



THE ART OF AFRICA -N- AMERICAN ARTISTS



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Less attention has been paid to African-American visual artists than to our counterparts in literature and music, yet our contributions have also been significant in the development of American culture. Beginning with the works of such talented artists as Robert Duncanson, Henry Ossawa Tanner, and Augusta Savage—who did achieve considerable critical acclaim—and continuing with artists of the modern period, such as Horace Pippin, Romare Bearden, Jacob Lawrence, William H. Johnson, Charles White and Elizabeth Catlett, African-American artists have had their works selected for inclusion at major art institutions in America and abroad.

Despite these success stories, African-American artists continued to confront the ongoing issue of exclusion from the cultural mainstream. Theorists and artists have reasoned that a Black aesthetic—a distinguishing mark of Black culture—was required to help the African-American community perceive itself as Black. By the 1960s, Black was not only beautiful, but it also took pride in the legacy of African-American achievement. Identification with all Black peoples spread across the African Diaspora, as did active participation in the social, economic and political improvement of the Black community. Defining African-American art exclusively as cultural productions that facilitated the Black Power Revolution, the adherents of these theories directed African-American artists to work collectively to develop a Black aesthetic for each artistic discipline. Whether the daring juxtapositions of jazz or the biting rhythms of poetry, this Black aesthetic was intended to advance the liberation of African-American self-perception—Black peoples seeing themselves and their world “in terms of their own cultural realities” (Larry Neal, *Black Art and Black Liberation*, 1969).

The relationship between African and African-American art has undergone continual revision since the early twentieth century. Although many contemporary African-American visual artists avoid Afro-centric themes in their work, the seeds planted during the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Liberation movements of the sixties have taken root and been developed by others. For many African-American artists, African art is a manifestation of the African people, created by and belonging to them. African objects evoke an entire culture, from the personal and domestic tasks of daily living to ceremonial rituals. The integration of beauty and function is apparent in chairs, spoons, bowls, cups, knives, and multicolored apparel and jewelry. Wood, bronze, ivory, gold, cloth and copper are some of the materials used in symbols of expression that also served as indicators of power, spirituality or leadership.

The intent of this exhibition is to broaden the discussion about developments in contemporary African-American art-making. (Our thanks to Mark Wentzel for lending pieces from his collection of African art and artifacts to provide context for the work by American artists of African descent.) The evolving relationship between African-American art and the traditional, indigenous arts of Africa raises important questions about the place of African-American art in American culture. Many of the artists represented here—some self-taught, many academically trained—choose to create African-influenced work using Western art-making processes and approaches. Yet the ways in which they incorporate these influences, whether in techniques, materials or subject matter, speak more to the individuality of these artists than to a monolithic aesthetic.

As interest in collecting African-American art grows, these newly sought after contemporary works should assume their rightful place alongside American music and American literature as creative expressions that demonstrate the richness that African-American artists have brought to American culture.

Mutópe J. Johnson, guest curator

PECK SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

Wm. Robert Bucker, Dean

THE INSTITUTE OF VISUAL ARTS

Since 1996, the Institute of Visual Arts (Inova) at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Peck School of the Arts has established an international reputation as a contemporary art research center. The mission of the Institute of Visual Arts is to engage the general and university publics with contemporary art from around the world through exhibitions and programs. Inova is recognized for the high quality of its programs and for the opportunity it offers artists to experiment in the creation of new work.

