Memories & Inspiration: The Kerry and C. Betty Davis Collection of African American Art presents sixty-two selected works from a body of art amassed over thirty-five years. Kerry, a retired mailman, and Betty, a former television news producer, have foregone many comforts to live with drawings, paintings, prints, and sculpture as their principal luxuries. Their collection includes works by Romare Bearden, Elizabeth Catlett, Ernest T. Crichlow, Sam Gilliam, Lois Mailou Jones, Jacob Lawrence, Gordon Parks, and Alma Thomas, but Kerry and Betty do not search exclusively for well-known and/or documented artists. Rather, they focus on “the importance of gathering and preserving a spectrum of approaches to the black image in order to console the psyche and contribute to a more authentic articulation of the self.”

The result is an eclectic gathering of works crossing different mediums, subjects, and styles by a group of artists of the African diaspora who—in terms of training, experience, and expression—are strikingly diverse but unified in their use of cultural and historical narratives. As their collection has grown, so has the Davises’ storehouse of memories of discovering new works of art, building friendships with artists, and conversing with museum professionals and other collectors in their home. They have also continued to expose their collection to family, friends, and church members who, while receptive to the fine arts, are unlikely to visit such local institutions as the High Museum of Art in Atlanta—prompting the artist Leon Nathaniel Hicks to refer to their residence as “a museum in a home.” Memories & Inspiration brings together an awe-inspiring selection of works, but it is their personal resonance—their connection to the Davises’ hopes, passions, and everyday lives—that gives the collection its unique power.