

IMPOSING BLACKNESS: WEUSI ARTIST COLLECTIVE 1965-1975

Curated by Dr. Myrah Brown Green



Ed Sherman, *Count Basie's Club, Harlem*. ca. 1969

July 24 - September 18th, 2022

BLACKBURN 20120

Blackburn 2020 is a non-profit exhibition space affiliated with the Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop, a program for the Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts.

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IMPOSING BLACKNESS

WEUSI ARTIST COLLECTIVE | 1965-1975

Nii Ahene-La
Abdullah Aziz
Hameed Benjamin
Kay Brown
Perry Cannon
Taiwo DuVall
G. Falcon Beazer
Gaylord Hassan
Bill Howell
Rudy Irwin
Muhammad Mufutau
Dindga McCannon
Otto Neals
Ademola Olugebefola
James Phillips
Okoe Pyatt
Abdul Rahman
James Sepyo
Emmett Wigglesworth



In the midst of a tumultuous moment in history, sparks of light were sent throughout the universe in the form of art. This art manifested in word, song, dance and the visual aesthetic. Anthems like *Say It Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud* by James Brown, *We're A Winner* by Curtis Mayfield, *R.E.S.P.E.C.T.* by Aretha Franklin and *Odunde' Odunde'* by Babatunde Olatunji became calls to action; reminding Black People of their magnified greatness. The Weusi Artist Collective heeded the call!! Translated from Swahili to English, Weusi means "Blackness."

In an effort to make sure that the Weusi Artist Collective's legacy would live in perpetuity generations later, this historic group, founded in 1965 during the height of the Black Arts Movement, became the pivotal force who used their art to ease the social pains of a people, spread Black love, fight against obvious racism across the globe and promote family all in the blink of an image; sometimes subliminal too. Abdullah Aziz, Hameed Benjamin, Kay Brown, Perry Cannon, Taiwo DuVall, G. Falcon Beazer, Gaylord Hassan, Bill Howell, Rudy Irwin, Nii Ahene-La, Muhammad Mufutau, Dindga McCannon, Otto Neals, Ademola Olugebefola, James Phillips, Okoe Pyatt, Abdul Rahman, James Sepyo and Emmett Wigglesworth were among those who led the march. They came with an arsenal of woodcuts, etchings, serigraphs, paintings, sculpture, collage and other forms of masterful art making techniques. These masters became the shoulders on who the generations that follow now stand. Let's not forget the families of these artists; wives, partners, children, parents and extended family were a part of their support systems. They too were in the trenches helping to make sure this masterful organization continued to thrive. Many of the members are now ancestors. However, because of the collective building, the Weusi Artist Collective still continues today.

In 1968, Nyumba Ya Sanaa Gallery ("House of Art" Gallery) located at 158 West 132nd Street was born. Later renamed Weusi Nyumba Ya Sanaa Academy of Fine Arts and Studies. This academy

became the mecca for all Black artist who wanted to implement or continue to move forward the “New Art Renaissance” of the sixties into a new “Age of Aquarius.” The Weusi Artist Collective used this platform to inspire and teach those who wanted to move beyond what the world bequeathed to all people in the form of technology, medicine and spirituality. Ultimately, teaching workshops, providing lectures and working along-side the new Black visual artist and other creatives including film makers, song writers, stage designers, poets, play writers, actors and musicians was ignited. Illuminating the artists’ self-worth and aesthetic gifts were at the forefront of their teachings. These in-house programs continued for more than fourteen years until this internal space was taken due to a massive flood.

This tribute exhibition of *Imposing Blackness: Weusi Artist Collective, 1965-1975* opening at Blackburn 20|20 reminds us of the friendships Robert Blackburn and a number of Weusi members once had. Blackburn opened his doors to Weusi members after hearing about the unfortunate closing of the Weusi Nyumba Ya Sanaa Academy of Fine Arts and Studies. He made available a space for those members whose art medium’s focus was in fine art printing; allowing them to explore and continue teaching this fine craft.

More than fifty-seven years later, the Weusi Artist Collective holds on to their “perpetuity status.” I am so proud to know and have known many of the artists whose work is shown. And as we experience the works of the masters hanging in the gallery, remember that each piece is a manifestation of how a nation can be taught and healed one image at a time.

- Dr. Myrah Brown Green



Abdullah Aziz



Dance of the Maidens #1 1980-1989
Copper drawings
18 x 24 in.



Black Beauty 1972
Wood blocks
32 x 23 in.



Muslim Woman 2006
Mixed medium
23.5 x 19.5 in.

Hameed Benjamin



Untitled 1989

Watercolor

6 x 8.75 in.

Courtesy of Otto Neals

Kay Brown



First Kick of Life

30 x 22 in.

Archive of Robert Blackburn

Perry Cannon



Collage

46 x 31 in.

Courtesy of McCannon Family

Taiwo DuVall



Drummer Amari 1958
Oil on canvas
14.5 x 11 in.



Madagascar 1968
Hand-pulled woodcut on Chine Collé
14 x 10 in.



Musical Chimes Played in Time 1971
Hand pulled woodcut on rice paper
12 x 16.5 in.