Bruce Knackert, Director of Galleries
Nicholas Frank, Curator

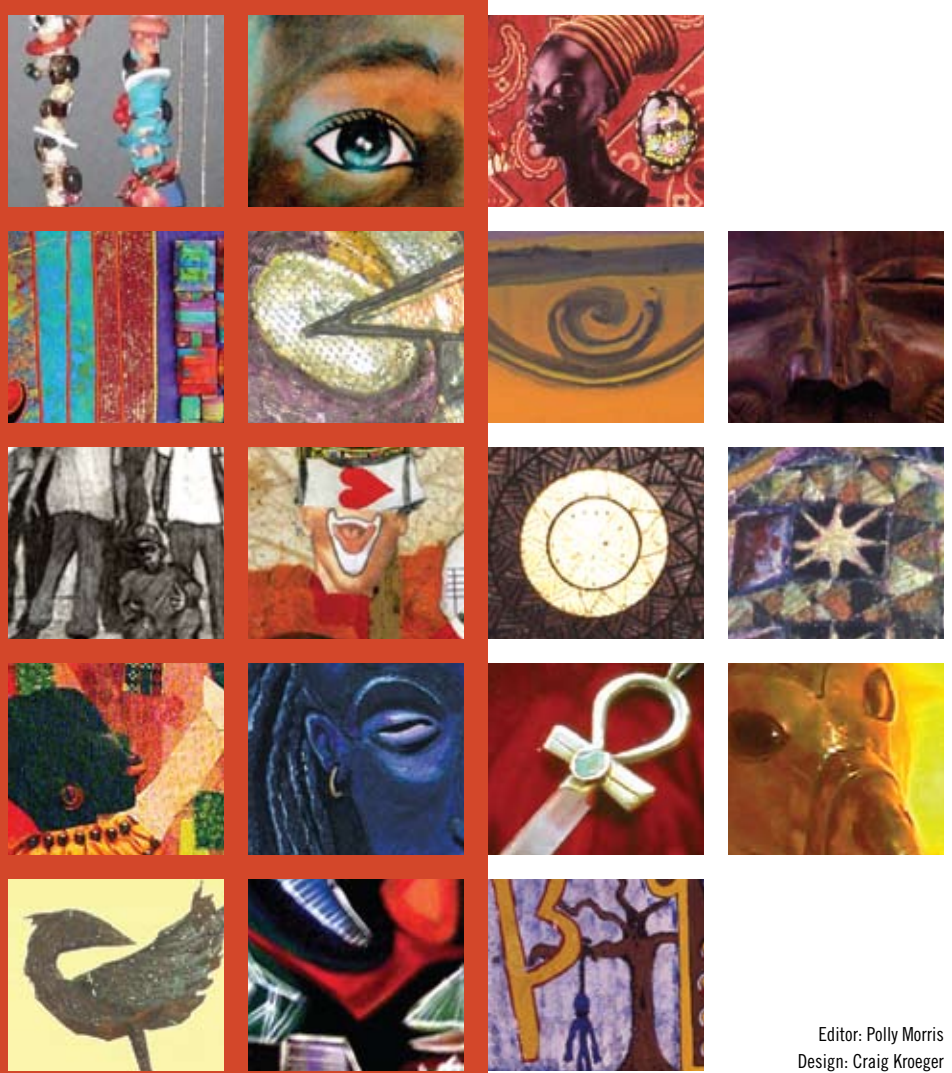
INOVA/ZELAZO

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Zelazo Center for the Performing Arts
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Gallery hours:
Wednesday-Sunday, 12 noon-5 pm
and during select performances
in the Zelazo Center

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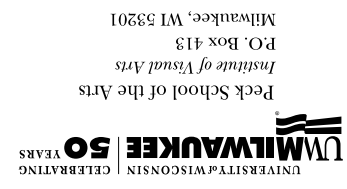
Chokwe Mask from Angola
Courtesy of the Mark Wentzel Collection



February 3-March 4, 2007
Inova/Zelazo (The Mary L. Nohl Galleries)
Opening reception: February 3, 3-5 pm
Gallery talk begins at 3:30 pm.
DAVID ANDERSON
MUNEER BAHAUDDIEN
BLANCHE BROWN
GEOFFREY EDWARDS
CHRYSAL DENISE GILLON
FREDDIE ANTHONY GREEN
CALVIN GREER
SONJI HUNT
MUTÓPE J. JOHNSON
GEORGE RAY MCCORMICK, SR.
RAS AMMAR NSOROMA
SYLVESTER SIMS
KHADIJA M. SMITH
EVELYN PATRICIA TERRY
PATRICK TURNER
DELLA WELLS
SHEAR WINSTON
and selections from the Mark Wentzel Collection
of African art and artifacts

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AMERICAN ARTISTS

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CHRYSTAL DENISE GILLON
Miss Helen's Place, 2006
Assemblage and collage
10 1/2 x 13 1/2 inches



EVELYN PATRICIA TERRY
Wandering Back Memories II, 2005
Mixed media chine-collé monoprint
15 x 11 inches
Courtesy of the Wayne and Theresa Embry Collection

GEORGE RAY McCORMICK, SR.
Sankofa, 2004
Welded steel
6 feet



RAS 'AMMAR NSOROMA
Ancestral Shrine, 2000
Mixed media
14 x 18 inches



CALVIN GREER
Oba's Bowl, 2006
Tatajuba wood
15 inches in diameter



SYLVESTER SIMS
Jelly, 2006
Oil on canvas
36 x 24 inches

SONJI HUNT
Architectural Element I, 2007
Muslin, canvas, acrylic and fabric paint
43 x 38 inches



