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**THE BARNETT ADEN GALLERY: A HOME FOR
DIVERSITY IN A SEGREGATED CITY**

A Dissertation in

Art History

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ABSTRACT

In 1943 Professor James V. Herring along with Alonzo J. Aden, his former student and colleague at Howard University, opened the Barnett Aden Gallery within the modest home they shared in Washington, D.C. As founders of one of the first black-owned galleries in the nation, their mission was to provide an exhibition space for talented artists without regard to ethnicity or national origin. During the next twenty-five years, the Barnett Aden Gallery became a unique site for cross-cultural exchange—where artists, writers, musicians, and politicians of all races met freely for social, professional, and aesthetic discourse—one of few such places in severely segregated Washington, D.C.

The Barnett Aden performed the traditional gallery function of featuring talented emerging artists, but it provided a critical service for African American artists, who had few opportunities to show their work in parity with white artists or even to see evidence of their existence within established art institutions. By placing their work alongside that of honored black predecessors, such as Henry Ossawa Tanner, Edward Bannister, and Meta Warrick Fuller, the gallery validated their artistic identity and situated them within an art historical tradition.

In this dissertation I assert that the Barnett Aden Gallery carried out even broader psychological and ideological tasks for the artists, the patrons, the gallery owners, and the art community of Washington, D.C. By situating exhibitions within their home (rather than using the pristine white rooms favored by many galleries), Herring and Aden literally brought home the idea that artistic creativity was inherently part of the African American experience, and, at the same time, enhanced their own status as members of the black intellectual elite of the city. The domestic environment and the integrated atmosphere altered the viewing experience of the spectators and broadened their outlook toward art and its creators. Through their exhibition policies and their collaboration with established art institutions, the gallery owners created a unique cultural space and set the stage for development of a surprisingly integrated art community in an otherwise racially divided city.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: PORTRAIT OF A GALLERY

“My exciting meeting with Alonzo Aden and Dr. James V. Herring still sends out vibrations. In this warm little Gallery, for the first time, I deeply sensed the charismatic force of the Afro-American artist and a revelation about some beautiful people was intensified for me as I walked about the Gallery.” Larry Erskine Thomas¹

Something was up in the quiet African American neighborhood around Randolph Place in Washington, D.C. (Fig. 1) It was October of 1943, and the neighbors were concerned. It seems that someone was opening a business at 127, and they suspected, based on all the comings and goings, that the residents might be running the “numbers.”² They soon noticed, however, that the clientele of this “business” was exceptionally well dressed and often drove fine automobiles—and some of the visitors were white! Their fears were completely allayed in October of the following year when they saw none other than Eleanor Roosevelt as she exited from her limousine. Soon thereafter, several of the women in the neighborhood donned their fur coats and showed up at the door of the gallery. They were met at the door by Howard University Professor James V. Herring, who promptly turned every one of them away. He said, “Now you don’t want to come in here. This is a numbers house—the president’s wife is in here playing numbers!” Herring

¹ Larry Erskine Thomas, quoted in Anacostia Neighborhood Museum, *The Barnett-Aden Collection* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1974), 159.

² The “numbers” refers to illegal lotteries in several large American cities. These were looked down upon by the black middle class, until the 1950s, when playing the lottery became respectable. See E. Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie* (New York: Free Press, 1957), 210-13.

later claimed that this shamed the women, but it also broke the ice and the gallery thereafter became a source of pride rather than suspicion.³ (Figs. 2, 3)

In fact, these neighbors were witnessing the birth of the first successful black-owned private art gallery in the nation.⁴ On October 16, 1943, Alonzo J. Aden, along with James V. Herring, his former professor and colleague at Howard University, opened the Barnett Aden Gallery within the home they shared at 127 Randolph Place.⁵ Aden was the director and the gallery was named after his mother, Naomi Barnett Aden. The gallery continued for the next twenty-five years—holding nearly 200 exhibitions and showing the work of perhaps as many as 400 artists.⁶ As one of the first black-owned galleries in the nation, the Barnett Aden provided an exhibition space for talented artists without regard to ethnicity or national origin. Aden and Herring showed a panoply of talented artists, including all the major Washington artists, as well as established national and international artists. Located in a quiet middle-class African American neighborhood, the Barnett Aden Gallery became a cultural meetingplace, where artists, writers, musicians,

³ James V. Herring, quoted by David Driskell, interview by the author, Hyattsville, Md., April 2002. Driskell was an art student at Howard during the early 1950s and worked part time at the Barnett Aden Gallery, where he became close to Herring and Aden.

⁴ Although the Barnett Aden Gallery is repeatedly credited with this honor, Augusta Savage actually had a gallery in New York for a brief period in 1939 called The Salon of Contemporary Negro Art. The gallery opened on June 8, 1939, but a lack of funding caused the gallery to close a few months later. Savage had been the director of the Harlem Community Art Center, funded by the Federal Art Program, a wing of the Works Progress Administration, since 1937. The center became a model for other urban centers, such as the South Side Chicago Art Center. See Dierdre L. Bibby, *Augusta Savage and the Art Schools of Harlem* (New York: Schomburg Center, 1988).

⁵ Today the Randolph Place address is located in a neighborhood called Bloomingdale; however, in a map of neighborhoods from 1967, it appears that the Randolph Place address was located between LeDroit Park and Eckington. Bloomingdale is a more recent designation. See Iris Miller, *Washington in Maps: 1606-2000* (New York: Rizzoli International, 2002), 149.

⁶ Richard A. Long, foreword to *Salute to the Barnett Aden Gallery* (Baltimore: Murphy Fine Arts Center, Morgan State College, 1968).

and politicians of all ethnicities met freely for social, professional, and aesthetic discourse—one of few such places in strictly segregated Washington, D.C.⁷

The opening on October 16, 1943 was the first of hundreds of such festive Saturday night occasions. Those who were invited included colleagues from Howard University, teachers from Miner’s Teachers College, principals from local high schools, and friends like Laura Carson and Dr. and Mrs. Cecil Marquez. There were political figures, as well as literary. Inside visitors found an elegantly appointed home with artwork integrated into the domestic environment. As artist Lila Oliver Asher said, “The whole house was a gallery—every piece of wall.”⁸ Guests would have been invited to sign the guest book that lay on the distinctive round desk, the only part of the setting that overtly suggested a business purpose. There would doubtless have been fresh flowers and special food on hand in the dining room—Aden liked to shop at MacGruder’s or Bloomingdale’s for these occasions. These openings were typically crowded; one writer estimated that 150 people attended the first opening.

For an interior view of the gallery, we have a wonderful painting by John N. Robinson, which gives us a vivid idea of the interior of the gallery. (Fig. 4) This painting was exhibited in May and again in August of 1947 as *Interior—Barnett Aden Gallery*.⁹ Aden commissioned Robinson, who had primarily showed landscapes at the gallery since the first year. The painting shows Aden at his desk, looking very serious as he writes. He is dressed in business attire, with a suit and tie, and a handkerchief in his pocket. The

⁷ For instance, in the late forties none of the major restaurants in the downtown area served African Americans. Ironically, some of these same restaurants did serve black diplomats from abroad, while United States citizens of African ancestry were refused. See Kenesaw M. Landis, *Segregation in Washington, a report, November 1948* (Chicago: National Committee on Segregation). 11-20.

⁸ Lila Oliver Asher, interview with the author, Chevy Chase, Md., 2002. Asher taught ceramics and drawing at Howard University from 1948 to 1991.

⁹ It appears the name of this painting was changed sometime before the 1974 exhibition of the collection, where the painting is called *First Gallery*.

desk is the only object that suggests that this is not an ordinary house. Its gleaming round form is the focal point of the painting and therefore accentuates Aden as the director and “CEO” of this enterprise.¹⁰ There are paintings and sculptures scattered throughout the scene, but the walls are not crowded. Everything is balanced and appropriate. The single visitor, whose race is unclear, is shown in the front hall with his arms clasped against his torso. He seems to be backing up so that he can get a better view of the painting above the radiator.

Small objects of art fill the side shelves of the round desk and a single blue vase stands atop it. The other side holds books. The artist has expanded the look of the modest rowhouse by capturing an extended view from the living room through the dining room and into the kitchen. Each room is well lit with shadows suggesting multiple light sources. A strong light from the left brightens the first room and an overhead fixture in the last room glows white even as the open window allows bright sunlight to fall on the polished dining table.

There is a simple elegance to the scene. There are no areas of inlaid marble, there are no chandeliers, nothing suggestive of great wealth or luxury—just smooth clean lines, soft blue walls, and gleaming surfaces. Only a closer look at the varied styles of the paintings reveals a certain boldness of décor. Two sculptures are present and there are glimpses of nine paintings, some of which are identifiable. On the small table on the

¹⁰ This round desk is part of the current collection, owned by Robert L. Johnson. An examination made by the author indicates that Robinson adjusted the scale so that Aden appears a little larger than life size.

lower left is *Guitar Player*, a sculpture by Cuban artist Theodoro Ramos-Blanco.¹¹ The table seems tilted forward so that we can better see this small blue ceramic piece.

On the wall to Aden's right, next to the fireplace, is a painting by white artist I. Rice Pereira titled *Nautical Abstraction*. This painting was shown during her solo exhibition at the gallery in December of 1948. The catalogue for the show indicates that it was owned by the gallery—it may be the painting that Aden selected to keep from her solo show. Pereira was among a group of New York artists who, during the 1930s, preferred a hard-edged, geometric approach to art.¹² This work was part of a series of works based on sketches of marine paraphernalia made at the wharf in Provincetown during the 1930s.¹³

While the Barnett Aden Gallery reached out to artists of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, an underlying objective was to show the work of deserving African American artists, who faced subtle and overt prejudice at traditional institutions.¹⁴ Government support had aided many black artists during the 1930s, but by 1943 this support had ended and most had nowhere to show their work. As artist James L. Wells stated, “The Barnett Aden Gallery showed the works of artists regardless of race, creed or

¹¹ Ramos Blanco was born in Havana in 1901. He studied in Havana and Rome, exhibited with the Harmon Foundation, and won a prize at the American Negro Exposition in Chicago in 1940. In that same year he received a commission from Howard University to create a bust of Antonio Maceo, the Afro-Cuban hero of Cuba's war of independence.

¹² Others in this group included Balcombe Greene, Carl Holty, and George L. K. Morris. Pereira experimented with paints mixed with metal, glass, radium, and other new materials. During the 1940s she applied these paints to panels and installed painted glass panels over them. See Karen A. Bearor, *Irene Rice Pereira: Her Paintings and Philosophy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993).

¹³ This painting is not part of the current collection. *Nautical Abstraction* may be identical to the painting titled *Wharf Construction*, owned by the Lowe Art Museum, University of Miami, and illustrated in Bearor, 22.

¹⁴ For instance, Lois Mailou Jones frequently asked her white friend Celine Tabary to take her work to competitive exhibitions at the Corcoran and other institutions, where Jones subsequently won many prizes, which, she felt, would have been denied her had it been known the artist was black. Betty LaDuke, “Lois Mailou Jones: The Grande Dame of African-American Art,” *Woman's Art Journal* 8 (Fall/Winter 1987/88): 28.

color at a time when it was nearly impossible for the Negro artist to gain entrance to other galleries local or national.”¹⁵ The gallery showed the work of such now-famous black artists as Richmond Barthé, Romare Bearden, Elizabeth Catlett, Jacob Lawrence, Hughie Lee-Smith, and Charles White. Several, including Lois Mailou Jones and David Driskell, had their first major one-person show at the Barnett Aden Gallery.

The gallery performed the traditional function of showing talented emerging artists, but it provided a unique service for African American artists, by supplying an art historical context for their work. By placing their work alongside that of honored black predecessors, such as Henry Ossawa Tanner, Edward Bannister, and Meta Warrick Fuller, the gallery validated their artistic identity and contextualized their work within a tradition (in the same way that public museums had always done for white artists). (Fig. 5)

But the Barnett Aden was not a “black” gallery. During the forties and fifties a multitude of white artists showed there, including Pereira, Herman Maril, Jack Perlmutter, William Calfee, Lila Asher, Jacob Kainen, Theodore Stamos, Bernice Cross, Minna Citron, Marguerite Zorach, Gene Davis, Kenneth Noland, and Morris Louis. According to Jacob Kainen, the unofficial “dean” of Washington artists,

Herring was widely respected. He had a great style, imperious but with a sense of humor. And he had a vast background. So did Aden. . . . The Barnett Aden regularly showed Washington artists of all kinds and we used to go to their shows on Randolph Place, especially the openings, which were very nice. All the more experienced artists, the better artists naturally showed there: Jack Perlmutter, [Bob] Gates, etc.

¹⁵ James L. Wells, quoted in *Anacostia Neighborhood Museum*, 159-60. Wells taught printmaking at Howard University. See *James Lesesne Wells: 60 Years in Art* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Project for the Arts, 1987).

Kainen also recalled seeing European contemporary art at Barnett Aden, even before he saw it at the Phillips Memorial Gallery.¹⁶

According to artist and art historian David C. Driskell, the gallery was never advertised and did not even have a sign to identify it from the street; there was only a small plaque next to the front door. As he said, “People just knew.”¹⁷ Word spread among Washington artists that this was a place where they should be showing *and* going. At the Barnett Aden leading professionals from the black community met and socialized with white professionals from all over the city. The Saturday night openings were by invitation only and became famous as splendid, festive affairs. The dapper and gregarious Aden and the calm but regal Professor Herring were perfect hosts, reveling in the opportunity to introduce local friends to such notables as the poets Langston Hughes and Georgia Douglas Johnson, foreign ambassadors, members of the President’s cabinet, and even Eleanor Roosevelt, who was photographed signing the guestbook.

Who were these two men? In chapter two of this thesis I trace the backgrounds of Herring and Aden from their home state of South Carolina to their meeting at Howard University in the late 1920s. I discuss how Herring almost single-handedly created the art

¹⁶ Jacob Kainen, “Washington Art: 1940 – 1965 with emphasis on Howard University and the Barnett Aden Gallery,” unpublished interview by Keith Morrison, April 20, 1984, transcript, Jacob Kainen papers, box 2, Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C. Kainen was a New York artist who relocated to Washington, D.C., in 1942. In New York Kainen was associated with the most advanced painters and artists’ associations. He was “an insider, seemingly on the verge of joining that loose coalition of painters and sculptors who would later make up the New York School.” See Avis Berman, “Images from a Life,” in the National Museum of American Art’s *Jacob Kainen* (Washington, D.C.: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 9.

¹⁷ Driskell, 2002. Driskell was a student at Howard University and later taught there from 1962 to 1966. He also taught and chaired the art department at Fisk University from 1966 to 1977. From 1978 until 1983 Driskell was the chair of the art department at the University of Maryland, and subsequently became Distinguished University Professor of Art until his retirement in 1998. Driskell is known for organizing the groundbreaking *Two Centuries of Black American Art* for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1976, as well as numerous other exhibitions of black art. His own art work is in many collections, including Arkansas Fine Arts Center, Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Birmingham Museum of art, Corcoran Museum of Art, Howard University, and Portland (Maine) Museum of Art. In 2002 the David Driskell Center for the Study of the African Diaspora opened on the campus of the University of Maryland.

department at Howard University beginning in 1921, just a few months after he was hired to teach drawing in the architecture department. Herring built a strong and progressive art department by recruiting the best instructors he could find—artists such as Lois Mailou Jones, Lila Oliver Asher, and James Lesesne Wells. He also recruited students. He found Alma Thomas studying costume design in the home economics department and promptly convinced her to switch to the art department, where she became its first graduate in 1924. Herring nurtured the careers of countless talented students, including James A. Porter, who joined the art faculty in 1927.¹⁸

In 1928, after years of campaigning, Herring finally convinced the Howard administration that an art gallery was needed at the university. He hired Alonzo Aden, one of his former students, as the first curator of the Howard Gallery of Art. Aden gained further experience in 1936, when he was invited to curate an exhibition of Negro life at the Texas Centennial Exhibition.¹⁹ Aden expanded his knowledge in 1938 when he was awarded a grant to travel and study in Europe from the American Association of Museums. In 1940 Howard philosopher Alain Locke asked Aden to curate the Tanner Hall Art Galleries of the American Negro Exposition in Chicago, a testament to his position in the field.

At the Howard gallery Herring and Aden planned a succession of ambitious exhibitions throughout the 1930s, emphasizing diversity and including artists from Europe, America, Africa, Cuba, Japan, and South America. They also showed African art

¹⁸ Porter became an acclaimed artist and art historian. His 1943 publication, *Modern Negro Art*, was the first of its kind and became the foundation for subsequent scholars of African American art. He succeeded Herring as chairman of the art department at Howard University in 1953.

¹⁹ For a detailed study of the Centennial, see Renée Ater, “Creating a ‘Usable Past’ and a ‘Future Perfect Society,’” in Susan Earle, ed. *Aaron Douglas: African American Modernist* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 95-113.

from the collection of Locke, who—although head of the Philosophy Department at Howard—was a powerful influence on African American art. Locke strongly advocated the development of a “racial” art based on the formal structures of African art distinct from European traditions.²⁰ Herring’s teaching philosophy was different. Unlike Locke, he encouraged artists to find their own unique voices, drawing on a wide range of sources. Herring felt that his students and the city as a whole needed to see much more national contemporary art. In 1943, after a disagreement with the administration, Aden left Howard, and later that year he and Herring opened the Barnett Aden Gallery in their Randolph Place home, not far from the Howard campus.

The gallery was never a moneymaking enterprise—the artists received all profits from exhibition sales. Herring continued to teach and manage the art gallery at Howard University, and Aden held several government “day jobs.” The Barnett Aden Gallery was a labor of love surviving on the salaries of the two founders, small membership fees, and help from numerous friends and supporters like Alma Thomas, Laura Carson, and Dr. and Mrs. Cecil Marquez. Aden did, however, ask for a donation of one work from each artist featured in a one-person exhibition, and it was primarily in this manner that the Barnett Aden Collection was slowly formed.²¹ Through his work at Howard, Herring was well known in the Washington area, and he had many connections with artists and galleries in New York and other cities. Reportedly, during the 1930s Herring accompanied Duncan Phillips, director of the Phillips Memorial Gallery in Washington,

²⁰ Locke first published on this topic in 1925. His seminal essay, “The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts,” was widely read by the artists and intellectuals of the Harlem Renaissance period. See *The New Negro*, ed. Locke (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925).

²¹ Herring and Aden would occasionally purchase modestly priced works and artists later donated some works in appreciation of the gallery and also because they wanted to be represented in the collection. A portion of the original Barnett Aden Collection still exists and is now owned by Robert L. Johnson, former owner of Black Entertainment Television.

on some of his buying trips to New York City. Art historian Carroll Greene has even suggested that Herring may have been influential in Phillip's decision to purchase one-half of Jacob Lawrence's multi-paneled series *The Migration of the Negro*.²² In chapter three I discuss the history of Washington's art scene, including the group of artists who had a long association with the Phillips gallery.

One mission of the new gallery was to encourage the private purchase of art for the home. By showing how fine paintings, sculpture, and ceramics enhanced their own modest townhouse, Herring and Aden hoped to create an appreciation for art within their community. In fact, the first exhibition in October of 1943 was called "American Paintings for the Home." This emphasis may have limited the scale of works they could show, but it certainly did not limit the style or subject matter. The black artists they showed were not afraid to combine African American images with abstract African forms, and figural painters like local black artist John Robinson were shown in conjunction with white abstractionists such as I. Rice Pereira, who had her first Washington one-person show at the Howard University Gallery of Art. Keith Morrison has commented that there was "sometimes a conspicuous uneven 'look'" to their exhibitions, but he explains that it "was not that their taste was uneven, but rather that their guiding principle was cultural, not formal."²³ In the 1950s the Barnett Aden Gallery continued to show the work of emerging "stars," including the early work of Kenneth Noland, Morris Louis, Gene Davis, Romare Bearden, and Alma Thomas.

As I discuss in chapter four, the Barnett Aden Gallery maintained a program of five to eight exhibitions per year throughout the 1940s and 1950s, but after the

²² Carroll Greene, Jr., phone conversation with the author, March 6, 2002.

²³ Keith Morrison, *Art in Washington and its Afro-American Presence, 1940-1970* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Project for the Arts, 1985): 83.

unexpected death of Aden in 1961, the aging Herring was unable to continue at the same pace. “The Professor” (as he was affectionately known) continued to welcome individuals into his home to view his now sizeable collection, but the activities of the gallery as an institution waned. Contemporary African American artist Sam Gilliam recalls taking his high school students to visit Dr. Herring at Randolph Place, where they heard colorful stories about the artists whose work hung on the walls.²⁴

When Herring died at the age of eighty-four in 1969, the home at 127 Randolph Place was sold to pay his bills, and the collection was dispersed into the hands of three individuals. Adolphus Ealey, a local friend and artist, inherited the bulk of the collection and (to his credit) kept much of it intact. After years of campaigning unsuccessfully for an institutional home for the collection in Washington, Ealey finally moved the collection to Florida, where it was acquired by the Florida Education Fund in 1991. The collection was sold again in 1998, this time to Black Entertainment Television’s founder Robert L. Johnson, who brought the art works back to Washington, where they are professionally stored. The official credit line for objects in the contemporary collection is “from the Barnett Aden Collection, Washington, D.C.” According to curator Tuliza Fleming, the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture is in the early stages of putting together an exhibition of the collection.²⁵

²⁴ Sam Gilliam, phone interview with the author, February 12, 2002. Gilliam (b. 1933) moved to Washington in 1962 and developed a highly individualistic style based on pouring and splashing paint on to canvases. These were subsequently rolled, folded, crumpled and then hung from ceilings, walls, or over armatures. Commonly referred to as “drape” paintings, these works became monumental in size, filling gallery spaces. In 1971 Gilliam installed *Seahorses*, his first outdoor works, at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. In New York he exhibited at the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Museum of Modern Art, and he was part of the 36th Venice Biennale in 1973. To read about his career see Jonathan P. Binstock *Sam Gilliam: A Retrospective* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2005).

²⁵ Tuliza Fleming, phone conversation with the author, October 2007.

As part of my research into the workings of the gallery I had the privilege of examining the works in the collection as it existed in 2003. Initially I assumed that the current collection might provide insight into the aesthetic tastes of Aden and Herring. I thought that it might give an idea of the artists who showed at the gallery and what kind of art they preferred for their collection. However, as my research continued, I realized that the current collection is markedly different from the collection as it existed in 1968 and earlier. I also came to realize that there were many artists who showed repeatedly at the gallery, who were not (or were no longer) part of the contemporary collection. These included black artists such as Merton Simpson, James L. Wells, and Charles White, all of whom had solo exhibitions at the Barnett Aden Gallery; and a host of white artists, including Ruth Galoon, Jack Perlmutter, and Therese Schwartz, who also had solo shows at the gallery. I would argue that the current collection reflects much more of the aesthetics or interests of Adolphus Ealey, who owned and managed the collection between 1969 and his death in 1992. During this time there were many additions of contemporary black artists' work to the collection, and there were many works removed (presumably sold). When I discovered these omissions I concluded that my information about the gallery's artists and the exhibition program would have to come from other sources. Chapter five concludes with a brief discussion of the legacy of the Barnett Aden Gallery, and the Appendix to this thesis is the culmination of my efforts to reconstruct the exhibition history of the gallery.

Review of the Literature

Surprisingly little has been written about the Barnett Aden Gallery. While many artists and art historians strongly assert the historical significance of the gallery, no one

has taken the history of the gallery as a research project in itself. One reason for this is undoubtedly the scarcity of records from the original gallery, as well as the lack of any substantial group of archival “papers” from the founders, Herring and Aden. My search for such primary documents was only partially successful. The records from the gallery have never been made available to researchers and almost certainly have been destroyed.²⁶

In the decades since the gallery closed there have been two significant exhibitions of the collection—each with a lengthy catalogue. In 1974 Ealey arranged for the collection to be shown at the Smithsonian Institution’s Anacostia Museum, and afterward, at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. The introduction to this catalogue by Ealey contains a short history of the gallery (based on his conversations with Herring), and there are brief biographies of the artists represented, as well as tributes to the gallery written by more than a dozen contemporary artists and art professionals. The tributes attest to the significance of the gallery and now hold additional value, since most of those who contributed are deceased.

The second catalogue was published in 1994 after the collection was purchased and exhibited by the Florida Education Fund at the Museum of African American Art in Tampa, Florida. This catalogue followed a similar format, with a slightly longer history of the gallery written by Carroll Greene, Jr. (based on his conversations with Ealey) and

²⁶ According to art historian Lynn Moody Igoe, there were numerous boxes filled with gallery records in the basement of the gallery shortly before Herring’s death in 1969. In 1971 Igoe contacted the executor of Herring’s will and expressed her interest in writing a book about the history of the gallery. As she recalled, “I promised to organize the papers and use them in creating a lasting tribute to what Herring and Aden had done. Unfortunately the executor said I could see the papers only if I paid him \$1,000.” She added that “at this time of my life...he might as well have asked for a million dollars. So I used my fellowship to start a bibliography of African American art” Lynn Moody Igoe, e-mail message to author, June 28, 2002. I contacted this man several times between 2002 and his death in 2006, but he refused to verify whether these records were still in existence.

profiles of Herring and Aden were added to those of selected artists in the collection. While both catalogues give credit to the original gallery, they provide only limited, mostly anecdotal, information about the history of the gallery.

The Museum of African American Art, in Tampa, also produced a thirty-five-minute video called *The Legacy*, which included interviews with Lois Mailou Jones, Lila Oliver Asher, David Driskell, Carroll Greene, Jr. and Adolphus Ealey. Although I believe that the original mission of the gallery may have been somewhat misrepresented by the dramatic assertions of the narrator, the firsthand accounts from those personally involved at the gallery are invaluable sources of information not found anywhere else.

During the course of my research, I located numerous local newspaper announcements and brief reviews of exhibitions at the gallery dating from the very first exhibition in October of 1943. Most of these (with a handful of exceptions) are a paragraph or two in length, and even the occasional longer reviews are largely descriptive with little critical analysis. But these clippings, along with the exhibition catalogues (actually small brochures) published by the gallery for many of the shows, have allowed me to recreate much of the exhibition history of the gallery from 1943 through the early 1960s (See Appendix). These small catalogues were found at a variety of locations around Washington, including Howard University Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Archives of American Art, Martin Luther King, Jr. Library, Corcoran Museum of Art, Smithsonian American Art Museum, and the National Gallery of Art. Most were found in the vertical files of those artists who exhibited at the gallery.

Mainstream art journals like *Art Digest* and *Art News* often listed the gallery in their "Washington, D. C." section, but most of the full-length articles about the gallery

were in the African American press. A popular journal called *Our World* featured the gallery in a 1951 article, “Washington Art Comes Home: Negro Sponsored Barnett Aden Gallery Gives a Homey Touch to Interracial Art Exhibits.”²⁷ It included several photographs inside the gallery and details about the personalities of Herring and Aden.

