

art

See Art From "African American Perspectives"

The Rose Art Museum contributes to Black History Month with its latest exhibit.

By JILL WEINSTEIN

For more than 15 years, the Rose Art Museum has annually mounted, "The Lois Foster Exhibition of Boston Area Artists," a group exhibition which provides exposure for artists working in the greater Boston area. In conjunction with Black History Month, the museum is offering its first area exhibition of African-American art, entitled "African-American Perspectives."

"The past two decades have seen an unparalleled period of creative growth and attention to the works of African-American art and artists," writes Cynthia Hymes Bell, Art Director for One Vision, Inc. and one of the exhibit's four curators, in her essay, "Laying the Groundwork for 'African-American Perspectives.'"

"African-American art has been established as a means to educate, expose and raise the consciousness of the American public about African-American culture and experiences from a historical and contemporary perspective.

African-American art is a declaration of African-American self-esteem, racial pride and vernacular culture. Enriched by traditions as diverse as abstraction, realism, cubism, expressionism and contemporary color theories, African-American artists' creative vision capture the essence of the human condition."

The works involve a variety of materials and media and range from sketches of prominent African-American personalities to a startling depiction of a verse from a William Blake poem they are similar only in that they all reflect and express certain important aspects of African-American culture, such as religiosity, "black pride," and diverse heritage.

Bryan McFarlane, a Jamaican-born professional artist, uses his Jamaican-Maroon heritage as a way to create a mystical and sacred space for him as well as the viewer in his work "Interior for Yansa" (Yansa means "Bird Goddess of Healing").

This work, as McFarlane states, is "like taking a look into the



the Justice/Shulamit Lewin

"I Armed My Fears With 1,000 Shields and Spears," by Robert Freeman, is just one piece featured in "African American Perspectives," on display in the Rose Art Museum until March 14.

womb of God." Through oil colors, he depicts fragments of stained glass, darkened passages and arches which when seen as a whole seemingly allows the viewer to experience the fundamental elements and images that make up Brazilian-African religion.

The portfolio "Nine American Masters" is Edward McCluney's tribute to nine great-African-Americans who he feels "have distinguished themselves as timeless masters of arts and letters." These prints praise the accomplishments of such personalities as Bill Cosby and Ella Fitzgerald, for their work undoubtedly transcends ethnic and cultural boundaries.

Probably the most political of the works on display are those of Ellen Gallagher, whose untitled mixed media works criticize the entertainment industry as being the

source of the stereotypical "black features," through her literal and repeated display of the thick lips and bulging eyes (The industry's most prominent early stars, like Al Jolson, consistently used "black-face" when performing on stage or on screen. This make-up subsequently emphasized any area of the face that was not covered, namely the eyes and the lips.)

In his series entitled "I Armed Myself with 10,000 Shields and Spears," Robert Freeman reveals his "Ifa" inspired interpretation of William Blake's poem, "The Angel" (The Ifa is a West African system of spirituality that includes divination and ancestor worship). Through his merging of traditional Western literature and African spirituality, Freeman creates a powerful image of vision and struggle.

The exhibition's strength is its diversity, in medium and theme.

Each artist provides his or her singular view of what is fundamental to African-American culture.

In conjunction with the exhibit, there will be two discussions co-sponsored by the groups of the Intercultural Center. On Feb. 19, Professor Dessima Williams (SOC) and Bryan McFarlane will speak about the Afro-Caribbean Connection and how it implicitly effects one's work. On March 14, Professor Pamela Allara (FA) talks with the exhibit's three women artists on how gender and race affects their work.

The show will run through March 14. Admission is free.

Hours are Tuesday through Sunday, 1 p.m. to 5 p.m., with extended evening hours Thursday to 9 p.m. A catalogue will be available.

For more information, call X3434.

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