

# AFRO-AMERICAN ART

*takes a variety of forms*

BOSTON

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(Top) Dana Chandler, standing before a work of his, is the director of Northeastern University's African-American Master Artists-in-Residency Program.

(Bottom left and right) Liz Harris of the Harris Brown Gallery admires two of the works in the new South End establishment.

limit, the market for Afro-American art."

Despite the professional caliber of the artists it represents, Harris associates certain risks with opening a gallery with a special focus. Galleries like hers, she notes, address a myth that Afro-American art can be stereotyped into narrow forms. "Some buyers and collectors resist the idea that this is art," she explains. Bostonians have yet to appreciate the "wealth of talent" of Afro-American artists, she continues. "They don't realize that a whole body of work is being created where one would never know the color of the artists' skin."

While Harris Brown's location in the South End might seem to make it less competitive with what some consider the more mainstream

Newbury Street galleries, Harris predicts hers will eventually be viewed as mainstream a gallery as any in Boston. "We want our art to be accessible to the broadest possible range of people in our communities," she says, noting, "what we're showing is as good as anything on Newbury Street."

Dana Chandler, creator/director of the Afro-American Master Artists in Residency Program (AAMARP) at Northeastern University, and associate professor of art at Simmons College, says Afro-American art has always been marked by a high degree of professionalism. "Boston artists are appearing with more and more training, and more blending of their own culture into the professional art scene," he notes. (The work of 14 artists from

AAMARP will be exhibited at the Massachusetts College of Art, Thompson Gallery, 364 Brookline Ave., Boston, from February 15-March 4, and at the Cambridge Center for Adult Education, 42 Brattle St., Cambridge, now through February 28.)

This level of expertise is finally being recognized this year, as large corporations are purchasing and exhibiting the works of more young black artists. Jamaican painter Bryan McFarlane, "a finalist in the 1984 Artists Foundation Competition, has two large-scale pieces in the "Art of the State 1984" exhibit at the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, through February 22. Recognition in corporate collections is "of tantamount importance" to

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McFarlane, from both an economic and an artistic perspective. The high cost of materials can be prohibitive to lesser-known artists, and exposure in corporate collections can be mutually beneficial to the artist and the public. "Society must develop aesthetically," explains MacFarlane. "Why shouldn't we gravitate toward something that beautifies an environment?" he argues, pointing out

that corporate collections make art available to society at large.

Like Liz Harris, Dana Chandler stresses the eclecticism of the images and themes local Afro-American artists are working with today. A large body of their work is related to the Afro-American experience — from Dr. Reggie Jackson's photos of Nigeria and Ghana and painter James Reed's portraits of black women, to Chandler's own paintings, inspired by his trip to Africa in 1970. But "the American public is only slowly becoming aware of the diversity of Afro-American art . . . Some of us create art that relates to our own people,

but some use images that are not at all specific to the black experience," insists Chandler. "No one can say we're just producing things that relate to black folks."

And such variegated themes are not new to the Afro-American art scene. As early as the nineteenth century, Chandler says, black painters like William Dunkenson Bannister and Palmer Hayden were drawing American landscapes.

Landscapes are familiar territory to Bryan McFarlane, whose paintings of both tropical and New England landscapes and human figures will be exhibited at the AAMARP Gal-

lery, 11 Leon St., Boston, through February 28. MacFarlane, AAMARP Master Artist in Residency, and faculty member at Massachusetts College of Art, leans toward colorful, dream-like landscapes conjured from his Caribbean memories because he finds them aesthetically pleasing images, not political ones. His art, he states firmly, is not the product of an effort to document his ethnic group. "Artists in this country are often perceived to be protesting about something . . . art is not left often enough to its pure aesthetic beauty. I'm an artist, not a politician."