

"Impressions/Expressions: Black American Graphics" on display

December 16, 1980

"Impressions/Expressions: Black American Graphics," a survey of graphic work by black American artists, will be presented at the Mandeville Art Gallery at the University of California, San Diego from January 6 to January 28.

Sixty-three prints dating from the 18th century to the present are included in the exhibition. "Impressions/Expressions" was curated by Richard J. Powell, organized by the Studio Museum in Harlem and Howard University's Gallery of Art, and is being circulated by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service.

The earliest print represented in the exhibition is a reproduction of a portrait of slave poetess Phyllis Wheatley, engraved in 1773 by Scipio Moorhead, also a slave. This print and others are examples of creative work done by blacks in spite of the fact that black artists and artisans were denied the opportunity to acquire skills and practice their trades.

Black printmaking was stimulated in the 1930s and 1940s when the Work Project Administration formed the Federal Arts Project. Many WPA/FAP-era prints are featured in the exhibition, including Raymond Steth's satirical lithograph, "The Evolution of Swing," and Sargent Johnson's abstract "Lenox Avenue."

A number of printmakers who emerged during this period continued to be active. The exhibition features recent works as well as works done in the 1940s by Elizabeth Catlett and James Wells.

Through the decades, the work of black artists has increasingly reflected the expanding technical and stylistic options available to the printmaker. The burgeoning civil rights movement of the 1950s and the cultural and social revolution of the 1960s shaped the efforts of black artists. A neo-Africanist approach, spawned by a growing sense of black nationalism, is apparent in many of the contemporary works.

The work of several West Coast artists is included in the exhibition. Two pieces by Betye Saar, an artist whose colorful assemblages and collages were featured in an exhibition at UC San Diego in 1979, are included in "Impressions/Expressions." Bay area artist Margo Humphrey, whose work has been compared with jazz and gospel music because of its power and its improvisational qualities, also has two pieces in the exhibition.

The Mandeville Art Gallery is open from noon to 5 p.m. Sunday through Friday and from 7 to 9 p.m. Wednesdays. An opening reception is scheduled from 5 to 7 p.m. Tuesday, January 6. Admission to the gallery is free.

In conjunction with the exhibition, the UC San Diego Black Performing Arts Program will present a concert in memory of the late Dr. Martin Luther King. The concert, featuring the UC San Diego Gospel Choir, will begin at 8 p.m. Thursday, January 15, in the Mandeville Center Auditorium, with a reception following in the Mandeville Art Gallery.

For more information contact: Leslie Franz, 452-3120

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