



GRIOTS' GALLERY  
AND ACADEMY

**GRIOT'S GALLERY AND ACADEMY**

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EXHIBITION OCTOBER 22ND, 2016

# Griots' Gallery Inaugural Exhibition Catalog Essay

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Another gallery? Why here? Why Now? Miami has enjoyed spectacular growth as a visual arts destination. Seemingly there is a gallery simply a stone's throw away from every corner. The Design District has moved north into Little Haiti. Several galleries have established "beachheads" north of 82nd Street. These galleries are appearing without any specific connection to the neighborhoods or communities in which they now reside.

This growth spurt in visual arts venues has been irregular and not inclusive of all segments of the community. Miami is a polyglot, diverse community that draws people around the world with many émigrés from Central and South America and Africa. It also has a large indigenous people of Native Americans and African Americans. However, Black diaspora art and artists are one of the segments that is insufficiently represented. Too often the mainstream arts community is focused on the "tried and true" and promote artists that have established pedigrees and track records. There is frequently little room for the exceptional or the experimental.

The Gallery and Academy:

will provide a differing curatorial perspective from the mainstream arts community, recapturing the humanity of those who are often discarded, forgotten and marginalized.

will address the specific deficits related the underrepresentation of black diaspora artists and their accomplishments that have gone unnoticed and unacknowledged.

will serve as an agent of change and development for this community, directing our attention internally to the neighborhood as well as outwardly to the greater Miami Arts Community.

will serve as a resource for this neighborhood and the larger community.

will provide an intimate setting where residents can feel welcome, comfortable, and encouraged to participate in the arts.

will provide validation to the fact that art is not an elitist preoccupation, but a key voice for human self-expression.

will provide opportunity to encourage experimentation, reimagine identities, and activate liberation.

will help residents develop an expanded worldview that informs them that they can be much more than they currently are.

will showcase the diversity of the black art diaspora and help our communities imagine the possibilities that can lead to fulfilling forms or identity and being, showing that art is essential to their lives, not peripheral.

will assist our neighborhood in telling its truths and singing its songs.

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Internally we must reveal the community to itself. Who are we? How did we come to be? Where do we go from here? Though we have many often-inchoate thoughts, diaspora artists provide the visualization and the incarnation of those thoughts so that subsequently they can be recognized and resolved.

“The health of a community is proportional to the depth of its artistic development.”

Samella Lewis, *Black Artists on Art* Volume

Externally, we will create critical conversations with mainstream venues and establish a more visible presence in that community that challenges current cultural paradigms and grapples with ideas of agency, perspective, aesthetic choices and strategies of presentation and communication.

When visual images were/are presented to an external community, blacks were frequently presented as cartoons or caricatures. We must replace images that inadequate to express our full humanity. The record must be corrected.

**“...Using art for the thing that it does best, which is to create human portraits and communicate ideas and forge a climate where people of different races or classes are known to you because they make themselves known. In the simplest terms, art humanizes. It opens the circuit of empathy. And once that process happens, it’s that much harder to think of people as a statistic. Art reverses the alienation that can creep into society.”**

**“Does Black Culture Need to Care What Happens to Hip Hop?”**

Vulture.com MY 27, 2014

Questlove (The Roots)

To support these efforts it is essential that we expand the notion of what is considered to be black art. In its simplest form, black art is art produced by black artists. In many circles, this production is reduced to artwork where there is some evidence of black content/presence in the works produced. Black artists have created remarkable art without any overt indication of their ethnicity or cultural background. We would like to correct this common, but misinformed opinion that “blackness” must be evident in black artistic production.

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As a gallery and academy we support black diaspora arts through cultural programming that will include the following activities:

- Providing exhibition space for artists who will share and discuss their art
- Developing collectors and connoisseurs for the art,
- Educating and informing the public about the breadth and depth of this art,
- Teaching techniques that are essential to preserving and conserving the art as material artifacts,
- Capturing and archiving the history of the artistic production,
- Stimulating appropriate analysis, criticism and interpretation of these works
- Supporting critical conversations throughout greater Miami related to this field,
- Encouraging black diaspora art research and related scholarly production
- Training and Educating Students for careers/employment in the art industry, and
- Expanding the definition of black art

#### Griots' Gallery and Academy Core Collection Description

The Griots' Gallery and Academy has a core collection of artwork that provides a broad sampling of Black Diaspora art. This core is reflective of the collection efforts of a married couple over the past twenty years. It has more than 700 works and represents over 200 artists. It contains a broad cross-section of black diaspora artistic production—media, styles, geographic distribution, eras, artists, etc.

