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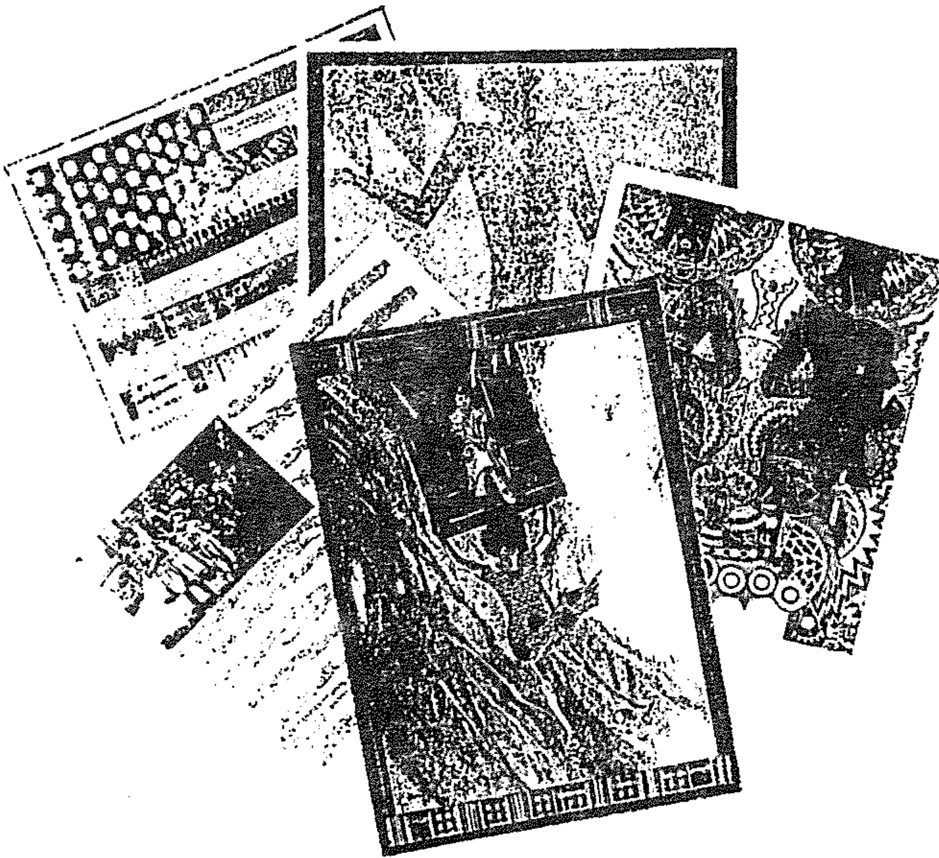
Design in Recent African-American Paintings



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Design in Recent African-American Paintings

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The 1980s saw an economic boom in the United States and Western Europe, which fueled a great expansion in all of the arts. In politics, and to some extent in purely technological terms, the decade was full of contradictions. In the United States, the kind of art in which politics played the largest part from the 1970s and during the 1980s and 1990s (this despite the generally turbulent political of the nation as a whole) was the emergent art of minority groups, above all that produced by African-Americans. One authority on the subject, writing in 1970, defined the situation thus: "Black art is didactic art rising from a strong nationalistic base and commitment to the use of the past and its heroes to inspire heroic and revolutionary ideas, to use recent political and social events to teach recognition control and extermination of the 'enemy,' to project the future which the nation can expect after the struggle is won."[1] Historically, many African-American artists have deliberately chosen to work within the conventions of abstraction in general and abstract expressionism in particular. Artists often regarded these modes of expression as mainstream during the 1960s and 1970s. Viewed as less Afrocentric at a time when positive figurative images served the need of African "biology" and an American "sociology," those are the socio-historical circumstances that can cloud a clear understanding of African-American identity. For expressing pride in race and cultural heritage, the work of African-American abstractionists was often excluded from major surveys of black arts. The Black artists throughout the country would turn their creative genius toward an honest examination of the problem and visualizing a solution. Groups all over the country were working along the same lines. They called this phenomenon the Black Arts Movement. Ironically, mainstream museums and art galleries also excluded such artists from its surveys of abstract expressionism over their distinct contribution to this movement.

This research offers a closer look at the work of these artists and reveals their distinct style—how they used color, design, composition and aesthetic perspectives, which often overlap and intersect with the artistic vision and ideological concerns of the Black Arts Movement to formulation of a theoretical approach for the creation of black art and how to integrate the aesthetic of truly abstract, nonobjective work. How viewers would react to this work, they would develop from their principles of a Black art form. What are the different kinds of lines they use to illustrate their figures, shapes, words? What does the text do in the image? Does it help to understand what's going on, or does it obscure the message further? They made a different kind of attempt to break away from established ideas and new designs concerning what Art should be about and how it should be made, in a most innovative period.

*African-American Art

In Egypt we know so little about contemporary African-American art. It was not new; this was a time when "artists of African descent throughout the world began to look at Africa as a source of their aesthetics and philosophical basis of African art with contemporaneous ideas, ideals and symbols from their own time and place. And in the United States it had surfaced in the 1920s, in the writing of leading black in intellectuals, particularly Alain Locke, a Harvard-educated philosopher who became a professor at Howard University." Locke's essay, "The legacy of the Ancestral Arts," published in 1925, laid down a program for African-American Art urging it to draw on the tribal art of Africa. The artists of the so-called" Harlem Renaissance" of the inter-war years accepted Locke's support but prudently ignored many of his urges. In European and American history, they never let one forget their heroes. Every year one is reminded of George Washington's birthday... but little is said about Black heroes. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s helped them to establish their artistic identities and find appropriate styles for expressing them. The turning point proved to be the assassinations of Malcolm X in 1965 and Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1968, which provoked an out-pouring of African-American art. The feeling grew that art produced by African-Americans must be pursued. The aim of racial liberation to the exclusion of all else is that it should become primarily an instrument of propaganda rather than one of individual self-realization. A number of artists, such as Benny Andrews (1930—), made African-American propaganda art of a brutally effective kind, taking their cue from the socially committed painting, which had flourished in America during the 1930s (fig.1). Other artists, such as the Washington-based painter, Sam Gilliam (1933), utterly rejected the call to arms. His ambition, successfully achieved, was to be accepted as an abstract painter on the same footing as other leading American abstractionists. His closest kinship is not to anything specifically African but to the work of artists such as Morris Louis. Finally, there was a third group of artists, often women, whose work acknowledged African-Americans as

[1] Smith. Edward: Visual Arts In the Twentieth Century-Harry Abrams, Inc., New York. 1997, p-_312

participants, even if unwilling and disaffected ones, in the contemporary mass culture of the United States. Their work frequently linked feminist concerns to African-American ones.

A leading artist in this category was the California-based Betye Saar (1926—). Her hardest hitting works are collages based on derogatory commercial images of African-Americans, such as the plump, "obsequiously grinning black mammy used as a trademark by the Aunt Jemima range of food products. In one work of the series, the liberation of Aunt Jemima is transformed into a gun-toting revolutionary (fig.2). She always works with found objects to create assemblages that reflect black experience in the United States."[2] Jeff Donaldson is a cultural warrior who takes the tapestry of Black life and weaves elegantly a simple message of dignity and integrity. His paintings celebrate the spontaneity of their re-creations encompassing the textured elements of poetry, in which he exalts freedom. And his work expands beyond the limiting contours of the solitary struggle to the larger truth of an awakened consciousness ("Malcolm's Message." I believe in anything necessary to correct unjust conditions, political, economic, social, and physical. Anything necessary as long as it gets results). The Black artists of the 70s and 80s and 90s moved beyond the protest art of the 60s. The artists reinterpreted the Black experience from the inside and their works tell us, from the inside, that the darkness is its own light.

