



Color of Freedom

New Black History Exhibit Opens at UMUC

By Bobby Marvin
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(February 19, 2009) - Draped on the corridor walls of the University of Maryland University College Marriott Inn's art gallery, bold colors of purple and blue acrylic paint and bright orange and yellow tones illuminate Black faces.

Nationally renowned cubist and abstractionist Joseph Holston honors African-American history and culture with his latest exhibit, *Color of Freedom: Journey Along the Underground Railroad*, presented and available for viewing at the UMUC Inn and Conference Center.

With a special request made by UMUC, Holston, 65, worked tirelessly on the exhibit for a year using line, color and texture to create abstract paintings along with original sketches that chronicles the African-American journey from Africa to a life of bondage.

The exhibit is co-sponsored by the David C. Driskell Center for the Study of the Visual Arts and Culture of African-Americans and the African Diaspora at the University of Maryland, College Park.

Holston says he hopes the exhibit brings aesthetic imagery to a complex story.

"I'm much more connected than I thought I was. I felt that I needed to be a spokesperson, I felt more committed in that respect because I don't usually go around talking about my art. But when it comes down to *Color on Freedom*, I feel that I have a message and I have to, some kind of way, create this and pass this message on to people," explained Holston, who also contributed artwork to UMUC prior to *Color of Freedom*.

The exhibit is interpreted through four different stages, beginning with *The Unknown World*, which depicts the early arrival of Africans in America. *Living in Bondage-Life on the Plantation* captures the throes of living in captivity and the third phase, *Journey of Escape*, describes the Underground Railroad. The closing segment, *Color of Freedom*, expresses former slaves' jubilation as they celebrated emancipation.

Recognizing his own personal ancestry, Holston recalled his mother's artistic talents, which sparked his own interest in art at age 4. As he studied the works of his favorite artists, Holston noticed the poor representation of African Americans. He quickly realized the importance of African-American art.

"Norman Rockwell inspired me as an artist, but he didn't depict Black life. He depicted a very warm environment as far as Whites were concerned. I said to myself, "We need to get positive images out there on the behalf of our race." So that's one of the reasons why I felt the need to dedicate my life in depicting positive African-American subject matter," said Holston.

In a career that extends nearly 40 years, Holston's work has been displayed in various museums across the country including the Baltimore Museum of Art, Fort Worth Museum of Fine Art in Texas, The Afro-American Museum in Philadelphia and the Yale University Art Gallery.

For Holston, *Color of Freedom* is not only a commemoration, but a lesson to young African Americans about self awareness.

"While I was creating this body of work I was thinking in terms of it being an educational piece because the most important thing I try to do in my work is educate," said Holston. "I hope that I am some kind of conduit in this whole series because I would definitely want to make sure the younger generation does not forget what got them to where they are today."

'Color of Freedom: Journey Along the Underground Railroad' will be on exhibition at UMUC's art gallery through March 6.