MUTÓPE J. JOHNSON
Behind the Modern HipKnowsUs, 2004
Watercolor and watercolor pencil on paper
26 1/2 x 38 1/2 inches



DAVID ANDERSON
All Black Men Ain't Thugs, 1999
Pencil
15 1/2 x 19 inches

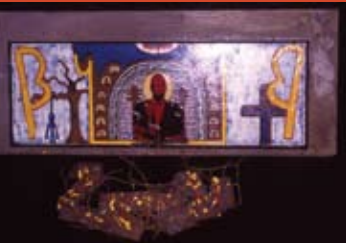


FREDDIE ANTHONY GREEN
Serenity, 2004
Sterling silver, gem turquoise, South Dakota rose quartz

MUNEER BAHAUDDEN
Sankofa, 2006
Ceramic and grout
18 x 18 inches



BLANCHE BROWN
African Woman Sculpture, 2006
Mixed media wall hanging
40 x 15 inches



GEOFFREY EDWARDS
Pentecostal Patriarch, 2006
Mixed media
39 x 25 inches

DAVID ANDERSON

It was the need to communicate that laid the foundation that enabled David Anderson to capture the attention of art lovers across North America, Europe and Africa. Anderson went from being a shy child to having his artistic gift noticed and embraced. According to Anderson, his "God given gift has afforded him opportunities that ordinarily would have never been available to a child growing up on welfare in the inner city of Milwaukee, Wisconsin." Anderson's first national recognition came through the staff at the local Boy's Club. His work has been included in corporate art collections; he has presented his art to dignitaries such as Wade McCree, U.S. Solicitor General under President Jimmy Carter, and celebrated actor James Earl Jones; and he shared a magazine cover with track star Jessie Owens. Nothing has affected Anderson more than the two trips he was blessed to make to Africa, the first trip a gift from the late Brother Booker Ashe formerly of the House of Peace. In 2003, Anderson was commencement speaker at Roosevelt Middle School of the Arts. Anderson has been juried into numerous national art shows including the National Black Arts Festival, Atlanta, Georgia, for a total of six times. Anderson no longer uses the term "self taught" to describe himself. Instead, he considers himself "God prepared," or a visionary creating visual statements in a unique style deeply rooted in the will of God. Anderson has been described as a "Blues artist" because of the strength of emotion his compositions evoke. "People have said that they can feel the joy and pain, witness the social injustice, and see history and heritage in them."

MUNEER BAHAUDDEN

Muneer Bahaudden was born in Chicago and grew up in Michigan. He earned his B.F.A. from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and moved to Milwaukee in 1990. Adroitly incorporating and transforming commonplace objects such as hair, bottles, discarded pencils, scrap metal, nails, cloth, paper, and anything with the spiritual energy to speak to him, this award-winning artist reflects the African Diaspora in his installations, table surfaces, assemblages, original prints, ceramic murals and sculpture. Bahaudden's work is part of several prestigious private and public collections, including that of the City of Milwaukee. He created a public art sculpture for the City of Chicago and an installation for the African Exhibition—on permanent display at the Field Museum of Chicago. In 2000, he received a public art commission from the Neighborhood Millennium Art Initiative in Milwaukee to create Sacred Grove in the Metcalfe Park area. Bahaudden feels artists are prophets, artists are historians, and artists are scientists found in every facet of civilization. His objective is to contribute to and sustain the total human family by the preservation of an African-American aesthetic, by collaborating with his ancestors and contemporaries, and by creating and disseminating works with universal themes that stress one humanity.

BLANCHE BROWN

Blanche Brown celebrates African-American women in both simple and extravagant ways, using oils, pastels, acrylics, charcoal and abstract sculpture in her work. "African-American women have an inner beauty that comes from life experiences that have made them strong, resourceful survivors," observes Brown. "We are creative, innovative, and adaptable." The African-American women in her compositions move and express themselves freely. A firm believer in working from both sides of the brain, Brown also draws on her experience with technology to create work. She believes that technology is a continuum that can be expressed in concrete and abstract ways. She explores the use of objects and materials such as metal and fabric, various shapes, geometry and structure to visually display technology. Her use of shapes represents technology's unconventional and changing nature, and her use of found objects represents the creative and the practical. As an artist, Brown's goal is to convey the intelligence, culture and uniqueness of the African-American woman.