*Harlem

Harlem is one of the neighborhoods in Manhattan, one of the five boroughs of New York City. During the mass migration of African-Americans from the rural agricultural South to the urban industrial North (1914-18), many who came to New York settled in Harlem. The area soon became a sophisticated literary and artistic center, which the Black people were making their own Culture. During the 1920s Harlem was home for some of the most famous African-American writers, musicians, and artists. Many African-Americans migrated north to states such as New York in order to escape the unfair "Jim Crow laws" in southern states. They were looking for good jobs and opportunities to improve their life. They were looking for a place where they would be treated justly. Back then Harlem was just such a place. Many art classes were held for children in Harlem to help them to achieve success one day. Responding to the heady intellectual atmosphere of the time and place, writers and artists, many of whom lived in Harlem, began to produce a wide variety of fine and highly original works dealing with African-American life. Jazz music became very popular, and many nightclubs and dance halls for black and white people. The musicians, writers, and artists of Harlem created a place where the world could see the cultural achievements of African-Americans. Plays, stories, poems and music allowed them to share their pride in their accomplishments. That special time during the 1920s became known as the Harlem Renaissance.

*The Harlem Renaissance

The Harlem Renaissance, the African-American cultural movement, also known as the Negro Renaissance, emerged toward the end of World War I in 1918, blossomed in the mid-to late 1920s, and then faded in the mid-1930s. The Harlem Renaissance marked the first time that mainstream publishers and critics took African-American art seriously. Some common themes existed, such as an interest in the roots of the 20th-Century African-American experience in Africa and the American South, and a strong sense of racial pride and desire for social and political equality. But the most characteristic aspect of the Harlem Renaissance was the diversity of its expression. The visual art of Harlem Renaissance was an attempt at developing a new African-American aesthetic in the fine arts. Believing that their life experiences were valuable sources of material for their art, these artists created an iconography (usage of recognizable symbols to convey the artists' message) representative of the Harlem Renaissance era. Thematic content included Africa as a source of inspiration, African-American history, folk idioms, including music and religion of the south, and social justice. Their collective efforts not only established this new African-American identity, but also contributed to the development of modern American culture.

* Recent Development in African-American Painting Designs

New African art in the 1990s is less sophisticated than its Far-Eastern equivalent. The fact that the use early modernists made of African masks in their works shows that some of the roots of modernism in 20th Century western art by Picasso and others are actually a traditional African practice. And the bridge between what had been happening in the United States during the prewar epoch and what was to happen in the 1940s was partly built by two artists, Roberto Matta and Wifredo Lam. The Jungle makes use of a polymorphism of human animal and vegetable life, and it also makes allusion to African Art, particularly African masks. The dense, frieze like composition helps to create a picture-space, which is simultaneously claustrophobic and disturbingly undefined. The direct ancestor of the Jungle is Picasso's les *Demoiselles d' Avignon*. And the late 1950s and early 1960s saw a focus on the positive

[2] Ibid.

conceptualization of the Black body in an era when European American artists were excising every body from the canvas. Or, like Willem de Kooning and Francis Bacon, tearing it to shreds by constantly emphasizing their commitment to humanity. This was the lesson that the creators of Abstract Expressionism were not slow to absorb.

Western art lies in Africa. With this in mind, when we look at contemporary African artists in the West, they somehow are overcome by the culture of the West—they are active members. They are a part of a network of mutually influential global entanglements, and they often find familiar cultural fragments when they encounter modern Western art. It offers a painted surface that has an ideological significance. Paintings are associated with the West and carvings with traditional Africa. Their aesthetic responses have been rooted in their own cultural understanding and were suitable for their own needs. As new Africans came to the New World, and as Blacks from the New World returned to places like Freetown, Sierra Leone, in the 19th Century, African painting took two forms. The first and at the moment somewhat better known variety is rooted in the new African cities and in African commercial life. The most celebrated exponent of this style is the Zairean artist, Cheiri Samba (1956-)."His paintings are vehicles for outspoken social commentary, highly political narrative paintings are rooted in newspaper cartoons and hand-painted advertising signs and have little do with traditional African ways of making imagery (fig.3). They are, nevertheless, profoundly African in their humor their outspokenness, and their gift for storytelling.[3]

The leaders at the forefront of independence movements encountered each other, along with blacks from the New World, while attending schools in London, Paris, and the United States. In recent decades, a distinctly aesthetic dimension has been added to that dialogue. African artists working in England, Spain, or the United States today are a response to the world system at the end of the 20th Century, but it is also a continuation of centuries-old African movements and migration. The continuing strength of African religion manifests itself, by contrast, in the paintings of the Benin artist. The forms may not seem profoundly African, especially to a western observer, but their meaning could not be more so. Though in a western format, the paintings are a direct expression of an impeccably traditional aspect of African life. Nowadays an African artist may by contrast evolve and change his style radically just as his counterparts do anywhere else on the globe, moving with the Art contemporary movement, so their artistic experience cannot be purely traditional. Definitely their style will have evolved in a western way too. Not in the style of their ancestors, but it's a matter of the world. Its very excellence and its extreme sophistication should make it accepted on a parallel level to western art.

Composition in African-American Feminist Painting

"A work used 'Real' elements to create a viable feminist art in response to the rise of the women's movement in the 1960s.[4] African-American female artists have had to struggle to find a completely new way to address their experiences; painting, prints, drawings, photographs, mixed-media installation, and sculpture. From the use of domestic materials like beads, buttons and fabric to the incorporation of non-western artistic approaches and models, they have enriched and informed the course of 20th Century American art. The works are a diversity of social and personal issues, including history, ethnicity, age, class, religion, prejudice, and invisibility through the eyes and experiences of the artists. Each generation of women faced new challenges in their art and lives, and emerged victorious. Pioneers like Lois Mailou Jones and Elizabeth Catlett, who began their careers in the 1930s and 1940s, had to fight to be recognized as individuals and as artists. Meanwhile, members of the younger generation like Alison Saar and Carrie Mae Weems face the prospect of providing leadership for African-American female artists in the new millennium. While each artist has her own unique vision, she also supports, or "bears witness," to the lives and works of her sisters, to introduced contemporary works by African-American female Artists surveys the impressive and unique contributions of an important and under-recognized segment of the art community.

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[3] Ibid, p-_371.

[4] Ibid, p-_323.

***Using the Flag Desig**

At the dawn of the Civil Rights Movement, African-Americans appealed to the ideals of justice and equality outlined in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, symbolized by the American flag. By the time of the rise of the Black Power Movement, the American flag had become a symbol of oppression and exploitation. In the 1960s and 1970s, *African-American artists used the flag to highlight the contradictions between the official narrative, which proclaims justice and equality as the law of the land, and the everyday realities of discrimination against African-Americans in the socio-economic and human rights spheres.[5] Their inclusion in this image is also intended as a comment on the artist Jasper John's "vacuous" use of the American flag in his work of the 1960s. The symbols are shown in large scale and often in bright colors to emphasize the powerful political messages that motivated their creation. The Artist works represent the visual strategies adopted by Faith Ringgold (fig. 5), Dana Chandler, Gordon Parks, Emma Amos (fig. 9). David Hammons, Carol Byard, and other artists used the flag as a symbol of institutional racism.

***Groups in The Artists' Movements**

In theory and practice, artists of the Black Arts Movement have been a major driving force in the growth of a remarkable and rich aesthetic and style uniting people of African descent all over the world. They produced a range of authentic voices and a rich body of artwork that is truly "Trans-African"—the all group movement, and artists who worked in the United States, who joined in forming group such as Africobra, Where We At, Spiral, and Weusi, as well as Kindred Spirits, artists who operated within the aesthetic and ideological framework. They were masters whose impressive body work influenced the Black Arts Movement, and the fields of Black art and visual culture from gender and feminist perspectives.

***AfriCobra:** Was founded in the late 1960s by Jeff Donaldson, Wadsworth Jarrell, and Barbara Jones-Hogu, among others as a coalition of Black Revolutionary Artists In AfriCobra's 1970 manifesto, written by Jeff Donaldson, the group developed a new African-American aesthetic involvement in Black self-identity to fulfill principles. Certain aesthetic qualities are emphasized [illegible] image, innovative approaches to rhythm, and the use of high-energy colors. In addition are the [illegible] stylistic innovations found in contemporary African and African American music

***Spiral:** Romare Bearden in the early 1960s discussed the role of Black artists and other issues of concern. Spiral was formed on July 5, 1963 as a result of that meeting. Spiral brought together a dynamic group of artists divergent in age, background, interests and style of work, which ranged from abstractionist to realist. They formed for debate and an exchange of ideas on aesthetics and artistic standards. After two years, the group had an exhibition shown only in black and white. They had outgrown the aesthetic limitations and urgent concerns of the period.

