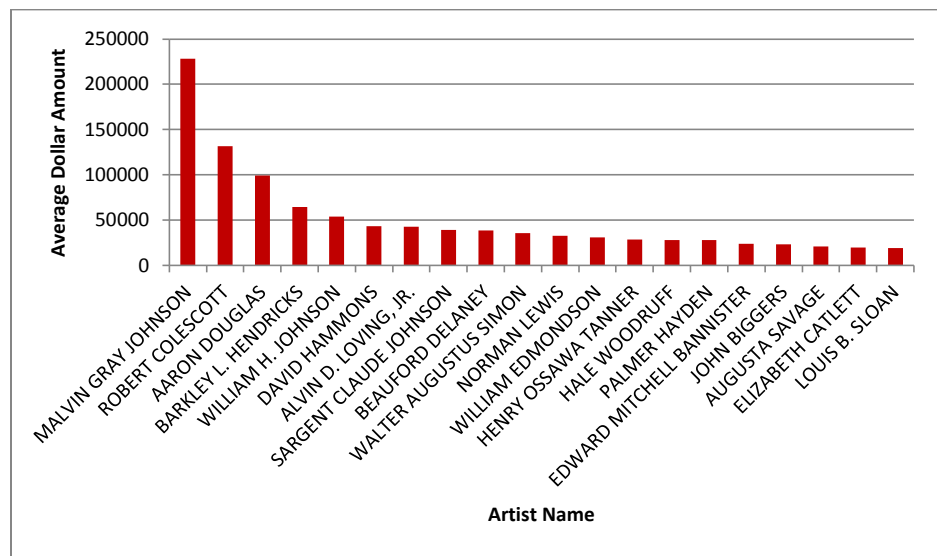
**Figure 4.5** Cover of *African-American Fine Art: The Golden State Mutual Insurance Company African American Art Collection*. New York: Swann Galleries, 2007.



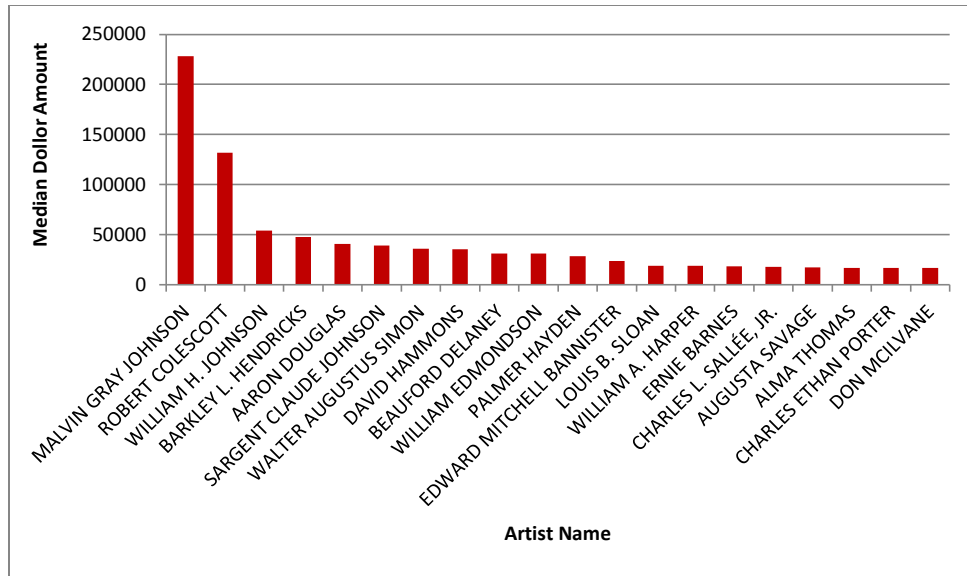
**Figure 4.6 Hughie Lee Smith, *Slum Song*, Oil on canvas, 1944.  
Source: Swann Galleries online catalogue, (Accessed 3/25/2012)**