GEOFFREY EDWARDS

Geoffrey Edwards, visual artist, poet, and percussionist, was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He received his B.S. from Jackson State University in Mississippi where he majored in psychology and minored in fine art. Though he received no formal training in fine arts prior to attending Jackson State, it was during these undergraduate years that he began to learn of the healing potential in the creative process. Since then he has invested most of his time working and helping others to learn to use art therapeutically. Edwards has created a large body of work in various media including ceramics, gourds and mixed media. He has also worked collaboratively with other Milwaukee artists on several murals throughout the city. Edwards is currently pursuing his master's degree in art therapy at Mount Mary College in Milwaukee. He lives in with his wife Jamea, a fellow artist, and their two sons.

CHRYSTAL DENISE GILLON

The third daughter in a family of four girls and scarce means, Chrystal Denise Gillon grew up familiar with hand-me-downs. Her father could fix anything using the most unlikely objects. This stimulated Gillon's imagination and aptitude for breathing life into unusual and discarded objects. Gillon's parents divorced when she was twelve, and she, her mother and sisters moved in with her maternal grandmother. She was nurtured in an environment that encouraged self-development, creativity and reading. Her mother taught each of her daughters to knit, sew, crochet and embroider. These experiences laid the foundation for Gillon's eclectic approach to combining media in her work: "It's so natural for me to use torn paper in my charcoal drawings, silkscreen techniques with dry pastels in creating African patterns and paper doll cutouts with xerox transfers, beads, thread and found objects to create my *Boo Babies* and assemblages." Gillon received a B.A. in Art Education from Alverno College and a B.F.A. from the Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design. She has participated in numerous exhibitions and her work is included in both private and corporate collections.

FREDDIE ANTHONY GREEN

Born in 1953 in Peoria, Illinois, Freddie Anthony Green (also known as the Crystal Machine) is of African/Native American ancestry. A custom lapidist and metal fabricator currently resident in Milwaukee, Green's artistic career began in 1983 with the formation of Meta-Jewelry Designs, Inc. His work combines natural gemstones and minerals with sacred geometry. By utilizing sacred geometry and universal symbols like the ankh, pyramids and eagle feathers, Green shares the cultural significance of his African and Native American heritage with the public. Many of the stones and minerals used in the work were personally excavated by Green and his family. (Through his personal mining expeditions he has collected one of the finest mineral specimen collections in the Midwest.) Green's work has been in the Chicago Field Museum as well as in venues in Sedona, Arizona and Hollywood. He was a featured artist for the opening of the Luxor Hotel in Las Vegas.

CALVIN GREER

Calvin Greer's love of woodwork is evident in his creations. He masterfully interprets the texture, color and form of the wood to awaken its inner beauty, while intricately detailing the art form to an exquisite finish. The aura of beauty, warmth and spiritual energy that Greer's woodwork radiates simply compels one to touch, hold and feel the object. Greer is self-taught in the craft of woodturning, but his artistic ability comes from his training in stained glass and photography. A custom furniture-maker for ten years before concentrating exclusively on wood art forms, Greer's approach to woodturning couples spontaneous emergence with his innate ability and skill. The result is a series of unique, free flowing forms embellished with carvings and inlays. Greer relishes creating art work that calls forth his ancestral lineage and the cultures of ancient Africa—the Benin, Ife, Nok, Kimit and Songhay. His work reflects cultures shaped by both Africa and the New World. Thus, his art must be understood in the context of three creative streams: Africa, the New World and the artist's own creative vision.

SONJI HUNT

Sonji Hunt has always loved to paint: "It is my way of translating the world around me into something meaningful." She views her everyday physical surroundings and experiences through fragmented lenses, deconstructing what she sees and then reassembling it into something else. These shapes tell a story. Movement, color and texture are central to her work: her giant iconic leaves and pods travel through environments and situations in her visual dialogues. A painter and fabric artist, Hunt received her B.F.A. and M.F.A. degrees in Drawing and Painting from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. She has taught at various colleges and universities in the Midwest. Most recently, she has exhibited in Ohio, Tennessee, Massachusetts, Arkansas and Wisconsin and her work has been published in several books about art and creativity.