***"Where We At" Black Women Artists:** By the late 1950s and early 1960s, the majority of Black female artists were commonly underrepresented at the onset of the Black Arts Movement. In the spring of 1971 a group of 14 African-American women organized a landmark exhibition entitled, "Where We At" The group included Dindga McCannon, Kay Brown, Faith Ringgold, Jerri Crooks, Charlotte Ka,and Vivian E. Browne The group served as a source of empowerment for African-American female artists as they controlled their representation and foregrounded issues concerning Black women's sensibility and issues aesthetics. The group was active in bringing art to the community and using it as a tool of awareness and liberation, so they organized workshops in schools, hospitals, and cultural centers, as well as art classes for youth in their communities.

***Kindred Spirits and Pan-African Connection:** While many African-American artists joined in forming groups and movements, many "Kindred Spirits" worked an exhibition for the works of David Hammons, Melvin Edwards, Elizabeth Catlett, Dana Chandler, and others. The rise of a modern postcolonial African Art encompasses a new visual vocabulary and symbols rooted in the African Arts Movement. African-American artists embarked on a journey to study and reclaim their rich African heritage, participating in major pan African forums such as the first world Art festival of Negro Arts 1966 and FESTAC77 in Lagos, Nigeria. Masters like Skunder Boghossion, Malangatana, Papa Ibratall, Ibrahim El-salahi, and Bruce Onobrakpeya, influenced them as well as artists such as Cuban Wilfredo Lam. All of these Pan-African artists have impacted the style and aesthetics of the Black Arts Movement

***Gallery 5-The Pioneers:** The Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s was rooted in earlier achievements of artists of the Harlem Renaissance. These artists, like Hale Woodruff and Meta Vaux Warrick found a new source of inspiration in their African ancestors. Fuller formed the genesis of a style and aesthetic that influenced

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[5] Blackness in Color-Visual Expressions of the Black Arts Movement, 2000, Herbert F. Johnson Museum-Cornell University

the development of African-American Art throughout the 20th century. By the 1950s and early 1960s, masters such as John Biggers, Romare Bearden, Jacob Lawrence, Lois Mailou Jones, Elizabeth Catlett, and Charles White, with a rich African heritage, influenced the artists of the Black Arts movement

***Gallery 4-Weusi-Art, Activism and The Community:** An artists' group, founded in Harlem in 1965 adopted the name Weusi who called for the creation of positive "Black art for Black people to reach out to the community for Black Artists to exchange ideas on issues ranging from African culture and aesthetics to artistic techniques and a fashion show. 'Weusi' as a group valued individual creativity within an African-centered perspective ... Weusi has developed a new iconography and visual vocabulary, which have become expressive of Black aesthetics.[6]

***Gallery 1: The Legacy of Absence:** *Racist Stereotypes and The Legacy of Absence.* Racist stereotyping of the African-American was created in both popular culture and high art as system of "visual encoding" which reflected the social hierarchy and the status of African-Americans in society. In the white imagination, Blacks were cast as sambos, mammies, pickaninnies, jigaboos and coons, as seen in the minstrel shows of the late 19th and early 20th Centuries. These negative images have had a profound and destructive impact on African-American life. Some took control of Black representation by deconstructing these racist images, such as works by Jeff Donaldson, Murry DePillars, Faith Ringgold, Frieda High, and Betye Saar on the image of Aunt Jemima, a reincarnation of the Black mammy. The work by Emma Amos critiques European classical ideals as universal standards of beauty for women and reflects the different strategies African-American artists have adopted in inverting negative images. A sampling of younger artists' works reflects emerging discourses in the fields of Black art and visual culture from gender and feminist perspectives, which provide an insight into how such discourses are evoked in mapping absence and presence within post modernist and conceptualist frameworks.

*** Design in The Recent Artists' Paintings.**

***Lois Mailou Jones [1905-1998]**

Lois Mailou Jones was born in 1905 in Boston, Massachusetts and became a pioneering artist of the Harlem Renaissance, influenced by the exciting political and masterful 20th Century. She became a teacher at Howard University in 1930, as a professor of painting, and also book illustrating, textile and costume graphic design and watercolor. In her career Jones overcame prevalent gender and racial barriers. Jones's work was mostly inspired by her experience with discrimination and the aftermath of the Harlem Renaissance. In 1970 Jones visited several African countries, and she put her experiences on canvas. "These paintings reflect regional African motifs, costumes, hairstyles, textiles, color combination, and symbols in a beautiful sense of color, structure and design[7] (which she uses in her textile patterns) that carry the color to victory, for unorganized color alone could not possibly do the trick. "Mine is a quiet exploration and quest for new meanings in color, texture and design." Jones's composition, light, and color are her own. Broad, freely applied brush strokes convey the light that pervades the entire composition and the painting's bright colors are in harmony with the impressionist tradition. Jones's concern for form is achieved through color relationships rather than modeling in light and shade. During this period Jones painted *Ubi Girl From Tai Region* (fig.4), one of her best-known works. The painting is of a Nigerian girl in ceremonial makeup along with two masks from Zaire and a fetish from the Ivory Coast, reinvigorating the "African mask, sculpture and spirit and transforming them from objects of a French components of a modern black identity.[8] Like the poetry produced under the African and Caribbean literary movement known as Negritude, in this painting, there are four basic masks which occupy most of the painting. On the far right there is an oval white shape that is composed of contour black and green lines which accentuate the nose, eyes, and mouth and a red stripe seen on the white mask makes a link between this one and the whole painting. The two pinkish-purple masks are in the form of a circular shape. The eyes surrounded with different shades as well as the mouth are also examples of oval. The eyes are also accented with different circles. The mask in the left center is a black background profile that enhances the multi-colored masks, and there is an orange color behind this figure on the far right of the painting. The background colors and the African borders enhance the masks in the center, making it the focal area. It has a light value, bringing out the image of a three-dimensional effect. The images are constructed with geometric shapes. The center contains the masks, circular

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[6] Ibid.

[7] St-_James Guide To: black Artists, p-_287.

[8] http://www.iniva.org/harlem/lois.html

with shapes to form the borders of the masks. "All of the masks seem to symbolize different cultures joining together.[9] *Ubi Girl from Tai Region,* is a valuable painting because of its expressivism, or how it demonstrates the power of art to touch the heart or the mind. The painting shows how different cultures or ethnicities can unite in their unique ways. The image also portrays emotions. The picture is not on an intellectual level but on an emotional level. It emphasizes Africa's rhythmic and mythic dimensions. All of Jones's work shows a strong sense of design. Her artistic style shows a progressive evolution, and throughout her career she has managed to experiment with and master a myriad of techniques. Atmosphere and a heightened consciousness created a new sense of what it meant to be "African" (or "black") in the 20th Century.
Her lifelong openness to new ideas led her to explore a wide cross section of styles that evolved in the 20th century, taking from each what fit her own vision. Through her continual development as an artist and her extraordinary teaching talent she became a prominent and influential advocate of African-American art and artists. Many of her students have become major contemporary African-American artists and art teachers, and her paintings hang in major museums. She painted subjects that reflected the personal circumstances of Black people.

