

WoodmereArtMuseum

TELLING THE STORY OF PHILADELPHIA'S ART AND ARTISTS

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WOODMERE EXHIBITION *WE SPEAK: BLACK ARTISTS OF PHILADELPHIA, 1920s – 1970s* SHOWCASES 50 YEARS OF WORK BY BLACK ARTISTS IN PHILADELPHIA

Fourteen oral histories transcribed in the accompanying catalogue shape the exhibition

PHILADELPHIA – This Fall Woodmere Art Museum presents *We Speak: Black Artists in Philadelphia, 1920s – 1970s*. The exhibition will feature over 70 paintings, photographs, sculptures, and prints produced by black artists living and working in Philadelphia during the roughly 50 year period. *We Speak* examines a series of relationships in the arts, while considering how artists supported each other and mentored subsequent generations. **The exhibition will open on September 26 and run through January 24.**

The exhibition was organized with direct input from artists and their family members, museum professionals, collectors, gallery owners, and scholars in the form of fourteen oral histories, which are transcribed in the exhibition's catalogue. The oral histories represent a process of discovery that shaped the checklist and thematic structure of the exhibition.

We Speak also explores how different institutions and organizations in Philadelphia either provided a platform for black artists to advance their careers, or fell short of doing so. Among the many Philadelphia institutions that are part of the history presented include: the Graphic Arts Workshop of the Works Progress Administration; the Barnes Foundation; the Pyramid Club; the Philadelphia Public Schools; the Wharton Center and other settlement houses, the Ile-Ife Black Humanitarian Center; the National Conference of Artists; the Brandywine Workshop; the Afro-American Historical and Cultural Museum, as well as Philadelphia's academies, museums, universities, galleries, and artist groups.

William Valerio, Director of Woodmere Art Museum, said, "Woodmere is the only museum able to bring to life an exhibition such as *We Speak* because our mission is to tell the stories of the art and artists of Philadelphia. By taking a closer look at our collection, we discovered some thought-provoking connections between artist's inspirations and ideas. We wanted to undertake the oral histories to learn more about the relationships and social contexts they shared. The artists included in the exhibition addressed matters of race and equality in many different ways, both implicitly and explicitly."

The curatorial time frame of *We Speak* begins in the 1920s with Philadelphian Alain Locke's publication of "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts," (1925) which was a seminal text in the New Negro Arts Movement, issuing a call to black artists to find inspiration in their African heritage. In the 1970s, questions of identity and culture were

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reframed by the social politics of the post-Civil Right era and the black power movement. The nationwide bicentennial celebration also brought to the surface questions about progress toward freedom and equality.

Rachel McCay, Assistant Curator at Woodmere, organized the exhibition jointly with Susanna Gold, Guest Curator. McCay said, "The exhibition explores the many ongoing conversations in the arts that were resonant to black artists in Philadelphia during the time period, including questions of identity and gender, academic tradition, relationships within the urban fabric, exploration of abstraction, and the influence of African culture."

Among those featured artists are: Laura Wheeler Waring (1887--1948); Allen R. Freelon, Sr. (1895--1960); Dox Thrash (1892--1965); Selma Burke (1900--1995); Paul F. Keene, Jr. (1920--2009); Charles Searles (1937--2004); Ellen Powell Tiberino (1938--1992); Barbara Bullock (b. 1938); Moe Brooker (b. 1940); Donald E. Camp (b. 1940); Barkley L. Hendricks (b. 1945); Richard J. Watson (b. 1946); Allan L. Edmunds (b. 1949), and many more.

An illustrated catalogue accompanies the exhibition. A variety of programs, lectures, films, workshops, and concerts will be offered through January 24, 2016.

Some of the featured programming:

- **Albert Barnes: Redefining the Mainstream** discussion with Kimberly Camp, 11/7
- **The Adored Maverick: Barbara Bullock**, Lecturer: A.M. Weaver, 11/9
- **Readings in African American Literature: Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye**, 11/16
- **Panel Discussion: Breaking Barriers, Black Artists in Philadelphia** featuring Paul Adkins, Louis Massiah, Ursula Rucker, Kariamu Welsh, 1/23

Housed in a 19th-century stone Victorian mansion on six acres in the Chestnut Hill section of Philadelphia, Woodmere first opened its doors to the public in 1910. The building, grounds, and core of the permanent collection are the gifts of Charles Knox Smith (1845 – 1916). A civic leader of his time, Smith's vision was to provide a spiritual experience to the people of Philadelphia through encounters with great works of art in the context of the extraordinary green environment of the Wissahickon and Chestnut Hill. Today, Woodmere's Collection consists of more than 5,000 works of art, telling the stories of the art and artists of Philadelphia. Woodmere's collection can be viewed online, and the museum encourages artists and their family and friends to share information about works in the collection. The Museum is opened Tues. – Thurs. 10 a.m. – 5 p.m., Friday 10 a.m. – 8:45 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m. – 6 p.m., and Sunday 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. Admission is free on Sunday. Website: woodmereartmuseum.org

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