One major source for information about the gallery has been scholarship on the individuals who showed there, since many of these have become prominent artists. Writings on Alma Thomas, a founding member and vice-president of the gallery, have been particularly helpful. For instance, in a 1981 monograph on the artist, curator Adelyn D. Breeskin described Thomas’ close relationship with Herring and the “pivotal” role that he and the gallery had on her development as an artist.²⁸ In the catalogue for a 1998 retrospective of Thomas’ work, Tritobia Hayes Benjamin pointed out that the Barnett Aden Gallery was one of Washington’s first galleries to exhibit modern American art and gave Thomas the “opportunity to interact there with numerous contemporary artists from across the nation.”²⁹ In addition, I located an unpublished master’s thesis titled “The Path to Creativity: The Life and Career of Alma Thomas in Washington, D. C.” by Sandra Fitzpatrick.³⁰ This text has an entire chapter devoted to Thomas’ involvement with the gallery. Although Fitzpatrick mostly references previous scholarship, her interview with the late Laura Carson (who purchased the only work sold at the inaugural 1943 opening) provides fresh insights on the early years of the gallery.

²⁷ “Washington Art Comes Home: Negro Sponsored Barnett Aden Gallery Gives Homey Touch to Interracial Art Exhibits,” *Our World* 6 (May 1951): 30-32.

²⁸ Adelyn D. Breeskin, introduction to Merry A. Foresta, *A Life in Art: Alma Thomas, 1891-1978* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press for the National Museum of American Art, 1981), 7.

²⁹ Tritobia Hayes Benjamin, “From Academic Representation to Poetic Abstraction: The Art of Alma Woodsey Thomas,” in *Alma W. Thomas: A Retrospective of the Paintings*, Fort Wayne Museum of Art (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 1998), 24.

³⁰ Sandra Fitzpatrick, “The Path to Creativity: The Life and Career of Alma Thomas in Washington, D.C.,” Master’s thesis, 1982.

Many other artists have written of their experiences at the gallery. Black artist Larry Erskine Thomas described his first visit to the gallery: “My exciting meeting with Alonzo Aden and Dr. James V Herring still sends out vibrations. In this warm little Gallery, for the first time, I deeply sensed the charismatic force of the Afro-American artist....” Thomas recalled hearing about the gallery when he was in Ethiopia teaching arts and crafts. He heard that the gallery “would encourage struggling and unknown artists with something to offer. In July of 1952, I came to the United States on my first home leave and I headed straight for the Barnett Aden Gallery....”³¹ Other artists have noted how unusual the gallery was. As artist Jack Perlmutter exclaimed, “Oh, it was unbelievable! Lonnie made a place where white and black artists could meet socially, and in that way extend the definition of art. The idea that art doesn’t belong to just one group.”³²

It is from such individual anecdotes, many gleaned from interviews conducted by the author, that I have pieced together the history of the gallery and the personalities of its founders. Other perspectives on the gallery were found in books and catalogues about Lois Mailou Jones, Jacob Kainen, Herman Maril, Elizabeth Catlett, and James A. Porter. Some of these sources described the layout of individual exhibitions, providing clues to exactly how the spaces served the needs of the gallery. Others describe exactly who attended the openings and the invaluable contacts that could be made at the gallery.

Literature on the Art Scene in Washington, D.C.

In 1988, in a series of articles published in *Museum and Arts Washington*, Jean Lawlor Cohen outlined the history of the arts in Washington, D.C. The first of these,

³¹ Thomas, quoted in Anacostia Neighborhood Museum, 159.

³² Jack Perlmutter, interview with the author, Bethesda, Md., June 2003.

“The Old Guard: Washington Artists in the 1940s,” was extremely valuable for placing the Barnett Aden Gallery in the context of other institutions in Washington, D.C. Cohen noted that even during the war there had been a small “but lively” art scene, largely due to a handful of “rugged individualists” like Herring and Aden.³³ From this article I was able to construct a basic chronology of the early development of the various art institutions in the area.

A publication sponsored by the Works Progress Administration proved to be a valuable resource for learning about the history of Washington, D.C. institutions up to the 1930s. The Federal Writers’ Project, as it was known published a series of books as part of the “American Guide Series,” with detailed information about individual states and certain cities in the United States. Published in 1937, *Washington: City and Capital* is a lengthy tome with sections on a myriad of topics, including a detailed history of the early art institutions in the city.³⁴ This text explains the complex history of the national art collections and the creation of the National Gallery of Art. A detailed description of the Corcoran Gallery collection is provided, along with a detailed map of the floor plan as it existed in the 1930s.

Another source of information for my project was *Art in Washington and its Afro-American Presence, 1940-1970*. Sponsored by the Washington Project for the Arts, this catalogue was written by the African American artist and writer Keith Morrison. This author chronicled the development of the art community in Washington, beginning with two “pioneers” of the 1920s: Duncan Phillips, founder of the Phillips Memorial Gallery,

³³ Jean Lawlor Cohen, “The Old Guard: Washington Artists in the 1940s,” *Museum and Arts Washington* 4 (May/June 1988): 55-67.

³⁴ Federal Writers’ Project, Works Progress Administration, “American Guide Series,” *Washington: City and Capital* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1937).

and James V. Herring, founder of the art department at Howard University. Morrison asserts that during the period 1940-1970 just about every major Washington artist—and many others beyond the city—were impacted by the programs at Howard University and the Barnett Aden Gallery.³⁵ He provides information about the controversies and personality clashes of those involved. He credits these institutions with creating the open atmosphere within the Washington art community that paved the way for the kind of success that Sam Gilliam achieved in the 1960s.

Although a valuable source, Morrison's account seldom distinguishes between the program at Howard and that at the Barnett Aden Gallery. He based much of his analysis on the 10th anniversary exhibition at Howard, and he does not refer to any specific exhibitions at the Barnett Aden Gallery, not surprising considering the dearth of information. Morrison made the assumption that it was Herring who directed the Barnett Aden, which, as I discuss in chapter four, was not the case. Aden was the director of the gallery from its opening in 1943 until his death in 1961.

There are several books and reports about social conditions for African Americans in Washington, D.C., in this period including *Segregation in Washington* (1948), a special report written by the National Committee on Segregation, and *Dusk at the Mountain: The Negro the Nation and the Capitol, A Report on Problems and Progress* (1963) by Haynes Johnson. The 1948 report documents the daily difficulties encountered by African Americans in Washington, D.C., including appalling examples of the many ways that blacks were barred from restaurants, theaters, auditoriums, hospitals, vocations, and housing. The study is replete with charts and statistics that reveal the

³⁵ Morrison, 12. Morrison is a Jamaican-born artist who became one of the leading figures in the American art world from the early 1960s through 2004. Morrison is a prolific painter as well as a respected scholar. See David C. Driskell, ed., *Keith Morrison* (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 2005).

devastating effects of segregation in the nation's capital during the 1940s. Segregation continued well into the 1950s. As Johnson documents in his book, African American residents were still forced to live in a densely populated section of the District of Columbia, largely due to what he terms a "two-price system" of housing that effectively "priced out" potential black homeowners who were given quotes several thousand dollars above those given white prospects. Johnson also discusses the class conflicts within the African American community and the declining status of what sociologist E. Franklin Frazier called the "black bourgeoisie" during the 1950s. These texts were helpful in situating Herring and Aden within their own elite class of black academic intellectuals, but also revealed their denigrated status within the larger realm of Washington society.

For the early history of the arts at Howard University, I consulted Walter Dyson's *Howard University, The Capstone of Negro Education, A History: 1867-1940*. In this comprehensive account, Dyson provides detailed information about the University, such as expenditures for each department, and the salaries of professors. For a history of the art department in particular I looked to a 2005 exhibition catalogue published by the Howard Gallery of Art. *A Proud Continuum: Eight Decades of Art at Howard University* contains a wealth of information with essays by Scott W. Baker, Tritobia Hayes Benjamin, Richard J. Powell, Teresia Bush, Lisa E. Farrington, and David C. Driskell. Scott Baker's essay, "From Freedmen to Fine Artists," provides a detailed account (based on primary sources) of the history of the visual arts at Howard. The catalogue also contains many photographs taken at Howard, showing students at work in classrooms, interior views of the Howard Gallery, and examples of work by the alumni.

Literature on Black History and Culture

For a sense of class issues within the black community, I consulted *Black Bourgeoisie* by E. Franklin Frazier. When published in 1957 this account was widely criticized because Frazier dared to criticize the “new middle class.” Frazier claimed that from 1935 to 1955 a new black middle class developed with “a deep-seated inferiority complex.” With no chance of succeeding in white society, this group, he contends, was constantly striving for status within the black community, spending lavishly on empty rituals, such as debutante balls and cotillions. Frazier calls this “a world of make-believe,” with “only pretended racial pride.”³⁶ However, even Frazier admitted that there were exceptions, particularly the elite in academia.

A study of the issues behind the “black elite” is provided in *Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, and the Struggle for Racial Uplift*, by Jacqueline M. Moore.³⁷ Moore discusses the conflicting ideas of Washington, the “accommodationist”, and Du Bois, the “radical.” She says that the debate was more of a personal conflict than a true debate, but Washington did try to defeat the NAACP, which Du Bois helped found, and many other projects.

Kevin Kelly Gaines covers much of the same subject matter in *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*. He describes “uplift theory” as black elites’ response to segregation and white supremacy. He states that the position of these black elites was “deeply contradictory, rehabilitating the image of

³⁶ E. Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie: The Rise of a New Middle Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1957), 24.

³⁷ Jacqueline M. Moore, *Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, and the Struggle for Racial Uplift* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 2003).

African Americans through class distinctions, which enforced hierarchies.’³⁸ He describes how they sought to rehabilitate the race’s image by embodying respectability. In the face of constant threats of violence and humiliation African Americans sought to define themselves and maintain self respect.

For insights into the complex issue of skin color within the black community I consulted Margaret L. Hunter’s *Race, Gender, and the Politics of Skin Tone*. Hunter writes that “hidden within the process of racial discrimination, is the often overlooked issue of colorism.”³⁹ She states that this colorism (prejudice based on skin color) continues to affect the life chances of dark-skinned African Americans. In *Skin Deep* by Cedric Herring, Verna M. Keith, and Hayward Derrick Horton, a similar claim is made. Herring discusses the historical origins of colorism when “mulattoes maintained their elite position in the Black community for at least fifty years following Emancipation. They passed their advantages on to their children by continuing their close association with whites, and by avoiding intermarriage with darker Blacks.”⁴⁰

Literature on galleries and collecting

Scholarship on the function of galleries has been largely subsumed into museum discourse, but there are a few books that specifically addresses galleries, including Brian O’Doherty’s 1986 book *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, and *The Art Dealers: The Powers Behind the Scene Tell How the Art World Really Works* by Laura De Coppet and Alan Jones. O’Doherty describes the development of pristine

³⁸ Kevin Kelly Gaines, *Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

³⁹ Margaret L. Hunter, *Race, Gender, and the Politics of Skin Tone* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 2.

⁴⁰ Cedric Herring, Verna M. Keith, and Hayward Derrick Horton, *Skin/Deep: How Race and Complexion Matter in the ‘Color Blind’ Era* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

white-walled rooms as the favored context for viewing art, and the reaction against this format by some artists during the 1960s and 1970s. He relates how the “ideal gallery subtracts from the artwork all cues that interfere with the fact that it is ‘art.’”⁴¹ Obviously in the home setting of the Barnett Aden Gallery there were many such “interfering cues,” but I investigate how this may have served certain functions—functions not needed by more mainstream galleries. O’Doherty’s book served as a catalyst for critical thinking about how this gallery-within-a-home worked for both the spectators and the artists. In De Coppet and Jones’ study, thirty-two New York art dealers (including a few who were active in the forties and fifties) tell their own stories in short chapters on each. These were helpful in contrasting the New York and Washington art scenes, as well as the goals of the individual art dealers.

I also consulted biographies of a few gallery owners, including Lee Hall’s 1991 monograph on Betty Parsons and a 1998 book on Julien Levy.⁴² Both of these sources included appendixes with a complete list of exhibitions concurrent with those at the Barnett Aden. A wonderful source for information about the local art scene and the artists associated with the Phillips Collection is *The Eye of Duncan Phillips: A Collection in the Making*.⁴³ Edited by Erika D. Passantino, this vast account includes essays by thirteen scholars. Of particular note is the essay by Washington artist Ben L. Summerford titled “The Phillips Collection and Art in Washington.” Aside from the essays, Appendix A,

⁴¹ Brian O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (San Francisco: The Lapis Press, 1986): 14.

⁴² Lee Hall, *Betty Parsons: Artist, Dealer, Collector* (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1991) and Ingrid Schaffner and Lisa Jacobs, eds., *Julien Levy: Portrait of an Art Gallery* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998).

⁴³ Erika D. Passantino, *The Eye of Duncan Phillips: A Collection in the Making* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

“Exhibitions at the Phillips Collection,” was extremely helpful as I traced the exhibition practices at the gallery.

Literature on Gender and Sexuality

It is commonly acknowledged that Herring and Aden were homosexuals, and I have considered the implications that their sexual identity had on their lives and careers. A valuable starting point was Ann Gibson’s 1994 article “Lesbian Identity and the Politics of Representation in Betty Parsons’s Gallery,” in which she examines Parsons’s definition of abstraction as difference through the notion of “camp.” Gibson suggests that Parsons’s sexuality may have predisposed her toward certain artists.

For information about homosexuality in black communities I turned to *The Greatest Taboo: Homosexuality in Black Communities*. This book of essays by numerous contributors begins with an astute foreword by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. As he argues, “What makes the closet so crowded is that gays are, as a rule, still socialized—usually by their nearest and dearest—into shame.”⁴⁴ In her essay bell hooks discusses the historical treatment of gays in the black community. She states, unexpectedly, that “among the older African Americans she spoke to in small close-knit southern communities, there was a tolerance for a variety of sexual practices and preferences.”⁴⁵

For an interesting study of architectural interiors and “constructed” space I read Aaron Betsky’s *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire*. Although the interior of the Barnett Aden Gallery does not align comfortably with Betsky’s definition of queer space, there are many fascinating correlations. For instance, Betsky states that “queer

⁴⁴ Henry Louis Gates, Jr., foreword to *The Greatest Taboo: Homosexuality in Black Communities* (Los Angeles, New York: Alyson Books, 2001), xiv.

⁴⁵ bell hooks, “Homophobia in Black Communities,” in *The Greatest Taboo*, 68.

space challenged the division of space into places of work and places of living....”⁴⁶

Obviously, the spaces of the house on Randolph Place were used for both living and working, with few clear demarcations.

Christopher Reed’s *Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture* provides an examination of the notion of domesticity in the context of modern art. In his introduction to this compilation of essays Reed explains how, by the twentieth century, “[T]he home has been positioned as the antipode to high art.” He documents “the growing divergence of domesticity and modernism, despite—or because of—their intertwined roots in turn-of-the-century culture.”⁴⁷ This is particularly pertinent to a discussion of a gallery located in a traditional domestic space.

Interviews

Personal interviews played an important role in my research. These included Lila Oliver Asher, Scott Baker, Tritobia Hayes Benjamin, David Driskell, John Hope Franklin, Sam Gilliam, Samuel Green, Carroll Greene, Jr., Edward L. Loper, Jack Perlmutter, Peter L. Robinson, Warren Robbins, and Bill Taylor. By far the most helpful were my two extended interviews with artist and art historian David Driskell.⁴⁸ Both interviews were held at his home in Hyattsville, Maryland. Driskell had extended contact with the Barnett Aden Gallery—he worked there after his classes at Howard University during the early 1950s, he had his first one-person show there in 1957, and he became

⁴⁶ Aaron Betsky, *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire* (New York: William Morris, 1997), 64.

⁴⁷ Christopher Reed, ed., introduction to *Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996).

⁴⁸ For information on Driskell and his art collection see University of Maryland Gallery of Art, *Narratives of African American Art and Identity* (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 1998). For information on Driskell as an artist see Rebecca T. Frishkorn and Rueben M. Rainey, “The Artist and his Gardens,” *International Review of African American Art* 20, pt. 4 (2006) 2-11. For a survey of his recent work see *David Driskell: Painting Across the Decade 1996-2006* (New York: DC Moore Gallery, 2006).

acting director of the Barnett Aden for a time during the 1960s. He knew Herring and Aden personally and credits them for many of his ideas about art and art collecting. These interviews were extremely informative about the operations of the gallery, the personalities of Herring and Aden, and the roles that each man played in the day-to-day operations. Driskell greatly enhanced my understanding of how the gallery worked. He even drew the layout of the house at 127 Randolph Place as he recalled it.

Several artists recalled their excitement upon discovering the gallery and the dramatic impact of the gallery's setting in a well-appointed African American home. John Hope Franklin called me to express how much he enjoyed visiting the gallery during the 1950s: "It was always a festive occasion at the gallery." He added, "It was remarkable that Aden would open his private home to both communities."⁴⁹ All my interviewees expressed their profound respect for Herring and Aden and what they accomplished at the Barnett Aden Gallery.

Much of my research was done at the Archives of American Art, where I located transcripts of several unpublished interviews from the 1950s and 1960s, including one with Jacob Kainen and another with James L. Wells. I also located a number of documents (invitations, exhibition announcements, etc.) related to the gallery in the papers of Gene Davis, William Calfee, Elizabeth Catlett, Lois Mailou Jones, Jacob Lawrence, Hughie Lee-Smith, Norman Lewis, Edward Loper, Herman Maril, Theodoros Stamos, Prentiss Taylor, Ellis Wilson, Joe Wolins, and Hale Woodruff.

⁴⁹ John Hope Franklin, phone interview by the author, January 2003. Franklin is professor emeritus at Duke University. His publications include *The Free Negro in North Carolina, 1790-1660* (1943), *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans* (1947), *The Militant South, 1800-1869* (1956), *The Emancipation Proclamation* (1963), and *A Southern Odyssey* (1976).

Returning to the “portrait” of the gallery by Robinson, it is obvious that there were no clear boundaries between the private and public functions of the gallery. It was the unique setting of the gallery that played a crucial role in the reception of the art on view. In chapters four and five I examine how the genteel atmosphere altered the viewing experience. Most white visitors had never entered the private home of an African American, and most black visitors had never shared a private domestic space with white onlookers. Not only did Herring and Aden introduce visitors to a wide range of contemporary American art, they integrated the work of black artists into the mix in a way that naturalized the idea that art belongs to everyone.

CHAPTER 2 FROM SOUTH CAROLINA TO WASHINGTON, D.C.

“Now as everyone knows, Howard University is the capstone of Negro education in the world. There gather Negro money, beauty, and prestige. It is to the Negro what Harvard is to the whites....Not only is the scholastic rating at Howard high, but tea is poured in the manner!” Zora Neale Hurston¹

The Barnett Aden Gallery of Washington, D.C., was the creation of two men: James V. Herring and Alonzo J. Aden. Both were born in South Carolina—Herring in Clio in 1887 and Aden in Spartanburg in 1906. Both were sent by their families at an early age to Washington, D.C., in pursuit of better educational opportunities. Herring attended Howard Academy, a preparatory high school at Howard University, and Aden attended Armstrong High School, which was part of the public school system.² Both men made Washington their home and became respected members of the black community. They became partners soon after meeting in the late 1920s and began living together in 1929. Despite Aden’s numerous affairs over the coming years, they maintained their partnership and mutual respect for the rest of their lives.

Washington was one of the most popular destinations for African Americans migrating to the North, primarily because of the presence of Howard University. Although Washington was severely segregated, the size and relative prosperity of the African American community offered a measure of security and comfort. The public school system in Washington offered a much better education, and nearby Howard University was an inspiration for young black students in the area. It was also a place

¹ Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road: An Autobiography* (New York: Lippincott, 1942; New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 113. Citation is to the Harper Collins edition. Hurston was a writer and folklore collector and participated in the Harlem Renaissance. See Deborah G. Plant, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Biography of the Spirit* (New York: Praeger, 2007).

² *Bison* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University, 1933), 29. This is the student annual for 1933. Another source says that Aden attended Dunbar High School.

where, on occasion, light-skinned men like Herring and Aden could “pass,” even if only for a few hours, and gain access to areas where those with darker skin could not safely venture. As the nation’s capital there were other advantages, including government jobs and those public places where segregation was not allowed, such as the Smithsonian museums, the congressional lunchroom, and the restaurant at Union Station.

In this chapter I will outline the backgrounds of Herring and Aden and the motivation for their migration to the nation’s capital—in particular the lure of Howard University. Next I will examine the early work of Herring at Howard, where he established the art department and inspired young black artists to excellence, eventually establishing the Howard Gallery of Art. Finally I will look at the early career of Aden and discuss the personal and professional partnership he forged with Herring in mid-twentieth-century Washington, D.C.

Herring’s Early Life and Work

Herring seldom spoke of his early life, but he did open up to Hope Wyche, a reporter for the *Hilltop*, the Howard student newspaper. Published in 1950, this “portrait” of Herring listed his mother as Alice (Carrol) Herring and his father as William Culbreth.³ Of my interviewees, only David Driskell recalled Herring mentioning his parentage. Driskell remembered an occasion when Herring told him that his mother was an especially dark-skinned African American, while his father was a white Jewish merchant in Clio, South Carolina.⁴ There was no doubt an unsanctioned union in 1880s South Carolina, and the fact that Herring took his mother’s surname suggests as much. A

³ Hope Wyche, “Portrait,” *Hilltop*, November 10, 1950.

⁴ David Driskell, 2002. Driskell recalled that Herring pointed to a book and said, “My mother was as black as that book.”

study of census records for the period was inconclusive, but it does seem likely that James Herring was born into a family of “farm laborers” near Clio, South Carolina.

Although born in South Carolina, Herring attended public school in Greensboro, North Carolina. He was probably sent to live with relatives or family friends—a common practice among southern black families who found local “colored” schools severely lacking. Herring maintained ties with his Greensboro friends, keeping his King Street address in Greensboro as his permanent address until the late 1920s, when he purchased the house on Randolph Place in Washington. In her article for the *Hilltop*, Wyche noted that Herring hesitated when asked about his schooling in Greensboro—and then confided that he was “whipped for drawing.”⁵

As a child growing up in the South, Herring would have been familiar with daily humiliations and may have witnessed violent acts against African Americans. Wilma King writes about the indelible effect of such incidents especially for children. For instance, Mary McCloud Bethune was only twelve years old in 1887 (the year of Herring’s birth) when she witnessed a near lynching of a man who had refused to blow out a match for a drunken white man.⁶ In fact the 1880s was the beginning of an intensified level of violence against the black population. “The scale of the carnage between 1882 and 1930,” wrote Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck, “meant, on the average, a black man, woman or child was lynched every week by a hate-driven white mob.”⁷ In South Carolina Governor Cole Blease (1911-1915) openly endorsed lynching

⁵ Wyche.

⁶ Wilma King, *African American Childhoods: Historical Perspectives from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 148.

⁷ Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992) ix, quoted in Wilma King, 137.

as necessary for the good of society.⁸ It is no wonder that families migrated north when they were able, or at least sent their children north.

The so-called Great Migration of African Americans to northern cities did not begin until about 1915; however, migration north had been a steady stream since just after the Civil War. Many families who did not migrate sent their children north to escape the racism in the South and to find educational opportunities. During the first decades of the twentieth century, education for African Americans beyond grade school was severely limited in the southern states. In Washington, Dunbar and Armstrong were the “colored” high schools, and both had highly educated teachers, many with advanced degrees, who had nowhere else to take their talent.

In 1908 Herring came to Washington, where he attended Howard Academy, a preparatory high school within the university. There he came to the attention of his English instructor, Annie R. Barker, who encouraged his artistic interest and took him to the Corcoran Gallery of Art, where he saw his first original oil painting. In 1914 Herring traveled to Canada and London through the benefit of a Frances Hendricks and Harriet E. Judson scholarship. He earned a scholarship to Syracuse University, where he studied at the Crouse College of Fine Arts. This may have been Herring’s first experience at a predominantly white institution, and it seems that he adapted well, participating in a number of activities. He was an officer in the Thumb Box Society, a group that produced small paintings, and won first prize “for figures out of doors” at the Society’s first public exhibition in 1915.⁹ He was also a member of the university choir all four years.

⁸ Walter Edgar, *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 468.

⁹ “Along the Color Line,” *Crisis* 9 (February 1915): 163.

During this period Herring gained his first teaching experience, teaching two summers for the department of art at Wilberforce University in Ohio.¹⁰ He also had a solo exhibition of his own work, from which a number of paintings were purchased.¹¹ In 1917 Herring graduated from Syracuse with a Bachelor of Pedagogy in Art degree. In the fall of the same year Herring was appointed (through the Methodist Board in Cincinnati) to teach art and history at Haven Academy in Meridian, Mississippi.

After a year of teaching in Mississippi, Herring accepted an assignment working as an education secretary for the YMCA, first in Mussel Shoals, Alabama, and later in Camp Lee, Virginia. These were prestigious positions for African Americans during this period. Such work offered leadership experience and could even establish a career path. The YMCA secretaries were chosen based on appearance, education, and personal conduct. For example, Jesse E. Moorland, one of the first black secretaries of the international YMCA, became a national leader. Moorland believed in non-confrontation of racism, an ideology that appealed to an elite still dependent on white assistance. He saw the role of the black elite as that of liaison to white society. Through this work with the YMCA Herring was no doubt influenced by this ideology of non-confrontation, a policy he adhered to throughout his life. While working for the YMCA in Alabama, Herring traveled regularly by rail between small towns. Due to his light skin he was able to travel in the white car, but he took along and pretended to read a Jewish newspaper.

¹⁰ Wilberforce University was founded in 1856 on a site that was one of the destination points on the Ohio Underground Railroad. It was named after the eighteenth-century British abolitionist William Wilberforce.

¹¹ Wyche.

Herring spent most of the summer of 1918 traveling throughout the midwestern and southern states, eventually arriving in New York. In September Herring returned to teaching, this time at Straight College in New Orleans, where he taught art and history. In 1920 he returned to Greensboro to teach art and art appreciation at Bennett College, and “took an active part in the dramatic work.”¹² It was during this time that Herring met and befriended the drama teacher and actor Richard B. Harrison.¹³ It was to Harrison that Herring confided his dream of someday establishing his own art gallery.

Finally, in 1921 Herring began his teaching career at Howard University. Hired by Albert I. Cassell, Herring was “employed as an Instructor in Architecture and to teach the subjects in the field most closely related to the fine arts.”¹⁴ (Fig. 6) Herring, however, had a grander vision for his future at Howard—apparently from the very beginning. Artist and art historian Elton C. Fax later wrote about Herring’s entrance:

In 1921 a dapper, aggressive, young black man, fresh from Syracuse University, strode on the campus of Washington’s Howard University with the announcement that he was there to establish an art department. His name was James Vernon Herring. From what he later told this writer, that announcement evoked gales of laughter that must have been heard all the way to Baltimore. The derision came not from the students but from administration and some faculty members who should have known better.¹⁵

Although music classes had a long history at Howard University, it took much longer for the visual arts to become appreciated. The founders of the University were interested in preparing preachers of the gospel and considered music an important area of

¹² Wyche.