***Faith Ringgold**

Faith Ringgold is an African-American painter, sculptor, writer, and performance artist. She is a professor of art at the University of California in San Diego. Born in New York in 1930, today, she is best known for her painted story quilts—art that combines painting, quilted fabric and storytelling. She has exhibited in major museums in the United States, Europe, South America, Africa, and the Middle East. She is in the permanent collection of many museums including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art. She has written and illustrated five children's books. She has received more than 75 awards, fellowships, citations and honors, including the Solomon R. Guggenheim Fellowship for Painting. Her work has redefined and enriched black and feminist cultural ideals through themes of African-American culture. Faith Ringgold moved from paintings through her large political canvases of 1963-67, her soft sculptures, and performances of the mid-and late 1970s (*Witch Masks, Family of Woman Masks, Portrait Masks of Harlem*) to reach her quilts of the early 1980s. Ringgold's painting style mimics folk art, providing images of black people that were unavailable to her during her formal art education but that originate comfortably within the context of the African-American art that has developed throughout the 20th Century. Her 1969 paintings *Flag for the Moon* and *Die Nigger* reflected deep resentment toward a government that spent billions of dollars to put one man on the moon while millions of blacks lived in poverty and strife. *Flag Story Quilt* (fig. 5) represents her most recent effort to use the American Flag. She used strips of tie-dyed fabric to represent both the red stripes of the flag and the blue field containing the stars. The fifty stars are represented by small patches of appliqued white cloth, each cut into the shape of a human skull in profile. Each skull contains a sequined eye. All these elements have in turn been appliqued onto a canvas background, which in turn has been attached to the requisite lining and backing of the quilt form. Ringgold refocused her vision to celebrate contemporary black culture in America. She eschewed the materials of the fine arts, such as canvas and oil paint, due to high expenses of painting material. Ringgold started to use craft materials (painted fabric, African frames, quilts and thread) in vertical, horizontal lines and between them sloping lines. Ringgold also explored performance art, using her life-size sculptures as costumes in the work and the resurrection of the Bicentennial Negro. This fable about black cultural rejuvenation inspired matriarchal power feminism. The truths Faith Ringgold visually plies us with are that women and men of African descent figure significantly in matters of art and art history, for the most part a positive image of tolerance, while admitting dehumanizing acts of racism and sexism.

In 1980 Ringgold collaborated with "her mother to create their first quilt of Harlem, which recorded the faces of people they had known throughout the years.[10] Ringgold employed quilting as a metaphor to commemorate one of the few art forms that enslaved American blacks had been allowed to develop and preserve African culture. She mixes the actual with the improbable to revise life scripts under her painted and pieced guidance. Whether it's the story of an eight-year-old girl flying over New York City's George Washington Bridge or a missive featuring Matisse's chapel as the setting for an African-American wake and gathering of the elders, Ringgold's myths underscore the capacity of the storyteller to control the language, images, and very structure of the narrative like Henri Rousseau images. In *We Came to America* (fig. 6) "acrylic on canvas, slaves struggle in the water near a black Statue of Liberty, the flames of whose torch ignites the slave ship on the

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[9] http://www.Tfaoi.com/newsmu/nmus74c.htm

[10] St-_James Guide To: Black Artists, p-_457.

horizon.[11] We come to see a universe where, through the expressive details of nature and an all-encompassing, panoramic representation of a society, artists transmit the iconographic, sensorial, and magical dimensions of the world. It transforms a seldom seen side of reality into a fantastic apparition, reminding viewers that the strangeness and extraordinariness of an every day existense are in the discerning eye of a bold and unfurled imagination. An inner vision is just as likely to emerge from a trained artist from Harlem as from a French or Haitian artistic "outsider." To ensure the freedom of her voice, she imbeds the text of her writings into her quilts, thus realizing the natural synthesis between narrative and image that would characterize her mature work. Using acrylic paint, Ringgold illustrates her stories with a picture in the center panel, surrounded by text written on strips of cloth that most often frame the piece. Her stories are generally based on the lives of people she knew while growing up. She made the easy transition to writing and illustrating award-winning children's books centered on black themes that were not available to her or her daughters while they were growing up. Another aspect of the unspoken power of work resides in each painting's pieced fabric border. Tie-dyed, floral, and chromatically coordinated with the fantastic paintings that they frame, Ringgold's borders bring to mind the raincoat and dress on the chic African-American woman in high fashion.

•Jean-Michel Basquiat [1960-1988]

Jean Michel Basquiat was the fastest rising and most controversial artist of the decade of the 1980s. Basquiat became within a short spell of time the most famous African-American artist to date. "He was born in Brooklyn, New York on December 22, 1960[12] and died on 12 August 1988. He was aware of the art world and its mechanisms. He was genuinely interested in the avant-garde art world and anxious to be a part of it. You can see him as one of the Four Horseman of cultural apocalypse—the other three being Robert Mapplethorpe, Keith Haring and Jeff Koons. Basquiat and Keith Haring were the two graffiti painters, "who in theory sprang from the New York subway system. . What the graffitists did was to deface subway trains,[13] creeping into the railway yards where the rolling stock was kept in order to decorate the exteriors of the cars with exuberant spray can designs. His first paintings were described in *Art Forum* in an article called "The Radiant Child" as "a logical extension of what you could do with a wall."

Basquiat is a much more interesting and paradoxical figure. He was technically African-American and made frequent use of "black" imagery in his work. "He went to study African spiritualism in Korogo,[14] to retrace the Middle Passage that landed his forebears in the Caribbean. His real subject is the plurality of his own thoughts and feelings. His work is technically rudimentary—graphic rather than painterly and he was always shifting between painting and poetry, drawing and writing Rap and graffiti, art and life. He felt free to include anything that took his fancy. He had a lively hand and the ability to draw in this fashion is a God-given gift. He quickly adopted the neo-expressionist style, a European import that had revived and energized the New York art world and he immediately attracted the attention of important art critics. From an early stage, he was one of Andy Warhol's entourage. "Warhol, despite his keen interest in anything novel and potentially fashionable,[15] was at first wary, but the two artists eventually produced a series of collaborative pictures, which eventually culminated in a collaboration between Basquiat and the pop artist. Basquiat's content centered on the relationship between black cultural concerns within a white, Eurocentric frame of reference. His visibility depended on assuming "the blackness defined by the white imagination he had to sacrifice those parts of himself (that whites) would not be interested in or fascinated by." Paintings from 1981 and 1982, such as *Irony of Negro Policemen and Native Carrying Some Guns, Bibles, Amorites on Safari*, superficially bear out this idea. Upon reflection, however, the meaning of Basquiat's symbols and words, which he chose quickly and unconsciously, as in jazz improvisation, double back on themselves endlessly as he deconstructs white myths about black people and vice versa. Basquiat's subtle dialogue erodes the racist and classist frame of reference of

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[11] Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art-Faith Ringgold-Number 13/14, Spring/Summer 2001, p-_25.

[12] St-_James Guide To: Black Artists, p-_38.

[13] Smith, Edward. p-_346.

[14] Harris, Michael D.: Transatlantic Dialogue-Contemporary Art In and Out of Africa-Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1999, p-

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[22] Art Review-Jean Michel Basquiat-Journal-March, 1996, p-_21

His investigations reached their greatest depth in *Crowns*, where his vision focused on the white male world and a black mans place within it. *Crowns* can be read biographically as Basquiat was freshly kinged and then thrown into an art world full of malevolent, warring kings (other male artists). His art speaks to the colonization of Africa, racism, homelessness, and loneliness. His life in many ways overtook his works themselves, and many critics only discuss his upbringing and background rather than looking at the works themselves and trying to read their messages.

Basquiat's last painting, *Riding with Death* 1989, shows him on his final artistic journey. He was riding a horse, but it was not Osundare's "horse of remembrance." It was horse of amnesia. This was a bone-white horse, one from which there was no dismounting,-a vehicle. As his skeletal body sits astride the bones of a skeletal horse, he seems to maintain the cool element that appears so crucial to his identity. That cool factor becomes a point of contention in the 1984 mixed media, *Melting Point of Ice* (fig. 7). To be cool is not to be a loser, but to be a player pushing the edge of ice. To be cool is not only to live close to the edge, but to be the edge itself. These competitive paintings in effect still essentially "graphic." That is, as much a kind of large-scale and colorful splashed with crowns, drawing in paint as actual painting possesses immense energy and a vast range of cultural reference. "His art springs from a graffiti background. He uses large canvasses, such as Pegasus, that swarm with amusing words, symbols, writing and little drawings, like an unfiltered, nervous mental buzz that paint only occasionally intrudes upon. They are largely linear with shapes colored in, stick-figures, and African mask faces, and sprinkled with enigmatic words and brief phrases, illustrating some of the collage-inspired imagery that he was known for, and other patterns to compose his pieces, sometimes with extremely powerful political, historical, and personal messages. You can see imagery related to Africa, the Caribbean (where his parents were from), and the street, from contemporary sports stars and traditional African art to the drawings of Leonardo da Vinci. It is perhaps the most fascinating product of the New York art scene at the time.