**Media:** Oils, Acrylics, Drawings, Watercolors, Mixed Media, Etchings/Engraving, Collage, Sculpture, Photographs, and Prints

**Styles:** Cubist, Vernacular, Art Brut, Abstract, Figurative Abstract, Abstract Expressionist, Landscape Abstract, Still Life, Proto-afrofuturist, and Magical Realist

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**Geography:** America, Africa, Haiti, Caribbean, and South America

**Artists:** Old Masters, Emerging, Mid-Career, and Contemporary

**Eras:** Mid 20th Century to the Present

This core collection highlights black diaspora art production from a variety of perspectives and showcases its breadth and depth.

Through art, we work in a space of imagination. Imagination allows us to envision a range of future possibilities and thus guide us into that future. Through the arts we can review our history and place ourselves in it. We can re-conceptualize the past in ways that assist us in moving forward. We offer the community ways of seeing and being that more closely resonates with their lived existence than they are provided from the commonly expressed western canon.

**Welcome to Griots' Gallery and Academy!**

Please take the journey with us--Enjoy and Learn.

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# Al Johnson

- Al Johnson, Jr. is a man of many talents-illustrator, portraitist, fine artist, and educator. He has worked as a storyboard artist on numerous feature films and has received significant public commissions. He was the official portraitist for the Shirley Chisholm portrait on display in Brooklyn's Borough Hall and has provided original renderings for the Georgia Aquarium.
- Mr. Johnson uses his formal training and techniques in combination with his innate creativity to present multi-layered, complex images. His works give up their secrets slowly and only after multiple viewings. There is almost always something more to be discovered.



*The Remover of Obstacles*

Artist: Al Johnson, Jr.  
Medium: Giclee on Arches Paper  
Size: 20 X 20



*Our Struggles Recharged*

Artist: Al Johnson, Jr.  
Medium: MM on Canvas  
Size: 64 X 64

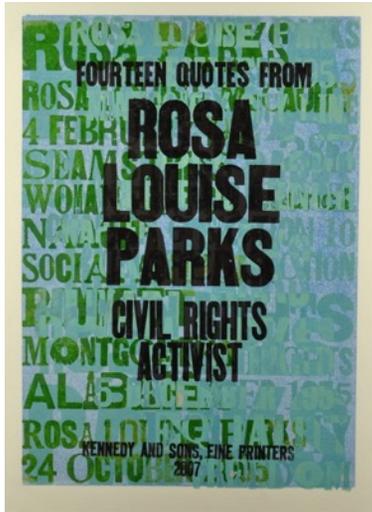


*False Idol*

Artist: Al Johnson, Jr.  
Medium: Mixed Media Collage  
Size: 24 X 24

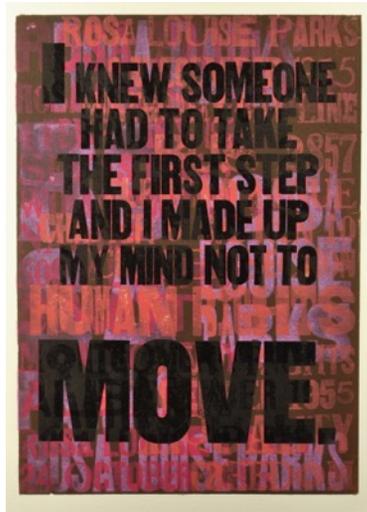
# Amos Paul Kennedy Jr.

- Amos Paul Kennedy Jr. is a computer programmer turned printmaker. He received an MFA in printmaking from the University of Wisconsin. He is very much concerned about race as a key issue of our time and reflects this concern through his personal choice of themes and subjects. He also wishes to reconnect people with the art of the poster where he articulately amplifies the power of the spoken word and the visual image when they are combined. In this collection, he highlights quotes of Rosa Parks that shows the breadth and depth of her thought and her lifelong commitment to a variety of social justice issues.