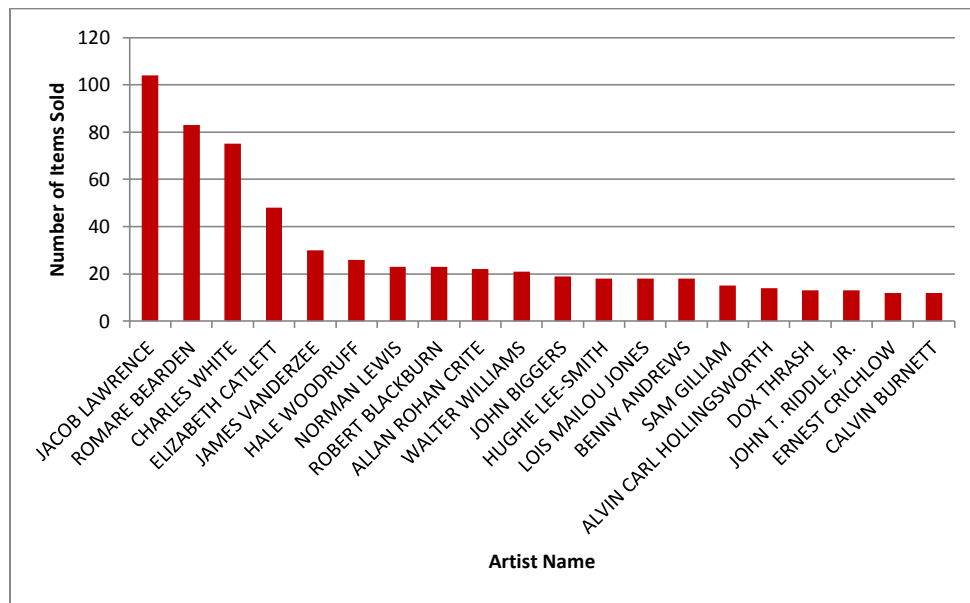
**Figure 4.7a Swann Galleries African American Fine Art Auctions, 2007-2010  
Popularity of Artist by Total Dollar (\$) Amount**



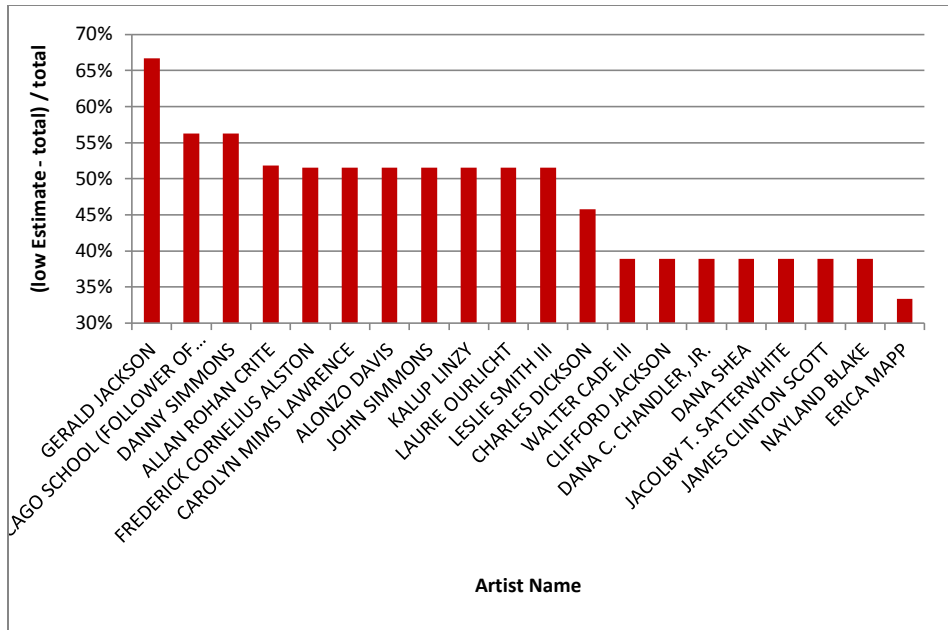
**Figure 4.7b Swann Galleries African American Fine Art Auctions, 2007-2010  
Popularity of Artist by Average Dollar (\$) Amount**