¹³ Harrison was famous for his portrayal of “De Lawd” in *The Green Pastures*. This play ran for sixteen months on Broadway, went on a national tour appearing in 203 towns in forty states, and won the Pulitzer Prize.

¹⁴ Walter Dyson, *Howard University: The Capstone of Negro Education, A History 1867-1940* (Washington, D.C.: Graduate School of Howard University, 1941), 141.

¹⁵ Elton C. Fax, *Seventeen Black Artists* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1971), 9. Herring graduated from Syracuse in 1917 and, thus, was not actually “fresh from Syracuse University.”

study for these men, reinforcing the widely held stereotype that “the Negro was gifted in music.”¹⁶ Although drawing classes were taught in the Normal Department at Howard as early as 1871, drawing was not considered a major subject, but rather an “accomplishment,” and eventually such classes were dropped from the curriculum in 1876. It was not until 1889 that drawing became a requirement for trade courses within the Industrial Department with classes taught by Della P. Mussey. In 1892 the drawing course was transferred back to the Normal Department and Harry J. Bradford was hired as Teacher of Drawing. (Bradford would later teach drawing to the young Herring at Howard Academy.) More courses in the visual arts were resisted by the Howard administration well into the twentieth century. This situation began to change in 1919, when William A. Hazel organized the Department of Architecture at Howard. Hazel (and his successor Albert I. Cassell) emphasized architecture as a fine art and recognized the critical importance of art history to the field.¹⁷

Thus, when Herring returned to Howard University 1921, it was a different institution than the one he had attended earlier. Howard Academy, the preparatory high school that Herring attended no longer existed, and the University as such had truly come into being. The dedicated faculty had kept their vision of creating a first class university based on the classical model. This despite the fact that successive white administrators had attempted to transform Howard University into an industrial school modeled after Hampton and Tuskegee Universities. This was largely due to the faculty and the fact that

¹⁶ Dyson, 126.

¹⁷ Dyson, 139-141. For a detailed account of the art department’s early years see Scott W. Baker, “From Freeman to Fine Artists,” in *A Proud Continuum: Eight Decades of Art at Howard University* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Gallery of Art, 2005), 2-17.

they knew they could not easily be replaced; therefore, they boldly created a curriculum based on their own visions.

Attitudes toward teaching the fine arts were beginning to change by the time Herring was hired. According to one account, Herring “gradually overcame—with watercolors—the resistance to art courses on the part of Howard trustees.”¹⁸ Within months (by the end of 1921) approval was given by Dean Harold Hatfield to establish a separate art department at Howard. Beginning with one room on the second floor of the Engineering and Architecture building, the first courses offered were “design, free-hand drawing, composition, water-color painting, and life sketch.”¹⁹ In 1922 May Howard Jackson was hired to teach sculpture, and models from the Corcoran Art Gallery began posing twice weekly for “life-classes.” Gwendolyn Bennett was hired in 1924, teaching design for one year before leaving to study in Europe, and teaching another year after her return the following year. Herring actively recruited both faculty and students for the new department. James Porter (who succeeded Herring as head of the Art Department in 1953) was hired in 1928 to teach freehand drawing and painting, and painter and textile designer Lois Mailou Jones joined the faculty in 1930 to teach design. Alma Thomas, who would later achieve acclaim for her abstractions based on nature, was convinced by Herring to become an art major, graduating in 1924. (Fig. 7)

At Howard University Herring joined a host of distinguished intellectuals who had reached the zenith of their careers at the nation’s foremost black university. As former professor Lila O. Asher recalled:

¹⁸ Romare Bearden and Harry Henderson, *A History of African-American Artists: From 1792 to the Present* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 371. Herring was an accomplished watercolorist by this time, but it is unclear how he used this skill in his campaign.

¹⁹ Dyson, 141-142.

Well, you have to remember that the faculty from Howard was quite sophisticated, well-educated people. They were the elite. They had degrees from Europe, from Oxford, from Africa—some had two Ph.D.'s. There was no other place to be for most of these scholars. When we had our graduation ceremonies, the faculty procession was fantastic, because you had all of these colorful costumes from many countries.²⁰

The faculty included such scholars as E. Franklin Frazier in Sociology, Rayford W. Logan in History, Sterling N. Brown in Religion, Ralph J. Bunche in Political Science, and Alain Leroy Locke in Philosophy. Most influential for the visual arts was Professor Locke. Locke's educational triumphs, prior to coming to Howard, included a scholarship to Harvard, where he completed his studies in three years, and his selection as the first African American Rhodes scholar in 1907. In England Locke studied philosophy at Hertford College until 1910 and then at the University of Berlin for an additional year. While in Europe Locke met a number of well-educated Africans and gained a new perspective on the social position of African Americans in the United States. He also came to appreciate African art and gradually became aware of its influence in the careers of European modernists such as Picasso, Braque, and others. Upon his return home, Locke spent six months in the South before accepting a position at Howard University. Hired as an instructor, he eventually became head of the Philosophy department. Locke became a pivotal figure for African American artists through his writings, lectures, and his promotion of certain visual artists.

In November 1924 a dinner, sponsored by Charles S. Johnson, editor of *Opportunity* magazine (published by the National Urban League), was held at the Civic Club in New York. It was at this dinner, which honored black artists and writers, that Locke met Paul Kellogg, editor of *Survey* magazine. This magazine was published in the

²⁰ Asher, interview.

middle of each month, while *Survey Graphic* (a more heavily illustrated version) was published at the first of each month. Kellogg was so impressed with the African Americans in attendance that he decided to devote an entire issue of *Survey Graphic* to Harlem. With the advice of Johnson, Kellogg asked Locke to edit this special edition for March of 1925. The success of this issue inspired Locke to create and edit an anthology, *The New Negro*, which was published later in that year. This book became synonymous with the Harlem Renaissance—that great flowering of creativity that was occurring among black writers and artists, not only in Harlem, but in several large cities in the North.²¹ The book included the fiction of Jean Toomer and Zora Neale Hurston, the poetry of Countée Cullen and Langston Hughes, and essays by E. Franklin Frazier, Melville J. Herskovits and W. E. B. Du Bois. The text was illustrated by black artist Aaron Douglas and Bavarian graphic artist Winold Reiss. In Locke’s essay “The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts,” he articulated his vision for the role of visual artists in this Renaissance. He called for American Negro artists to follow the lead of European modernists such as Picasso, Matisse, Derain, Modigliani, Pechstein, Archipenko, and Lipschitz (among others), all of whom were profoundly influenced by the forms of African art. As he wrote,

African sculpture has been for contemporary European painting and sculpture just such a mine of fresh *motifs*, just such a lesson in simplicity and originality of expression, and surely, once known and appreciated, this art can scarcely have less influence upon the blood descendants, bound to it by a sense of direct cultural kinship, than upon those who inherit by

²¹ The Harlem Renaissance was also known as the New Negro Arts Movement or the Negro Renaissance. The dates for this Renaissance vary according to each source, but all encompass the decade of the 1920s. Some factors leading to this Renaissance were the continuing migration from south to north, the success of black soldiers during World War I, the death of Booker T. Washington in 1915, and reactions to violence in several cities in 1919. See *Harlem Renaissance: Art of Black America* (New York: Studio Museum of Harlem, 1994).

tradition only, and through the channels of an exotic curiosity and interest.²²

Through acclaim for *The New Negro* Locke came to the attention of Mary Beattie Brady, the director of the Harmon Foundation. This foundation presented annual awards in eight separate fields to accomplished African Americans, and Locke became a consultant. He was particularly influential in his promotion of the Harmon Foundation art exhibitions, which were held beginning in 1928 into the 1930s. Two of the exhibition catalogues (1931 and 1933) included essays written by Locke, where he promoted his ideas about the role of visual artists.²³ Locke encouraged the development of a “racial school of art” to rival black accomplishments in literature and music. In 1936 Locke published *Negro Art: Past and Present*, the first major survey of black art. He continued to write and lecture about black art and championed the careers of black artists until his death in 1954.

One might think that Locke and Herring would be natural allies, but it seems they had a strictly professional relationship from the beginning and over the years developed an antagonism that lasted until Locke’s death. Both were considered authorities on black art, and both were called upon as consultants. Herring’s teaching philosophy stressed a broad knowledge of art, including African art, but he did not privilege the study of African art in the way that Locke suggested. In 1926 Herring wrote that the mission of the Department of Art was “to offer the broadest foundation in art, through practical and intellectual training in aesthetics, resulting in a breadth of view, rendering the student

²² Alain Locke, “Legacy of the Ancestral Arts,” in *The New Negro*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925; New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 256. Citations are to the Simon and Schuster edition.

²³ Gary A. Reynolds and Beryl J. Wright, *Against the Odds: African-American Artists and the Harmon Foundation* (Newark: Newark Museum, 1989), 65-67.

capable for professional careers as painters, illustrators and teachers of art.”²⁴ A decade later, Herring directly addressed Locke’s philosophy in his foreword to an exhibition catalogue titled *Art of the American Negro*. Herring minimized the importance of studying African art by stating, “We agree that sound constructive lessons may be gained from the best examples of African art, as well as from Greek, Chinese or Indian...”²⁵

Locke may have looked down upon Herring’s credentials. Herring never attained a graduate degree; however, he did do further study at the noted Fogg Museum on the campus of Harvard University, where he studied Korean, Chinese, and Japanese art during his summer breaks from Howard. Herring had a strong interest in Asian art throughout his life, appreciating the contrasts between techniques used by Western and Asian artists.²⁶

Herring continued to educate himself through travel, reading, visiting exhibitions, attending conferences, spending time with artists, and participating in a myriad of art-related activities within the university, the community, and beyond. By 1924 he was a member of the College Art Association as well as the American Federation of Arts, and by 1931 he was on the board of the College Art Association. Years later many would comment on his wide breadth of knowledge. Unlike Locke, Herring was not a prolific writer, and was much less well known than either Locke or Porter. As curator Albert J.

²⁴ James V. Herring, *Annual Report of the Department of Art*, Howard University, Washington, D.C., 1924-26, 218.

²⁵ James V. Herring, foreword to *Art of the American Negro* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Gallery of Art, 1937).

²⁶ Driskell recalled that Herring would “take down a book on Asian art and explain how they used a different kind of perspective—not linear perspective, but aerial perspective.” Driskell, interview, January 2003.

Carter said of Herring, “He was a great organizer and administrator, had excellent taste, was a renowned critic, an impeccable dresser, and quite a gourmet.”²⁷

Herring articulated his exhibition philosophy in his foreword to the tenth anniversary exhibition catalogue for the Howard University Gallery of Art. He wrote, “Our policy has been to leave the discovery of racial and nationalistic artists to our chauvinistic friends. We have preferred to exhibit the works of all schools and trends regardless of ideology or any designated sphere.”²⁸ Thus, it seems Locke did exert influence on individual artists, but his influence did not extend to the leadership of the art department at Howard University. Locke and Herring cooperated professionally at Howard when necessary but avoided each other whenever possible.

There were more than philosophical differences between these men; there was real animosity between Locke and Herring. Some suspect that Locke, who was homosexual, competed with Herring for the attention of the young and attractive Alonzo Aden. In fact, Locke’s personal papers at Howard University contain a photograph of Aden presumably given to Locke. (Fig. 8) This soft-focus and inscribed studio portrait implies a certain familiarity between the two men.

The most explicit example of the animosity between Locke and Herring was related to me by David Driskell, who recalled an incident from his time in Herring’s class:

I remember, for example, there was a funeral for a Howard professor that we wanted to go to, but it was during class. So, someone—not me, I was afraid—proposed to him [Herring] that we go, and he turned around and said, “What for?” And some of them started to come up with reasons such as “he was my professor” (but of course he wasn’t), and he said, “Let the

²⁷ Albert J. Carter, quoted in *Anacostia*, 153.

²⁸ James V. Herring, foreword to *Tenth Anniversary Exhibition* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Gallery of Art, 1940).

dead bury the dead!” So later we went to hear Dr. Locke lecture. (He and Dr. Locke did not get along.) So at the end Dr. Locke singled out a group of us and said, “I don’t recall seeing you at the funeral—you should have paid your respects.” We told him that Mr. Herring wouldn’t let us out of class. And then Dr. Locke said (not terribly professional of him) that “too bad it wasn’t Professor Herring’s funeral!” So we went right back and told Mr. Herring that Dr. Locke said, “too bad it wasn’t your funeral!” (We were always carrying messages back and forth). And that’s when Mr. Herring leaned back and said, “You tell Dr. Locke that—I’ll bury *him*!”²⁹

There were professional jealousies. Herring mentioned on several occasions that Locke never mentioned him in any of his writings.³⁰ This does seem to be a conscious exclusion considering Herring’s role in creating the art department at Howard University, and the subsequent success of the Barnett Aden Gallery. Locke wrote several forewords for the Howard Gallery’s catalogues, but he (according to my research) avoided the Barnett Aden Gallery completely.

Herring’s writings were limited to forewords for exhibition catalogues and two short articles for *Crisis*, the journal for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), in the early 1940s.³¹ Throughout his writings Herring often defers to the ideas and words of others with lengthy quotes sprinkled throughout. In the articles he quotes Albert C. Barnes, James A. Porter, James J. Sweeney, Mary Beattie Brady, and many others, but he does not mention or quote Locke. Considering Locke’s stature within the academic community, this seems yet another pointed exclusion.

Several writers have noted that there was constant friction among the faculty at Howard University. As Constance Green wrote, “the reason is clear: where opportunities

²⁹ Driskell, 2002. Rumor has it that Herring attended Locke’s funeral in 1954 and repeated his admonition as he approached the casket.

³⁰ Adolphus Ealey, quoted in Morrison, *Art in Washington*, 47. Of course, this statement implies that Herring read all of Locke’s writings.

³¹ James V. Herring, “The American Negro as Craftsman and Artist,” *Crisis* 49 (April 1942): 116-118, and “The Negro Sculptor,” *Crisis* 49 (August 1942): 261-262.

are so limited, only the most generous individual would dream of letting a rival snatch a coveted prize from him without fighting....”³² Howard University may have been the capstone of Negro education, but it was also a professional dead end. After capturing a prized position at Howard, one soon realized that there were almost no opportunities to advance.

James A. Porter, Herring’s former pupil (hired as an instructor in 1927), did become a noted writer and art historian. In 1943 he published *Modern Negro Art*, a survey of the achievements of African American artists. This book came just three years after Locke’s *The Negro in Art* and was a much more thorough examination of the subject. In it Porter described the work of more than one hundred black artists. *Modern Negro Art* was acclaimed internationally as the finest text on the subject. Thus Porter and Locke researched similar subjects, but it was their profoundly different opinions about what black art should be that formed the basis of their longstanding feud. Porter’s philosophy was much more in line with Herring than it was with Locke.

While Locke believed that black artists should draw from their ancestral heritage and develop a unique racial aesthetic, Porter, in contrast, believed that the artist should “seize upon any material that may enrich his ideas and his productions.”³³ In a 1936 essay for *Art Front*, Porter went so far as to imply that Locke’s ideas were racist in that they would segregate African American artists.³⁴

³² Constance McLaughlin Green, *The Secret City: A History of Race Relations in the Nation’s Capital* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967), 212.

³³ James A. Porter, “James A. Porter—Artist,” *Opportunity, Journal of Negro Life* 11 (February, 1933): 47.

³⁴ Years later Porter acknowledged that Locke had made important contributions. See James A. Porter, “One Hundred and Fifty Years of Afro-American Art,” in *The Negro in American Art* (Los Angeles: UCLA Art Galleries, 1966), 6.

Although Herring was not a writer, he was in demand as a public speaker. In 1926 Herring gave the commencement address at Peabody Academy in North Carolina, and it was in the following year that he began to organize traveling exhibitions of the work of Howard students to North Carolina. It was through the success of the earliest traveling student shows that the idea of a gallery at Howard was initiated. Herring again used his persuasive skills to convince the administration that an art gallery would benefit not only the art department but the university, bringing nationwide attention. The Howard University Gallery of Art was officially established in 1928 by the Board of Trustees. Less than two years later the formal opening was held on Monday evening, April 7, 1930. The gallery was initially funded with a \$1000 gift from Mrs. Avery Coonley “to make revolving exhibitions of contemporary arts and crafts available for immediate visitation and appreciational study by students of the University.”³⁵ The gallery was designed by Albert I. Cassell and installed on the first floor of the Rankin Memorial Chapel. The uniqueness of this new gallery was noted by a *New York Times* art critic who stated, “Never until now has there been such a place where Negro art students have had the opportunity to study on such a large scale within the walls of their own institution products of artists of the highest rank both at home and abroad.”³⁶ (Fig. 9)

The gallery at Howard was immediately successful, with attendance for the first year reaching 17,576. This success was “credited to the director—James Vernon Herring, a man of unflagging effort and indomitable personality.”³⁷ On the occasion of the first

³⁵ Tritobia Hayes Benjamin, “A Proud History in Profile: The Howard University Gallery of Art,” in *A Proud Continuum: Eight Decades of Art at Howard University*, ed. Carolyn E. Shuttlesworth (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Gallery of Art, 2005), 20-22.

³⁶ *New York Times*, October 26, 1930.

³⁷ Ruby Moyses Kendrick, “Art at Howard University: An Appreciation,” *Crisis* (November, 1932): 348.

anniversary of the Howard gallery, art students demonstrated their appreciation of Herring's dedication by presenting him with a \$200 life membership in the College Art Association.³⁸ In the fall of 1928 Herring established a visiting lecture program in the art department that became so successful that seating became a problem.

HERRING'S PARTNER IN WORK AND LIFE: ALONZO J. ADEN

Alonzo J. Aden also came from South Carolina. He was born in 1906 to the former Naomi Barnett and Ephraim Aden. Many accounts say that both were from "old families" in South Carolina.³⁹ Aden's mother, Naomi, was a graduate of Avery Normal Institute in 1894 and taught in Charleston and Spartansburg for thirty-five years. His father, Ephraim Aden, may have held several jobs over the years, but he is listed in Naomi's obituary as having been "in the hotel business in Asheville [North Carolina]."⁴⁰

Aden was known for a particular comment about his background. "We were never slaves!" he often stated. He claimed that his ancestors had traveled freely from Africa. I have no proof for this statement, but certainly his family had blended with whites by the beginning of the twentieth century. Aden, his brother, Frederick, and his mother, Naomi, were all quite light-skinned. Aden himself had blonde hair (at least into his early twenties) and green eyes, and was described as "young and beautiful, draped...in high fashion from hat to shoe."⁴¹

In 1920, when he was fourteen years old, Alonzo was sent to Washington to live with his aunt and uncle to attend public schools in the capital city. The Washington city

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Good breeding was important to the black elite of Washington, D.C. "Family background, good breeding, occupation, respectability, and color bound them into an exclusive self-consciously elitist group." See Willard B. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite 1880-1920* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1990).

⁴⁰ "Mrs. Ephraim Aden, Former Teacher," *Washington Evening Star*, June 20, 1956.

⁴¹ Morrison, 31.

directory for that year lists James M. and Laura Aden as residing at 919 R Street Northwest. James' occupation is listed as a "porter," while Laura is listed as a "seamstress." Aden often mentioned the fact that his aunt (at one point) had sewn dresses for Alice Roosevelt Longworth.⁴²

According to university records, Aden graduated from Armstrong High School and studied for a time at Hampton Institute before returning to Washington and enrolling at Howard in 1927. The city directory for that year lists Aden's occupation as "student," and his residence is listed as the home of his aunt and uncle. By 1929, however, Aden's occupation is listed as "elevator operator," and his residence had changed to 2201 2d Northwest (the same as Professor Herring). He shared this apartment with Herring until 1934, when they moved into the home on Randolph Place. By this time the professor⁴³ would have been forty-seven years old and Aden twenty-eight years old.

While working toward a teaching degree, Aden developed an interest in art history, and by 1930, when the Howard University Gallery opened, he was working as a gallery assistant under the supervision of Herring. It was not until 1933 (at age twenty-seven) that Aden received his Bachelor of Arts in Education. Although many knew of their relationship during the 1930s (and even of Aden's dalliances), official records reveal nothing of the liaison. Even correspondence between the two maintained the façade of a strictly professional relationship. In a letter dated August 8, 1933, Herring

⁴² Alice Roosevelt Longworth was the oldest daughter of Theodore Roosevelt, twenty-sixth president of the United States. She was known for her outspokenness, her wit, and (during this period) for her beauty and fashion sense.

⁴³ Herring insisted upon being addressed as "the professor."

formally addressed his partner, “My dear Mr. Aden,” but also makes sure that Aden is aware of how to contact him throughout the coming weeks.⁴⁴

During the academic year 1935-1936, Aden took a leave from his Howard position for further study in museum work. In February of 1936 he completed a museum course and sixteen-week apprenticeship in the Visual Education Department at the Buffalo Museum of Science. This was funded by a scholarship from the Rockefeller Foundation. Soon after completing this training, Aden was recruited as a curator for the Hall of Negro Life at the Texas Centennial Exposition planned for October of 1936. Aden was on loan from Howard to the United States Department of Commerce, as curator of the exhibitions on Negro Life. The Department of Commerce organized and funded the project after local organizers refused to fund this part of the Exposition. Aden was under the direction of General Manager Jesse O. Thomas, who spoke highly of Aden’s contribution and especially his “artistic sensitivity” and “sustained enthusiasm.”⁴⁵ Aden wrote a guide to the exhibition, in which he gave a detailed description of the interior of the hall, including the four large murals painted on site by Aaron Douglas.⁴⁶ This guide has additional value because the Hall of Negro Life was demolished during the following year.

In 1937 Aden returned to his position at the Howard gallery and participated in all manner of outside activities. He gave talks to local groups, such as the “Men’s

⁴⁴ J. V. Herring to Alonzo J. Aden, 8 August 1933, Howard University Gallery of Art Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁴⁵ Jesse O. Thomas to James V. Herring, 3 December 1936, Howard University Gallery of Art Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁴⁶ Alonzo J. Aden, “Educational Tour through the Hall of Negro Life,” in *My Story in Black and White: The Autobiography of Jesse O. Thomas*, by Jesse O. Thomas (New York: Exposition Press, 1967), 138-148. For information on Aaron Douglas’ four murals see Renée Ater, “Creating a ‘Usable Past’ and a ‘Future Perfect Society’.” In *Aaron Douglas: African American Modernist*, ed. Susan Earle (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 95-113.

Brotherhood” at the Lincoln Congregational Temple, about his experience at the Texas Centennial Exposition. On Saturdays he could be found teaching special art appreciation classes to Shaw Junior High School students, using color reproductions from the *Washington Star*’s art appreciation campaign.⁴⁷ (Fig. 10)

In 1938 Aden was awarded a travel grant from the American Association of Museums to travel and study in Europe. One of only ten recipients nationwide, Aden was lauded in the mainstream and black press for this opportunity.⁴⁸ He spent time in London, Cologne, Berlin, Dresden, Munich, Venice, Florence, Rome, and Brussels. One article stated that Aden proposed “to study African arts and crafts in European galleries,” but it is unclear whether this was a priority for Aden or merely part of his proposal.

After Aden’s return to Howard University, he resumed his work in the gallery and gave several lectures about his European tour to local groups such as the Alumni of International House in Washington. Aden developed a wide range of professional ties by participating in a number of art organizations. He attended meetings of the American Federation of Art, based in Washington, D.C., and traveled to Chicago in May of 1940 to attend a meeting of the American Association of Museums.

With his advanced training and experience in Dallas, Aden was asked to be part of the American Negro Exposition in Chicago in 1940, curating the Tanner Hall Art Galleries. While the presentation of Negro achievement had been limited to only one hall at the Texas Centennial, the Chicago celebration was on a much larger scale. The entire exposition was dedicated to American Negro history and achievement. Described as the “Negro World’s Fair” in *Newsweek* magazine, the Exposition drew 250,000 visitors

⁴⁷ “Colored Students Study *Star* Prints,” *Washington Star*, December 4, 1938.

⁴⁸ “Alonza (*sic*) Aden Wins Study in Europe,” *Washington Post* May 17, 1938.

between July 4 and September 2, 1940.⁴⁹ Herring also contributed to the exhibition, serving on the Eastern Jury along with Alain Locke, Edward Bruce, Holger Cahill, and sculptor Richmond Barthé.

Aden's success as a curator was noticed by the white art establishment, in particular the National Gallery of Art in Washington, where Aden gave a series of "curatorial lectures" in 1941 and 1942. In 1942 the College Art Association recognized the work of Herring and Aden and the art department at Howard University by holding its prestigious annual conference at Howard. During that same year Aden was a discussant at another conference hosted by Howard dedicated to the mission of college art galleries.

After so much success and recognition as the curator of the Howard University Gallery of Art, it comes as a surprise that Aden resigned from his position at Howard in 1943. The art department annual records reveal nothing about the reason for his sudden departure, and, in fact, Aden's departure is not even mentioned. Without solid information many have guessed that Aden was asked to leave, but for what reason? The reason must have been serious and perhaps of a personal nature. Aden, by this time, had been living with Herring for eleven years; however, it is widely known that his interest in other men continued. Some have suggested that an embarrassing indiscretion on the part of Aden led to his departure from Howard.

Construction of Place and Identity within the Washington Elite

In his 1903 book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. Du Bois wrote eloquently about the "peculiar" identity problems of black Americans—"shut out from their [white] world by a vast veil."⁵⁰ He coined the term "double-consciousness" to describe

⁴⁹ "Negro World's Fair," *Newsweek* (September 9, 1940): 20.

this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts. Two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.⁵¹

African Americans reacted to this double-consciousness in various ways. Some sought to withdraw behind the veil and avoid contact with white society as much as possible. Others strove for social status by making ties with white society, emulating white social values, and creating a stratified social system based largely on skin color, but also on income and accomplishments. Although educated and light-skinned, Herring and Aden were not automatically part of the elite. For instance, as one scholar noted, “Being a professor at Howard University might give one access to certain social rank..., but it did not ensure inclusion in all aspects of elite life without considerable other contributions to black society....”⁵²

The black aristocracy of Washington had a long history, dating back to the 1860s.⁵³ Sometimes referred to as the “black 400” of Washington, this group actually consisted of fewer than one hundred families at the turn of the century. These “old families” (as they called themselves) could trace a history of accomplishments in

⁵⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (first published 1903; New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2003), 8. Citations are to the 2003 edition. Du Bois was an influential black political thinker who was dedicated to the work of full citizenship for African Americans. On page three of this book he prophetically claimed, “The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line.”

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵² Jacqueline M. Moore, *Leading the Race: The Transformation of the Black Elite in the Nation's Capital 1880-1920* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 5.

⁵³ Willard B. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880-1920*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 40.

