

Collection reveals the culture and identity of African Americans through art



Randy Hayes, *Bayou near Benoit*, 2005, oil on photographs with pushpins. Image courtesy of the artist.

WASHINGTON, DC.- An exhibition honoring the lives and traditions of African Americans opened August 16 at Howard University Gallery of Art. *Reflections: African American Life* from the Myrna Colley-Lee Collection offers insight into the culture and experiences of African Americans, highlighting their Southern roots, traditions and migratory history. Featuring American art from the 20th century to the present, and consisting of more than 50 paintings, works on paper, photographs, and fabric works, the pieces in the exhibition come from the collection of renowned costume designer and arts patron, Myrna Colley-Lee.

International Arts & Artists, a nonprofit arts service organization in Washington, D.C., partnered with the office of Myrna Colley-Lee to organize *Reflections* and its tour. The exhibition was co-curated by René Paul Barilleaux, chief curator and curator of art after 1945 at the McNay Art Museum in San Antonio, Texas; and Susan Lloyd McClamroch, an independent curator. The imagery in *Reflections*—including figurative and landscape works, with emphasis on narrative—illustrates a story of heritage, community and place, with each creation revealing a portion of the inspiring story of the African diaspora. The exhibition conveys the transformative journey and quiet wisdom of a strong and spiritual people.

Beginning in the 1960s and continuing to design for regional theatres today, Colley-Lee is credited as one of the foremost costume designers in the Black Theatre Movement. She is a leading advocate for the arts, an arts patron, and a professional artist. She has developed her collection from a wide range of sources, compiling works from around the world—from U.S. art galleries to remote villages. This exhibition offers an exceptional opportunity for viewers to admire Colley-Lee's collection and inspiration from 1927 to 2012.

Having debuted in March at the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts in Michigan, Reflections then traveled to Howard University Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., where it is currently on display and open to the public through October 25. From Howard, it will continue to the Alexandria Museum of Art, Louisiana; Lauren Rogers Museum of Art, Laurel, Mississippi; and the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, Alabama. Reflections is available to travel to additional venues during the summer of 2014 and the summer and fall of 2015.

Colley-Lee is the recipient of the Doctor of Creative Arts (honoris causa) from Mississippi State University, and a M.F.A. in Scenic and Costume Design from Temple University. She studied scene painting and properties at Brooklyn College, and completed her B.F.A. in Art Education at the Women's College of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

International Arts & Artists in Washington, DC, is a non-profit arts service organization dedicated to increasing cross-cultural understanding and exposure to the arts internationally through exhibitions, programs and services to artists, arts institutions and the public. Visit www.artsandartists.org.