***Emma Amos**

Amos is an African-American painter and printmaker. She was born in 1938 in Atlanta, Georgia, and she is an art professor at Rutgers University in New Jersey. In 1963 she was a member in Spiral, a group whose main thrust was art making and the politics of being an African-American artist. The association with Spiral is evident in the use of African textiles, Symbols, and motifs. "She makes public art as a collaborative act. She was influenced by the work of the American abstract expressionists, famous contemporary white American and European artists like, Geog Baselitz, whose distinctive characteristic is that he hangs his painting with the figures upside down. She was concerned with the issue of freedom of expression in figurative imagery."[16] In 1991 she completed a body of work entitled the "Women Artists" series. The titles are important to Amos and often introduce an element of irony, humor, and subversion. They are both amusing and serious.

She is very aware of the tradition of Abstract Expressionism with its emphasis on the beauty and richness of color and texture and its expressive power. Amos paints pictures that include material such as photographs. In her paintings, figures of various colors hurtle through space accompanied by such icons of civilization, Egyptian Pyramids, and Renaissance churches. The anxiety generated by falling bodies also is a metaphor. Color has given Amos pictorial control over the images of women, men, and children, black and white. The artist chooses the architects and design, with strength, color, and dramatic palette. In her paintings the space is often ambiguous and figures of all shades move within variegated ambiences of textured color.

In her early work Amos made borders from cloth that she wove herself. Sensuous strips of woven and printed cloth frame most of her paintings and they recontextualize the narratives and securely keep them within the borders of the painting, even when the figures are hurtling through space. These borders are luxurious, colorful, and beautiful and provide a personal and cultural context of renewal. These frames of cloth play a primary visual and symbolic role in the paintings. They contain totemic motifs such as eyes, phoenix-like birds, and hands, which introduce an element of magic, suggesting forces extant in the world beyond our control. Their juxtaposition with the painted canvas forces the viewer to ask about artificial division of art and craft in contemporary society. Amos is aware of multifarious meanings and implications of color. She has said: "Describing painting has always held double meanings. The term 'colored' it self—it all means something else to me. You have to choose, as a black artist, what to make your figures." In many of her canvases she paints herself darker than she is, in order to emphasize her African ancestry.

Emma Amos always utilized various media simultaneously to develop her ideas. From 1985 she began a new series paintings, *The Water Series*, showing black women and men swimming and diving, move throug.. ou

[16] Amos, Emma-Painting and Prints, 1992 Walerie Center of the Arts, Wooster, Ohio Art, p-_13

and water, in many ways an extension of the black athlete series. their darkness emphasized by the painterly white backgrounds with strokes of blue, green-yellow and umber. The illusion of uncontrollability of the dramatic falls and letting the figure slide out and into the water severs the illusion of the fear of water. Through pronounced brushstrokes these works often communicated the swift movement of figures and the charged atmosphere of their surroundings. She soon transferred these features successfully to her printmaking and canvas. She combed the sports pages for images of black men "being powerful as they played games that showed their great physical prowess." She was aware of the temporary and ambivalent nature of the black athletes' power—and wild animals in action such as alligators and mountain gorillas are running in different directions. As she points out, black men like wild animals. To express blacks at power and exploitation go hand in hand with the continuing search for images of physical prowess and boldness. The liveliness of the figures is apparent even through they are shown frozen in action because the technique has allowed the artist to paint out each scene with printer's ink the way she has always done when working with acrylic paint on canvas. The painting does speak of the lives and presence of famous black people and moves away from the cultural.

A self-portrait of Amos is shown in titled *Wile You Forgot Me,* the image of her as it appears in a book on her work, is comprises of two female figures embracing each other. With a calm expression on her face through the air in front of an opaque blue void Amos holds onto the portrait of her mother, with a diagonal cut, letting the figure slide out and into the air (fig. 8). The image shows her own character creating the form and the movement of the figure in action through a visual contemporary design.

In Amos's art, she created several images by using photographs for African-American people. These photographs inspired her to communicate political commentary. The people in Shivery's photos are meant be understood as first-hand witnesses to the plight of African-Americans. Like the X, the cipher United States and Confederate flags, and the target, it simultaneously functions as a metaphor for the artist's belief that she is being negated because the established art world continues to ignore her work. *Stars and Stripes* (fig. 9), which features the American flag, but instead of the usual stars, it contains a photograph of a group of African-American children who look directly at the camera. These poverty-stricken children remind us that not much had changed for most African-Americans by the 1930s. And the sad fact is that their situation is similar to that of many African-American children we see today in urban areas throughout the country. She uses the X in the design to express her refusal. Amos included these symbols in her painting in 1992 because she appreciated their ability to resonate with meaning for everyone. Her hands-on experimentation with several techniques as a painter and printmaker, matched with her increased confidence in sharing details of her life and thoughts as an artist, a woman, and an African-American, have resulted in her creation of unique and powerfully expressive paintings. She appreciates the immediacy of printmaking as a means of realizing ideas. Her work is highly regarded because she has always valued painting and print mediums as a viable art form in its own right, and she continually seeks the challenges its technical procedures offer.

***Skunder Boghossian**

Skunder Boghossian was born in 1937. He is one of Africa's best-known contemporary artists and is exhibited internationally. His artistic sensibilities are rooted in Ethiopian history culture. He migrated to the United States as an artist-in-residence at Howard University in Washington D.C., in 1972. He became one of the founders of the art group AfriCobra and an important architect in the Black Arts movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s "He seemed to have found inspiration in Modigliani's vision of the human form, and some what he has had an influence by Paul Klee, Andre Breton, Georges Braque, Max Ernst.[17] Roberto Matta and Wilfredo Lam had an unshakable influence on Skunder During 1959 he taught him how to use his visual cultural tradition like a number of West African artists.

Perhaps in Lam's work Skunder saw a reflection of himself. He recognized his African sensibilities where he uses symbolic images, fantastic animal and bird forms, in Ethiopian Language or traditional weaving technique, a complex braid-design motif in Coptic painting which may explain the layering of patterns and images to be found in his work. Skunder has found in modernism a language for expressing his personal vision, but his own personhood is clearly rooted in Ethiopian culture. He always saturated with power and familiar to those who create palimpsests wherein the world may read is origins.

As is evident from his works, Skunder uses highly diverse techniques and media to enhance the power of expression in his paintings. His works combine relief with bark cloth and goatskin. He works in oil acrylic, gauache, crayon, and pen and ink. Boghossian's "*Time Cycle II*" (1982) offers the finest example of his innovative techniques and experimentation with media. Like Ernst he used a method of splashing water on the

[17] St- James Guide To. Black Artists, p- 62.

canvas and then spraying it with paint to create a surface alive with energy. His works are vibrant in color and are enriched with symbols, motifs, and shapes drawn from his own Ethiopian heritage and the larger African continent. Boghossian's work synthesizes his country's rich and powerful traditions with European techniques. He was at his symbolic abstractionist and mythic best, a breath that calls to mind the African rift valley runs though the split from top to bottom. The viewer is welcome to be moved by whatever "significant forms" and allusions make up these paintings. He needs light to probe for the forms and colors, that he quarries out of the flat surfaces that are his primary hunting ground. He literally caresses the canvas, wood, metal or parchment on which he is about to work with the probability of images. In his paintings has revealed to us the intensity of light in the manner he treats this luminosity, often centered in one spot of the painting, creating such a depth of radiance in his canvas that it is impossible to think in categories of traditional dimensions. The luminosity escapes any measure of reality and becomes a whirl of cosmic dust, a movement. The color determined the light, for in Skunder's seemingly limitless virtuosity, darkness is also light itself. A case in point is "*Juju's Flight of Delight*" (fig. 10). The splendor of the painting calls to mind the majesty of creation and destruction that Hindu myth knows as "the face of life" as terrifyingly vast births take place, space penetrates space, and spaces are nested within space. The vision menaces and delights at the same time. Images both attack and play. Forms pull away from one another and yet remain connected and subdued. Colors are exploded from within their dark nether until they become shimmering jewels. Everything is organically interlinked in this large painting that is at once both matte and glossy—a dream to which an innocent child might surrender. The upper one cuts the composition into a higher and lower half. There is also a fissure between the left and the right sides, and yet, the composition holds its unity without the least eyestrain (evocatively Ethiopian in their paranoia). The tableau is split unequally between left and right. "More often than not, Skunder's paintings evoke several realities at once held together by color, form and a composition that is so subtle in its execution that one is hardly aware of it.[18] The importance of Skunder's works is in unrelenting search and discovery of form. These forms achieve significance, colors, textures, composition and relationships. We can say that artist and viewer have cooperated in creation.