Washington for several generations.⁵⁴ As first generation Washingtonians, Herring and Aden were not part of this upper class, sometimes called “cave dwellers.”⁵⁵ They were part of the black bourgeoisie, or middle class, still considered elite in terms of the black community. Aden often mentioned his mother’s years as a public school teacher in South Carolina and claimed that both the Adens and the Barnetts were old families in that state. Herring almost never mentioned his more humble background.

Du Bois wrote about the dilemma of the black professional class. He described it as a particular type of double-consciousness felt by those “striving to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture.”⁵⁶ David Lionel Smith elaborates upon this situation. As he says, “Black intellectuals are implicated in white culture by their educations and in black culture by social, political, and emotional ties, thereby representing both and neither.”⁵⁷ Indeed, Herring and Aden were tied to other art professionals due to their education and experience. They were able to mingle freely in white circles due to their light skin and knew how to present themselves as refined gentlemen within both black and white elite circles. Yet they remained tied to black culture due to their upbringing in the racist South at the turn of the century, their migration north for education, the limitations segregation and racist attitudes placed on their lives, family ties, and their understanding of the profound despair wrought by racism.

Aden and Herring undoubtedly considered themselves part of the “Talented Tenth,” the term that Du Bois used to describe the educated and cultured upper echelon

⁵⁴ Ibid., 41-42. The “oldest” of these families included the “Cooks, Bruces, Wormleys, Syphaxes, Shadds, Francises, Grays, Terrells, Grimkés, Pinchbacks, Purvises, Cardozos, Menards, McKinlays, Douglasses, and Murrays.”

⁵⁵ Green, 208.

⁵⁶ Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folks*, 9.

⁵⁷ David Lionel Smith, “What is Black Culture?” in *The House that Race Built: Black Americans, U.S. Terrain*, ed. Wahneema Lubiano (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997), 186.

within the black race who could lead the masses forward. Unlike Booker T. Washington, who stressed vocational training, Du Bois believed that “exceptional men” would be the ones to lead and elevate the Negro race.⁵⁸ As Du Bois said,

Education and work are the levers to uplift a people. Work alone will not do it unless inspired by the right ideals and guided by intelligence. Education must not simply teach work—it must teach Life. The Talented Tenth of the Negro race must be made leaders of thought and missionaries of culture among their people. No others can do this work and Negro colleges must train men for it. The Negro race, like all other races is going to be saved by its exceptional men.⁵⁹

Herring and Aden believed in racial uplift, especially the idea of leading by example. Both men could be generous and nurturing to students and artists (those they felt deserved it), but they could also be judgmental. David Driskell remembered a revealing conversation with Herring:

I was telling Professor Herring about a certain former student that I had run into named Thomas Flagg, and he quickly said, ‘Never heard of him.’ That is until I mentioned his accomplishments in piano. Then he said, ‘Oh, yes! I remember! Yes, very fine student...he’s from Memphis.’ Which means that he remembered him all the time, but he didn’t want me to think he did, if he had not accomplished something.⁶⁰

It was clear that Herring would not waste his time discussing anyone unless he felt he or she merited his attention.

Herring and Aden did in fact influence many people to live with a certain amount of style and elegance. Driskell and his wife, as a young married couple, decided that they

⁵⁸ Washington emphasized attainment of economic self-reliance before seeking full citizenship for African Americans. He founded Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute (now Tuskegee University) in Alabama in 1881. He came to national attention after his speech at the Atlanta Exposition in 1895 when he proposed that African Americans accept social segregation. “In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.” Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1901; New York: Dover, 1995), 107. Citations are to the Dover edition.

⁵⁹ W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Talented Tenth,” <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index>.

⁶⁰ Driskell, interview 2002.

wanted to live in the same manner, surrounded by art. During the 1960s, Adolphus Ealey, a young friend of Herring, described the Professor's influence: "He taught me that there is a right way to do everything. He stressed that you didn't have to have money to live in a certain style. It depended on how you approached things, how you went about it."⁶¹

Both Herring and Aden were educated to appreciate fine art in the European tradition. Visitors recall only classical music played at their home, and they may have (like many educated middle-class African Americans) looked down on Negro folk music, or Spirituals. This was despite the widespread popularity of groups such as the Fisk Jubilee Singers, who toured the United States and Europe in 1871. They sang songs derived from slaves, who mixed white hymns with "African American rhythmic complexity, call-and-response choruses, and lyrical expression related to the condition of slavery."⁶² In 1903 Du Bois devoted a chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk* to spirituals, which he called "the sorrow songs of slavery" and "the greatest gift of the Negro people."⁶³ In 1925, Locke too, expressed his admiration for spirituals and claimed that they were on their way to becoming a classical folk expression. "This universality of the Spirituals looms more and more as they stand the test of time."⁶⁴ The new black middle-class, however, looked down upon many folk traditions, (not just spirituals) such as folk songs, folk art, banjo playing, and vernacular literature. They sought to distance themselves from what they thought of as the unschooled and ignorant lower class of African Americans. They prized education above all and did not have time for those who

⁶¹ Adolphus Ealey, quoted in Robert C. Maynard, "The History Art Preserves," *The Washington Post*, January 23, 1975.

⁶² Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, *African American Desk Reference* (New York: Stonesong Press, 1999).

⁶³ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 178.

⁶⁴ Locke, *The New Negro*, 199.

wanted to elevate the creations of the uneducated masses. They also wanted to escape from their own painful history and that of their ancestors. Many saw how white society picked up on these folk traditions and molded them into hideous caricatures, most obviously in minstrel shows, where white (and black) entertainers wore black face and performed for white audiences.⁶⁵

Herring revealed his feelings about spirituals to David Driskell in the early 1950s, when a “farewell performance” by famed contralto Marian Anderson was announced.

Herring said with irritation,

She’s been farewellling for the last ten years and she hasn’t gone anywhere yet!...And all those old ditties she’s been singing (speaking about spirituals) somebody ought to just record them and put them in the Library of Congress and put them away. They are only about slavery and all those hard times.⁶⁶

Driskell said that Herring was “not anti-religion, but he was not very religious. He would sometimes mock and mimic black folks in church. He thought that was just emotionalism.”⁶⁷

Yet, Herring never simply forgot about the South he left behind. He returned again and again to southern black colleges, where he lectured, taught, and helped set up art departments. Most of these southern institutions were founded in the manner of Tuskegee and stressed vocational skills over more frivolous endeavors such as art. In 1947-1948 Herring took his first sabbatical, traveling throughout the South, accessing the

⁶⁵ For a study of the changing attitudes of African Americans toward the banjo and banjo playing, see Joyce Henri Robinson, “Harlem Renaissance, Plantation Formulas, and the Dialect(ic) of the Banjo,” in Leo G. Mazow *Picturing the Banjo* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), and Laural Weintraub, “Albert A. Smith’s Plantation Melodies: The American South as Musical Heartland,” *International Review of African American Art* 19, no. 1 (2003): 9-18.

⁶⁶ David Driskell, interview, 2002. Herring may have been referring to the Elder Lightfoot Michaux and his Church of God congregation. Michaux called himself the “Happy Am I” preacher, and broadcast every morning on a local radio station. He organized the Cross Choir of 156 singers, who performed at Griffith Stadium not far from Howard and the Barnett Aden Gallery. See Green, 238.

⁶⁷ Driskell, interview by the author, Hyattsville, Md., 2003.

needs of art faculty in southern schools. He resolved to bring quality art exhibitions to these colleges, and with a \$6000 grant from the Carnegie Corporation, he founded the College Art Service. This seldom-mentioned organization supplied traveling art exhibitions for about a dozen southern schools. Herring used the art collection at Howard, as well as material borrowed from other collections, including high quality color reproductions. Herring initially convinced nine southern colleges and universities to participate in this project.⁶⁸ Exhibitions for the first year included “American Watercolors and Serigraphs,” “Graphic Arts and Drawings by Negro Artists,” and “Gouache Paintings: The John Brown Series.” Florence Anderson, secretary at the Carnegie Corporation, helped Herring in his appeals for funding and noted that

Herring is the only Negro in the South who could operate this sort of thing and after talking with him I have no doubt of his ability to do so successfully. The status of the arts in the Negro colleges today is worse than it was in the white colleges when the Corporation started its program for their benefit nearly twenty-five years ago.⁶⁹

With careful management, the service was financially self-sufficient by the third year. Herring continued to operate the College Art Service even after his retirement from Howard University in 1953. The service continued until at least 1967, when a group of thirty-one oil paintings selected by Herring was sent on tour.⁷⁰

Although Herring, and sometimes Aden, worked diligently to help southern schools, both felt the need to separate themselves from the masses or the common folk. In this respect the two men fit within what E. Franklin Frazier called the “black

⁶⁸ The first nine were A and T College, Bennett College, and Johnson C. Smith College, all in North Carolina; Clark College and Morehouse College in Georgia; Dillard University and Xavier University in Louisiana; Morgan College in Maryland; and Howard University.

⁶⁹ Florence Anderson, “Record of Interview with James V. Herring,” Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.

⁷⁰ Richard A. Long, *American Paintings Circulated by the College Art Service* (Hampton, Va.: Hampton Institute, 1967).

bourgeoisie,” a new middle class that emerged during the 1930s. Published in 1957 *Black Bourgeoisie* was highly critical of this emerging class of African Americans, who saw themselves as superior to the uneducated masses and their folk traditions. Frazier saw this group as constantly striving for status in the Negro world and also in “the estimation of whites.” He insisted that their “pretended racial pride” was hollow. Why else, he asked, would such great value be placed on light skin?⁷¹

Aden in particular was proud of his light skin and made many statements revealing that he held prejudicial views toward darker-colored people. On one occasion he said to a dark-skinned friend, “*Your kind* just doesn’t understand.”⁷² He did however concede that it was possible for “those people” to rise above their color. This color snobbishness (if not downright prejudice) was ingrained in the consciousness of much of the black community. As one scholar notes,

The long history of skin color stratification ...has its roots in colonization and enslavement by Europeans....European and white Americans created racial hierarchies to justify their subhuman treatment of the people of color they colonized and enslaved. This was the beginning of the ideology of white supremacy. The alleged superiority of whiteness, and all things approximating it including white or light skin, was the rule.⁷³

Intraracial skin color bias initially involved light-skinned blacks’ rejection of African Americans who were darker.⁷⁴ This variation of skin color came about largely due to white masters who raped or had consensual sex with enslaved black women. As these women gave birth to mulatto children, an entire hierarchy developed based on the

⁷¹ E. Franklin Frazier, 24. Many black scholars and sociologists were critical of Frazier’s book, claiming that he focused only on the failures, that he used too few primary sources, and that he exaggerated and overstated without adequate substantiation. Over time though many agreed that there was much truth to his original claims. See James E. Teele, ed., *E. Franklin Frazier and Black Bourgeoisie* (Columbia: University of Missouri, 2002).

⁷² Driskell, interview, 2003.

⁷³ Hunter, 2.

⁷⁴ Later in the century light-skinned African Americans were discriminated against as “not black enough.”

varied degrees of color. Some of these light-skinned children were allowed more privileges and a few were even granted their freedom. This preferential treatment of mulattoes by whites laid the groundwork for color bias within the black community. Gradually those with lighter skin developed a sense of superiority over the darker-skinned “field” workers who did not associate as closely with the white masters.

This prejudice continued after emancipation. Those light-skinned African Americans who had special privileges during slavery sought to dissociate themselves from the newly freed, darker-skinned African Americans. Beginning during Reconstruction, these elite light-colored blacks formed social clubs such as the Bon Ton Society of Washington, D.C., and the Blue Vein Society of Nashville. Admission to these exclusive clubs was strictly based on skin color. There were certain churches that admitted only light-skinned people into their congregation.⁷⁵ Even Highland Beach, the elite resort on Chesapeake Bay founded by Frederick Douglass’s son, barred those who were too dark skinned.⁷⁶ This skin color bias within the black community continued into the twentieth century and many would claim it exists today. As one scholar says, “Sociological research reveals that lighter-skinned African Americans [still] ...earn more money, complete more years of education, live in more integrated neighborhoods, and have better mental health than do darker-skinned African Americans....⁷⁷

In addition to light skin, personal grooming was highly valued by the black elite. Aden was always perfectly clad, going back to his student days at Howard. “Lonnie,” as

⁷⁵ Kathy Russell, Midge Wilson, and Ronald Hall, *The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color among African Americans* (New York: Anchor Books, 1993). Churches and other groups sometimes employed the paper bag test, which involved placing one’s arm inside a brown paper bag to see if the skin color was lighter than that of the bag.

⁷⁶ Green, *Secret City*, 79.

⁷⁷ Hunter, 2. Beginning in the 1970s artists such as Adrian Piper, Carrie Mae Weems, Betye Saar, and Alison Saar created works dealing with the complex issue of skin color.

he was called, was voted “best dressed boy” in his class.⁷⁸ Possibly his aunt, Laura Aden (the seamstress), assisted him in this respect. Herring, too, dressed impeccably with a diamond tie clip and a snowy-white jacket in the summer. In winter he could look theatrical with a black cape draped across his shoulders and a cane carried for effect.

Despite these trappings of class, Herring and Aden did not retreat into a world of make believe, as Frazier described in *Black Bourgeoisie*, creating meaningless rituals revolving around social clubs or Greek letter fraternities and sororities. Frazier described this new middle class as obsessed with wealth and appearances.

For that section of the black bourgeoisie which devotes itself to society, life has become a succession of carnivals. In cities all over the country, Negro society has inaugurated Debutante Balls or Cotillions which provide an opportunity every year for the so-called rich Negroes to indulge in lavish expenditures and create a world of fantasy to satisfy their longing for recognition.⁷⁹

Instead of meaningless rituals, Aden and Herring created interracial events that brought the elite of both races together in the friendly atmosphere of their home.

It must have been doubly difficult to be gay and African American during the middle of the twentieth century, when homosexuality was reviled by many people and considered to be a mental illness by others. There may have been a certain tolerance at the highest level within the black community, because of the gay writers associated with the Harlem Renaissance and the “network” of Alain Locke. As Henry Louis Gates, Jr., noted in 1993, the Harlem Renaissance “was surely as gay as it was black.”⁸⁰ A.B. Christa Schwarz expounds on this subject in *Gay Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*, where she writes:

⁷⁸ “Senior Selections,” *Bison* (Washington, DC: Howard University), 56

⁷⁹ Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie*, 201-202.

⁸⁰ Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “The Black Man’s Burden,” *Fear of a Queer Planet*, ed Michael Warner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 233.

Same-sex-interested writers shaped the Harlem Renaissance—not in the sense of a specific gay aesthetic, but because of their position at the heart of the movement, their involvement in a gay network that constituted a major structure within the Renaissance, and their creation of gay literary voices, which, audible to various extents, resound, reflecting the movement’s diversity.⁸¹

Schwarz describes this gay network as emerging from Locke and his wide-ranging correspondence with, among others, Bruce Nugent, and Countee Cullen (both self-identified gay men).

As opponents of Locke, Herring and Aden were not part of this correspondence, but they were friends with several in the extended group. For example, Driskell recalls meeting Langston Hughes at the Barnett Aden Gallery. Despite the tolerance accorded Locke, Nugent, Cullen, and others, overall homophobia was pervasive in black and white society in 1940s and 1950s—even more so than today. bell hooks has written about the black community where she grew up, where she noticed “a real double standard. Black male homosexuals were often known, were talked about, were seen positively, had played important roles in community life, whereas lesbians were talked about solely in negative terms....” She adds “Often, acceptance of male homosexuality was mediated by material privilege.... They were influential people in the community.”⁸² This was no doubt the case for Aden and Herring, who made many contributions to the local community. Both men gave lectures at local schools and were on a variety of local committees, including the executive committee for the Children’s Art Center in Washington.

⁸¹ A.B. Christa Schwarz, *Gay Voices of the Harlem Renaissance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 144. Schwarz describes Locke, Nugent, and Cullen as “self-identified gays,” and Claude McKay as bisexual. Langston Hughes, she says, did not self identify as gay, but she notes his “poetic gay voice.”

⁸² bell hooks, “Homophobia in Black Communities,” in *The Greatest Taboo, Homosexuality in Black Communities*, ed. Delroy Constantine-Simms (New York: Alyson Books, 2001), 68.

The two men also may have benefited because they fit a certain “non-threatening” stereotype—that of the “colorful” African American. As described by one scholar, the colorful African American was “seen frequently in the white-edited mass media, in forms varying from watermelon-eaters and cotton-patch snoozers to high-spirited military enlistees.”⁸³ Herring and Aden were indeed colorful characters. They entertained visitors with their antics, their stories, and their gourmet cooking. Each had a distinct sense of humor and both were considered by all to be gracious hosts.

Being homosexual in Washington became particularly treacherous during the late 1940s and 1950s. When Senator Joseph McCarthy announced, in 1950, that some two hundred Communists were working for the State Department, Deputy Undersecretary John Peurifoy denied this assertion, but he did reveal that “a number of persons considered to be security risks had been forced out, and that among these were ninety-one homosexuals.”⁸⁴ In his book *The Lavender Scare*, David K. Johnson describes how, at the very beginning of the Cold War, the State Department began campaigns to “rid the department of Communists and homosexuals.” Between 1947 and 1949 ninety homosexuals were removed from the jobs.⁸⁵ By 1944 Aden was one of the thousands of new government “war workers,” holding a clerical position during the day and attending to the gallery in the evenings and on the weekends.⁸⁶ I have no evidence that Aden was

⁸³ Nicholas Natanson, “Robert H. McNeill and the Profusion of Virginia Experience,” in Jan Lusaka and Deborah Willis, eds. *Visual Journal: Harlem and D.C. in the Thirties and Forties* (Washington, D.C.: Center for African American History and Culture and Smithsonian Institution, 1996), 99.

⁸⁴ David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 21.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ “A Mother—A Gracious Lady,” *Pulse Magazine*, May 1944. Aden is described simply as a “war worker” in this short article. He may have started this job in 1943, but if so, it is all the more amazing that he was able to organize the Barnett Aden Gallery and make plans for the first exhibition in October of 1943.

targeted, but working in such an atmosphere must have been frightening. Aden, no doubt, “passed” as a heterosexual at his government job.

In everyday life it is difficult to say to what degree Herring and Aden were “closeted.” It seems that little effort was made to disguise their friendship. For instance, in the Howard yearbook, Herring and Aden are listed separately but with the same address. Herring purchased the house at 127 Randolph Place in the late 1920s, with the assistance of his friend Alma Thomas. Both she and Herring are listed in the Tax Assessment Records as owners of the property until 1933, when Aden’s name replaced Thomas as co-owner.⁸⁷ The house was a point of pride for each of the two men, and Aden in particular identified himself via the house that was also a gallery. Not only did he commission the previously discussed portrait of the gallery by Robinson, he also sent out holiday cards that were simply a photograph of the gallery space within the house. (Fig. 11) The view is reversed from that in Robinson’s painting of the gallery. Here we see a view from the kitchen looking toward the dining room and into the living room, where the round desk is seen at the entrance. This time there are no people depicted—the gallery itself represents Aden. This was Aden’s holiday card, and the signature for best wishes is from Aden alone.

According to Brett Beemyn, Washington has a “gay” history going back to the nineteenth century. He notes that during the early and mid-twentieth century certain bars and restaurants in Washington began to attract gay and lesbian customers. These bars and restaurants did not welcome African Americans, who instead met and socialized in

⁸⁷ Tax Assessment Records, microfiche rolls 16-23, Martin Luther King, Jr. Library, Washington, D.C. This should correct the confusion about who owned the house on Randolph, which has been variously described as Herring’s house, as Aden’s house, and as Aden’s mother’s house, but rarely as a home that Aden and Herring owned together. Mrs. Aden did contribute financially to the founding of the gallery, and the gallery was named after her.

private homes. There was a rich tradition of “house parties” for African Americans, which were especially important for gay African Americans, as the only safe spaces to meet and socialize with others of various sexual preferences.⁸⁸

It is interesting that Herring and Aden took their private refuge and opened it up to the outside world, making it not completely public, but no longer strictly private. In doing so, they created what they could not find anywhere else in the city. While both men could “pass” when in public, they could not meet with darker-skinned friends. As Green put it: “Lightness of color was necessarily a bond, for where light-skinned people could move about in a white world with some freedom, the acceptance of a dark-skinned person into the group circumscribed the activities of all.”⁸⁹

Aaron Betsky has described the closet as “a place to hide, to create worlds for yourself out of the past and for the future in a secure environment.”⁹⁰ In this respect one could say that their Randolph Place home initially functioned as a “closet,” but what a “world” Aden and Herring created out of it. They instituted a kind of salon, where the world came to them. While other (white) Washington homosexuals met at bars or parks, Aden and Herring fashioned a unique space that both affirmed and denied their relationship. Many people did not know what to make of them, and for most, it did not matter. Visitors simply marveled and enjoyed the festive and inclusive atmosphere. They created what Betsky calls “a fantasy interior landscape” that attracted those with similar interests regardless of their sexual preferences.⁹¹ At the Barnett Aden Gallery Herring

⁸⁸ Brett William Beemyn, “A Queer Capital: Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Lives in Washington, D.C., 1890-1955” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Iowa, 1997), 2.

⁸⁹ Green, *Secret City*, 207.

⁹⁰ Betsky, 17.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

and Aden were professionals, teachers, entertainers, and friends—all of which took precedence over race or sexual preference.

Did their homosexuality affect their aesthetic choices? Ann Gibson has written about gallery owner Betty Parsons and suggests that her lesbianism predisposed her to value “difference” more than any other quality.⁹² In her case this meant that she refused to shun artists who were not abstractionists. One can only imagine that Aden’s and Herring’s experience as homosexuals affected their attitude toward others who were “different” in some way. It is tempting to guess that they were predisposed toward inclusiveness. As I discuss in Chapter 4, they showed more women artists than did comparable galleries in New York during the same time period, as well as whites and artists of color.

They took the domestic sphere, usually associated with the feminine, and transformed it into something in between, not strictly commercial (or masculine), but not strictly domestic either. As one scholar of the “domestic sphere” notes:

It is primarily in the home that we are constructed as sexual and gendered beings. If the domestic is the main arena for the enforcement of conventional divisions (and heterosexuality) it has also been a staging ground for rebellion against these norms.⁹³

At the Barnett Aden Gallery Herring and Aden quietly rebelled against these and other “norms,” most notably that of racial segregation. They created a unique social space where people came together in a homey atmosphere to indulge their interest in modern art. While other artists sought to escape the domestic, Herring and Aden escaped *to* the

⁹² Ann Gibson, “Lesbian Identity and the Politics of Representation in Betty Parsons’s Gallery,” in *Gay and Lesbian Studies in Art History*, ed. Whitney Davis (New York: Haworth Press), 245-270.

⁹³ Reed, 16.

domestic sphere, which they transformed into an alternative reality, a haven for intellectuals and art lovers of all backgrounds.

CHAPTER 3

NATIONAL ART AND WASHINGTON ARTISTS: DEVELOPMENT OF A LOCAL ART SCENE

“In any received history, there has always been another life going on beneath and beyond the written chronicle, which usually remains obscure and unknown to those who come later. That, it has seemed to me, has been the fate of the story of Washington art....” Bella Schwartz¹

Written accounts of Washington art often begin with the artists known as the Washington Color School,² a group of artists who, in the 1950s, began exploring the optical effects of pure color on unprimed canvas. These artists employed a variety of abstract approaches, some producing canvases drenched with ethereal layers of poured acrylic paint, others working with revolving and expanding circular motifs, and still others using masking tape to paint brilliantly hued vertical stripes on room-size canvases.

In fact, some would have you believe that Washington art actually began in New York City. The story is repeatedly told of a 1953 pilgrimage from Washington to New York, when a group of pioneers—artists and friends—with the guidance of New York critic Clement Greenberg, encountered the gestural abstractions of Willem de Kooning, the “drips” of Jackson Pollock, and, especially, the “pourings” of the artist Helen Frankenthaler. The language used to portray the impact of these encounters suggests that something miraculous (almost holy) took place. It seems that Washington artist Morris Louis was especially transformed by the experience. Note Greenberg’s description of Louis’ reaction:

¹ Bella Schwartz, “Remembering: A Memoir of the 50s in Washington,” *Washington Artists News* 2 (March 1975): 1.

² “The Washington Color Painters” was the title of an exhibition, sponsored by the Washington Gallery of Modern Art in 1965, that featured six artists: Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland, Gene Davis, Thomas Downing, Howard Mehring, and Paul Reed. In the exhibition catalogue, curator Gerald Nordland states that the work of these artists “has come to be called Washington Color Painting.” Sometime after this date various writers began to refer to these artists as “The Washington School.” Gerald Nordland, introduction to *The Washington Color Painters*, Washington Gallery of Modern Art (Washington, D.C.: Washington Gallery of Modern Art, 1965), 7.

His first sight of the middle period Pollocks and of a large and extraordinary painting done in 1952 by Helen Frankenthaler, called *Mountains and Sea*, led Louis to change his direction abruptly. Abandoning Cubism with a completeness for which there was no precedent in either influence, he began to feel, think and conceive almost exclusively in terms of open color. The revelation he received became an impressionist revelation and before he so much as caught a glimpse of anything by Still, Newman or Rothko, he had aligned his art with theirs.³

This pilgrimage is often cited as a turning point in the careers of Louis and his friend, fellow Washington artist Kenneth Noland, and subsequently, as the real beginning of a Washington art scene, when these artists returned, ready to share their New York “revelation” with the uninitiated artists of their own city.

Hints that there might be significant omissions in these accounts come from the artists themselves—that is—those who were there. As Washington artist Bella Schwartz wrote in 1975, “In any received history, there has always been another life going on beneath and beyond the written chronicle, which usually remains obscure and unknown to those who came later. That, it has seemed to me, has been the fate of the story of Washington art....⁴ *Washington Post* art critic, Benjamin Forgey, concurred in his 1988 essay titled “Washington’s Bad Case of Cultural Amnesia,” where he asked:

...what is it about Washington that allows such an important part of its cultural history to lie fallow, to go unrecorded and/or uninterpreted. It isn’t just the “AU [American University] School” that’s affected, of course. It’s also the Washington Workshop Center, the Institute for Contemporary Arts, the Howard University nexus, the Barnett-Aden [*sic*] Gallery, the Franz Bader Gallery itself—the battery of public and private institutions around which coalesced artists of varying theoretical persuasions and talents who discussed and argued ideas and possibilities and, in their studios, attempted to work them out. There’s a living art history here, still waiting to be told.⁵

³ Clement Greenberg, “Louis and Noland,” *Art International* 4, no. 5 (May 1960): 28.

⁴ Bella Schwartz, 1.