G. Falcon Beazer



Created for you...
Oil on canvas
23 x 19 in.
Courtesy of Anissa Beazer



The Jitter Buggers
Oil on canvas
36 x 24 in.
Courtesy of Anissa Beazer

Gaylord Hassan



They Shall Have Power in the Future 1986
Acrylic pointillism
18 x 25 in
Courtesy of Shelley Inniss



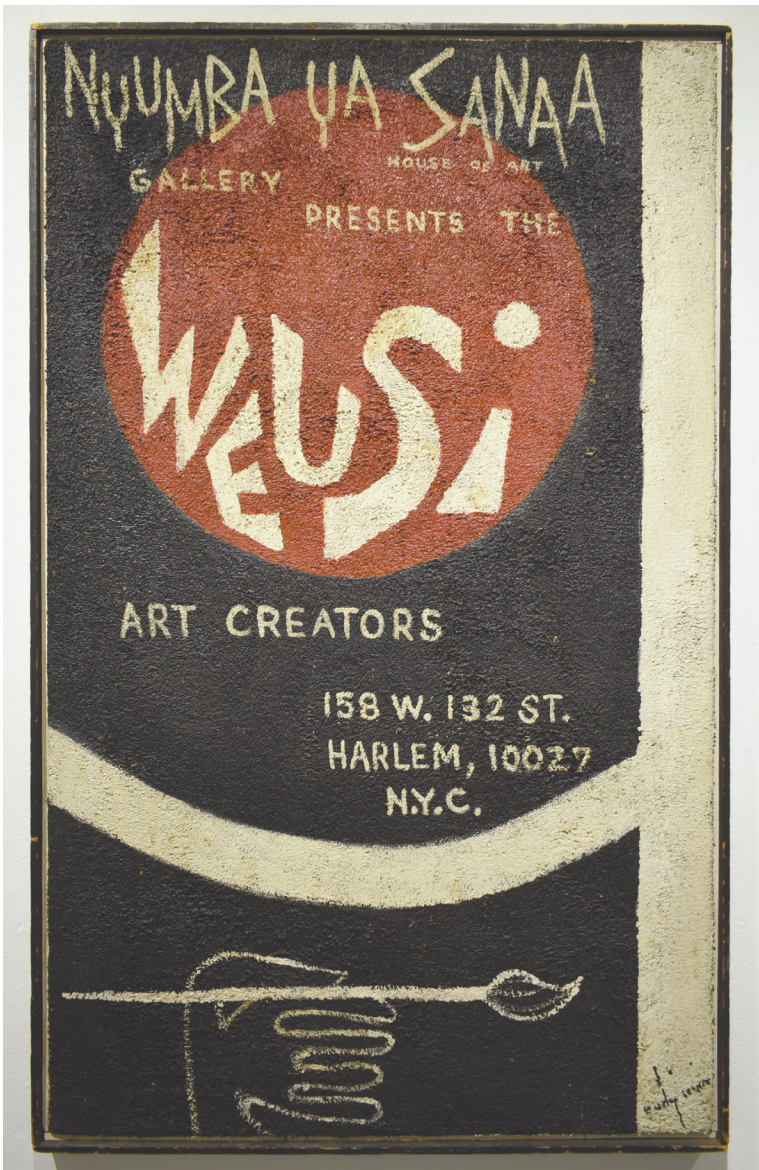
Expectation 1987
Collage
6.75 x 5 in.
Courtesy of Shelley Inniss

Bill Howell



Cowrie Shells 1973
Acrylic painting
51 x 25.5 in.
Courtesy of Shelley Inniss

Rudy Irwin



Gallery Sign / Untitled CA 1970

Oil on terry cloth

36 x 23 in.

Courtesy of Shelley Inniss

Muhammad Mufutau



Divinity Birds with Happy Fish 1997

Collage and pen

21.5 x 13.5 in.

Courtesy of Shelley Inniss

Dindga McCannon



The Sisters 1971
Relief
13 x 12.5 in.
Archives of Robert Blackburn



The Musician and His Lady 1972
Relief
15.5 x 12 in.
Archives of Robert Blackburn



Couple 1971
Relief
16.5 x 11.5 in.
Archives of Robert Blackburn

Nii Ahene-La



African Heritage 1972

Etching

14.5 x 19.5 in.

Courtesy of Bunnie and Taiwo Duvall

Otto Neals



The Chief's Stool 1974

Etching

13 x 17 in.

Courtesy of Richard Green and
Myrah Brown Green



Jungle Magic 1972

Collagraph

22.5 x 30 in.

Archives of Robert Blackburn

Ademola Olugebefola



Breaking Bread at Sunrise 1978

Lithograph

30 x 22 in.

Archives of Robert Blackburn



Breaking Bread at Sunset 1978

Lithograph

30 x 22 in.

Archives of Robert Blackburn

James Phillips



Father - Son - Holy Ghost
Collage and mixed media
52 x 15.25 in.
Courtesy of Shelley Inniss

Okoe Pyatt



Freedom Fighter 2014
Collage
17 x 21 in.
Courtesy of Brenda Daniel



Visionary 2013
Collage
18 x 22 in.
Courtesy of Alexa Donaphin

Abdul Rahman



Untitled 1989

Offset print

34 x 24.5 in.

Courtesy of Shelby Inniss

James Sepyo



Ifa Divination 1975
Wood carving
33 x 20 in.
Courtesy of Fela Sepyo



Awaken Young Seed 1973
Oil on canvas
40 x 30 in.
Courtesy of Fela Sepyo

Emmett Wigglesworth



Those Who were blessed, but forgot to give thanks 1979

Lithograph

22 x 30 in.

Archives of Robert Blackburn



EFA Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop



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