***Whitfield Lovell**

Whitfield Lovell was born in the Bronx in 1959. He has studied in Italy, France and Spain. He had drawn on old wallboards life-size figures dressed in the clothes of an earlier era to which were attached various real objects. His photographs were taken in the era after Reconstruction and before the Civil Rights Movement. Many are of people where the memory of slavery was still vivid. Thus, the African-Americans Lovell portrays have agency—they wear stylish "Sunday-best" clothes and ornaments to compose their bodies and faces. Lovell has had a lifelong fascination with photographic images of ordinary African-Americans, which he associated with family memories, and the history of the African in America. Hundreds of portrait photographs were taken 50 to 100 years ago. One cannot avoid meditating on who these people might have been, what were their dreams, their anxieties, and their struggles for a better life? ..These photographs are the starting point for Lovell, who then translates the images into drawings on walls, using symbols such as hands, birds and empty clothing in heavily layered narrative images, surrounded by antique, found objects. A sense of personal history is incorporated into these assemblages that reflect the artist's African-American heritage. He first began with the faces and hands, imagining the shadows and spirits of former phantom slaves and drew life-size figures on the brown oxidized pine boards of the walls. Then he combines them with artifacts from material culture to evoke the quotidian history of ordinary African-Americans. Respecting the fact that they maintain their self-composure and dignity in their daily lives, he sets aside direct references to racism in order to point to other issues.

He has been using old brood pine wallboards, with their fragments and peeling paint, as the support projects the strength and character of old walls, with their emphatic wood grain and occasional knots. The soft pine naturally yielded to the pressure of black conte crayon as Lovell drew freehand using a classic chiaroscuro technique for the heads and figures he translated from his vintage photographs, by selecting wallboards instead of primed white canvas or heavy paper. The boards have a sensuous reality that contrasts with the immateriality of drawn figures. The effect of the drawn figures is that of apparitions from an older past. The Artifacts: Lovell knows that much of the history of ordinary African-American can be teased from the meanings encoded within the material culture and tactile qualities of the artifacts with which they lived. Furniture, domestic implements, kitchen utensils, pots, tradesmen tools and signs, clothing, quilts, curtains, books, personal adornments, and mementos, bouquets of dried flowers, used suitcases, or guns produce an immediate tension with the illusion of portrait drawings on flat wallboards. He envisions them as part of a larger ensemble, and he always wanted to

[18] Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art-Skunder Boghossian-Number 11/12, Fall/Winter, 2000, p-_85.

de-emphasize the negative meanings associated with *barbed*, the ambiguity as a way to engage the viewer with the drawing.

"There are obvious links between Lovell's tableaux and work by other contemporary artists. Assemblage—the combination of structural artifacts materials— was developed in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s, notably by Robert Rauschenberg and Edward Kienholz, whose influence Lovell acknowledges but his emphasis on figurative themes go beyond assemblage. Another link between Lovell's work and contemporary art practice is the use of photographic images. Political artists in the early 1980s and 1990s used such images, like Antonio Frasconi and Christian Boltanski.[19] The titles in Lovell's work are often terse one-word titles and they help us to connect the illusion drawings and the allusions by artifacts. In many of the faces of Lovell's people we read agency, the will to control and determine their own future. For example, the strong women (fig. 11) *depicted potion in promise*. Lovell has drawn a young woman who stands beside a table, wearing a hat with large rose blooms decorating the bodice of her plain styled dress. She peers at the viewer, some very large material in several colors, but dust surrounds her, and affixed to the wallboards, she stares in the direction of a real hook affixed to the wall, described by Lovell as a mysterious question in contrast to her confident pose. The proud woman in "Potion" provides a similar example. The viewer is left to speculate about the power these potions give her. Are they meant for her friends or her enemies?

We identify with the portrait drawings because they are of people like us. The tension is partly resolved when we allow the artifacts to give the static figures a sense of motion or direction. The artifacts create the striking or dramatic situation of larger, more embracing interpretations. The richness of the result in Lovell's enigmatic tableaux prompt interpretations about aspects of African-American experiences not found elsewhere in contemporary art.

*Ouattara

An Ivory Coast painter, born in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, 1957, Ouattara arrived in New York City in 1988 at the urging of the painter Jean-Michel Basquiat. Ouattara had moved to Paris from Abidjan in 1977 at the age of nineteen. He was familiar with the work of modernist artists like Picasso, Matisse, Miro, and Brancusi, and he saw their work as a mirror reflecting his African cultural heritage back to him along with new European elements. The experience in Paris allowed him to learn new things and to synthesize them with what he had learned in his native Africa. "Ouattara brings an essence of spirituality to his work, and the sense that artists can move beyond the limits of the everyday world.[20] This spirituality works on two levels for Ouattara. He says that the modern world is in the grip of technology and spirituality allows one to better appropriate and take over the technology, to make it more humane. His personal training in spirituality, beginning at the age of seven, gave him an eclecticism that transcends dogma. His vision is the cosmos to be found in his work, *Ouranos*, 1994, meaning "cosmos," which has a globe-like form with a black-and-white figure on either side. Spilling across his canvases are the inscriptions of his eccentric mind: snapshots of preexisting portraits, album covers, shards of mirrors, and bottles on tree branches. The latter evokes the religion of voodoo and the historical transplantation of Africa to the New World (a symbol of Ouattara's own expatriate status from the Ivory Coast). The detritus of life initially seems to be haphazardly placed on his canvases, but after inspection there is no doubt that every part is integral to the whole. "His paintings are large and colorful, based on neo-expressionism but open to contemporary readings.[21] Like Julian Schnabel and David Salle, Ouattara has used neo-expressionism as a means to an end. And as with the Zairean painter "Cheri Samba," his paintings tell stories. This can be seen in the abundance of written words and printed matter found on the works. Words in Arabic, German, English, French, and other languages cut swaths in open fields of blue, yellow, and red. In his work, Ouattara regularly quotes visual elements from African cultures and traditions like Amharic, Bambara, Benin, Dogon, Nok, Senufo, and Zulu. However, he prefers that the viewer free-associate with the imagery in his work rather than ask for explanation.

He has passed discreetly from painting with materials to painting with raw materials. Incorporating pieces of wood, skulls and all sorts of objects into the blues, browns and reds, makes the otherwise underlying animist dimension of his work suddenly spring out. Found materials and artifacts of popular culture work like *objets d' art* on the surfaces of Ouattara's paintings. Although in painting nothing is new, the recycling of such materials on their surfaces marks his works, which create a daunting ambiguity. This apparently awkward

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[19] Hills, Patricia, Whitfield Lovell, recent tableaux, Exhibits DC Moore Gallery, New York, NY, 2000.

[20] Harris, p.-_16.

[21] St-_James Guide To: Black Artists, p.-_405.

quality turns into a simple matter, however, after the viewer has taken in the composition. On the one hand it simply makes visual sense, yet on the other there is a somewhat unrelaxed cosmology of floating symbols, all personal to their creator but all asking the viewer to make something of them. Another work, *"N'Krouma Berlin 1885,"* 1994 (fig. 12), has calligraphic characters from Amharic, an Ethiopian language that developed from Ge'ez, the ancient language of literature and religion. The dates 1885 and 1960 appear several times in the work. The dates may refer to the Berlin conference when European powers completed the colonial partitioning of Africa (except Ethiopia, which was colonized by the Italians for only a decade in the 20th Century) and the end of that colonization, marked by the independence of Nigeria and the Cote d' Ivoire in 1960. Ouattara. describes his paintings as "personal and spiritual documents filled with inscriptions for the world to discern... There are a lot of things going on in them. The narrative qualities offered by the parts of the paintings, for example, break down into the neosurreal interpolation of male/ female, life/death, and all things elemental.[22] The difficulty with this vocabulary is that it seems to be handled so loosely. Because Ouattara's work is so heavy with symbolism, it cultivates an enigma. Nonetheless, Ouattara treads in pop cultural products. The paintings, with their constant references to Dakar in Senegal, Paris, and New York, embrace and redistribute his own international spirit and ideology toward art that creates a natural synthesis between Africa and the West. In the process Ouattara has created documents on the *fin de siecle* globalism of the world's metropolises. Now he divides his time among New York, Paris, and Abidjan. His work has been shown in New York, Paris, and Tokyo. "His experience merely was one of the most notable because he and Basquiat penetrated the hard shell of the gallery/museum world in New York."