⁵ Benjamin Forgey, “Washington’s Bad Case of Cultural Amnesia,” *Washington Post*, April 24 1988. In this article Forgey makes the case for rediscovering the city’s artists of the 1950s, but he also laments the lack of scholarship on artists working in the city in the 1940s. Like Schwartz and others, he

The purpose of this chapter is not to downplay the accomplishments of the Color School artists, nor to deny the benefit of the attention their success brought to Washington, D.C., but it does seem that the enthusiastic writing about these artists has obscured all else that happened during the 1950s, implying that little of significance was created in Washington before that decade. Nor is this chapter an attempt to establish the Barnett Aden Gallery as a pivotal player in the development of the Washington Color School artists (although it did play a role). Instead, the purpose here is to situate both the Color Painters and the Barnett Aden Gallery within the larger history of art in Washington, D.C. I hope to present a more complete account of the galleries, artists' groups, art schools, workshops, museums, art clubs, and dedicated individuals who worked, often cooperatively, to develop a vibrant local art scene. The Barnett Aden Gallery was but one of the significant contributors to this history, although it is the one whose role seems most often to have been omitted, or at least, underestimated.⁶

In this chapter, I will establish the fact that a local art scene did exist in Washington, D.C., well before the Color Painters put the city on the modernist map. An exact date is debatable, but many artists report that by the early 1940s a limited, but energetic local art scene could be found in the capital, although, admittedly, one did have

feels that the "stardom" of Louis and Noland has obscured the accomplishments of other Washington artists, even some who were also described as "Color School" artists.

⁶ For example, in her 1969 article for *Art International*, Legrace Benson traces the history of art in Washington, recovering some of the forgotten galleries and art events, including a number of short-lived galleries founded in the 1930s and 1940s. She fully discusses the opening of the Phillips Gallery in 1921, but never mentions the establishment of the Art Department at Howard University. There is also no mention of the Howard University Gallery (which opened in 1930), nor of the Barnett Aden Gallery and its hundreds of exhibitions between 1943 and 1961.

to know where to look.⁷ I will trace the origins of this local art scene, beginning with the large public and private art institutions, some dating from the nineteenth century, and discuss how these impacted the local community and the local art scene. Next, I will look at the development of smaller institutions, including art schools, artists' groups, and local art galleries, as well as civic efforts to encourage art up to the late 1930s. In the final section, I will discuss the Washington art scene of the 1940s and 1950s and attempt to give an accurate and more inclusive account of the many artists and art professionals who worked together to bring progressive art and ideas to the city. I will discuss a number of local artists and their relationship with these institutions, but a fuller discussion of these artists' work will be reserved for chapter four.

A significant part of my task will be to consider how the impact of events was often different for the black community, and for black artists, than it was for the white community. As outlined in chapter two, there were some advantages for African Americans living in Washington, but the difficulties wrought by strict segregation and pervasive racism were far reaching and profound.

Monuments, Museums, and Monumental Galleries

The visual appeal of Washington, D.C., rests on its unique history as a planned capital. Most agree that eighteenth-century architect Pierre L'Enfant achieved his goal of designing a capital glorious enough to grace a great nation. With consideration first given to choosing appropriate sites for the Capitol, the White House, and the national mall,

⁷ As artist Jacob Kainen said in 1942, "Washington was a sleepy, spacious, gracious Southern town and it took a little time for me to find out that there were some good artists at work here." Kainen had just moved to Washington from New York City, where he had been closely associated with artists such as Arshile Gorky, Stuart Davis, and John Graham. Jacob Kainen, "[Art in Washington]," Transcript of lecture given at the Women's National Democratic Club, Washington, D.C., December 6, 1978 Kainen Papers, Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C., 2.

L'Enfant's plan has been called the "perfect balance of geography and topography."⁸ Branching from this original design were grand avenues, 150 feet wide, slashing across the basic rectangular street scheme, and meeting to create spacious circles and squares. These avenues, named after the states at Thomas Jefferson's suggestion, aided travel, but they were also "intended to break the monotony of the grid, to create monumental plazas...to order vistas so as to guide the eye to distant complementary ones...."⁹ It took many years for the city to grow into the magnificence of L'Enfant's plan, but by 1941 most of the familiar monuments were in place on the national mall, and neoclassical buildings with marble facades lined many of the streets nearby.

By the 1890s, the city had become home to a profusion of sculpture on a scale found nowhere else in the nation. There were bronze equestrian generals and marble statesmen standing proudly in L'Enfant's circles and squares, and there were dozens more sculpted statesmen inside the Capitol's Hall of Statuary. But Washington historian Constance Green has noted, "Most of it fell short of great art, but very little of it was patently inept...."¹⁰ In 1937, researchers with the Federal Writers' Projects¹¹ suggested that Washington visitors were apt to be more impressed with the history depicted in the monumental sculptures than with the works themselves. Visitors were advised: "If you arrive by train, you need not dwell on the monotonous symbolic sculptured figures which stand like so many sentinels above the arches of the great waiting-room. Nor need you

⁸ David L. Lewis, *District of Columbia: A Bicentennial History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976), 10.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁰ Constance Green, *Washington: Capital City, 1879-1950* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), 91. Green does note the critical praise given Augustus Saint-Gauden's memorial to his wife, which he called *The Peace of God*, soon after it was unveiled in Rock Creek Cemetery in 1891.

¹¹ The Federal Writers' Projects was established in 1933 as part of the Works Progress Administration. Among other projects, they researched and published an extensive series of "American Guides." These regional, state, and local guides attempted to present as complete a picture as possible of American communities, including the history of cultural institutions across the nation.

look back, on leaving the station, at the Gargantuan figures that rise above the arches of the main portal.”¹² Even Daniel Chester French’s famous *Lincoln*, inside the Lincoln Memorial, was described as “imposing by reason of its great size and dramatic setting, which give it a value that is not inherent in the work itself.”¹³

These monuments to national heroes were recognized from the days of L’Enfant as crucial symbols of American identity and American values—but it took much longer for leaders to recognize the importance of a national museum dedicated to all the fine arts. It was not until 1941 that the National Gallery of Art finally opened on the national mall, but the complicated history of the national art collections goes back much further. In fact, the oldest national art collection never made it inside the hallowed galleries of the National Gallery. This earliest collection originated with the holdings of the John Varden Museum, established in 1829, and was soon renamed the Washington Museum. In 1840 the Washington Museum collections were transferred to the National Institute for Promotion of Science, which was incorporated in 1842 as the National Institute. When the Smithsonian Institution was established in 1846, it was authorized to collect art, and, in 1862, acquired the collections previously held by the National Institute.¹⁴

This Smithsonian art collection was unofficially referred to as the “Gallery of Art” until 1906, when the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia established that this collection was, in fact, the National Gallery of Art. This new institution was administered by the United States National Museum from 1907 until 1920, when the

¹² Federal Writers’ Project, Works Progress Administration, “American Guide Series,” *Washington: City and Capital* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1937), 131. This 1130 page tome provides a detailed history of the art institutions that existed in Washington, D.C., up to 1937.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 134-135.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 380. After a fire in 1865 destroyed much of the Smithsonian collection, the surviving prints and drawings were loaned to the Library of Congress, and the paintings and sculptures were temporarily moved to the Corcoran Gallery of Art. In 1895 the collection was returned to the Smithsonian.

National Gallery of Art became a separate Smithsonian bureau. With no home of its own, the National Gallery collection was exhibited at several sites until 1910, when it was moved to the newly constructed Natural History Building and installed inside the North wing of this massive four-story structure. The works of art were installed in a partitioned area on the first floor, but in a museum dedicated to more than 14 million specimens in the fields of biology, geology, and anthropology, the fine art collection often went unnoticed. (Fig. 12)

The art collection remained inside the Natural History Museum until 1968, but after 1937 it was no longer called the National Gallery of Art—it became instead the National Collection of Fine Arts.¹⁵ This change came when Andrew W. Mellon, after negotiations with President Roosevelt, donated his extensive art holdings (the Mellon Collection) to the nation and agreed to fund construction of a suitable building for the collection, which, it was agreed, should be designated as the National Gallery of Art. Thus the original national collection, the National Collection of Fine Arts, remained in the Natural History Building, although conditions were already cramped in the 1930s. As described in 1937:

The exhibitions are enclosed in temporary wall partitions which serve for the hanging of pictures. The various units of the gallery collection are kept together as far as possible, although frequent changes in the space available results in their rearrangement. The lighting system of the

¹⁵ In 1968, the National Collection of Fine Arts was moved to the Old Patent Office Building, which was renamed the Fine Arts and Portrait Galleries. In 1972 the NCFA acquired the Renwick Gallery, located in the old Corcoran Gallery of Art building, and in 1980, the NCFA was renamed the National Museum of American Art. Finally, in October 2000, the name of the collection was changed to the Smithsonian American Art Museum. History of the Collection, http://americanart.si.edu/museum_info/history/index.cfm.

building, which was not designed for the particular needs of works of art, has been adapted as far as possible to provide necessary illumination.¹⁶

Conditions were quite different for the new National Gallery of Art collection (formerly the Mellon Collection), whose immense new home on Constitution Avenue was completed in March of 1941. (Fig. 13) Visitors were impressed by the imposing façade of the marble Beaux-Arts building and, inside, by its grand rotunda, with black marble floors and a fountain encircled by gigantic emerald-green columns. In the galleries they saw Mellon's original collection, which included "more than a hundred masterpieces of European painting," impressive examples of Renaissance sculpture, and early American portraits collected by Thomas B. Clarke. There were paintings by Raphael, Titian, Botticelli, Rembrandt, Van Eyck, and Velásquez; along with sculptures by Renaissance masters Donatello and Pisanello.¹⁷ In addition, by the time of the opening, the Samuel H. Kress collection of Old Master works had been added to the National Gallery. Some critics pointed to deficiencies in the collection, notably the dearth of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French art, but most were effusive in their praise.

However, the National Gallery of Art was not the first gallery to open on the national mall—that distinction belongs to the much smaller Freer Gallery of Art, which opened in 1923. Funded by Detroit railroad-car manufacturer Charles Lang Freer, the Italian Renaissance-style gallery was built to showcase Freer's extensive art collection, which he donated to the Smithsonian in 1906. Freer's gift consisted of major collections of Japanese, Chinese, Egyptian, Near Eastern, and Indian objects, along with a substantial number of paintings by James Abbott McNeill Whistler and selected works by other

¹⁶Federal Writers' Project, 380. This text explains the (1930s) layout of the Smithsonian museums and galleries, as well as that of the Corcoran Gallery of Art and the Phillips Memorial Gallery.

¹⁷Federal Writers' Project, 392.

American artists, including John Singer Sargent, Winslow Homer, Childe Hassam, Abbott Handerson Thayer, and Augustus Saint-Gaudens.

Visitors interested in American art could also venture to the Corcoran Gallery of Art, located just a few blocks from the national mall. One of the oldest art institutions in Washington, this large private gallery opened in 1874 at the corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and 17th Street.¹⁸ Established by wealthy financier William Wilson Corcoran (1798-1888), the original gallery collection included landscapes by Thomas Cole and George Inness, neoclassical portraits by Rembrandt Peale and Thomas Sully, and academic paintings by European academic artist Jean-Léon Gérôme. In addition, there were five sculptures, including Hiram Powers' famed *The Greek Slave* (1843), which became widely known after a nationwide tour in 1851. Although Corcoran died in 1888, the collection grew quickly, supported by his generous trust fund, and by 1897 the gallery required larger quarters, moving to its present location on 17th Street not far from the White House. (Fig. 14)

By the 1930s, the Corcoran Gallery's collection was extensive enough to allow visitors to trace much of American art's early history, with six galleries on the upper level designated as a "Retrospective Collection of American Paintings."¹⁹ This group included many nineteenth-century portraits of notable Americans by such artists as Rembrandt Peale, Gilbert Stuart, Thomas Sully, and John Vanderlyn. The landscapists of the Hudson River School were well represented with paintings by Alfred Bierstadt, Thomas Cole, Asher B. Durand, John Frederick Kensett and others. More recent American works (from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) included paintings by Mary Cassatt,

¹⁸ Designed by James Renwick, this red brick building is now the Smithsonian Institution's Renwick Gallery.

¹⁹ Federal Writers Project, 394.

Thomas Eakins, Abbott Handerson Thayer, Winslow Homer, Childe Hassam, and John Singer Sargent. From the first decades of the twentieth century were works by that group of New York artists dubbed “The Eight,”²⁰ including John Sloan, Robert Henri, George Luks, Arthur B. Davies, and Maurice Prendergast. The gallery also displayed many examples of European and American sculpture, including early twentieth-century works by British sculptor Jacob Epstein, American academic sculptor Daniel Chester French, and American sculptor Frederic Remington.

Across town, another large private collection opened to the public in 1921—the Phillips Memorial Gallery.²¹ In that year wealthy art collector Duncan Phillips and his wife, Marjorie, opened to visitors part of their own four-story brick mansion at 1600 21st Street Northwest (near Dupont Circle), as a way to share their private collection. (Fig. 15) Phillips named the gallery and collection as a memorial for his recently deceased father, and, especially, for his brother James, who had been his partner in collecting art until his death during the flu epidemic of 1918.

The Phillips Gallery was unique among Washington museums, because Phillips was devoted to presenting modern art, along with what he called its “sources.” At the Phillips local artists could see works by late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century artists, including Honoré Daumier, Vincent Van Gogh, Pierre Bonnard, Georges Braque, Henri Matisse, and Paul Klee. He purchased works that supported his philosophy of the

²⁰ The Eight painted realistic scenes of urban life. They exhibited together only once in 1908 at Macbeth Galleries in New York but were united by their opposition to the restrictions of the National Academy of Design.

²¹ The gallery has operated under four different names: Phillips Memorial Art Gallery (July 1920 to May 1923), Phillips Memorial Gallery (May 1923 to October 1948), The Phillips Gallery (October 1948 to July 1961), and The Phillips Collection (July 1961 to present). See Appendix B in *The Eye of Duncan Phillips: A Collection in the Making*, ed. Erika D. Passantino (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 684. I will address the gallery by its appropriate historical name, according to the time period under discussion.

continuity between historical masterpieces and modern art. These “sources,” which he displayed with the modern works, included Giorgione, whom he saw as “a source of modern romanticism,”²² and El Greco, whom he called “a prophet of modern painting who may justly be called the first ‘expressionist’ in art.”²³ Phillips felt that French painter Jean Chardin, that “enchanter of realism,” anticipated twentieth-century painting, especially “its acute consciousness of the material world,”²⁴ but Eugene Delacroix’s great achievement, he felt, relied less on his pictures and more on his example: “He emancipated the art of painting in France,” Phillips believed, “from a tyranny of academic dogmatism.”²⁵ Phillips continually regrouped these paintings, inviting new dialogues between past and present and challenging viewers to rethink modern modes of representation.

By the 1930s the Phillips family had moved elsewhere, and the entire mansion was devoted to the collection. There were new European works, including a cubist work by Picasso, abstractions by Georges Braque, and a mystical painting by Odilon Redon. Phillips continued to travel and purchase European, especially French, art, but he was also increasingly purchasing contemporary American art. Through his friendship with New York gallery owner Alfred Steiglitz, Phillips became a devoted collector of certain early American modernists, including Arthur G. Dove, John Marin, and Georgia O’Keeffe. Other early purchases of American art included works by Albert Pinkham

²² Duncan Phillips, *A Collection in the Making* (Washington, D.C.: Phillips Memorial Gallery, 1926), 9.

²³ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

Ryder, Vincent Augustus Tack, Karl Knaths, Milton Avery, John Graham, and Charles Burchfield.²⁶

Thus, by 1941 there was a large amount of art on view in Washington, D.C., including three public collections on the national mall: The Freer Gallery, with its collection of Asian and American art; the National Collection tucked away inside the massive Museum of Natural History; and the imposing National Gallery of Art, suitably housed inside its resplendent temple. In addition, two private galleries with large collections—the Corcoran and the Phillips—essentially functioned as public museums, since both charged low admission fees and no fees on certain days each week.

These institutions were a source of great pride for most of the nation's citizens, who came from across the country to stand in awe before the Lincoln Memorial and to stand, equally moved, before the great works of art at the National Gallery. They were, for most, a confirmation of American history and democracy. But how much impact did these national monuments and museums have on the local community and the local art scene in Washington?

Several scholars have written about the importance of institutions for creating a sense of nationhood and for legitimizing a culture's social beliefs and its political system. Carol Duncan has argued that historically museums have served as “powerful identity-defining machines,” and that the experience of visiting a museum becomes a “ritual of citizenship.”²⁷

²⁶ Eric Gibson, “The Phillips Collection,” *Studio International* 199 (June 1986): 24.

²⁷ Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 101. Marxist interpretations go even further, calling these institutions an essential means for social control. Louis Althusser refers to them as “Ideological State Apparatuses,” which “function massively and predominantly *by ideology*....” As he explains, this ideology is mostly symbolic, but nevertheless sends a powerful message to

However noble these sentiments, this was not the case for black citizens, who could visit these national museums, but soon discovered that they were actually depositories of white culture, and served only to enhance their sense of disenfranchisement and estrangement from high art/culture. If, as Duncan claims, these national institutions served to validate American values and beliefs, then clearly the message to African American visitors was—in America, past and present, you do not count and your story will not be told. This message was easily reinforced, since there was not a single work by a black American in the National Gallery's collection, nor anywhere else on the national mall until 1964. In that year James Hampton's visionary folk creation, *The Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations' Millennium General Assembly* (c.1950-1964), was purchased and placed on loan at the National Museum of American Art. In 1993 Elizabeth Broun, director of the National Museum of American Art wrote:

Remarkably, for 135 years after the founding of the federal art collections in 1829, no work by a black American was represented in the nation's holdings. Although blacks played a crucial role in every aspect of American life—colonization, settlement, building of railroads and industry, wars, agricultural economy, and the growth of cities—the 'mantle of culture' was represented in this museum and most others nationwide solely through the accomplishments of white artists.²⁸

It is worth noting that the first work by an African American added to a national collection was not that of a fine artist (such as Edward Bannister, Henry Ossawa Tanner, or Lois Mailou Jones), but rather that of the self-taught Hampton, whose *Throne of the*

the viewers. See Louis Althusser, quoted in introduction to *Art History and Its Institutions: Foundations of a Discipline* ed. Elizabeth Mansfield (New York: Routledge, 2002), 3.

²⁸ Elizabeth Broun, preface in Regina A. Perry, *Free within Ourselves: African-American Artists in the Collection of the National Museum of American Art* (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1992), 8. Hampton's work was donated to the museum in 1970.

Third Heaven was discovered in a rented garage after his death. This assemblage of 180 separate pieces, covered in gold and silver foil, was his vision and forewarning of the Second Coming of Christ. This institutional support of work by the untrained black artist continued a trend from earlier in the century, when the self-taught sculptor William Edmondson became the first African American featured in a solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Horace Pippin, another so-called “primitive” black artist, also achieved a measure of success in the 1940s, including a small exhibition at the Phillips.²⁹

For the most part black Washingtonians avoided the national mall. While theoretically these national museums welcomed everyone, the surrounding segregation, especially downtown, presented both practical and psychological barriers for black visitors.³⁰ Black community leader and activist Mary Church Terrell, who called Washington’s segregation practices a national disgrace, described the situation:

For fifteen years I have resided in Washington, and while it was far from being a paradise for colored people when I first touched these shores, it has been doing its level best ever since to make conditions for us intolerable.... As a colored woman I may walk from the Capitol to the White House, ravenously hungry and abundantly supplied with money with which to purchase a meal, without finding a single restaurant in which I would be permitted to take a morsel of food, if it was patronized by white people, unless I were willing to sit behind a screen.³¹

²⁹ Phillips Memorial Gallery, *Three Negro Artists: Horace Pippin, Jacob Lawrence, Richmond Barthe* (Washington, DC: Phillips Memorial Gallery, 1946). Pippin was injured in World War I and afterwards began doing burnt wood panels and oil paintings about his war experience.

³⁰ As national institutions, the museums on the mall did not participate in the segregation of the city. In fact, the restaurant at the National Gallery of Art became a favorite lunch spot for Herring and Aden, especially when meeting with white friends. White artist Jack Perlmutter recalled many pleasant lunches there with his friend Aden. Jack Perlmutter, interview by the author, Bethesda, Md., June 14, 2003.

³¹ Mary Church Terrell, 1907, quoted in Sandra Fitzpatrick and Maria R. Goodwin, *The Guide to Black Washington: Places and Events of Historical and Cultural Significance in the Nation’s Capital* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 2001), 25-26.

This segregation continued well into the 1950s, but African Americans' avoidance of the museums on the mall continued even longer. Characterizing the atmosphere in the city in 1965, historian Constance Green wrote:

Nor did more than a handful of colored parents take their children to the Smithsonian museums, the exhibits at the National Geographic Society, and the art galleries, all of which were flooded year in and year out with white Washingtonians and white tourists. What Negro children could see there were still the artifacts and art of an alien world of an earlier day in which colored people had had no recognized place.³²

African Americans did flock to the national mall for events that held meaning in their own lives and history, such as the dedication of the Lincoln Memorial in May 1922. But again, the message was clear—in what should have been a joyful ceremony the black observers were herded, like cattle, into one specific area. As described by historian David L. Lewis: “A roped-off section, separated by a dirt road, was assigned to blacks, and from that section the distinguished educator and successor to Booker T. Washington, Dr. Robert Russa Moten, trudged to the speakers’ platform to address the crowd.”³³ The message to black citizens rang out clearly again, just three years later, in the summer of 1925, when 25,000 “hooded and white-robed” Ku Klux Klansmen culminated their government-sanctioned parade with ceremonies at the Lincoln Memorial.³⁴

In 1939, however, the audience was not segregated when 75,000 Washingtonians crowded the steps of the Lincoln Memorial on Easter Sunday to hear the acclaimed African American contralto Marian Anderson. This concert was a bittersweet triumph, since Anderson had originally been scheduled to sing at Constitution Hall, but was barred from this venue by the Daughters of the American Revolution. The outraged black

³² Green, *The Secret City*, 6.

³³ David L. Lewis, *District of Columbia: A Bicentennial History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1976), 75.

³⁴ Green, *Washington: Capital City*, 279.

community formed a citizens' committee and brought national attention to "the depths into which white ignorance and prejudice had forced all African Americans."³⁵ Facing mounting public pressure, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt resigned her DAR membership, and the Lincoln Memorial was offered as an alternative concert site by Harold Ickes, Secretary of the Interior.

Black Washingtonians also did not venture in large numbers to the two private institutions discussed thus far, the Corcoran Gallery of Art and the Phillips Memorial Gallery. These may, in fact, have been even less accessible to the black community than those on the national mall. The Corcoran was part of the downtown area, which was known for its hostility to African Americans, and the Phillips Gallery was situated within an upscale white neighborhood, where it could be dangerous (or at least unnerving) for black citizens to stroll the sidewalks or wait for a bus.³⁶ Certain middle-class black parents did take their children to these galleries, including local black artist Peter L. Robinson Jr., who recalled, "I grew up browsing the Corcoran and the Phillips. My father knew that I was interested, and he saw that I got to see whatever I wanted to see." When asked if there were many other black visitors to such institutions in the 1930s, he replied, "...only a few now and then."³⁷

What impact did all of these art institutions have on local artists—white and black? The Smithsonian art collection was not consistently on display until 1910, when it

³⁵ Green, *Secret City*, 248.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 261. Green explains the dilemma of a city divided—so divided that the white community knows almost nothing about the black community. She notes, however, that blacks knew much more about the white community, because, for them, ignorance was dangerous. Even well-to-do blacks knew that some places must be avoided completely, and others must be approached with caution. David Driskell recalled that in the early 1950s African Americans were careful never to walk after dark in a white neighborhood. As he said, "Oh, no—you would be locked up! Just for being there. It was really horrible." David Driskell, interview by author, Hyattsville, Md., January 13, 2003.

³⁷ Peter L. Robinson, Jr., interview by author, Washington, D.C., June 16, 2006.

was installed inside the Natural History Museum, and even then much of Washington was unaware of its existence. Local artists who knew of the collection were most impressed by their collection of paintings by American artist Albert Pinkham Ryder, whose works included thickly painted simplified forms enveloped in a haunting yellowish light.³⁸ Local artist Jacob Kainen was impressed with these, but recalled that “[t]he presentation was unbelievable with one thing over another....” He remembered twelve paintings by Ryder that “were hung in the narrow corridor under naked electric light bulbs.”³⁹ This presentation undoubtedly changed over time, since undated photographs show relatively narrow partitioned rooms, lined with paintings, but all hung at eye level in a single row.

More American art could be found at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, but some artists claimed that the atmosphere was old-fashioned, at least into the 1950s. Especially those who came from New York, like Kainen, who commented, “The Corcoran was like a mausoleum...with plaster casts of statues on either side of the staircase.”⁴⁰ Although Kainen’s comments were undoubtedly colored by his comparisons with New York, photographs and descriptions of the Corcoran from the late thirties lend credence to his evaluation. As described in the Federal Writers’ Project, “The sculpture group is approached on the first floor of the gallery through an atrium in which are mounted plaster casts of sculptures from the antique, Renaissance and later periods.”⁴¹ In their descriptions of the Corcoran’s “more recent and contemporary American artists’ works,”

³⁸ The paintings by Ryder included *The Flying Dutchman* and *Jonah*, both of which express the artist’s “poetic vision” according to the Federal Writers’ Project, 381.

³⁹ Jacob Kainen, transcript of speech at the Women’s National Democratic Club, Washington, D.C., December 6, 1978. Kainen papers, Archives of American Art, 4.

⁴⁰ Jacob Kainen, interview with Morrison, 15.

⁴¹ Federal Writers’ Project, 384.

the project writers imply that the examples were mostly conservative: “The works of most of these men, despite their proximity to the experiments of the modern school, remain essentially academic in treatment.” Only two of the six paintings by Arthur B. Davies, as they said, show the influence of “modern painting.”⁴²

The Corcoran did, however, play a significant role in bringing contemporary art to Washington through its sponsorship of biannual competitive exhibitions. Beginning in 1907, these juried “Biennials,” as they were called, drew entries from New York and cities around the nation, but local artists could, and often did, submit work. For many years the jurors for these high profile shows were all practicing artists (usually five), but after 1947 they also included Corcoran staff members and art professionals from other museums.⁴³ Artist-jurors during the 1920s and 1930s included such notable figures as Childe Hassam, Gifford Beal, William Glackens, Maurice Sterne, and Rockwell Kent; during the 1940s and 1950s Guy Pène Du Bois, Edward Hopper, Henry Varnum Poor, and Raphael Soyer were added to the roster. All of these jurors were white and male, with the exception of Lillian Westcott Hale, who served in 1923; and, according to former Corcoran curator Linda Crocker Simmons, no minorities were known to have served as jurors.⁴⁴

Talented local artists were sometimes chosen to exhibit in these high profile shows, including Sarah Baker, Jacob Kainen, Herman Maril, Robert Gates, Jack Perlmutter, and Bernice Cross, but local black artists faced obstacles. Artist Lois Mailou

⁴² Ibid., 388. The other artists mentioned in this group were Maurice Prendergast, Mary Cassatt, Thomas Eakins, Robert Henri, George Luks, Gari Melchers, George Bellows, Alexander Brook, and Bernard Karfiol.