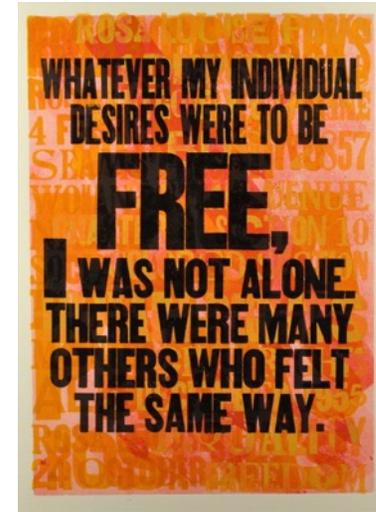
*Rosa Park Series*

Artist: Amos Paul Kennedy Jr.  
Medium: Print  
Size: 21 X 15½



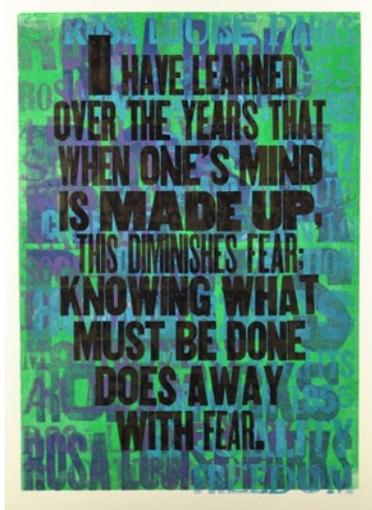
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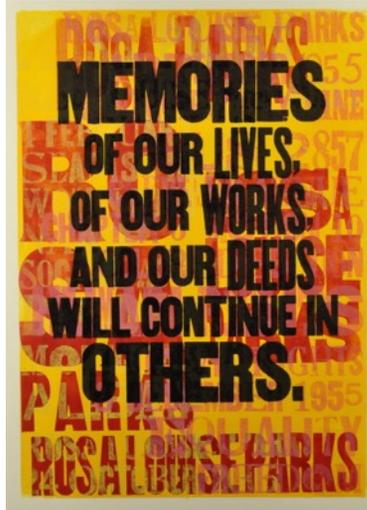
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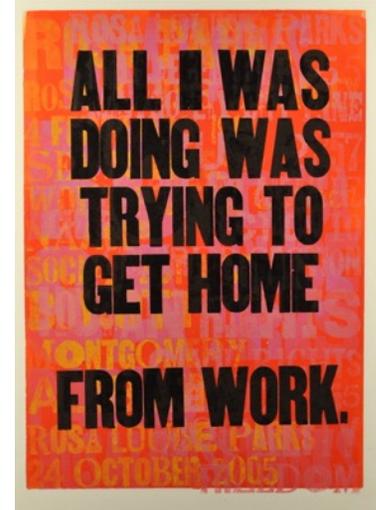
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# Beverly Buchanan

- Beverly Buchanan is a well-known African American artist who is renowned for her exploration of southern vernacular architecture including "shacks", shotgun houses, sharecropper cabins, outhouses, etc. She also includes the surroundings of these rural constructions to include flowers, gardens, and yards.



*Untitled (Flowers)*

Artist: Beverly Buchanan  
Medium: Pastel on Board  
Size: 14 X 17

# Brenda Joysmith

- Brenda Joysmith is an artist from Tennessee who spent more than two decades in California before returning to her home state. Her artwork captures the myriad ways African Americans live their lives in positive life affirming ways, not as victims of distress and disaster. Like her name, her art shows joy.
- She depicts black life with a strong southern sensibility that recalls the rural roots that many share. She captures children at play, women quilting, men watching in a world of porches and gardens—all of the ordinary activities that bind our communities together.



*Wishes and Willows*

Artist: Brenda Joysmith  
Medium: Giclee  
Size: 12 X 16

# Cal Massey

- Cal Massey is one of the few artists who has been able to support himself throughout his entire life with art alone. His career started as a child drawing at age 4. After graduating from the Hussain School of Art, he began work at Marvel Comics illustrating science fiction and war comics.
- He is well known for his commemorative pieces especially those created during his tenure at the Franklin Mint.
- In his figurative works, he portrays African Americans as figures of determination, beauty, dignity, and strength.
- He drew a lifelong inspiration from the universe-the stars and planets and created a series-"Universal Mystery:An Abstract View" which reflected this inspiration.



*Descent of Grace*

Artist: Cal Massey  
Medium: Acrylic On Canvas  
Size: 37 X 24

# Cantave Casse

- No information on this artist other than he came from Haiti.



*Tropical Landscape*

Artist: Cantave Casse  
Medium: Oil on Canvas  
Size: 48 X 36

# Charly Palmer

- Charly Palmer, an artist originally from Alabama, creates and explores a variety of themes common to the African American experience—civil rights, religion, music, sports, nature as well as some works that are primarily abstract in nature.



*In Many Colors*

Artist: Charly Palmer  
MM-Collage on Wood Panel  
Size: 48 X 24

# Eli Kincaid

- Eli Kincaid is a polymath from Cleveland, Ohio who is an author, educator, designer, historian, and fine artist. He possesses a strong interest in mentoring younger artists and fostering their belief in their own unique talents as artists and individuals.