MUTÓPE J. JOHNSON

Mutópe Johnson uses the medium of visual art to create works that speak to the human condition: "Capturing the tone of that condition is what inspires me to paint." The human figure, whether treated in a group portrait or as an individual, remains his favored subject. His exuberant, expressive, indigo-hued watercolor compositions place characters against strongly patterned backgrounds. Johnson's figurative paintings provide an important link between the Social Realist tradition that emerged from the Harlem Renaissance and contemporary African-American artmaking. Johnson received his B.F.A. from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. He is a member of ABEA (African-American Artists Beginning to Educate Americans About African-American Art), the League of Milwaukee Artists, the

City of Milwaukee Arts Board and the board of directors of the Milwaukee Art Museum's African-American Art Alliance. Johnson is represented by Greer Oaks Gallery and Peltz Gallery in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and Susan Woodson Gallery in Chicago, Illinois.

GEORGE RAY McCORMICK, SR.

Born in Vicksburg, Mississippi in 1944, George Ray McCormick, Sr. has lived in Milwaukee since 1950. A self-taught folk artist, McCormick's work ranges from doll making, painting and wood carving to sculptures in cast bronze and welded steel. McCormick has participated in two public art commissions awarded to artist and friend Evelyn Patricia Terry: as an apprentice at Vanguard Sculpture Services, he helped to fabricate several of the sixteen welded steel panels for *Kindred Ties* and later in his own studio he fabricated all twelve sculptures for *Giving Gifts*. In 2004, McCormick was commissioned to create West African Adinkra symbols for the Marquette Interchange Project on the Walnut Street Bridge. Selected exhibitions include the Charles Allis Art Museum's *External Traditions* (Milwaukee); Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry's *Black Creativity*; the Smithsonian Institution's 1998 National Folk Art Festival in Washington, D.C.; and a solo exhibition at the Garden Room in Milwaukee. He has work in the White House Collection and has several national awards including first place in the 1995 Holiday of Black Doll Festival, Columbus, Ohio and a purchase award at the 2003 Kentuck Art Festival, Northport, Alabama. McCormick's welded steel pieces are inspired by the blacksmiths of African descent. *Sankofa* and *Fighting Cocks* reflect his interest in African and African-American symbolism.

RAS 'AMMAR NSOROMA

Artist Ras 'Ammar Nsoroma is a native of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. 'Ammar began to pursue an art career while still in high school, collaborating and completing his first outdoor mural at age seventeen. After graduating from the Milwaukee High School of the Arts, he attended both the Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. To date, he has completed over fifty murals in cities including Los Angeles, Chicago and Washington, D.C. Also an accomplished portraitist and studio artist, 'Ammar began to incorporate an African aesthetic into his studio practice early on. Working mainly figuratively in mixed media painting (including sand glitter and chalk), 'Ammar's work has been included in exhibitions in Chicago, Minneapolis and throughout Wisconsin. Whether drawing inspiration from Haitian Voodoo or the Orisha, 'Ammar makes strong use of the rich cultural and spiritual symbolism of the African Diaspora.

SYLVESTER SIMS

Sylvester Sims is not only one of Milwaukee's most accomplished artists, he is also a part of Milwaukee's Black history. As an athlete, Sims competed in swimming (high diving), weightlifting, and amateur boxing. He also ran track and played semi-professional football. The winner of many athletic competitions and championships in the 1940s, Sims blazed a trail for the Black athletes who followed. In the early 1940s Sims attended the Layton School of the Arts in Milwaukee, where he studied watercolor under Earl Gesser. Sims continued to educate himself as an artist and now works in all media. Sims has shown extensively in and around Milwaukee, participating in exhibitions at the Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Mother Kathryn Daniels Conference Center, the Alfons Gallery and Greer Oaks Gallery, among others, and as far away as Birmingham, Alabama and Washington, D.C. Corporate collections include: Miller Brewing Company, Reynolds Aluminum, MacDonald's, Ponderosa, and Wisconsin Lutheran, where he produced art for a modern day Bible.

KHADIJA M. SMITH

Khadija Smith was born in Youngstown, Ohio, where her passion for art began to flourish. She sold her first painting, *Morning Mist*, at age twelve to a local news anchorwoman for \$35. After being accepted by the Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design, she realized that she had something to share with the world. Unexpected events made it difficult for her to attend MIAD, but they did not keep her from pursuing her career in art. Smith reached a milestone after turning thirty: she began to tap deeper into who she was as an artist and to understand why creating art made her extremely passionate. Although her past work was inspired by life-changing experiences, her current paintings draw on traditional African masks, their geometry and detailed carvings, and their ceremonial and tribal meanings. Smith uses bold hues—orange, blue and burnt red—in her mask-based paintings. By employing colors that are bursting with energy and life, Smith remakes the mask and brings new life to each piece. Khadija Smith continues to create art that speaks to the soul and stimulates the mind.