⁴³ Linda Crocker Simmons, introduction to *The Biennial Exhibition Record of the Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1907-1976*, ed. Peter Hastings Falk and Andrea Ansell Bien (Madison, Connecticut: Sound View Press, 1991), 10-12.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 12. As Simmons explains, the jury system was discontinued after the 30th Biennial in 1967, and selections for subsequent Biennials were made by the curator or director in charge.

Jones, professor at Howard University, claimed that, in 1941, she broke the color barrier imposed by the Corcoran, whose “policy forbade participation by African-American artists.” Jones asked a friend, white artist Céline Tabary, to deliver her entry to the gallery, because (as she later recounted), “If I had brought my entry down myself, and the guards had seen me, they would have put it in the reject pile right away. But because Céline took it, it was accepted.”⁴⁵ In fact, the painting, *Indian Shops, Gay Head, Massachusetts* (1940), received a prestigious award, the Robert Woods Bliss Prize for landscape, from the Society of Washington Artists. Jones allowed the prize to be put in the mail to her, fearful that a personal appearance might lead to retraction of the award.⁴⁶

The Corcoran Gallery did not begin annual exhibitions of regional art, called Area Exhibitions, until 1946. Some accounts imply that they reluctantly initiated these after years of local pressure. It appears that they took over this task after the Phillips Gallery discontinued its annual Christmas shows featuring local artists after 1945.

Beyond these annual events, by all accounts it was the Phillips Gallery that was the most compelling for local artists. Duncan Phillips was aware of the academic bias of most Washington art institutions and was determined to provide a gallery where visitors could study the latest trends in modern art. His arrangements of modern works alongside their antecedents were designed to educate and provoke serious contemplation. The gallery also sponsored an ongoing series of lectures by noted art critics and other professionals.

⁴⁵ Lois Mailou Jones, quoted in Tritobia Hayes Benjamin, *The Life and Art of Lois Mailou Jones* (San Francisco: Pomegranate Artbooks, 1994), 49. The discrimination at the Corcoran was not official policy, but, according to Jones and other black artists, it did exist.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 50. According to archival records at the Corcoran, the first African American whose work was selected for exhibition by the jury was Allan Rohan Crite in 1939. See Simmons in Falk and Bien, *The Biennial Exhibition Record*, 12. Crite worked in Boston and may have mailed his entry to the museum.

After 1934 Phillips did purchase a few paintings each year from Washington or Baltimore artists, but he did not consider these to be part of the permanent collection, calling them, in 1944, the “Encouragement Collection.”⁴⁷ Phillips followed his predilection for concentrating on certain artists, collecting a small body of works from each, rather than purchasing single works from a larger number of artists. Phillips called these “exhibition units.” He felt that this strategy allowed viewers to review the development of an artist’s career, as well as study the development of distinct art movements.

According to artist Ben Summerford, Phillips bought numerous works from local artists “like Sarah Baker, William Calfee, Bernice Cross, Margaret Gates, Robert Gates, John Gernard, Jacob Kainen, James McLaughlin, and Herman Maril.”⁴⁸ There are no black artists listed in this group, even though the artists listed above consistently showed their work alongside black artists in locations around Washington, D.C., including the Barnett Aden Gallery.

When Phillips did purchase African American art, it was usually through his New York connections, especially Edith Halpert of the Downtown Gallery. Such was the case in 1942, when Phillips purchased half (30 of 60 panels) of Jacob Lawrence’s epic “Migration of the Negro” series. Halpert had been introduced to Lawrence’s work by Alain Locke and subsequently exhibited the entire “Migration” series as part of the “American Negro Art” show at the Downtown Gallery in December of 1941. The idea for this exhibition came after reading Locke’s 1940 publication, *The Negro in Art: A*

⁴⁷ Ben L. Summerford, “The Phillips Collection and Art in Washington,” in *The Eye of Duncan Phillips: A Collection in the Making*, ed. Erika D. Passantino (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 608. Local purchases ranged from “only a few works per year to more than twenty-five.”

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 607.

Pictorial Record of the Negro Artist and of the Negro Theme in Art, when Halpert decided to enlist Locke's assistance in her effort "to introduce Negro art in a large inclusive exhibition...."⁴⁹ The 1941 exhibition allowed Halpert to bring Lawrence's series to the attention of Phillips as well as Alfred Barr, director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. When both institutions expressed interest in purchasing the series, Halpert arranged for the series to be split, with the odd-numbered panels going to the Phillips Gallery and the even-numbered panels to the Museum of Modern Art. Barr acknowledged to Halpert the significance of the purchase as the first example of "negro" art to enter the Modern collection, but in Phillips' correspondence about the series there were "no references to matters of race...."⁵⁰ Phillips was no doubt impressed with Lawrence's unique melding of abstract and narrative forms and recognized that the series fit well with his growing collection of modernist art; however, it appears that the purchase, significant as it was, did not herald any substantial new interest in collecting and showing black art.

After the purchase in February of 1942, the complete "Migration" series⁵¹ was on view at the Phillips Gallery for eighteen days and then sent on a two-year traveling tour, organized by the Museum of Modern Art, to fifteen locations across the nation.⁵² During

⁴⁹ Edith Halpert, letter to Alain Locke, June 9, 1941. See Elizabeth Hutton Turner *Jacob Lawrence: The Migration Series* (Washington, D.C.: The Phillips Collection, 1993), 162.

⁵⁰ Charles S. Moffett, foreword, *Jacob Lawrence: The Migration Series*, ed. Elizabeth Hutton Turner (Washington, D.C.: The Phillips Collection, 1993), 8. Moffett was director of the Phillips Collection in 1993, when the last traveling exhibition of the entire series was organized.

⁵¹ The premier exhibition of the series at the Phillips Gallery (February 14 to March 3, 1942) was titled "Exhibition of Tempera Paintings by Jacob Lawrence," thus, obscuring the historical and racial nature of the subject matter. See Passantino, Appendix A, 662.

⁵² The "Migration" series was not featured again at the Phillips gallery until 1962, when twenty-four "selected" panels were exhibited. All thirty panels owned by the gallery were shown in 1969, and the entire series was exhibited there in 1972 and 1993, when a traveling exhibition along with an impressive publication were sponsored by the Phillips Collection. See Passantino, Appendix A, 667-673.

the next twenty-five years Phillips never purchased another Lawrence painting and purchased only a few by other black artists. One was a painting by Boston artist Allan Rohan Crite, purchased in 1942; and two others were by “folk artist” Horace Pippin, purchased in 1943 and 1946. (“Folk art” was the terminology used by Phillips.) These were acquired through Halpert, who also lent works for the 1946 exhibition at the Phillips Gallery called “Three Negro Artists: Horace Pippin, Jacob Lawrence, Richmond Barthe.”⁵³

While it is likely that black artists were part of the many group exhibitions (especially those featuring local artists) at the Phillips Gallery, none were given solo exhibitions until 1967, when Marjorie Phillips offered Sam Gilliam a one-person show. In fact, out of the hundreds of solo exhibitions held between 1924 and 1999 (aside from a few showings of the “Migration” series), there were only three solo shows for black artists: Gilliam in 1967, Pippin in 1977, and Lois Mailou Jones in 1979.⁵⁴ All three came after the death of Duncan Phillips in 1966. In fact, Lawrence’s “Migration of the Negro” series was exhibited at the gallery only twice during Phillips’ lifetime—once just after the purchase in 1942, and again (partially) in 1962, when 24 of the 30 panels owned by the Phillips were shown.⁵⁵

⁵³ According to the exhibition catalogue, the idea for the exhibition came from James Lane and Mr. Shaw of Catholic Interracial Council. All of the works were loaned to the Phillips except for Lawrence’s “Migration” panels and two paintings by Pippin: *Barracks* and *Domino Players*.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* This was decades after Jones’ solo exhibitions in New York, Boston, Port-au-Prince, Haiti and other sites in Washington, including the Barnett Aden Gallery, where she had her first Washington solo show in April/May 1946. Jones, who trained at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and at the Academy Julien in Paris, was a professor in the art department at Howard University from 1930 until her retirement in 1977.

⁵⁵ After his death in 1966, Phillips was succeeded as director by his wife, Majorie, until 1972, when their son, Laughlin, became director. He was succeeded by Charles S. Moffett in 1992. The current director is Jay Gates. The entire series was on view at the Phillips Collection from May 3 until October 6, 2008. The exhibition was titled “The Great American Epic: Jacob Lawrence’s Migration Series.”

Phillips did not exhibit local artists' work until 1935, when, during the Christmas season, the gallery began sponsoring juried exhibitions of regional artists and offered their work for sale to the public. These juried exhibitions were exciting events for local artists, including Lois Mailou Jones, whose submission in the 1944 Christmas show was purchased by the Phillips Gallery.⁵⁶ After the Christmas show in 1945, these annual shows ended, and the gallery held exhibitions of regional art more sporadically, usually during the summer.⁵⁷

In the late 1930s Phillips began to hold solo exhibitions for selected local artists. These were mostly small shows and usually featured artists employed by or closely associated with the Phillips Gallery, such as John Gernand, James McLaughlin, Harold Giese, Robert Gates, Margaret Gates, Elisabeth Poe, Bernice Cross, and C. Law Watkins.⁵⁸ Marjorie Phillips, also an artist, had numerous solo exhibitions at the gallery, as did her son, Laughlin Phillips. Although black artists were not part of this favored group, according to James Agee,

Phillips understood and actively sought diversity, long before the public was conscious of such matters. In the late 1930s, at a time when Washington was a far more southern town in its laws and attitudes than it is today, he organized shows of black artists that included Horace Pippin, Jacob Lawrence, and Romare Bearden.⁵⁹

According to the exhibition record provided in *The Eye of Duncan Phillips: A Collection in the Making* (1999), Agee's claim seems overstated and even misleading. Pippin,

⁵⁶ This painting remains in the permanent collection (as of 1999), along an additional work by Jones. *Passantino*, 616.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ James Agee, "Duncan Phillips and American Modernism," in *Passantino The Eye of Duncan Phillip*, 377.

Lawrence, and Richmond Barthe⁶⁰ were featured in the 1946 show mentioned above, but this was a singular event, rather than a recurring practice. There were no shows featuring black artists at the Phillips Gallery during the 1930s, and during the 1940s there were only two: the newly purchased “Migration” series in 1942 and the “Three Negro Artists” four years later. This small show in 1946 was the last one featuring black artists until 1962, when a portion of the “Migration” series was shown again.⁶¹

Yet, this is not to say that there was any conscious prejudice on the part of Phillips or his gallery staff. He had many friends in the black community, including Herring and Aden, and often loaned art works to both the Howard Gallery and the Barnett Aden Gallery. He and his wife attended social affairs at both institutions. While the purchase of the “Migration” series was a major event in the history of African American art, it would not have occurred without the urging of Edith Halpert, and perhaps not without Alfred Barr’s simultaneous bid for the series. While Phillips was interested in the work of black artists, it does not seem to have been an abiding interest.

Community Art: Schools, Fairs, Clubs, Bookstores, and Fledgling Galleries

Well into the twentieth century the only school of fine art in Washington was the Corcoran Gallery of Art, which began offering classes in 1890. Over time the school

⁶⁰ Agee must have listed Bearden in error (instead of Barthé). Bearden’s extensive exhibition history (as outlined in the catalogue for his 2003 retrospective at the National Gallery of Art) does not list any solo or group exhibitions at the Phillips Gallery.

⁶¹ Called “Selections from ‘The Migration of the Negro’ Series by Jacob Lawrence,” this was a partial exhibition of their holdings—only 24 of their 30 panels were mounted.

expanded, and by the 1930s it was offering Saturday classes for youth, scholarships, summer school, commercial art courses, and instruction in ceramics.⁶²

However, the Corcoran School of Art was known for its bias against African Americans (until at least the 1950s). According to former Baltimore curator and Howard alumni, Samuel Green, “We faced a lot of discrimination.... Even now I have a hard time thinking positively about the Corcoran. They had a school of art, but they would not allow black students. You could go to the gallery, but they would not enroll you.”⁶³ This exclusionary policy was especially significant, because the art classes at the Corcoran were free. The art school was funded by a special account, part of William Corcoran’s trust fund for the gallery.

This policy of discrimination dated back to the nineteenth century. In a 1942 article for *Crisis* magazine, James Herring related the experience of Annie E. A. Walker, a light-skinned African American from Alabama, who entered the Corcoran School of Art, “but was dismissed when it was learned that she was colored....” Herring went on to explain that, undaunted “she then entered the Cooper Union School for the Advancement of Science and Art, and was graduated in 1895. She studied the next year at the Academe Julien, and exhibited in the Paris Salon of 1896.”⁶⁴

Across town Duncan Phillips made art appreciation and education a central focus of his gallery from the start. (It appears there was no policy of discrimination at the Phillips Gallery, although other factors may have limited black participation.) Phillips

⁶² Degree programs were established in 1966, but it was not until 1978 that the first Bachelor of Fine Arts was awarded at the Corcoran Gallery of Art. Full accreditation status came in the 1980s, and in 1999 the name was changed to the Corcoran College of Art and Design. See http://www.corcoran.org/about/history_school.htm.

⁶³ Samuel Green, interview by author, Baltimore, Md., January 15, 2003.

⁶⁴ James V. Herring, “The American Negro as Craftsman and Artist,” *Crisis* 49 (April 1942): 117.

was continually changing the arrangement of his collection, in ways meant to inspire and educate the public. These arrangements were supplemented with many lectures by Phillips himself and a variety of invited speakers. Phillips instituted an educational program under the leadership of the artist C. Law Watkins, who established a school of painting associated with the gallery from 1930 until his death in 1945. According to Washington artist Ben L. Summerford, “the school encouraged students to move unprejudiced into contemporary modes of expression without abandoning the lessons of the past.”⁶⁵ The Phillips Gallery Art School began with free classes in 1930 and by 1931 had enrolled two hundred students. This free school was closed in 1932, due to the Depression, but Watkins soon opened a separate facility called Studio House, largely supported by the Phillips Gallery. Studio House employed local artists as instructors and was in operation until 1938, when the classes were moved back to the Phillips Memorial Gallery. In 1942 the art school joined forces with American University and created a program leading to both bachelor’s and master’s degrees in painting. This dynamic partnership lasted only three years, but during that time students divided their time between academic classes at the university and drawing and painting classes at the gallery. When Watkins died in 1945 the partnership was dissolved, but the art program at American University continued under the leadership of local artist William Calfee.

Yet for African Americans seeking education, these gallery schools paled in comparison to the appeal of Howard University. The campus, located along Georgia Avenue in Northeast Washington, attracted young black students from across the nation. Established in 1867 by General Oliver Otis Howard, the University had become, by the

⁶⁵ Ben L. Summerford, “The Phillips Collection and Art in Washington” in *The Eye of Duncan Phillips*, 607.

turn of the twentieth century, the premier institution of higher learning for African Americans and the “capstone of negro education.”⁶⁶

Emancipated African Americans flocked to Howard, where they were soon able to study law, medicine, philosophy, music, drama, and architecture; however, until 1921, they could not major in fine art. In that year James Vernon Herring was hired by Albert I. Cassell, head of the newly established Department of Architecture. According to Dyson, Herring’s assignment was “to teach the subjects in the field most closely related to the fine arts. For the first time at the University illustrated lectures in the history of architecture, sculpture and painting were given by Herring.”⁶⁷ Although hired as an instructor in the Department of Architecture, Herring immediately began a campaign for the formation of a separate art department at the University. Although drawing classes had been held at Howard since 1890, and even though several professors, including Locke (hired in 1917) were ardent supporters of black artistic expression, there is no record of interest in a separate art department before Herring’s arrival.⁶⁸

Herring became known for his dogged persistence, and in the fall of 1921, just months after his arrival, he was put in charge of the new art department at Howard University. With just one classroom and one instructor (himself), the new department was launched.

Over the years Herring recruited many fine artists to the art department faculty, beginning with May Howard Jackson (1922), a noted black sculptor and portraitist with training at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Jackson was hired to teach sculpture and modeling from life, so Herring arranged for models from the Corcoran

⁶⁶ Dyson, 440.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 141.

Gallery of Art to pose at Howard twice per week.⁶⁹ The multi-talented Gwendolyn Bennett,⁷⁰ hired to teach design in 1924, left after one year to study in Europe, but she returned to teach again during 1926 and 1927. An early graduate of Howard's art department, James A. Porter, was recruited in 1927 to teach painting and later became a renowned art historian, eventually succeeding Herring as head of the art department upon Herring's retirement in 1953.

Painter and printmaker James L. Wells was targeted next, after Herring saw his work in one of the Harmon Foundation Exhibitions in New York. In a 1989 interview with Richard Powell and Jock Reynolds, Wells clearly recalled the moment when Herring came to see his work: "Herring said 'I want to see the work of this young man—this so-called artist!'" Wells laughed along with his interviewers and added, "Herring was very humorous!"⁷¹ Initially hired to teach drawing and ceramics, Wells soon developed advanced classes in printmaking, airbrush, and cast bronze sculpture.⁷²

In the spring of 1930 Herring was a visiting lecturer at the Palmer Memorial Institute in Sedalia, North Carolina, where he was so impressed with instructor Lois Mailou Jones and the work of her students, that he promptly decided to recruit her.

Tritobia Hayes Benjamin described the encounter, as related to her by Jones:

Professor Herring took me aside and said, "I want you to come to Howard University in September." I told him that I had a contract with Charlotte Hawkins Brown and I

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Bennett was a talented writer and poet, as well as a visual artist.

⁷¹ James L. Wells, interview with Richard Powell and Jock Reynolds, November 15, 1989, audio recording, James L. Wells Papers (Washington, D.C.: Archives of American Art). Wells clearly recalled that when Herring came to see his work he exclaimed, "I want to see the work of this young man—this so-called artist." After laughing aloud with his interviewers, Wells added, "Herring was very humorous!"

⁷² Scott W. Baker, "From Freedmen to Fine Artists," in *A Proud Continuum: Eight Decades of Art at Howard University*, Howard University Gallery of Art (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Gallery of Art, 2005), 6.

did not think I could leave in September. He said, “Don’t worry; I’ll talk to her. We’ll have you at Howard in the fall.”⁷³

As Benjamin notes, “Herring was a man of his word. He was greatly respected in the intellectual community, and very persuasive.”⁷⁴ Jones did begin teaching at Howard in the fall of 1930, and Professor Herring continued to seek out the most qualified instructors available for his department. Several white artists taught in his department over the years, including Céline Tabary (1948-1953), Franz Rapp (1943-1951), Morris Louis (1954), and Lila Oliver Asher (1948-1991).

Herring even recruited students and offered assistance with practical matters, such as finding financial aid and housing. A few were “stolen” from other departments, most notably Alma Thomas, who became the first graduate of the new art department in 1924. As Thomas related to Judith Wilson in 1979, Herring persuaded her to abandon her home economics major and switch to art. Herring (with his typical zeal) told her, “You don’t need to be a cook, that’s all black people are!”⁷⁵ Thomas later became an ardent promoter of the Barnett Aden Gallery and a lifelong friend of Herring’s.

Other D.C. galleries opened and closed during the thirties. Two of the more ambitious were the Washington Museum of Modern Art and the Gallery of Future Masters, both established in 1937. The Museum of Modern Art, organized by a group of local socialites, held its first exhibition at the Metropolitan Club in downtown

⁷³ Lois Mailou Jones, quoted in Benjamin, *Lois Mailou Jones*, 14.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Alma Thomas, quoted in Judith Wilson, “Teacher, Patron, Pioneer: Alma Thomas, A One-Woman Movement,” *Ms 7* (February 1979): 60. James Porter, the second head of the art department, continued this tradition in 1952, when he visited a drawing class taught by James L. Wells and noticed the work of a young student named David Driskell. When Driskell told him that he was a history major, Porter promptly fired back, “You don’t belong in history. You belong here.” As Driskell explained to the author, “In those days we did what our professors told us to do!” Driskell, interview with the author, 2003.

Washington. According to Cohen, this show featured five “modern” artists: Seurat, Renoir, Gauguin, Cézanne, and Van Gogh. Cohen adds that these European artists were “even then too radical for local tastes,” and the institution dissolved in 1939.⁷⁶ The Gallery of Future Masters, despite its promising name, suffered a similar fate, closing in 1938.⁷⁷

Washington newspapers reported on all of these activities during the 1930s, although there was little actual criticism of the art on view. The press also made efforts to support the local art scene. For example, in the spring of 1935, the *Washington Post*, along with the D.C. Federation of Women’s Clubs, sponsored a unique type of exhibition. Called the “Greater Washington Independent Artists Exhibition,” this was actually nine separate exhibitions, held concurrently inside nine downtown department stores. The event drew 1700 entries, which were judged by “internationally known artist and critic Ernest Lawson” (a member of The Eight and an exhibitor at the 1913 Armory Show) and a committee headed by Duncan Phillips.⁷⁸

The *Post* reported great excitement for this event, with visits by first lady Eleanor Roosevelt to several of the department stores on the first day. The *Post* also reported that “(r)esponse among Washington artists to the exhibit was tremendously enthusiastic.”⁷⁹

However, this enthusiastic response was almost surely limited to the white art

⁷⁶ Cohen, “The Old Guard,” 55. This came after accumulating debts totaling \$23,000. Cohen describes how the organizers of the museum appealed for emergency financial support on the society page of a local newspaper. See “These Charming People” *The Washington Times Herald*, November 6, 1938.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ “20 D.C. Artists Win Cash Prizes in First Independent Art Exhibit,” *The Washington Post*, 14 April 1935. The participating department stores were Jelleff’s, W.B Moses & Sons, Woodward & Lothrop, Lansburgh & Bro., Palais Royal, Julius Garfinckel & Co., Kann’s, the Hecht Co. and W. & J Sloane. Robert F. Gates won the \$100 Andrew W. Mellon award for the best watercolor, and Bernice Cross received *The Washington Post* award of \$100 in the painting division. Other winners included Karl Glockner, Eben F. Comins, and Prentiss Taylor.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

community, since downtown Washington was known for its hostility toward African Americans. Restaurants, hotels, and theaters refused admission to blacks, and the clerks at downtown department stores turned their backs when a black shopper approached.⁸⁰ The only exception was Morton's Department Store, opened in 1933 by Mortimer C. Lebowitz, who welcomed black customers. Upon his retirement in 1993, Lebowitz described the situation for black shoppers during the 1930s, "They were treated very cruelly and clearly were not made to feel welcome. Everyone at the time felt they would lose customers if they catered to black customers."⁸¹ Morton's was not one of the nine stores included in the exhibition, and it was not until 1957 that the featured department stores hired any African Americans.⁸² A few black artists did submit works to the exhibition,⁸³ but they likely would not have felt free to spend much time viewing the artworks alongside the crowds of white visitors, since even friendly integrated groups faced harassment in public settings.⁸⁴

A more congenial venue, at least for the black community, was the *Times Herald* Outdoor Art Fair, which held annual art competitions, beginning in 1937. These fairs, which continued in some form into the 1960s, were usually held at President's Park (now Lafayette Square) across the street from the White House. These fairs quickly became the most popular art event in the city, with a festival-like atmosphere complete with music by

⁸⁰ Saturdays were the exception, since it was presumably just after payday.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, citing Mortimer C. Lebowitz, interview in *Washington Times* 28, January 1993.

⁸² Green, *Secret City*, 315.

⁸³ These included printmaker Prentiss Taylor, who won the first prize of twenty-five dollars in the "black and white category." Taylor (1907-1991) was an art therapist at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in D.C. and a pioneer in the use of art in psychotherapy as a way to reintegrate the disordered mind. It appears that this exhibition did not become an annual event in the city.

⁸⁴ Fitzpatrick and Goodwin, 34-35.

the Art Fair Troubadours.⁸⁵ With various prizes totaling \$20,000, the sponsors had no shortage of entries. By the sixth annual art fair in 1943, the total three-day attendance was estimated at 25,000, with visitors enjoying thousands of artworks displayed beneath the trees.⁸⁶

The atmosphere may have been more carnival-like than serious, but many professional local artists did participate (along with hundreds of amateurs). After all, cash prizes were always welcome, and the President's Park site (across from the White House) made the event inviting to artists and visitors of all ethnic backgrounds. The annual outdoor fair provided encouragement for young artists, including fourteen-year old "colored" student John Farrar. Farrar's portrait of General Douglas MacArthur was voted "most popular" by visitors to the fifth annual art fair in 1942, and he received a one-year scholarship for private art instruction with Polish artist Elias Kanarek. The public was fascinated by this precocious teenager, who was featured in a long *Times-Herald* article titled, "He Loves to Paint and Make Biscuits."⁸⁷ Farrar continued to paint and continued to win awards. After serving in the military he returned to Washington, where he exhibited his work at the Barnett Aden Gallery on several occasions.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Tina Marranzano, "Schoolboy Gets \$100 Bond For Most Popular Art Fair Oil," *Times-Herald*, October 4, 1943. Dressed whimsically "in velvet smocks, berets, and plaid bow ties, these Troubadours—violinist, accordionist and bass—moved from exhibit to exhibit, followed at all times by crowds of admirers."

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Tina Marranzano, "He loves to Paint and Make Biscuits," *Times-Herald*, 28 June 1943. This article shares heartwarming anecdotes about Farrar's life, emphasizing his geniality despite his family's struggles with poverty and illness. Such press attention to a local black family was unusual in Washington, but it was this type of article that the white community found comforting. With his unusual talent and amiable demeanor, Farrar fit easily into the stereotype of the "colorful" black character, which white readers found both fascinating and non-threatening.

⁸⁸ Farrar's work remains in the Barnett Aden Collection and will be discussed in the next chapter.

Another gallery established during the 1930s, the Howard University Gallery of Art, did survive, and in fact flourished throughout the coming decades, offering ten to sixteen exhibitions per year. Although historically black colleges and universities had long been leaders in the preservation of African American history and culture, Howard University was the first of these to create a gallery specifically dedicated to the visual arts.⁸⁹ Created through the persistence of Professor Herring and local art patrons such as Mrs. Averly Coonley, the gallery opened in April of 1930 inside a specially prepared area of Rankin Chapel. Shortly thereafter, an art critic writing for the *New York Times* stressed the historical significance of the occasion by declaring it to be “the only gallery in the country run by negroes.” He wrote, “Never until now has there been a place where Negro art students have had the opportunity to study on such a large scale within the walls of their own institution products of artists of the highest rank both at home and abroad.”⁹⁰

Herring recognized the need to bring a wider range of art to Howard students, as well as the city of Washington, and the Howard Gallery soon became the finest university gallery in the city. With limited resources, Herring diligently pursued every possible avenue to bring art to the gallery. One gains a sense of the effort involved by examining the catalogues from the period. The inaugural exhibition of “outstanding American paintings” was sponsored by the College Art Association, where Herring had been an early and active member. Others were circulated by The American Federation of Art and the W.P.A. Federal Art Project, but many more were organized by Herring, who tirelessly sought out loans from a vast group of public, professional, and philanthropic

⁸⁹ The art collection housed at the Hampton Institute Museum (now the Hampton University Museum) in Hampton, Virginia was probably the first publicly accessible African American art collection. Kinshasha Holman Conwill, introduction to *To Conserve a Legacy: American Art from Historically Black Colleges and University*, ed. Richard J. Powell and Jock Reynolds (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999), 11.

