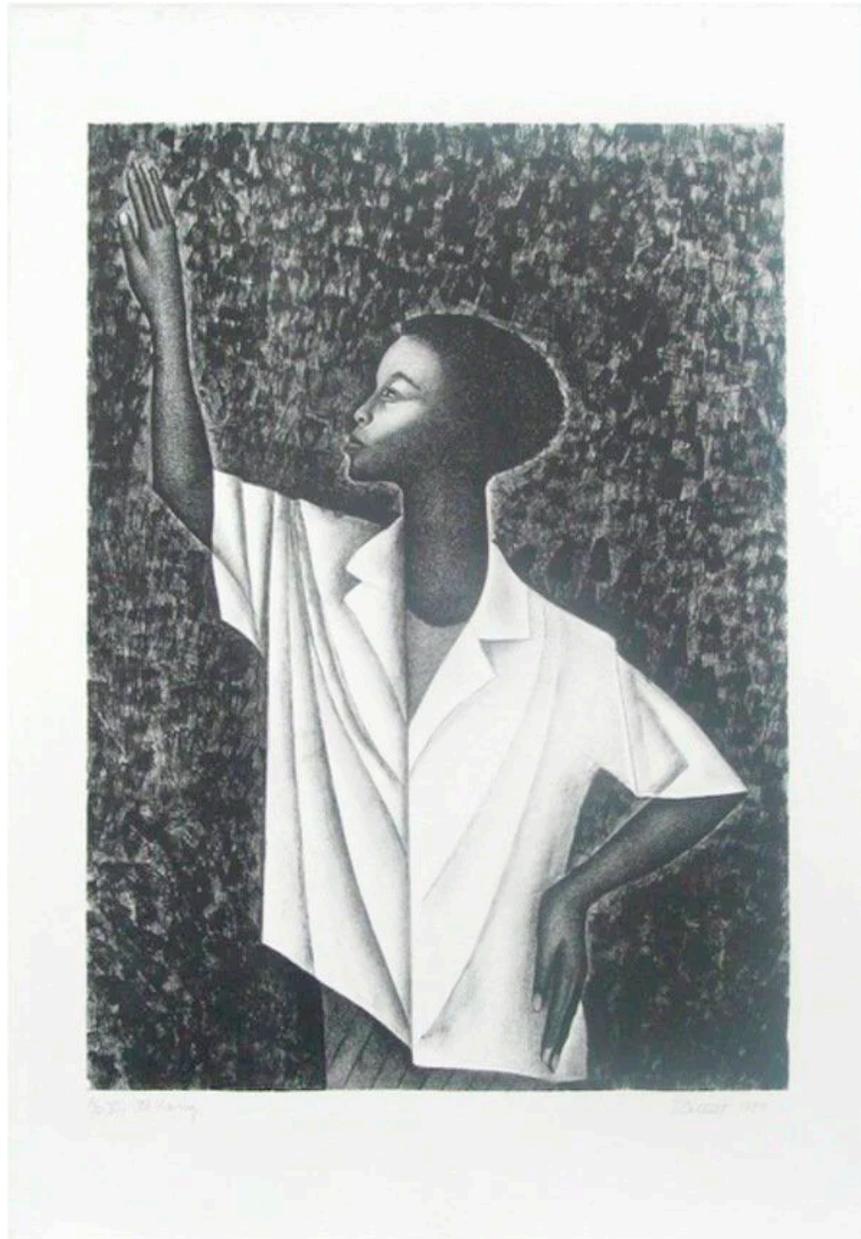


February exhibition at the Guild shines the spotlight on historically overlooked artists

By Ryan Anderson

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“Waving,” by artist Elizabeth Catlett, “illustrates the emotional impact of a simple gesture and allows the viewer to interpret the work in many ways,” said Joshua Guerrier, co-curator of “The Profound Responsibility of Individuality: A Selection of Works by Prominent African-American Artists,” which will be on exhibition this month at the Creative Arts Guild.

The Creative Arts Guild will celebrate and highlight works on paper by African-American artists in February, an exhibition that organizers say illustrates the depth and diversity within American art that hasn't always been given its proper due.

"This will be one of our stronger exhibits" in memory, including contemporary prints by professional artists from the prestigious Brandywine Workshop in Philadelphia, said Amanda Brown, executive director of the Guild. Those pieces are complemented by art from the collections of Joshua Guerrier and Robert T. Webb, and the works are from 1957-2013.

When Webb approached Guerrier with the concept for this show, "it felt like a very appropriate way for us to team up," Guerrier said. "It provided us an opportunity to further educate ourselves while giving us the privilege to share these works with others."

"The Profound Responsibility of Individuality: A Selection of Works by Prominent African-American Artists" in Gallery Five20, as well as an exhibition in Gallery One11 curated by Murray Goodlett, both officially open Friday with an artist reception free and open to the public from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., Brown said. The exhibits will be on display until Feb. 25, and "both are really important," especially during Black History Month.

"Black History Month was a worthwhile platform to share the work to promote a community dialogue," said Guerrier, a musical artist and entrepreneur. "This art would be enjoyed in any community, (and it's) meaningful to us to pull together the exhibit and share it."

"I feel like we provided an experience that's inclusive and also national in scope, (as) these are important artists," he added. "Exhibits like this shine spotlights on underrepresented groups."