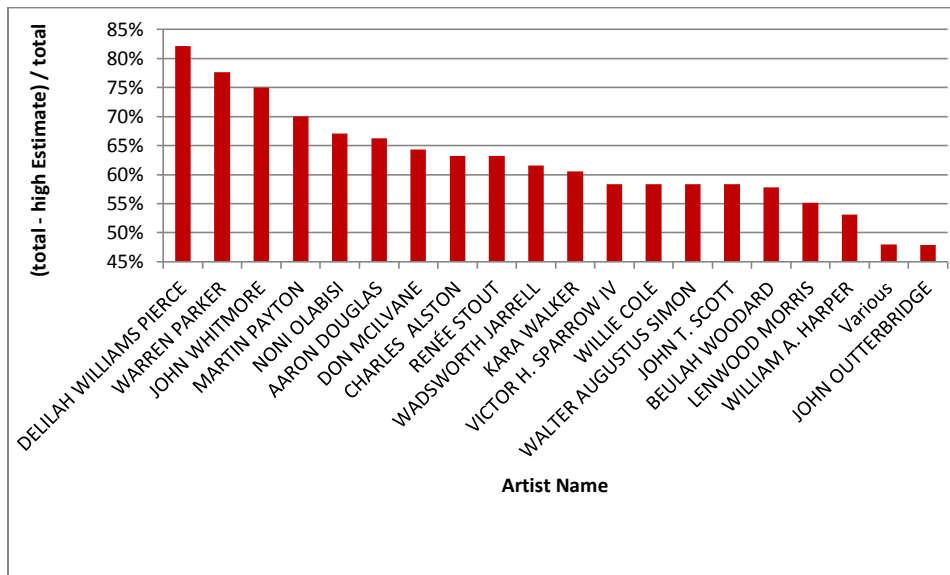
**Figure 4.7c Swann Galleries African American Fine Art Auctions, 2007-2010  
Popularity of Artist by Median Dollar (\$) Amount Sold**



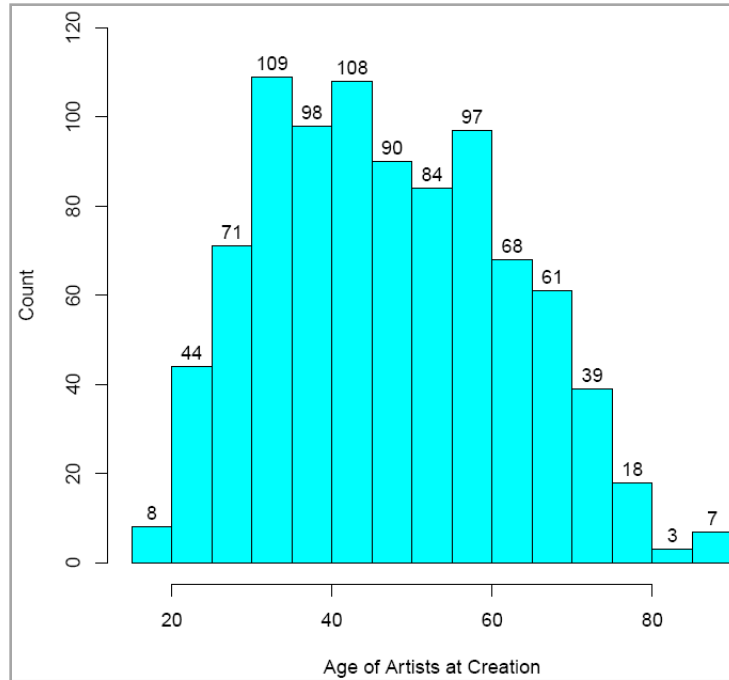
**Figure 4.7d Swann Galleries African American Fine Art Auctions, 2007-2010  
Total Number of Items Sold**



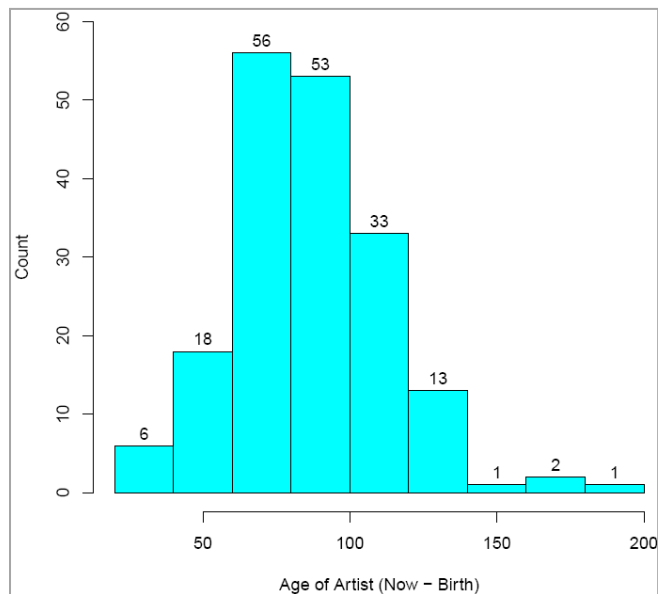
**Figure 4.7e Swann Galleries African American Fine Art Auctions, 2007-2010  
Over-estimated Artists**