⁹⁰ *New York Times*, October 26, 1930.

organizations, as well as individual art collectors, and directors of galleries and museums across the entire East and Midwest. Museums who loaned works included not only all of the major Washington museums, but also those in Baltimore, Cincinnati, Cambridge, Chicago, and New York. Galleries in many cities also loaned works, including these in New York: ACA, Kraushaar, Babcock, Milch, Downtown, Ferargil, Midtown, Marie Sterner, and Durand Ruel.⁹¹

Herring was also pleased to exhibit African art at the Howard Gallery. One show used photographs to reveal the richness of the Barnes Collection of African art, but others featured splendid examples of African art from the collection of Alain Locke. As discussed in chapter two, Herring and Locke maintained a decades-long personal feud, but they preserved a cooperative professional relationship at Howard and elsewhere. Locke had attained an international reputation by the 1930s, largely through his 1925 publication of *The New Negro*, a ground-breaking book that came to epitomize that great flowering of black culture in the urban North called the Harlem Renaissance.

Although Locke was the head of the Philosophy Department at Howard, he had quite specific ideas about the role of art in black culture. In his own essay for *The New Negro*, called “The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts,” Locke wrote, “We ought and must have a school of Negro art, a local and a racially representative tradition.” In developing this tradition, Locke urged black artists toward “the study and example of African art....”⁹²

Considering their personal differences, it is doubtful that Locke made any direct suggestions to Herring about the focus of the university exhibitions, but Herring would

⁹¹ Aden, “The Gallery of Art.”

⁹² Locke, “The Legacy,” 267.

certainly have been aware of Locke's ideas.⁹³ As discussed earlier, Herring did show African art at the Howard gallery, but only as one part of the gallery's diverse offerings, and without the singular emphasis that Locke might have preferred.⁹⁴ In his foreword to a 1937 exhibition catalogue, Herring made this clear by stating, "We agree that sound constructive lessons may be gained from the best examples of African art, as well as from Greek, Chinese or Indian...." He continued, "The outcome of the indefatigable work of the younger Negro artists has become known as the Negro Renaissance. To many intelligent persons, this name is false, because the movement is but the affirmation of the right of a race to follow its instincts, its traditions, its tastes, constructing according to them a true art."⁹⁵

The Howard Gallery of Art was an immediate success, formally opening Monday evening, April 7, 1930, with "a distinguished assembly of art patrons."⁹⁶ Attendance for the first year was 17,576. Ten years later, the gallery was moved to a larger space inside Founders Library, and the attendance figures increased dramatically, with attendance of 25,082 for the academic year 1940-1941.⁹⁷ Members of the white community—including artists, government officials, and business leaders—visited the Howard Gallery, drawn there not only by the elegant Sunday afternoon openings, but to hear lectures by noted artists and art professionals. At the Howard Gallery the city's racial divide was regularly

⁹³ Herring often complained that Locke never included him in his writings.

⁹⁴ James Porter, on the other hand, often disagreed with Locke and openly challenged his ideas. (Much later in life, Porter acknowledged Locke's contributions in what amounted to an apology for his earlier attacks.)

⁹⁵ James V. Herring, foreword to *The Art of the American Negro* Howard University Gallery of Art (Washington, D.C.: Howard University, 1937).

⁹⁶ Dyson, 142.

⁹⁷ Alonzo J. Aden, "The Art Gallery," Annual Report, College of Liberal Arts, Howard University, 1942, 144.

transgressed, and it soon became an important addition to the progressive interracial art scene of Washington.⁹⁸

Washington Art in the 1940s and 1950s

When the Barnett Aden Gallery opened in October of 1943, galleries in Washington, D.C., were almost non-existent—that is—galleries interested in contemporary local artists. Many of those who frequented the Barnett Aden during the 1940s and early 1950s recall only one other gallery in the city—the Whyte Bookstore and Gallery located just north of Dupont Circle.

Although primarily a bookseller, James Whyte decided in 1938 to prepare space on the second floor balcony of his store for small art exhibitions. One year later he hired Franz Bader, a recent emigrant from Vienna, to organize these shows. (Fig. 16) Bader began with exhibitions of European prints, but he soon reached out to local artists, providing encouragement and much needed exhibition opportunities. Over the next fourteen years, despite his limited exhibition space, Bader built a reputation for showing quality contemporary art, and finally, in 1953, he established his own institution—The Franz Bader Gallery—at 1705 G Street Northwest.⁹⁹

Bader nurtured the careers of many local artists in a manner similar to that of Aden at the Barnett Aden Gallery. In a 1962 *Art in America* “cross-country” survey of galleries and dealers, Frank Getlein described Bader as an “avuncular” dealer, comparing him to the recently deceased Aden. “Bader, like Aden, leans strongly on encouraging Washington area artists to develop what strikes him as their strongest suit and to avoid

⁹⁹ The Bader gallery moved again in September 1964 to 2124 Pennsylvania Avenue and in October 1979 to 2001 Eye Street. After Bader’s retirement the gallery continued, moving to 1701 Pennsylvania Avenue around 1987, and in 1990 to 1500 K Street until its final show in 1995. Bader died in 1994. See Franz Bader Gallery papers, Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.

following fashion into avantism for its own sake.”¹⁰⁰ Bader ran the gallery until his retirement in 1985, showing many of the same artists who showed at the Barnett Aden Gallery. He was known for his support of black artists, including Lois Mailou Jones and Richard Dempsey (among others), who showed at his gallery in the late 1940s. Black artist Alma Thomas met Bader in the 1940s at the Whyte Bookstore, which she visited often in her avid search for new art books. Thomas, who helped found the Barnett Aden Gallery, chose Bader as her dealer in the late sixties and had solo shows there in 1968 and 1970.

Though fewer recall it today, there was another gallery showing contemporary art in Washington during the forties. Open only five years, the G Place Gallery, established by newcomer Caresse Crosby, made its mark on the local art scene. Crosby came to Washington in 1941 after living for years in Paris, where she was part of Gertrude Stein’s artistic circle and ran the avant-garde Black Sun Press. Upon arrival in Washington, D.C., this wealthy widow was shocked by the racism so openly displayed and promptly gained notoriety by staging her own production of *Othello* “with black actor Canada Lee playing the title role and herself as Desdemona.”¹⁰¹

An enthusiastic promoter of all the arts, Crosby opened her art gallery in 1942 at 916 G Place Northwest and used her international connections to show noted European surrealists, including Max Ernst and Giorgio de Chirico. She also brought in New York artists and even helped to arrange a show of African American art called *New Names in American Art* (discussed below). In 1943, her friend from Chicago, David Porter, joined her in Washington, opening a separate gallery on the second floor of the G Place

¹⁰⁰ Frank Getlein, “Washington—Remote Control,” *Art in America* 50 (Number 1, 1962): 131.

¹⁰¹ Cohen, “The Old Guard,” 59, 64.

Building. Accounts of these galleries can be confusing, since Crosby and Porter worked together on some projects, but each operated a separate gallery within the G Place building. Upstairs, Porter mounted shows by Mark Rothko and other New York artists, but occasionally he sponsored a photography exhibition, and, more rarely, a show of local artists. In 1944 Porter offered a solo exhibition to local artist Jacob Kainen, which was his first solo show in Washington, D.C.¹⁰²

The G Place Gallery (as both came to be called) made its mark in the history of African American art in 1944 by organizing an exhibition called *New Names in American Art*. The purpose of the show was spelled out on the cover of the small catalogue: “Created by Caresse Crosby and David Porter to present the recent contribution Negro artists have made to painting and sculpture.” Keith Morrison notes that “Crosby and Porter had done considerable research with help from Herring and Locke in preparing the show.”¹⁰³ Locke also wrote the foreword for the catalogue, where he commented that most of these young artists were already known in “professional circles,” but “neither the individual nor the group significance of these young Negro artists has as yet been fully realized.”¹⁰⁴ These were assuredly “new names” for many who saw this exhibition, but most of the artists listed in the catalogue had already shown their work, many in the Washington area. Of the thirty-six artists listed in the “New

¹⁰² Avis Berman, “Images from a Life,” in *Jacob Kainen*, curated by Walter Hopps, essays by William C. Agee and Avis Berman (Washington, D.C.: Thames and Hudson, Smithsonian Institution, 1994), 26. This source says that “Kainen’s first solo show in Washington was at Porter’s G Place Gallery, opening in January 1944”; however, the catalogue for this show refers to the site simply as “The G Place Gallery.” Kainen insisted that his show was held in Porter’s gallery. When an interviewer tried to conflate these two galleries, Kainen bristled, insisting that “there was Crosby’s gallery and there was Porter’s gallery.” Jacob Kainen, unpublished interview by Ruth Kainen, November 27, 1978. Jacob Kainen Collection, Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.

¹⁰³ Morrison, 16.

¹⁰⁴ Alain Locke, foreword in “New Names in American Art,” (Washington, D.C.: The G Place Gallery, 1944), no page.

Names” catalogue, several had already shown at the newly opened Barnett Aden Gallery, and sixteen had shown there by the end of the gallery’s first year.¹⁰⁵ “New Names in American Art” traveled to Hampton Institute, Virginia, in April of 1944, and subsequently, in May, was shown at a much larger institution—the Baltimore Museum of Art.¹⁰⁶ However, by 1947 Crosby was disillusioned with the local art scene—specifically with the lack of collectors—and decided to move on to other challenges. Porter had already departed for New York to pursue his own painting career and their short collaboration came to a close.¹⁰⁷

With such an obvious dearth of galleries in Washington, the announcement of a new gallery in town was a noteworthy occasion, duly noted in the local press, but for Professor Herring and Alonzo Aden it was much more. Those who were around for the opening of the Barnett Aden Gallery on October 16, 1943, repeatedly recall it as an incredibly bold venture, when Herring and Aden welcomed an integrated group into their home on Randolph Place.

To realize just how bold, one must realize the explosive racial climate in 1943 Washington. At a time when public harassment made interracial meetings effectively impossible, Herring and Aden’s purposely integrated exhibitions and gatherings were major accomplishments in themselves. Certainly, the white artists and art professionals of

¹⁰⁵ “Exhibiting Artists During 1943-44,” in the catalogue for the first anniversary exhibition at the Barnett Aden Gallery, “Paintings by Candido Portinari of Brazil,” foreword by Robert C. Smith, (Washington, D.C.: The Barnett Aden Gallery, October 1944).

¹⁰⁶ Crosby also claimed to have “discovered” Romare Bearden. His first two Washington solo exhibitions were held at the G Place Gallery—one in 1944 and another in 1945. It was through Crosby, in the summer of 1945, that Bearden met Samuel M. Kootz, whose newly established gallery in New York would soon show his work. See Ruth Fine, et al., *The Art of Romare Bearden*, (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2003), 217.

¹⁰⁷ Cohen, “The Old Guard,” 64. In Georgetown there was another gallery run by Mrs. Fox, the Little Gallery, which showed local artists. Few records were located by this author, but a scattered assortment of small exhibition brochures reveals that this gallery did show some of the recognized talents in the area, including Bernice Cross.

the city were, as a group, much less prejudiced than the majority of Washingtonians—many had relocated from northern cities and were shocked by the segregation in the nation’s capital. Still, no one—white or black—had ever received an invitation to a black-owned art gallery within a black-owned home in a black neighborhood. Years later, white artist Jack Perlmutter said of the venture, “Oh, it was unbelievable!”¹⁰⁸ He explained that Aden “provided exhibition space for black artists, but he also showed white artists and worked it out so that they could meet socially, and thus, extend the definitions of art...proving that it doesn’t belong to any one group.”¹⁰⁹

Many white Washingtonians had never set foot within an African American neighborhood; others had visited Howard University on occasion but had never been invited to someone’s home in the “colored” part of town. The invitations for that first Saturday night opening must have occasioned a measure of surprise (at least) upon their receipt at certain well-appointed white residences. Herring and Aden were aware of the risks, but they were determined to bring together prominent guests from all across Washington, regardless of their race. Still, they were cautious. As Driskell recalled, “They were very selective about who they invited.”¹¹⁰

Like Bader at the Whyte bookstore, Aden showed contemporary local artists, giving younger artists a chance to exhibit their work, but Aden was able to offer a more complete gallery experience than Bader had available in his balcony area of the Whyte Bookstore. From the beginning, Aden and Herring spared no efforts to make sure the gallery was acknowledged as a serious institution. They sent formal invitations for their legendary Saturday night openings, made sure that exhibitions were announced and

¹⁰⁸ Perlmutter, interview.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Driskell, interview, 2002.

written about in the local press, established regular visiting hours, and offered a continuous program of exhibitions. They cooperated with other local institutions, loaning and borrowing works, providing guidance for those interested in black artists, and serving as judges for art competitions.

In addition to enjoying the ongoing special exhibitions, visitors could venture upstairs to the “print room,” where there was a growing collection of works on paper by well-known American and European artists. According to Morrison, Romare Bearden recalled that “he had never seen a Matisse in Washington before seeing one at the Barnett Aden Gallery.”¹¹¹ Over time, the gallery owners amassed an impressive collection of works in all media, some of which were always on view.

As director of the gallery, Aden (like Herring at the Howard Gallery) appealed to organizations, individuals, museums and other galleries—both local and throughout the Eastern half of the nation—to bring a continuous series of fine exhibitions to the Barnett Aden Gallery. Duncan Phillips generously loaned works to the fledgling gallery, just as he continued to do for the gallery at Howard University.

Visiting the Barnett Aden Gallery was a unique experience within the Washington art scene. The domestic setting was not without precedent, since Phillips had also opened his lavish home to the public, but Herring and Aden made it possible for those of more modest means to imagine living with fine art. Both men hoped that their elegant home could expand local art patronage, especially in the African American community, where there was scant participation at the time. Black visitors experienced a comfort level at the Barnett Aden that could not be found at other galleries, despite the progressive views of some whites, such as Bader, Crosby, Porter and others. After all, the gallery was located

¹¹¹ Morrison, 14.

within their own community, one of the few places in racist America where blacks could enjoy a measure of safety and free expression. They knew the gallery was a special place, even if only because they could relax “and just be human,” as Driskell said.¹¹²

At the Barnett Aden Gallery’s many openings and parties, the gallery owners brought together artists, patrons, museum directors, and important art figures from around Washington and the region. The openings became crucial networking occasions, when artists met one another, as well as art professionals from around the region.

Directed by Aden, with financial support from Herring (who continued as head of the art department at Howard University until 1953), the Barnett Aden Gallery maintained a varied and ambitious schedule, with six to eight exhibitions each year throughout the forties and fifties, only slowing after the sudden death of Aden in 1961.¹¹³ For nearly twenty years Aden encouraged local artists—both white and black—and exhibited their work alongside that of more established artists from New York, Chicago, Boston, and other cities. Artists associated with the Phillips Gallery, such as Robert Gates, James McLaughlin, Bernice Cross, and Marjorie Phillips, showed their work at the Barnett Aden, as did Gene Davis, Kenneth Noland, and Morris Louis, three artists later celebrated as part of the Washington Color School. As Kainen told Morrison in 1984, “All the more experienced artists, the better artists, naturally showed there....”¹¹⁴

Aden gave encouragement to a whole league of young artists, but his support was especially important for African American artists. Government support had aided many

¹¹² Driskell, interview, 2003.

¹¹³ These numbers are estimates based on an extensive, but incomplete exhibition history compiled by the author. See Appendix. This history is based on a number of sources, including local newspaper gallery listings and similar listings in art journals such as the *Magazine of Art*. Forty-one of the original Barnett Aden Gallery exhibition catalogues have been located by the author. These were found in individual artist’s archives and in vertical files at Howard University, National Gallery of Art, and other Washington institutions. As yet, this is the most complete exhibition record available.

¹¹⁴ Kainen, interview by Morrison, 20.

black artists during the 1930s, when artists such as Augusta Savage and Jacob Lawrence obtained work through the Works Progress Administration, but by 1943 this support had ended. As Washington artist James L. Wells noted in 1974, “The Barnett-Aden [*sic*] Gallery showed the works of artists regardless of race, creed or color at a time when it was nearly impossible for the Negro artist to gain entrance to other galleries local or national.”¹¹⁵ Local black artists, such as Lois Mailou Jones, James L. Wells, Richard Dempsey, and James Porter, were shown alongside local white artists, including Jack Perlmutter, Celine Tabary, Jacob Kainen, and William Calfee. These Washington artists were introduced to artists from New York, such as Elizabeth Catlett, Charles White, Norman Lewis, and Jacob Lawrence (all black), as well as Irene Rice Pereira, Theodoro Stamos, Minna Citron, Robert Gwathmey, Sylvia Carewe, Kenneth Evett, and Joe Lasker (all white). They showed the work of Eldzier Cortor, William Carter, and Archibald Motley (all black artists) from Chicago. There were a few international offerings, such as *Tibetan Banners and Small Bronzes* (1943), Brazilian artist Candido Portinari (1944), *Calligraphy and Drawings by Wang Chi-Yuan* (1959) and Countess Grabowski (1957). A full discussion of the type of art shown at the Barnett Aden Gallery will be the focus of the next chapter.

While Aden ran the gallery on Randolph Place, Herring continued his work at Howard University, as both head of the department, instructor, and director of the art gallery.¹¹⁶ Herring was aided at Howard by his dedicated new gallery curator, Albert J.

¹¹⁵ James L. Wells, quoted in Anacostia, 159.

¹¹⁶ Several written accounts state or imply that Professor Herring directed the Barnett Aden Gallery, but all of my interviewees agreed with Driskell, who insisted, “Mr. Aden made the selections. He set the policy.” David Driskell, interview by the author, April 30, 2002. These accounts are supported by contemporary newspaper and journal articles that refer to the Barnett Aden as “Aden’s gallery.” As artist and Howard graduate Peter Robinson told the author, “Herring was much too busy running the university art department and gallery to get that involved.” Robinson, interview with the author, June 16, 2006.

Carter.¹¹⁷ Herring's colleague and former student, James Porter, brought national attention to the university with the publication of his book *Modern Negro Art* in 1943.¹¹⁸

But by the late 1940s another local university's art department was gaining attention. American University's partnership with the Phillips School of Art in the early 1940s had greatly enhanced its art department. After Watkins' death in 1945, one of his teaching assistants, William Calfee, became department chairman and soon established the Watkins Memorial Gallery at American University in honor of his predecessor. The collaboration with the Phillips Gallery ended, but the legacy of Watkins' work continued, as Calfee hired several instructors associated with the earlier school, including Sarah Baker and Robert Gates. Calfee and his faculty published a small "arts" periodical, *The Right Angle*, which sought to stimulate interest by publishing many (sometimes opposing) points of view.¹¹⁹ By the early 1950s, according to several artists, the art department at American University had become an exciting place. Bella Schwartz recalled that "in those days the Art Department at AU was regarded in many quarters as a 'way-out' place of avant-gardism in the arts."¹²⁰ Alice Denney, who later directed the Jefferson Place Gallery in Washington, took classes there and met many artists who would later show at her gallery. These included Alma Thomas, who began taking

¹¹⁷ Carter was a graduate of the Howard Art Department and an accomplished artist. He was an enthusiastic supporter of Herring's goals for the gallery. Driskell related to the author that Carter was extremely loyal to Herring and would insist that "the professor" was always right. Driskell interview, 2003.

¹¹⁸ James A. Porter, *Modern Negro Art*, 3rd ed. (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1992). This book was acknowledged as the first comprehensive survey of African American art.

¹¹⁹ John Crozier Galloway, ed. *The Right Angle* 1 no.6 (August 1947), 2.

¹²⁰ Bella Schwartz, 1.

painting classes at American University in 1950, at the age of fifty-nine, studying with Jacob Kainen, among others.¹²¹

The Barnett Aden and the Whyte gallery (and for five years the G Place Gallery) remained the most prominent local galleries throughout the forties, but in 1947 two art institutions of a different type emerged. These were the Washington Workshop Center for the Arts (known simply as the Workshop), and the Institute of Contemporary Art (or ICA). The Washington Workshop Center, founded by local painter Leon Berkowitz, his wife, the poet Ida Fox, and Helmuth Kern, opened on the top floor of the McLean Mansion on Massachusetts Avenue, now the Indonesian Embassy. The Workshop was primarily an art school, but it also served as “a cultural center for discussions and sharing of ideas.”¹²² Artists remember trudging up the four flights of stairs as much for the camaraderie as the classes, where the inspiration, as Gene Davis jokingly put it, came from “the smell of turpentine and the altitude.”¹²³ Ida Fox was the director from 1947 until 1955, and the staff included (at various times) Berkowitz, Kainen, Perlmutter, Herman Maril, Pietro Lazzari, Lucille Evans, Kenneth Noland and Morris Louis. Most participants were white, but several artists recall that African Americans were welcome. Howard alumni Alma Thomas and Delilah Pierce took classes there. According to Morrison, most of the African American figures from Howard, including Jones, Porter, Wells, and Herring, visited the workshop, as well as two other mature black artists:

¹²¹ On the American University Website chronology they proudly note that as of 1937 the “Board of Trustees votes to admit black students, making AU one of the first universities in a segregated city to do so.” See “About the University”, AU Timeline,” website: <http://www.american.edu/about/timeline.html>.

¹²² Jack Perlmutter, “The Progression of Art Styles in Greater Washington, D.C.,” *Art Voices South* 3 (May/June 1980): 91. In 1980 Perlmutter was a Professor Art and Chairman of the Department of Graphics at the Corcoran School of Art in Washington, D.C. The Workshop later moved one block and by 1953 was located at 1300 New Hampshire Avenue. In addition to art, the Workshop offered classes in music, theatre, and dance.

¹²³ Gene Davis, no date, quoted in Cohen, “The Old Guard,” 69. Cohen says that Davis, who later became part of the Color School group, never actually signed up for a class at the Workshop.

Malkia Roberts and Richard Dempsey.¹²⁴ It is also likely that Aden, who was close friends with Perlmutter, visited the Workshop.

Louis taught painting at the Workshop from 1947, and he held his first one-person exhibition there in 1953. In that same year, also at the Workshop, Louis met Kenneth Noland, who would soon introduce him to New York art critic Clement Greenberg.¹²⁵ As the site of this fateful meeting, the Washington Workshop has become part of the Color School lore, with several written accounts implying that it was the only creative place in town at that time. In fact, some writers (including Keith Morrison), claim that it was at this moment—the opening of the Workshop—when “modernism began in Washington’s art.”¹²⁶ This point is debatable, but the Workshop did bring significant contemporary artists to Washington, including Willem de Kooning, who was featured in a 1953 retrospective. The center was forced to close in 1956, shortly after the Berkowitzes left on a decade-long excursion to Europe.

The activities at the Institute of Contemporary Art were more broad in scope than those of the Workshop. Founded by poet and editor Robert Richman in 1947, the ICA was originally located at 1751 New Hampshire Northwest.¹²⁷ As described in one of their brochures, the program of the Institute was “based upon the concept that the best way to experience and to understand the fundamental unity of the culture of our time is through the interrelated presentation of all the contemporary arts and humanities under one

¹²⁴ Morrison, 55.

¹²⁵ Washington Gallery of Modern Art, *Color Painters*, 12.

¹²⁶ Morrison, 11. Morrison states that this assumption is correct “except for one thematic concept....This was the exploration of a wider world view of art developed from cross-cultural experiences.” He credits the gallery at Howard and the Barnett Aden gallery for long promoting this view.

¹²⁷ Jacob Kainen. The ICA lost its physical home for a period of time, during which the Corcoran hosted some of its activities. Bella Schwartz recalls its location on New York Avenue. See Bella Schwartz, 1.

roof.”¹²⁸ The catalogue for a 1950 art exhibition described a program “based on the apprentice workshop relationship between student and instructor.”¹²⁹ This philosophy, stressing the unity of the arts, was probably inspired by the model of the Bauhaus, an influential German art school, which flourished between the wars. In fact, prominent Bauhaus figures, such as artists Josef and Anni Albers, visited and gave talks at the ICA. The art classes, which Schwartz recalled as “racially mixed,”¹³⁰ were taught by local artists, including Noland, who came to Washington, D.C. in 1949 to teach at the ICA and Catholic University. Washington sculptor Anne Truitt studied with Alexander Giampietro at the ICA in the late 1940s, and later wrote, “I am blessed to have had him as a teacher and always knew so, but know it better in my maturity.”¹³¹ The art school closed in the early fifties, but the ICA continued, for a dozen years, to sponsor exhibitions, art workshops, concerts, lectures, literary readings (T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden), and showings of avant-garde films at various locations around Washington.

Another remarkable Washington institution was the Dupont Theater Gallery, where art exhibitions were held in the lobby beginning in March 1948.¹³² Directed by Kurt Weiner, who installed special lighting for the art shows, this unlikely site became a serious venue for local artists. Group shows were chosen by a jury that included Weiner, Jacob Kainen, and Alonzo Aden. The Dupont Gallery was a non-commercial enterprise and part of Washington’s integrated art scene, and showed many of the same artists who exhibited at the Barnett Aden. These included Robert Gates, Morris Louis, Kenneth

¹²⁸ From ICA brochure, quoted in Bella Schwartz, 1.

¹²⁹ “Modern Art in Washington,” (Washington, D.C.: Center Market City and Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1950). This catalogue lists workshops in music, literature, writing, painting, sculpture, pottery, design, graphics and theatre.

¹³⁰ Bella Schwartz, 1.

¹³¹ Anne Truitt, *Daybook, the Journal of an Artist* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982) : 127.

¹³² Herring, James V. “Annual Report.” 1947-48.

Noland, and Gene Davis, whose first solo exhibition was held there in 1952. Black artist Richard Dempsey had a retrospective at Dupont in 1954, and the gallery hosted Alma Thomas' first solo exhibition in 1960, featuring watercolors indicative of her developing abstract approach. In 1955 director Weiner indicated his admiration for Aden's contributions by featuring an exhibition of selected works from the Barnett Aden Gallery's growing collection at the Dupont site.