***Results**

The African-American has philosophies and aesthetic concepts as well as a mission for the black struggle against international efforts to control their land and economics by Europeans or Euro-Americans. "What used to be the coalition of Black Revolutionary Artists became the African commune of Bad Relevant Artists; They wanted their art to mean something for black people, Art for the people, they reflect the art, and the art is for them, not for the critics." Programmatic, art which deals with concepts that offer positive and feasible solutions to their individual, local, national, and international problems. Modes of Expression, that lend themselves to economical mass production techniques such as "Poster Art", with Art which moves the emotions and appeals to the senses. It uses recent political and social events to teach recognition, control and extermination of the "enemy;" and to project the future which the nation can expect after the struggle is won. The basic tenets would be social content message-oriented art, including traditional African art forms. They decided to work together using different artist ways, or techniques, and experiments in order to reach high levels. Functionalism would be the key for freedom, and "don't keep trying" is the other important key for them. Having essentially no tradition to draw upon, the would-be painters, sculptors and graphic artists set out to establish their artistic community mainly through improvisation and style.

-The titles are very important to the artists and often introduce an element of irony, humor, and subversion, which are both amusing and serious. They also used the forms, and used the Black Woman returning nude in their work as a symbol to reflect the situation of the African-American as a Negro element. The use of symbols within a system of meaning to communicate ideas, traditional African embodies its philosophy to give symbolism which requires reflection and hidden levels of meaning and the symbols are shown large scale and often in bright colors to emphasize the powerful political messages that motivated their creation. Art is not only read between the lines, but also looking behind the symbols.

-There is a mixture between art and a high level of the skill as (craft Revival) quilt and knitting in Modern African patterns of undulating and symbols complete this well crafted work. Free Symmetry—the use of syncopated, rhythmic repetition, constantly changes in color, texture, shapes, form, pattern movement, features. Color is a political statement and property of great complexity and multivalence in contemporary American society concepts, like coolade colors (flair and clothing style of the day—"loud lime, pimp yellows, hot pinks, high-key color clothing"). And swaying geometric images—in twenty-one colors—suggest the syncopated jazz rhythms in music. They may represent black-and-white keyboards or any balance of contrasting values, including light/dark, slow/fast, long/short, happy/sad, high/low. Bright colors with sensibility and harmony. And "shiny" became incorporated into one of the aesthetic principles "Luminosity," and so on. The visual and verbal arts are long roads, just as every musical instrument has its own distinctive character. It has a very personal significance for all African-American people, this double consciousness of the beauty and the political

[22] http://rmc2.library.cornell.edu/contemporaryafricanart/PublicView/default.htm

implications of color has informed their work significantly. They have learned that "to put brush to canvas as a black artist was a political statement. These acts should lead all artists to question critically who paints what, why, and how. This intense questioning altered the nature of their work.

-The images of returnee art often focus on community-oriented challenges that are different from the purely formal exercises commonly found in modern and postmodern art. As the various mediums, dimensions, and hands of the artists, the returnee's meta-modern extension of and challenge to modernism and postmodernism is an unfolding drama. Its vision is formally vivid, ideologically convincing, and psychologically transforming. As returnee artists anchor their visual recollection along the Africana shores of the Middle Passage, their visions and voices intersect like roads and rivers, responding to Langston Hughes's call that "So long/So far away/Is Africa." Finally, Africa is visible in the painting, sculpture, and mixed-media compositions of the creative recollections of returnee artists. With these concepts and the aesthetic principles; the abstract African symbols and design patterns; African-American aesthetic use of bold, glaring, vibrating color, geometric zigzag images, complex design patterns, and African symbols and animal icons in a multi-dominant motif with an African visual perspective. African-American artists endeavored to produce artistic messages that dealt with past, defined the present oppression under which black people lived, or war scenes, ancient and contemporary, occurring throughout the African design patterns, and offered examples for future solutions. The 20's renewed the celebration of pageantry of their collective ethos. She/he will no longer need to avenge personal and collective suffering through art, but will direct his/her energies to articulating the needs, spirituality, direction and values that will liberate or reorient his/her own people and the colonial mind. Yet the traffic of one does not hinder but complements the motion of the other. African-American artists are searching; it signals a time for reviving those ancestral gifts and ancient skills.

-Mimesis at midpoints, design which marks the spot where the real and unreal, the objective and the nonobjective, the plus and the minus meet a point exactly between absolute abstractions and absolute naturalism, visibility, clarity of form and line based on the interesting irregularity one senses in a freely drawn circle or organic object, the feeling for movement, growth, changes, and human touch. They considered their work as a message. It expresses and reflects feelings in their paintings. "The pain of learning that we cannot control our image," a knowledge which "rips and tears at the seams" of the efforts of black people, "to construct self and identity." Their images often make the viewer ask questions about the sources of civilization, and about the boundaries of culture. They also raise questions about how they define themselves and how others define them. Their freedom as artists to create any image, their freedom to change the subject, and the freedom of the artists to express their opinion on what is going around them, each works presents true voice or word to face what is going in the world. Western art is more interested in the final application as a technique, and how to produce the work in its final form. On the other hand, African art is trying to introduce meaning and value.

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Finally I would like to thank Cornell University for giving me the chance to turn an idea into something real and meaningful. And a big thank you to the Mario Einaudi Center and Professor David Lelyveld, the Center's director, for the support, expertise, and inspiration that enabled me to complete this project. I especially want to acknowledge Professor Salah Hassan, who through teaching African-American Art History has given me continual encouragement from the point when this project was an undeveloped idea to where it came together. He has shared this research with the true artist's respect for detail, and introduced me to so many contemporary African American artists. I am grateful that he was willing to stand behind me to give me a chance to make this the highest quality project possible. I would also like to thank the staff of the "NKA" *Journal of Contemporary African Art*, Hanna and Kim, as well as the staff members of the *Fine Arts Library* at Cornell, both of which have been helpful and positive on all occasions during my odyssey from idea to actuality. To every one who helped and supported this project I extend my gratitude. What I really want to say is: "Thanks!"

Afaf K. Elabd

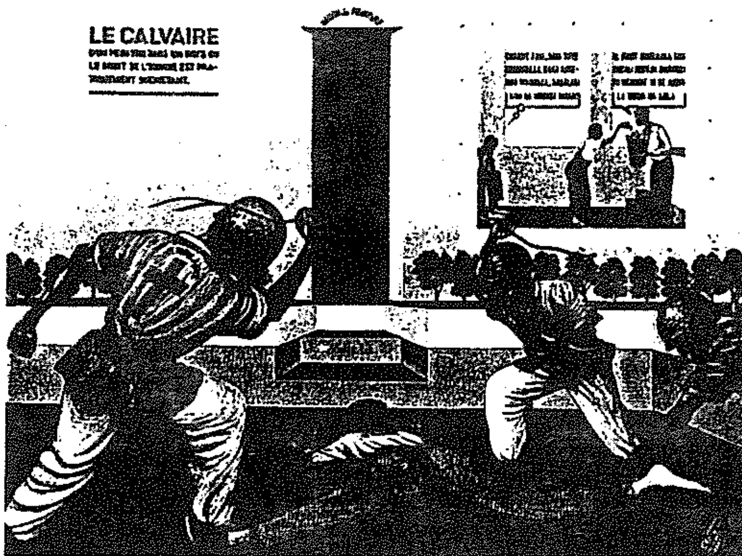

Plate 3. Cheri Samba, Calvary, 1992. Acrylic on canvas,(89 x 116 cm). Annina Nosei Gallery New York.

Plate 1. Benny Andrews,American Gothic,1971.Oil and collage on, canvas5 ft x 4 ft 2 in (1.52 x 1.27 m) Metropolitan Museum of NewYork.

Plate 2.Betye Saar, the liberation of Aunt Jemima, 1972. Mixed media,(29.8 x 30.3 x 6.9 cm) University of California, Berkeley ; purchased with the aid of funds from the National Endowment of Arts.