Both "underrepresented and incredibly talented," said Webb, a Dalton-based art collector and founder of the Guild's outdoor sculpture garden that is named for him. "Their bodies of work were an important part of America's artistic development during the past 75 years or so," and Harvard's Fogg Museum is hosting "an exhibit of Brandywine prints acquired by the university at the same time our show is on view, so that reinforces the caliber of the work."

Artists in the exhibit include Benny Andrews, Roland Ayers, Chakaia Booker, Moe Brooker, Samuel Brown Jr., Elizabeth Catlett, Nanette Acker Clarke, Adgar Cowans, Melvin Edwards and Jayne Cortez, Reginald Gammon, Marcus Glenn, Albert Gold, Raymond Howell, (former President George W. Bush's art teacher) Sedrick Huckaby, Edward Hughes, Paul Keene, Glenn Ligon, Thomas Malloy, Evangeline "EJ" Montgomery, Julie Oshana, Howardena Pindell, John T. Scott, Charles Searles, Edgar Sorrels-Adewale, Phyllis Thompson, Larry Walker, Richard Watson and Shirley Woodson, according to the

Guild.

"Following the exhibit, many of the prints will go on display in a public building to ensure ongoing access to the work and stories of African-American artists. Guerrier is also donating a collection of books about these and other artists as a resource for the Guild and the community," the Guild said in a press release.

Allan Edmunds, founder and president of the Brandywine Workshop, helped Guerrier and Webb select prints for this show and for possible long-term display, with Guerrier and Webb spending hours exploring and discussing possibilities from Brandywine for this exhibition.

"Brandywine has been in operation since the 1970s, so there was a lot of work to choose from," Webb said. "We selected pieces by significant artists that seemed unified as a collection representing different styles, different themes and different periods of time."

Guerrier noted that even when he and Webb were both enthusiastic about a print, it was often for different reasons, but "Good art should do that, right?"

"There shouldn't be a single reason to like a work of art," he added. "Looking at the pieces altogether, I'm very pleased with the end result."

Webb is "grateful" to have a pair of prints by Catlett in this show, as well as a Ligon print.

"Those pieces reflect extraordinary levels of talent," he said. Catlett's "Waving," for example, "illustrates the emotional impact of a simple gesture and allows the viewer to interpret the work in many ways."

Guerrier and Webb were both drawn to Catlett's works, and "printmaking was an important part of her work from her start as an artist until she passed," said Guerrier. She's "probably the artist in this exhibit who most directly addresses the realities of life, (as) the boy and girl in her prints aren't people you might expect to see illustrated in a show like this, (but) she elevates them, (and) there's dignity in how she depicts them."

Like Catlett, the majority of artists in this exhibition didn't simply "dabble in prints," Webb said. "These are serious works that they cared about as much as paintings or sculptures."

Guerrier is most proud to include Howell's "Carousel."

"I'm very attached to that piece, (as) it reminds me of times in my childhood so distant that I find it difficult to believe that they actually happened, whether they're memories or my imagination," he said. "The way Howell created it reinforces that."

"It's like looking into a dream, just a little bit hazy and atmospheric, not crisp as reality, and, you know, as we grow older, our childhoods feel like that, part dream, part reality," he added. "We remember slightly differently than how an event played out — maybe better, maybe worse."

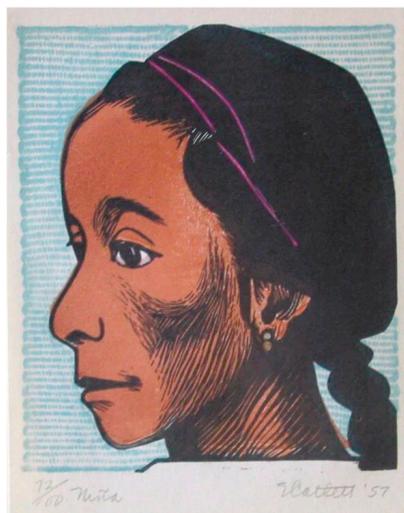
As for their own contributions to this exhibition, Webb and Guerrier agreed "each piece needed to tell its own story while being in conversation with others," said Guerrier. "Color, style, scale ... all that was a part of the discussion."

It had "to feel like a curated exhibit, not something just tossed together, (and) the goal was to create an atmosphere, (so) I selected pieces that just fit the overall theme of the show we were pulling together," Webb said. "I limited my choices to works on paper so that everything in the show is cohesive from that perspective."

He's especially fond of "Double Dutch," by Albert Gold, "a drawing completed in the civil rights era (that) focuses on a girl twirling two ropes," he said. "Compositionally, it's outstanding, (and) it reminds me of" the pastels of ballerinas by Edgar Degas.

"We don't see the girl's face or the other children at play," Webb said. "The girl is anonymous, so she represents her generation, (and) her time at play stands in stark contrast to all of the social change that was taking place in that decade, but also reminds us that throughout our nation's history, people have persevered."

"The girl playing double dutch is living her life as best she can while the world around her is in turmoil," he added. "For me, the work really speaks to the resiliency of people, (and) I consider it to be a work of deep humanity."



"Nina," by artist Elizabeth Catlett, is among the works that will be on display in "The Profound Responsibility of Individuality: A Selection of Works by Prominent African-American Artists," which officially opens Friday at the Creative Arts Guild.