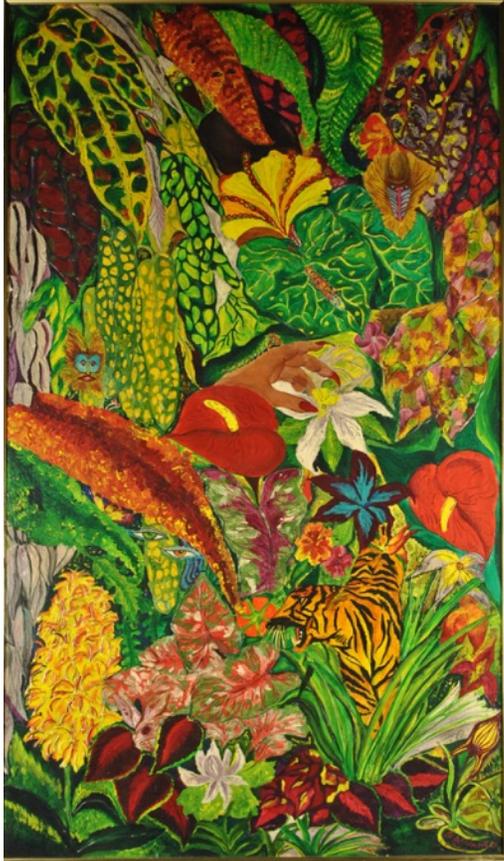


*Abstract Jazz*

Artist: Eli Kincaid  
Medium: Pastel on Board  
Size: 30 X 13

# E. Asunsold

- No information on this artist other than he came from Haiti.

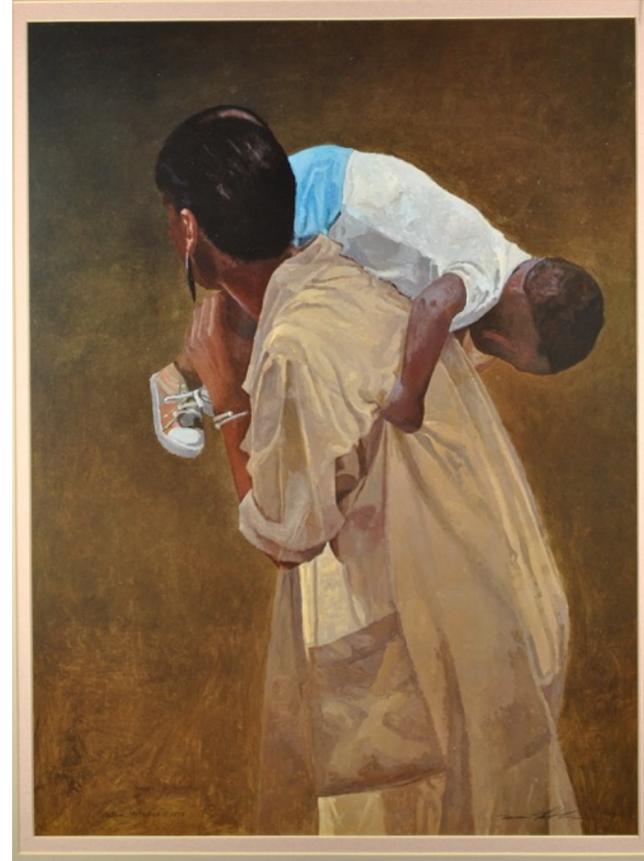


*The Jungle*

Artist: E. Asunsold  
Medium: Oil on Canvas  
Size: 46 X 27

# Dean L. Mitchell

- No information on this artist other than he came from Haiti.



*Bonding Years*

Artist: Dean L. Mitchell  
Medium: Lithograph  
Size: 25½ X 19 3/8

# Gilda Swoden

- Gilda Snowden is a fine artist who received her formal training (BFA, MFA--Wayne State University) and has worked as an art educator in Detroit. Her primary style is abstract expressionism. Two of her more well-known series are the "See No Evil" and the "Tornado" series. She tries to capture the unpredictable events that move humanity. This is depicted with bands of bright swirling colors.



*See No Evil 32*

Artist: Gilda Snowden  
Medium: Acrylic on Canvas  
Size: 10 X 10



*See No Evil 40*

Artist: Gilda Snowden  
Medium: Acrylic on Canvas  
Size: 10 X 10

# Harold Bradford

- Harold Bradford is an artist, originally from New Orleans, who spent his time after high school in the American northwest. He received football scholarships for colleges in the state of Washington. By living in the west, Mr. Bradford developed an interest in the African American contributions to the exploration and development of the west. These contributions recur frequently as a theme in his art.



*4 Acres and a Mule*

Artist: Harold Bradford  
Medium: MM-Original  
Size: 20 X 17

# Harold D. Smith, Jr.

- Harold D. Smith, Jr. is an educator from Kansas City who is also an active artist. Mr. Smith draws inspiration from the Kansas City music scene, especially Jazz and Blues. By using vivid, vibrant colors, jagged edges and sharp angles, Mr. Smith captures the deeply soulful feeling in blues and the "hot" frenetic pace of jazz. Each artist is portrayed in his/her own unique way preserving the tradition of the soloist as well as recognizing the place of the ensemble.



*Vibrant Trumpet*

Artist: Harold D. Smith, Jr.  
Medium: Acrylic and Oil  
Size: 30 X 22