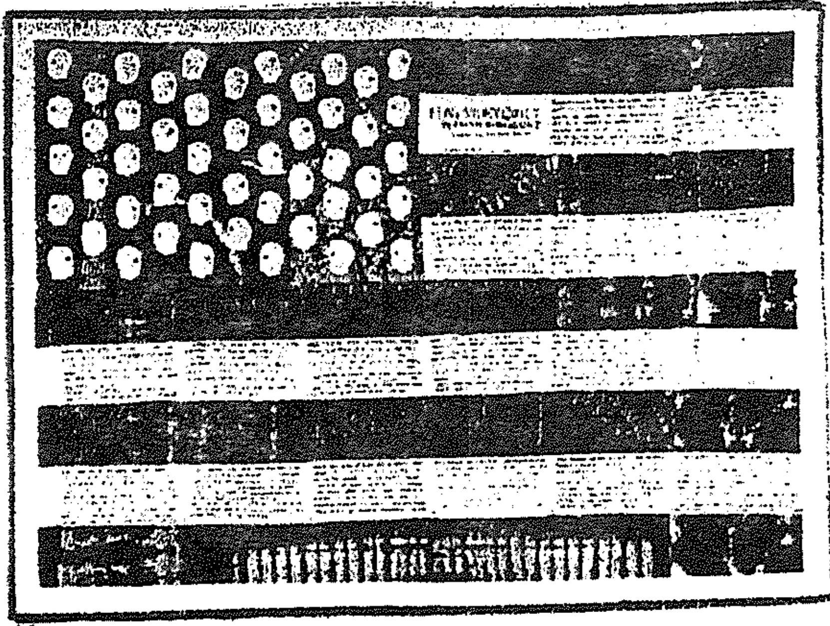

Plate 5.Faith Ringgold; Flage Story Quilt, 1985.Appliquied tie- dyed,and pieced fabric 57x78 in The American collection.

Plate 6.Faith Ringgold ;We Came to America 1997.[74.5x79.5] Aerrylic on canvas,painted and pieced border from series.

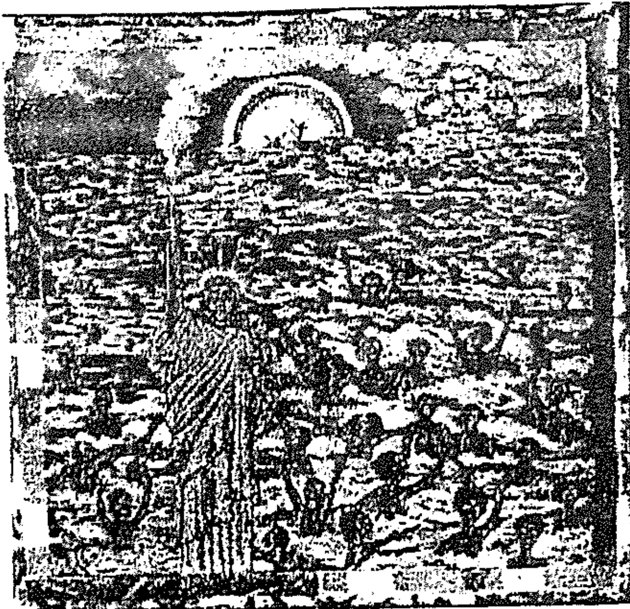

Plate 4.Lois Mailou Jones; Ubi Girl From Tui Region. 1972. acrylic on canvas-collection of the Boston Museum of Fine

Plate 8. Emma Amos ; Will You Forgot Me; 1991; Acrylic on linen canvas with African fabric borders; 64 x 44 in.

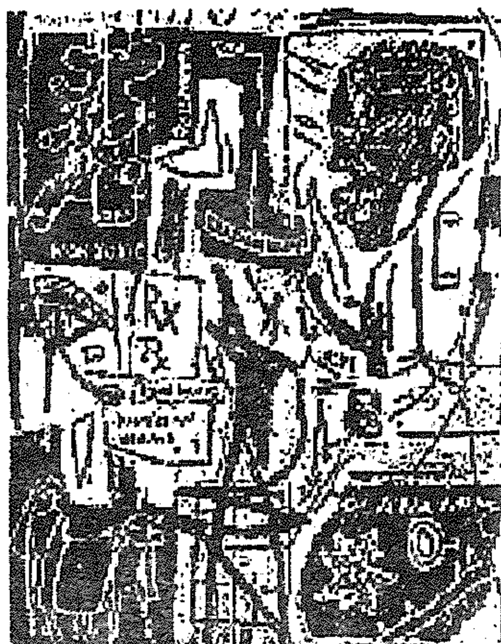

Plate 7.Jean Michel Basquiat ; Melting Point of Ice. 19 84 mixed media.

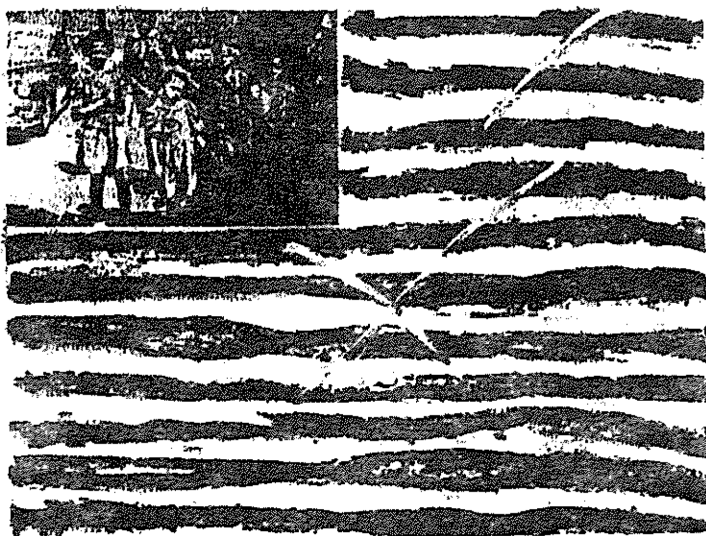

Plate 9.Emma Amos ;Stars and Stripes 1992.1aser transfer photography,oll on paper,edition of six 15 1/2x20 V2in

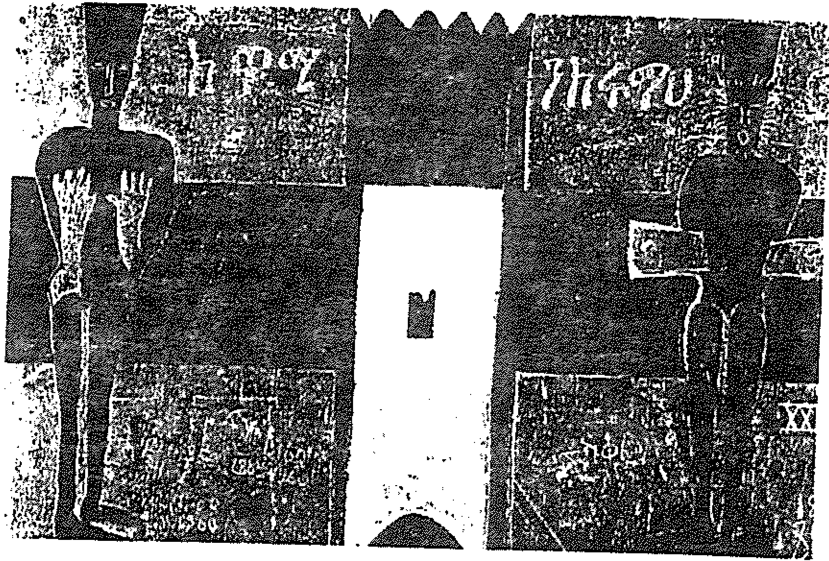

Plate 12.Ouattara ; N' Krouma Berlin , 1 885,1994.Mixed media on canvas- 15 7 1/2x 102 3/8

Plate 10. Skunder Boghossin ;Night Flight of Dread and Delight. 1964 Oil on canvas with collage 56 5/8 x 62 5/8 in. North

Plate I I.Whitfield Lovell; whispers from the walls 1999. Mattie When you Marry charcoal paper,fabric on wood. 84"x56"x 6".

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