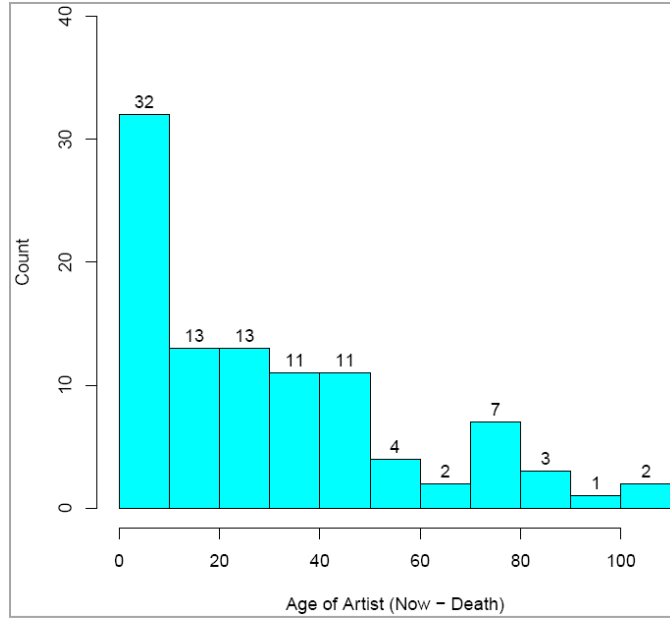
**Figure 4.7f Swann Galleries African American Fine Art Auctions, 2007-2010  
Under-Estimated Artists**



**Figure 4.8a Swann Galleries African American Fine Art Auctions, 2007-2010  
Age Range of Artists- At Time of Object Creation ( $n=905$ )**



**Figure 4.8b Swann Galleries African American Fine Art Auctions, 2007-2010  
Age Range of Artists- Time Elapsed Since Birth ( $n= 183$ )**



**Figure 4.8c Swann Galleries African American Fine Art Auctions, 2007-2010  
Age Range of Artists-Time Elapsed Since Death ( $n=99$ )**

## TABLES

**Table 4.1 Top 20 African-American Artists, Swann Galleries African-American Fine Art Department (2007-2010)**

Artist Name	Total Dollar Amount (rank)	Total number of items (rank)	Average Price per item (rank)	Median Price (rank)
CHARLES WHITE	1414518 (1)	75 (3)	18860.24 (22)	9094 (33)
ELIZABETH CATLETT	973482 (2)	48 (4)	20280.88 (19)	3960 (90)
JACOB LAWRENCE	857452 (3)	104 (1)	8244.731 (50)	6370 (55)
AARON DOUGLAS	794400 (4)	8 (29)	99300 (3)	40800 (5)
ROMARE BEARDEN	760670 (5)	83 (2)	9164.699 (43)	6000 (57)
NORMAN LEWIS	752160 (6)	23 (7)	32702.61 (11)	9600 (28)
HALE WOODRUFF	738555 (7)	26 (6)	28405.96 (14)	10200 (26)
JOHN BIGGERS	448360 (8)	19 (11)	23597.89 (17)	8400 (36)
BEAUFORD DELANEY	426000 (9)	11 (21)	38727.27 (9)	31200 (9)
ALVIN D. LOVING, JR.	302400 (10)	7 (31)	43200 (7)	7200 (46)
HUGHIE LEE-SMITH	298261 (11)	18 (12)	16570.06 (27)	4196 (78)
HENRY OSSAWA TANNER	259800 (12)	9 (26)	28866.67 (13)	5760 (59)
DAVID HAMMONS	259600 (13)	6 (36)	43266.67 (6)	35400 (8)
MALVIN GRAY JOHNSON	228000 (14)	1 (107)	228000 (1)	228000 (1)
BARKLEY L. HENDRICKS	194640 (15)	3 (69)	64880 (4)	48000 (4)
LOIS MAILOU JONES	173280 (16)	18 (12)	9626.667 (40)	6720 (50)
SARGENT CLAUDE JOHNSON	157200 (17)	4 (52)	39300 (8)	39600 (6)
ROBERT COLESCOTT	132000 (18)	1 (107)	132000 (2)	132000 (2)
WILLIAM H. JOHNSON	108000 (19)	2 (85)	54000 (5)	54000 (3)
BENNY ANDREWS	104760 (20)	18 (12)	5820 (71)	3660 (101)
JAMES VANDERZEE	104760 (20)	30 (5)	3492 (112)	2640 (126)
WALTER WILLIAMS	92520 (22)	21 (10)	4405.714 (86)	2640 (126)
BOB THOMPSON	88320 (23)	9 (26)	9813.333 (38)	4800 (66)