EVELYN PATRICIA TERRY

Evelyn Patricia Terry is a full-time professional artist who also lectures, writes about art, curates exhibitions and mentors other artists. Born in Milwaukee in 1946, she has lived here ever since (with the exception of two years spent in Tallahassee, Florida). She earned B.F.A. and M.S. degrees from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and an M.F.A. from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She has shown internationally, including a solo exhibition in Moscow, and has work in over 400 private, corporate, university and museum collections throughout the United States, Germany, and Japan—most notably, the Patrick & Beatrice Haggerty Museum of Art at Marquette University, the Milwaukee Art Museum and West Bend's Museum of Wisconsin Art. Her commissions include the Midwest Convention Center's John J. Burke Family Collection and twelve paintings for the 1989 Miller Brewing Company's *Calendar of Greats*. Terry's awards include the Milwaukee County Individual Artist Fellowship and the Intermedia Arts/McKnight Interdisciplinary Fellowship as well as two public art commissions, *Kindred Ties* and *Giving Gifts*. Terry's interest in printmaking began in 1968. *Wandering Back Memories II* and *Ancestral Memories: Wandering Back I* are mixed media monoprints in which she explores her African ancestry through design motif and chine-collé, a printmaking process.

PATRICK TURNER

Patrick Turner's collage works are based on the daily abstract realities of life that he has observed. "Our minds are fascinating," notes Turner. "My collages remind me of puzzles, bits and pieces of thoughts assembled together in a fashionable exchange of ideas that aspire to new levels and mysterious destinations." Turner's collages are in a constant state of change, the end result unknown until he has used the resources that he has on hand at the moment and there is no more to add—unless an inventive, surprising idea comes to mind. Turner uses found papers from books, sheet music, photos, papers that he has modified, lost letters that may reveal a secret passion, playing cards that represent the "games of chance" that we sometimes pursue. The blending of the past and the present creates a feeling of nostalgia, but these found objects add a layer of meaning that contributes to a more profound presence for works that Turner also imbues with charm and personality.

DELLA WELLS

Della Wells has exhibited her work throughout the United States and Italy. Venues include the Hurn Museum of Contemporary Folk Art in Savannah, Georgia and in Italy, The Kentuck Festival in Northport, Alabama, the Outsider Fair in New York, The Outsider Gallery in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Mark Wooley Gallery in Portland Oregon, Harmony Gallery in Hollywood, California, the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago, Illinois, the Ridgefield Guild Of Artists in Ridgefield, Connecticut, and Tag Gallery in Nashville, Tennessee. Wisconsin venues include the John Michael Kohler Art Center, the Anderson Art Center, the Charles Allis Museum, David Barnett Gallery, Peltz Gallery, the Museum of Wisconsin Art, Katie Gingrass Galley, Walker's Point Center for the Arts and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Union Art Gallery. Wells is also a recipient of an award from the Greater Milwaukee Foundation's Mary L. Nohl Suitcase Export Fund. "*Hold Up Thy Past So You Can Give Birth to Your Future*" pays homage to Wells's African heritage and its importance in understanding who she is. The mask represents that African heritage, the fertility dolls represent the new birth of self-awareness, and the dancers celebrate both the past and the future. The future cannot exist without the past and the past cannot be without a future.

SHEAR WINSTON

Shear Winston, a Milwaukee-based multi-media artist and jeweler, won city art awards in elementary school. He later attended Roosevelt Middle School of the Arts where he further cultivated his artistic interests, and graduated from Washington High School where he took advantage of their computer specialty classes. Winston studied engineering at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and then co-founded Quality Craft Amber Kingdom. He and his fellow artists traveled to art festivals and events throughout the United States, teaching and making quality handcrafted art available to the public. Winston studies African history and current events, and this serves as a spiritual inspiration in his daily life. Using the best of African traditional wisdom, he has gained a good understanding of contemporary African-centered art forms. The African-influenced work on display is handcrafted from silver, copper and brass metals set with semi-precious and precious stones.