



Art Celebrating Cultural Richness Resulting from the African Diaspora

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by Pat Rogers

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SETAUKET, NY-

Too often, in looking at the tragic consequences of centuries of oppression, slavery, segregation and heinous violations of human rights, the tremendous artistic legacy of the African Diaspora either fades from view or is ignored altogether.

In a bid to rectify this kind of unfortunate oversight, "A Celebration of Color," the current exhibition at Gallery North in Setauket, presents works that offer a vibrant look at creative responses and artistic sensibilities shaped by this historic racial uprooting. In recognition of Black History Month, Gallery North invited eight artists of color to participate in a show celebrating the art, history, and cultural richness that has resulted from the African Diaspora.

Robert Carter, Francks Déséus, Stephanie Dinkins, James Hoston, Nontsikelelo Mutiti, Phillip Smallwood, Ann Tanksley, and Emmett Wigglesworth are all contemporary artists whose heritage is visible in the works they create.

"This exhibition is the work of exceptional artists with strong qualifications, they are a well-seasoned group whose work reflects the diverse cultural heritage of the Diaspora and immigrant experience," said Gallery North Director Judith Levy.

On Sunday, Feb. 24, starting at 3 p.m., Dinkins, Hoston, Smallwood and Tanksley will discuss their inspirations and artistic process as part of the ArTalk@GalleryNorth series.



"On the Other Hand" by Emmett Wigglesworth. Acrylic on canvas,
5 x 6 feet. Photo by Jeff Foster.

East Setauket artist Fred Badalamenti described "A Celebration of Color" as an exhibition not to be missed in a recent essay.

Badalamenti is a member of the Artists Advisory Council at Gallery North and a former Deputy

Chairman of the Art Department and Director of Graduate Art Studies at Brooklyn College. He has also served as Visiting Artist and teacher of drawing and painting at Stony Brook University.

In his review, Badalamenti writes:

"...The jubilant paintings of Wigglesworth are among the keynotes of this show. The artist's rhythms of color and themes define powerful forces of imagery unconfined by heritage or modernity and are compelled by magnificent internal energies. Carter's portrayals offer renditions of rare skill and sentiment drawn on the dignity, grace, and soulfulness of his black subjects. Of equal distinction are five mixed-media prints by Tanksley—each astonishingly opulent—and all richly beguiling as a series.

Smallwood deserves high praise for the poignant and evocative skills of his watercolors, which reveal his gift for portraiture and the intimacies of black life and family. The enchantments of vision are ardently displayed in the videos of Dinkins; one of these previewed offered a mesmerizing experience of subtle movements, gestures of reflection, and artful imagination.

Without exception, the visitors to Gallery North will enjoy a boundless measure of delectations, creativity, and spirit from the eight artists represented in this special exhibition.

The advancement by immigrants into professions of culture and achievement is evident in all quarters of American life. None is indifferent, however, to daunting legacies in foreign oppression, slavery, impoverishment, and streams of indignity and mischief for all generations. It is a story of human history, of community salvation and faith, and of individual risings."



"Mid-Day#5" by Francks Décéus. Acrylic on canvas, 24 x 30 inches. Photo by Jeff Foster.

"Celebration of Color" opened on Feb 15 and remains on view through March 17. So far, the exhibition has been well received by viewers, according to Gallery North.

"This exciting exhibition has drawn a new audience for Gallery North," said Levy. "Visitors to the gallery have repeatedly expressed their fascination and delight upon viewing this animated and joyful exhibition."



"Shopping" by Robert Carter. Mixed media, 24 x 17 inches. Photo by Jeff Foster.

Following are a few of the ways each exhibiting artist connects to the experience of displacement through immigrant or the African American experience and how it impacts their work.

Robert Carter received his MFA from the Pratt Institute and plies his artistic talents as a painter, designer, illustrator and art educator. His mixed media portraits explore “connections with social circumstances from the African American perspective,” according to Gallery North.

Francks Décéus, a Haitian immigrant who grew up in Brooklyn, found it difficult to maintain both an identity as a Haitian and a New Yorker, creating a constant struggle with identity and acceptance. He states “the time period following major social events, crises, and upheavals is particularly interesting to me; because at these crucial moments we come together, regardless of ethnicity, gender, or class.” His work has been prominently exhibited around the country and he has been profiled in the International Review of African American Art as “one of the leading young modern painters of his generation, whose work depicts a high degree of sensitivity to social issues and his culture”

Stephanie Dinkins uses video and organic and found materials to create her sculptures and installations. She uses her work to “carve out space, both physical and mental, for the careful (re)consideration of the peoples, places, things, and ideas that are often swept under the rug of the American psyche in the name of sorrow, shame, power, or pride.” She received her MFA from Maryland Institute College of Art and currently is an Associate Professor and MFA Director at Stony Brook University.

James Hoston, a renowned illustrator who has worked with both Jeff Koons and Marvel Comics originally hails from Freeport, Long Island. He received his MFA from the New York Academy of Art and now teaches at his alma mater and at the Pratt Institute. He has been exhibited and well received across the United States and Europe.

Nontsikelelo Mutiti received her diploma from the Zimbabwe Institute of Visual Arts and her MFA from Yale University. She is a multimedia artist who explores everyday life. In her own words: “It begins with an image from my world, a very ordinary and familiar scene...Signs can be read from the surfaces of garments, containers and tools. The forms of the things themselves...Relying on modules of different kinds I continue to explore the complexity of cultural signifiers.”

Phillip Smallwood is a figurative watercolorist known for his “Lifescapes”, a powerful blend of portraiture and visual narrative. His work has received high honors such as Best in Show at the International Art Expo in Philadelphia and first prize in a New Jersey Watercolor Society Exhibition. He has also been awarded a Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition for his work related to the Art of Soul Exhibition in Bergen County, New Jersey.

Ann Tanksley takes inspiration from her travels following the African Slave trade, the writings of Zora Neale Hurston, and the music of Thelonious Monk. She has received numerous honors and awards for her paintings and prints. Her work is in many prestigious permanent collections including the Studio Museum in Harlem, the National Museum of Woman in the Arts, and the Hewitt Collection of African-American Art.

Emmet Wigglesworth is primarily a muralist whose art has graced the cultural landscape of New York City since 1958. His abstracted and colorful paintings feature motifs symbolic of African culture and figures that personify humanity, spirituality, power, and beauty. In his own words: “The enhancement of humanity gives life and talent meaning, it’s my hope and prayer that by using my talent in a functional way, I can remind humanity of the need to search for, and put into practice, spiritual truth.”



“Iconology” by Stephanie Dinkins. Photograph. Courtesy Gallery North.

BASIC FACTS: “A Celebration of Color” remains on view through March 17, 2013 at Gallery North, 90 North Country Road, Setauket, NY 11733. www.gallerynorth.org.

Featured artists in “A Celebration of Color” are: Robert Carter, Francks Déséus, Stephanie Dinkins, James Hoston, Nontsikelelo Mutiti, Phillip Smallwood, Ann Tanksley, and Emmett Wigglesworth.

ARTISTS’ TALK: Four exhibiting artists will present a talk on their inspirations and artistic process on Sunday, Feb 24, from 3 to 5 pm. Participating artists are Stephanie Dinkins, James Hoston, Philip Smallwood, and Ann Tanksley. The presentation is part of the gallery’s ArTalk@GalleryNorth series. For reservations or information, email info@gallerynorth.org, or call 631-751-2676.

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