AUGUSTA SAVAGE	84000 (24)	4 (52)	21000 (18)	17700 (17)
PALMER HAYDEN	84000 (24)	3 (69)	28000 (15)	28800 (11)
SAM GILLIAM	77772 (26)	15 (15)	5184.8 (73)	4080 (80)
EDWARD MITCHELL BANNISTER	72000 (27)	3 (69)	24000 (16)	24000 (12)
ALVIN CARL HOLLINGSWORTH	69600 (28)	14 (16)	4971.429 (76)	4920 (65)
JAMES DENMARK	66300 (29)	10 (22)	6630 (62)	2880 (119)
CHARLES SEARLES	65760 (30)	7 (31)	9394.286 (42)	4560 (68)
DOX THRASH	64560 (31)	13 (17)	4966.154 (77)	4800 (66)
CHARLES ALSTON	63840 (32)	7 (31)	9120 (45)	9600 (28)
ALMA THOMAS	61200 (33)	4 (52)	15300 (29)	16800 (18)
ROBERT BLACKBURN	61106 (34)	23 (7)	2656.783 (132)	2160 (134)
KARA WALKER	60840 (35)	4 (52)	15210 (30)	6420 (54)
ERNEST CRICHLow	55540 (36)	12 (19)	4628.333 (78)	3720 (98)
JOHN WOODROW WILSON	55200 (37)	9 (26)	6133.333 (68)	5040 (62)
RICHARD MAYHEW	54360 (38)	4 (52)	13590 (31)	15900 (21)
JOHN T. RIDDLE, JR.	47460 (39)	13 (17)	3650.769 (107)	1920 (146)
RICHARD WYATT, JR.	45720 (40)	5 (40)	9144 (44)	7800 (39)

**Table 4.2 Auction information for four media types**

<b>Media</b>	<b>Total_Dollar_Amount</b>	<b>Average_Dollar_Per_entry</b>	<b>Number of Items</b>
2-D Originals (Canvas, Paper, Mixed)	8,305,579	16,479	504
Photography	147,780	3,284	45
Prints or Multiples	2,705,297	5,487	493
Sculpture	1,173,830	33,538	35

**Table 4.3 Normality test (Shapiro-Wilk) results of auction prices for four media types**

<b>Media Type</b>	<b>Originals</b>	<b>Photo</b>	<b>Prints</b>	<b>Sculpture</b>
W	0.3581	0.535	0.3732	0.5483
p-value	<2.2e-16	8.442e-8	<2.2e-16	4.534e-9

**Table 4.4 Normality test (Shapiro-Wilk) results of auction prices for four media types after logarithmic transformation**

<b>Media Type</b>	<b>Originals</b>	<b>Photo</b>	<b>Prints</b>	<b>Sculpture</b>
W	0.958	0.9369	0.9755	0.9576
p-value	6.214e-10	0.1254	2.625e-6	0.2065

**Table 4.5 F test on the average price of four media types (logarithmic transformation on price)**

<b>Within Group Variability</b>	<b>Between Group Variability</b>	<b>F statistic</b>	<b>p-value</b>
1.1966	5.7034	5.5935	0.00106

**Table 4.6 Test of homogeneity for prints and originals using Bartlett test**

<b>Bartlett's K-square</b>	<b>Degree of freedom</b>	<b>p-value</b>
44.92	1	2.048e-11

**Table 4.7 Two sample t-test (unequal sample sizes, unequal variance) on the average price for originals and prints (logarithmic transformation on price)**

<b>T statistic</b>	<b>Degree of Freedom</b>	<b>p-value</b>
6.9114	803.269	9.777e-12

**Table 4.8 Auction price information for the two dates**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Total_Dollar_Amount</b>	<b>Average_dollar_amount</b>	<b>Total_Item</b>
Oct	4,848,498	11,069.63	438
Feb	7,483,988	11,712.03	639

**Table 4.9 Test for homogeneity of auction price for two dates**

<b>Bartlett's K-square</b>	<b>Degree of freedom</b>	<b>p-value</b>
4.5423	1	0.03307

**Table 4.10 Two sample t-test (unequal sample sizes, unequal variance) on the average prices for the two auction dates**

<b>T statistic</b>	<b>Degree of Freedom</b>	<b>p-value</b>
1.8254	637.755	0.0684

**Table 4.11 Auction information on Februaries for four consecutive years**

	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>
Total Dollar Amount	2,138,278	2,759,977	1,343,400	1,242,333
Number of Items	208	179	132	120
Average Dollar Amount	10,280.18	15,418.87	10,177.27	10,352.78

**Table 4.12 Auction information on Octobers for four consecutive years**

	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>
Total Dollar Amount	1,239,025	1,389,780	1,397,400	822,293
Number of Items	99	108	128	103
Average Dollar Amount	12,515.4	12,868.33	10,917.19	7,983.43

**Table 4.13 Test for homogeneity of auction price for two dates**

	<b>Bartlett's K-square</b>	<b>Degree of freedom</b>	<b>p-value</b>
Total Dollar Amount	2.1323	1	0.1442
Number of Items	2.8795	1	0.08972
Average Dollar Amount	0.0543	1	0.8158

**Table 4.14 Two sample t-test (equal sample sizes, unequal variance) regarding total dollar amount, number of items sold and average dollar amount for the two auction dates**

	<b>T statistic</b>	<b>Degree of Freedom</b>	<b>p-value</b>
Total Dollar Amount	2.1481	3	0.1209
Number of Items	2.062	3	0.1312
Average Dollar Amount	0.4119	3	0.708

**Table 4.15 Shapiro-Wilk test on the auction price for 925 data points before transformation**

<b>W</b>	<b>p-value</b>
0.3078	<2.2e-16

**Table 4.16 Linear regression analysis before transformation on auction price**

<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>F-statistic</b>	<b>p-value</b>
0.004812	6.623	1.17e-7

**Table 4.17 Shapiro-Wilk's test on the auction price after Box-Cox transformation**

<b>W</b>	<b>p-value</b>
0.9941	0.001067

**Table 4.18 Linear regression analysis for predicting auction price after Box-Cox transformation**

	<b>estimate</b>	<b>Standard error</b>	<b>t-value</b>	<b>p-value</b>
Intercept	3.041e0	2.467e-2	123.28	< 2e-16
age*age	-1.299e-5	1.024e-5	-1.268	<i>0.205129</i>
age	1.804e-3	1.033e-3	1.745	<i>0.081263</i>
Alive	-3.827e-2	5.84e-3	-6.553	9.41e-11
Photo	-4.844e-2	1.591e-2	-3.045	0.002395
Prints	-3.433e-2	5.506e-3	-6.234	6.91e-10
sculpture	5.001e-2	1.404e-02	3.562	0.000387
october	-1.529e-2	5.386e-03	-2.838	0.004639
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>F-statistic</b>		<b>p-value</b>	
0.119	17.7		<2.2e-16	

**Table 4.19 Linear regression analysis for predicting auction price including height, width and area variables**

	<b>estimate</b>	<b>Standard error</b>	<b>t-value</b>	<b>p-value</b>
Intercept	3.04E+00	2.39E-02	127.251	<2E-16
age*age	-1.70E-06	9.76E-06	-0.174	0.862
age	4.14E-04	9.90E-04	0.418	0.6762
Alive	-4.69E-02	5.58E-03	-8.408	<2E-16
Photo	-1.95E-02	1.54E-02	-1.27	0.2042
Prints	-2.35E-02	5.30E-03	-4.431	1.05E-05
sculpture	8.05E-02	1.46E-02	5.515	4.54E-08
october	-2.16E-02	5.12E-03	-4.222	2.67E-05
Height	3.10E-04	4.70E-04	0.659	0.5103
Width	8.45E-04	5.22E-04	1.618	0.106
area	3.23E-05	1.42E-05	2.28	0.0229
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>		<b>F-statistic</b>		<b>p-value</b>
0.227		26.49		<2.2e-16

**Table 4.20 Linear regression analysis for predicting auction price including size variable after stepwise procedure**

	estimate	Standard error	t-value	p-value
Intercept	3.05E+00	1.01E-02	303.259	2.00E-16
age	2.64E-04	1.70E-04	1.56	0.119
Alive	-4.68E-02	5.54E-03	-8.439	2.00E-16
Photo	-2.06E-02	1.52E-02	-1.361	0.174
Prints	-2.35E-02	5.28E-03	-4.438	1.02E-05
sculpture	8.09E-02	1.45E-02	5.587	3.06E-08
october	-2.16E-02	5.11E-03	-4.221	2.67E-05
Width	7.77E-04	5.07E-04	1.535	0.125
area	3.89E-05	9.76E-06	3.99	7.13E-05
R <sup>2</sup>		F-statistic		p-value
0.2266		33.11		<2.2e-16

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