This brings us full circle to the artists mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the Washington Color painters, and especially to Louis and Noland, the so-called "stars" of this group. After meeting at the Washington Workshop Center, Noland encouraged the older (but more hesitant) Louis to expand his horizons with a trip to New York. Noland had already met the critic Clement Greenberg while a student at Black Mountain College, and he arranged a tour of contemporary New York art with Greenberg as their guide. The group, which ventured to the studio of Helen Frankenthaler, was larger than most accounts recall, including Louis, Noland, Berkowitz, Ida Fox, Charles Egan, Franz Kline, Margaret Marshall, and Greenberg. As widely reported, Louis was particularly inspired by Frankenthaler's painting *Mountains and Sea*, which was created by pouring thinned pigment onto unprimed canvas, merging the colors with the surface. It is also widely known that after returning to Washington, Louis immediately began exploring the possibilities implied by Frankenthaler's technique. Less widely known is that, shortly after his return, Louis was hired to teach painting for a semester at Howard University, a fact that was often omitted in early chronologies of his career.¹³³ The New York trip may

¹³³ David Driskell, who was a student in Louis' class at Howard in 1953, recalled an incident years later at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, when he was introduced to a woman doing academic research on Louis. Despite Driskell's first-hand knowledge, the woman refused to believe the facts. She adamantly stated that "Louis did *not* teach at Howard" and promptly left the scene. Driskell, interview. 2002.

have been a crucial event for Louis (more than the others), but he had reached this receptive point in his career via the stimulus of working in the artistic environment of Washington, D.C.

After their return to Washington, Louis and Noland continued working, teaching, and exhibiting at the Workshop, the Dupont Gallery, the Barnett Aden Gallery, and (beginning in 1957) at the Jefferson Place Gallery, but, through Greenberg, they also showed their work in New York. Both were in the “New Talent” show at the Kootz Gallery in 1954 (chosen by Greenberg), and Noland was included in the prestigious “Young American Painters” exhibition sponsored by the Museum of Modern Art. Noland’s first solo shows in New York were at Tibor de Nagy in 1957 and 1958, while Louis’ first New York solo exhibition was at Martha Jackson in 1957. Both had shows at French & Co. in 1959, when Greenberg became the aesthetic advisor for that institution’s new contemporary gallery. By 1960 these two Washington artists were receiving invitations to exhibit from art institutions across the nation, as well as from Paris and Dusseldorf.

The critical support of Greenberg cannot be underestimated in the two artists’ rise to fame. After World War II New York came to be considered the center of the international art world, and by the 1950s, Greenberg was the city’s premier art critic. During the 1940s Greenberg had been the foremost advocate for “painterly abstraction,” and was an early champion of Jackson Pollock’s work. His writings helped forge and validate America’s first original art movement—Abstract Expressionism.¹³⁴

¹³⁴ Abstract Expressionism was an art movement that developed in New York during the 1940s largely inspired by Surrealism’s emphasis on the unconscious. The painters used large canvases, drew attention to the surface and flatness of these canvases, and attained a kind of individual artistic expression that did not rely on figuration.

After what was called the “prescience” of Greenberg’s support for the early work of Pollock and sculptor David Smith, the New York art establishment paid careful attention to his assessments of “emerging” artists. Greenberg’s article “Louis and Noland,” written in a 1960 issue of *Art International*, was a powerful endorsement of their talents. He described the two artists as “serious candidates for major status,”¹³⁵ and in the conclusion of his assessment, compared them to the “first-wave,” or what he calls “artists of Pollock’s vintage.”¹³⁶

Greenberg believed in modernism’s capacity for constant renewal, and he was continually searching for fresh examples. This eternal “quest for the new” may have contributed to his interest in these Washington artists. Greenberg’s 1960 article indicates a rather romantic view of Washington as a kind of idyllic artists’ colony. He wrote, “From Washington you can keep in steady contact with the New York art scene without being subjected as constantly to its pressures to conform....”¹³⁷

These color painters may have been spared the “pressure to conform” that New York artists felt (according to Greenberg), but they were not working in isolation. An examination of the exhibition records of the Workshop Center, Dupont Theatre Gallery, Franz Bader Gallery, Howard University Gallery, and the Barnett Aden Gallery suggest that Louis, Noland, and Davis were part of a much larger circle of progressive artists who exhibited regularly at all of these venues. This circle included Perlmutter, Kainen, Berkowitz, Mimi Bolton, Therese Schwartz, Dempsey, Wells, Thomas, Maril, Jones and Calfee. In fact, Louis, Noland, and Davis exhibited their work together for the first time at the Barnett Aden Gallery in a 1954 group show called “Abstractions: New York and

¹³⁵ Clement Greenberg, “Louis and Noland,” *Art International* 4, no. 5, 1960, 27.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

Washington Artists.”¹³⁸ They showed there together again in 1956, in two group shows, one in January and another in October. Many young artists working in abstraction first found encouragement by visiting the gallery on Randolph Place, where Aden was willing to give them a chance. For instance, Sam Gilliam recalled attending Kenneth Noland’s 1977 retrospective in Washington, when Noland “suddenly ran through the crowd, because he had to say hello to Alma.” Gilliam explained, “I asked someone about that, and found out that in the early days, the people who actually helped guys like Noland make their move were the blacks at the Barnett-Aden [*sic*].”¹³⁹ Several sources recall that Aden counseled Gene Davis during his early career.

In fact, abstraction and variants thereof were a continuing interest and were featured throughout the forties at both Howard University and the Barnett Aden Gallery. Herring, especially, had a longstanding interest in abstract art, which may have developed with his study of Asian art. In 1938 he arranged Irene Rice Pereira’s first Washington exhibition at the Howard Gallery, and she returned in 1949 when Herring organized a seminar at Howard University called “Abstraction in Modern Art”.

By 1957 there were considerably more galleries in the Washington area. There were, finally, a few more options for artists, and that may be why some sources speak of the “decline” of the Barnett Aden Gallery during the 1950s. An examination of Washington art “calendars” for the period indicates that the gallery continued to show a great variety of talented local and national artists, not slowing until after Aden’s death in 1961.

¹³⁸ This exhibition also included Stamos, Pereira, Thomas, Pietro Lazzari, and Harlan Jackson.

¹³⁹ Sam Gilliam, quoted in Ann Gibson, “teacher, painter, patron, pioneer...” *Ms 7* (February 1979): 90.

Of these new galleries some of the more serious were artists' cooperatives, such as the Jefferson Place Gallery, which was formed in 1957 by local art enthusiast Alice Denney and a group of artists she met while taking classes at American University. The original membership included American University professors Robert Gates, Ben L. Summerford, Helene McKinsey, as well as Calfee, Noland, Mary Orwen, and several artists from Baltimore. Later Gene Davis, Tom Downing, and Howard Mehring were added to the group. In a 1995 interview, Denney was asked about the acclaimed Color School, to which she responded: "I brought Ken [Noland] and Morris [Louis] to the Venice Biennale, but I believe Howard [Mehring] and Tom [Downing] were as good as they were. They just didn't have Clement Greenberg writing about them and promoting them. In fact, there was no 'School' here at the time; just a lot of artists doing different things."¹⁴⁰ Denney left the gallery in 1962 to concentrate on a new project, the founding of the Washington Gallery of Modern Art.¹⁴¹ Jefferson Place subsequently moved to P Street and became a commercial gallery with Nesta Dorrance as director. Until the gallery closed in 1974, Dorrance showed a variety of local artists and photographers,

¹⁴⁰ Barbara Vogt, "Alice Denney, on the Making of a Washington Contemporary Art Scene," *Koan* (April 1995) : 14. In 1964 Denney was asked to become Vice Commissioner to the Venice Biennale, and along with Alan Solomon, the Commissioner, selected four artists to represent the United States. The other two chosen were Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, who won first prize.

¹⁴¹ The Washington Gallery of Modern Art opened in 1962 with Denney as Assistant Director and Adelyn Breeskin (former director of the Baltimore Museum of Art) as the Director. They were able to open with a Franz Kline show because, as Denney put it: "Franz had been my house guest during the Kennedy inaugural. We were very excited to get it." In 1966 Denney helped stage Washington's premier Pop event, called the "Now Festival," which drew many of the top New York pop figures, including Andy Warhol, Claes Oldenburg, Robert Rauschenberg, John Cage, Lou Reed, and Alan Ginsberg. In the 1970s Denney was one of the forces behind the creation of the Washington Project for the Arts, which hosted poetry readings, dance performances, art exhibitions, and concerts, and offered all types of advice and opportunities for local talents. The Washington Project for the Arts is now affiliated with the Corcoran Gallery of Art. See Vogt, "Alice Denney," 13-16.

including Rockne Krebs, William Christenberry, and Carroll Sockwell, who assisted Herring at the Barnett Aden Gallery 1965 until 1968.¹⁴²

Surprisingly successful (for a few years) was the Art Rental Gallery, located downtown, which loaned local artists' works for a two-month period for a small fee. Similarly, the Artists Mart in Georgetown rented local artists' work.

An unusual spirit of cooperation and openness seems to have been part of the local art scene. This was in no small part due to the work of Herring and Aden, both at Howard and even more so at the Barnett Aden. Both were known and respected locally, but they also had ties to other cities, including New York, Chicago, Dallas, Philadelphia, and Atlanta. Herring often traveled to New York at the request of the Harmon Foundation and judged several of their exhibitions. He and Aden became friends with a long list of New York gallery directors, and frequently brought New York artists to their gallery-home. There they met Washington museum directors, gallery owners, and artists of all nationalities and races. Contacts first made at the Barnett Aden Gallery became part of an ongoing network of cooperation and cross-cultural exchange.

¹⁴² Paul Richard, "The Nesta Revival," *The Washington Post* 17 October 1986, B3.

CHAPTER 4

THE ART AND ARTISTS AT THE BARNETT ADEN GALLERY

“Throughout these years, Mr. Aden has demonstrated a zealous regard for the welfare of the artist, and an equally praiseworthy concern for the patron’s approach to art. Throughout the years he has striven always to present to the public the best in painting, sculpture and the graphic arts, and shunned whatever bias, favoritism or tendency of policy selfish interests may have sought to impose upon his viewpoint.” James A. Porter¹

In the catalogue for a special exhibition honoring the Barnett Aden Gallery in 1968, Richard A. Long estimated that there had been more than 200 exhibitions held at the gallery since it opened in 1943.² Because the gallery records have disappeared, this number cannot be confirmed, but my research suggests it is a reasonable estimate. This would mean an average of eight shows per year—a full exhibition schedule. But what kind of exhibitions were these? Who were the artists? What kind of art was featured? Was there a focus to the exhibition program? Did it differ from the program of the Howard University Gallery of Art? Who made the programmatic and curatorial decisions? Were most exhibitions conservative or progressive by contemporary standards? How did they compare with gallery shows in New York and elsewhere?

These questions have seldom been addressed since the Barnett Aden Gallery closed in 1968. As discussed in the introduction, most written accounts of the Washington art scene barely mention the gallery or omit it entirely.³ Of those that do include the Barnett Aden, most list a sampling of the exhibiting artists as proof of the gallery’s significance, but go no further. The critical role the gallery played in the careers

¹ James A. Porter, foreword to *Eighteen Washington Artists* (Washington, D.C.: Barnett Aden Gallery, 1953).

² Long, “Salute.”

³ I suspect that many of these writers erroneously assumed that the Barnett Aden was a “black” gallery and, thus, of marginal importance. Others were, perhaps, surprised to find the small Barnett Aden catalogues in the files of well-known artists (such as Kenneth Noland, Morris Louis, and Theodoros Stamos) and, thus, felt obligated to mention the gallery.

of certain now-prominent black artists—especially Alma Thomas, Lois Mailou Jones, James L. Wells, and David Driskell—is usually noted in these early accounts. Some accounts mention that white artists showed there too, but this often seems an afterthought. Even Jack Perlmutter, a local white artist who had two solo exhibitions at the Barnett Aden, wrote first about the gallery’s black artists, adding that the program “turned out to be broad enough to include first showings of the work of many white artists as well.”⁴ Such emphasis is understandable, but the long-term effect has been to obscure the regional and national impact of the Barnett Aden Gallery. For example, in an article about Washington art of the 1940s, Jean Lawler Cohen briefly summarized: “Until it closed in 1962, Barnett Aden provided serious exposure for most of America’s ‘name’ black artists: Jacob Lawrence, James Wells, Richard Dempsey, Alma Thomas, and Lois Mailou Jones....”⁵ In her subsequent article about the 1950s, “The Making of the Color School Stars,” Cohen completely omits the gallery, despite the fact that several of the Color School artists frequented the gallery and took part in exhibitions during the decade.⁶

Misperceptions about the Barnett Aden Gallery are largely related to the gallery’s collection of art—and the promotion of part of that collection after Herring’s death in 1969. At that time, Herring’s young friend Adolphus Ealey became heir to a large part of the gallery’s collection, including the paintings and ceramics.⁷ The collection, which was

⁴ Jack Perlmutter, “The Progression of Art Styles in Greater Washington, D.C.,” *Art Voices South* 3 (May-June 1980): 91.

⁵ Cohen, “Old Guard,” 64.

⁶ Cohen, “The Making of the Color School Stars, 1950-1950,” *Museum and Arts Washington* 4 (November-December 1988): 55-61. This is remarkable considering that she discusses every other Washington venue where these artists’ works were shown.

⁷ Ealey received the ceramics, oil paintings, watercolor paintings, and mixed-media works. Herring’s books, graphic arts, and prints were bequeathed to Dr. Felton J. Earls, while the sculpture went to Dr. and Mrs. Cecil Marquez.

gradually built by Aden and Herring over four decades, reflected the broad range of art shown at the gallery during its active years. However, Ealey, an artist himself, soon focused public attention on the black artists in the collection. This was not surprising, considering that Ealey's inheritance came during the emergence of the Black Power movement in the late 1960s, when self-definition and cultural separatism became the basis of a new Black arts movement.⁸ The spirit of integration, which had inspired Aden and Herring during the 1940s and 1950s, was out of favor by the late 1960s and 1970s. Over the next decades the collection was repeatedly referred to as a collection of African American art, even though it continued to include the work of many white artists. Ealey often spoke of Herring and the historic gallery, and his accounts seem to imply that the original Barnett Aden Gallery had been dedicated, primarily, to showing and collecting the work of black artists.⁹ This false, (or, at best, incomplete) image of the Barnett Aden was perpetuated in one account after another, until, by the 1990s, the gallery's active role in the Washington and national art scene had been virtually forgotten. Even Sharon Patton, one of the foremost authorities on African American art history, wrote in 1998 that "Aden focused on modern African American art but included Caribbean and white American art for the sake of the gallery's sales."¹⁰ There may be a grain of truth in this

⁸ Several black artists' groups were organized, independent of mainstream institutions, and some, such as AfriCobra, called for a new Black aesthetic inspired by Africa.

⁹ By 1973 the legal name of the collection itself was the Barnett-Aden Gallery, making it even more difficult to distinguish between statements about Ealey's collection and those about the historic gallery. Apparently Ealey added the hyphen between "Barnett" and "Aden," which had never been part of the gallery's name prior to that time. After publication of the catalogue for the 1974 exhibition of the collection and the subsequent press coverage, all references to the collection, as well as the historic gallery included the hyphen.

¹⁰ Sharon Patton, "A History of Collecting African American Art," in *Narratives of African American Art and Identity: The David C. Driskell Collection*, ed. Juanita Marie Holland (College Park, Md.: Art Gallery and the Department of Art History and Archaeology, University of Maryland, 1998): 49.

statement, but, as I shall discuss in this chapter, the motivation behind the integrated program was much more complex.

The only scholar who has written at length about the gallery (based on independent research rather than Ealey's writings and recollections) is Keith Morrison, whose 1985 book *Art in Washington and its Afro-American Presence, 1940-1970* focused considerable attention on the significance of the Barnett Aden Gallery. His study, however, concentrated on a broader theme: the total impact of the African American "presence" in the history of Washington art. Morrison considered the impact of the Barnett Aden in conjunction with the overall impact of Howard University's art department, the Howard Gallery of Art, influential Howard scholars (Porter and Locke), and the many talented African American artists working in Washington between 1940 and 1970.

Morrison interviewed a number of Washington artistic figures, but again, the paucity of original records from the Barnett Aden Gallery limited his assessment of the gallery.¹¹ His discussion of the art shown at the gallery was largely based on Herring's work as director of the Howard University Gallery (1930-1953). Focusing on the tenth anniversary exhibition of the Howard gallery, Morrison writes, "Herring's taste was eclectic....His instincts led toward diversity because he worked with the knowledge that

¹¹ Morrison often conflates the activities of the Barnett Aden Gallery with those of the Howard University Gallery. For example, on pages 30-31 he states, "The Barnett-Aden [*sic*] Gallery had a difficult beginning....[P]eople came to the gallery primarily to be with the entertaining and stimulating personalities: Herring and Aden, both of whom must have been among the most interesting characters of their time. They lived together and became famous for their colorful *afternoon openings*." In the next paragraph Morrison describes the "...well-dressed black women at the Sunday *afternoon openings* who would come in long gowns and lace and white gloves and sit and sip tea." (Italics added.) However, the sedate afternoon teas Morrison refers to were held at Howard—not the Barnett Aden Gallery. The openings at 127 Randolph Place were always Saturday night affairs—essentially cocktail parties.

much more national contemporary art needed to be seen in Washington.”¹² Morrison asserts that Herring maintained this approach throughout his career both at Howard and at the Barnett Aden Gallery. Such statements suggest that the Barnett Aden’s program was an extension of Herring’s exhibition program at the Howard University Gallery.

How much truth there may be in these statements is difficult to assess, since they were based on the erroneous assumption that Herring was director of both the Howard Gallery and the Barnett Aden.¹³ Morrison described Aden’s responsibilities, both at Howard and at the Barnett Aden, as “accessioning the collection, installing the exhibitions and preparing the catalogues and press releases.”¹⁴ This, I have discovered, was not the case. It was Alonzo J. Aden—not Herring—who ran the Barnett Aden. Not only does every gallery publication, from 1943 until 1961, list Aden as “director,” all first-hand accounts from gallery participants (including my interviewees) substantiate that Aden was indeed fully in charge of the gallery, and that it was he who made the decisions regarding the art shown. Professor Herring, as Aden’s friend and partner, no doubt had influence, but as the artist and Howard graduate Peter L. Robinson told the author, “...it was Mr. Aden who ran the gallery....Mr. Herring was busy running the Howard University Art Department—it’s a big job running a university art department.”¹⁵ Even after leaving Howard in 1953, as long-time friend Alma Thomas recalled,

¹² Morrison, 14.

¹³ Morrison repeatedly refers to Herring as director of both galleries. On page 18 (note 9) he states that, “...Herring directed two galleries simultaneously from 1943 until his death in 1969.” This could not have been, since Herring retired from Howard University in 1953 and he only served as director of the Barnett Aden after Aden’s death in 1961.

¹⁴ Morrison, 28. This quote describes Aden’s work at Howard, but Morrison goes on to describe his work at the Barnett Aden Gallery, “For his part, Aden worked at the new gallery pretty much in the strictly curatorial manner that he had done at Howard” (p.32)

¹⁵ Peter L. Robinson, interview by the author, Washington, D.C., 2006. I should add that this information was obtained during my interviews, but only when I directly asked, “Who ran the gallery?” My impression was that these individuals thought everyone knew that Aden was in charge.

“Professor Herring never relinquished his teaching career and after his retirement was visiting professor at a succession of colleges in the south. He left the management of the gallery to Alonzo Aden, who proved to be a most successful curator....”¹⁶

It should be clear at this point that a more thorough examination of the Barnett Aden Gallery’s exhibition history is long overdue—before it is erased completely from the record. Without primary sources, writers have been forced to make assumptions about the gallery, assumptions that have been repeated or subtly modified by subsequent writers attempting to include the Barnett Aden Gallery in their written accounts of the period.

The reason is simple—there are no records from the original gallery. No one has written an account based on any but a handful of the original gallery catalogues, and recreating a fuller account of the exhibition history has proven positively daunting. This, however, has been my project for the last several years. By painstakingly searching through files at a multitude of research sites around Washington and beyond, I have pieced together much of the exhibition history of the gallery. Although incomplete, this record (see Appendix A) allows—for the first time—at least a preliminary assessment of the type of art and artists shown at the Barnett Aden during its most active years.

In this chapter I will use this accumulated data to look at the overall exhibition program of the gallery between 1943 and 1961; next, I will look at the artists who showed at the gallery—those usually associated with the gallery and others never mentioned in its history; and finally I will attempt to characterize the Barnett Aden’s exhibition program and situate it within the context of twentieth-century American art history.

¹⁶ Alma Thomas, quoted in Anacostia, 158.

The Exhibition Program, 1943-1961

From the beginning, the practices employed at the Barnett Aden Gallery established that this would indeed be a serious and professionally run institution. As one writer said, they "pulled out all the stops."¹⁷ Aden, Herring, and the gallery officers¹⁸ followed established gallery traditions, mailing formal invitations, organizing elaborate openings, sending press releases, and providing small exhibition catalogues (beginning in 1944). Invitations were mailed to local art enthusiasts, friends, educators, artists—even government officials and visiting dignitaries. They invited museum and gallery directors from throughout the region, as well as art professionals and friends in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Atlanta, and other cities. Some of these traditions were adopted from those established by Herring and Aden at the Howard Gallery—but with certain changes. The genteel Sunday afternoon openings at the Howard Gallery became festive Saturday night occasions at the Barnett Aden, with cocktails, hors d'oeuvres, cigarette smoke, and boisterous repartee. One might meet foreign ambassadors, poets and writers from New York, popular entertainers, or perhaps the First Lady of the nation. Visitors dressed up, but the atmosphere was that of a glamorous cocktail party rather than an afternoon tea. (Fig. 17)

The exhibition catalogues were a standard size and type used by many contemporary galleries—in Washington, New York and elsewhere. Well-known art professionals often wrote the forewords to these, including James W. Lane, of the

¹⁷ Morrison, 14.

¹⁸ The gallery officers for 1943 and 1944 were President, Dr. Cornelius L. Golightly; Vice-President, Miss Alma W. Thomas; Secretary-Treasurer, Mr. James V. Herring; Recording Secretary, Mrs. Marjul Everett Cooke. Alonzo J. Aden is listed as the director with John A. Shuford as assistant director. There were also three "consultants": Miss Agnes De Lano, European Art; Mrs. Ruth R. Young, Oriental Art; and Mr. James A. Porter, American Art.

National Gallery of Art, Adelyn Breeskin, director of the Baltimore Museum of Art, and New York art critic Elizabeth McCausland.

Considering the financial constraints of Herring and Aden, the scale of the exhibition program at the Barnett Aden Gallery was, from the start, boldly ambitious. Opening in October of 1943, the gallery maintained a full exhibition schedule each year until 1962, shortly after Aden's death. When Richard Long estimated that two hundred exhibitions had been held at the Barnett Aden since its founding, he was referring to a twenty-five year period, from 1943 until 1968.¹⁹ This would mean an average of eight exhibitions per year, but considering the limited number of shows held after Aden's death in 1961, there may have been even more per year during the gallery's active period. The record (Appendix) that I have compiled is not complete, but it does list more than one hundred exhibitions, including several for each year during this period.²⁰ Given that my research came from numerous and disparate sources, I believe that it does present a representative sample of the exhibition program at the Barnett Aden Gallery.

A preliminary analysis of this list reveals that each year the gallery showed a number of group exhibitions, interspersed with solo shows. Some group shows featured only a handful of artists, with numerous examples of each artist's work; others included a dozen or more artists, with a single work each. Of the exhibitions for which I have evidence, about 40% were solo shows. When compared to some contemporary New York

¹⁹ Richard Long, "Salute." This estimate has credence, considering the probability that Long consulted with Herring, who took part in this tribute exhibition. If anything, it is an underestimate, considering Aden's statement in 1950, when he noted that the gallery had already presented "more than 150 shows." Alonzo Aden, preface to *Paintings and Prints by James Lesesne Wells* (Washington, D.C.: Barnett Aden Gallery, 1950).

²⁰ My sources included forty-four of the original Barnett Aden Gallery catalogues, as well as gallery invitations and press releases. Other sources were contemporary news articles, local art calendars, published interviews, my interviews, and the published chronologies of numerous artists. My hope is that the remaining gaps in this record will be filled over the next few years.

galleries, this percentage is quite low. For instance, during a similar time period, 78% of the exhibitions held at the Kraushaar Galleries were solo shows,²¹ while a full 90% of those held at the Betty Parsons Gallery featured a single artist.²² However, the Downtown Gallery, directed by Edith Halpert, had fewer solo exhibitions—only 39%—a ratio similar to that of the Barnett Aden Gallery.²³

The titles given these shows were not particularly evocative, suggestive of only a few general themes. During the first year the titles often referred to “art for the home,” but after 1944, this phrase was seldom included.²⁴ It seems the most repeated references, year after year, from 1944 until 1962, were to “contemporary art” or “contemporary American art.” References to specific styles of art are mostly absent, except for two shows featuring abstract work: one in March of 1947, “Abstract Paintings,” and another in May of 1954, “Abstractions: New York and Washington Artists.” Other titles reveal a geographical grouping, with references to artists from New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Washington, and Holin Hills (a Northern Virginia community). Solo shows, as well as those featuring a small group of artists, were given straightforward titles, with little more than the artists’ names.²⁵ These titles contain almost no references to race—surprising, considering later accounts that claimed the gallery focused on black artists. Of the

²¹ “Appendix: List of Exhibitions,” Kraushaar Galleries Records, Archives of American Art, <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/findingaids/kraugall.htm#appendix1>. This record lists 118 exhibitions between 1943 and 1961, of which 92 were solo exhibitions.

²² “Exhibitions at the Betty Parsons Gallery” in Lee Hall, *Betty Parsons: Artist, Dealer, Collector* (New York, Harry N. Abrams, 1991), 182-187. Between 1946 and 1962 Parsons held 147 solo shows and only 15 group shows (about 10%). I excluded from this count 38 shows featuring “duos.”

²³ “Appendix: Downtown Gallery Exhibitions, 1926-1969,” Downtown Gallery Records, Archives of American Art, <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/digitalcollections/collectionsonline/downgall/downgall.html#appendix1>. Between 1943-1962 this gallery held 64 solo exhibitions and 100 group exhibitions. I excluded exhibitions of folk art and shows of work by anonymous artists.

²⁴ Only the seventh anniversary exhibition in October of 1950 returned to this theme, although the title for this show referenced *contemporary* art for the home.

²⁵ Examples are “Therese M. Schwartz” (1952), “Norman Lewis: Paintings” (1958), and “Exhibition of Paintings by: Pietro Lazzari, Helen Rennie, Alma Thomas and Andrea Zerega” (1959).

exhibitions that I have identified, only one early group show, “The Negro in Art,” referenced race, although even this exhibition featured both black and non-black artists.²⁶

The inaugural exhibition, a large group show called “American Paintings for the Home,” was widely promoted, “with “50 paintings, sculptures, and prints” by at least twenty-one artists. In many respects this initial exhibition would set the standard for the gallery’s program—and thus, bears further examination. The formal invitation announced the official opening and invited visitors “on Saturday, October 16, 1943, and the week following, through Sunday, October 24, 1943, from ten a.m. to ten p.m., daily.” This week-long celebration with twelve-hour days indicates the magnitude of the founders’ dedication to the new enterprise.

There was no catalogue for the first exhibition (the gallery began publishing small catalogues the following year), but reporters for the local papers recreated much of the atmosphere in their coverage, including the names of the exhibiting artists and descriptions of some of the works. A writer for the Sunday edition of the *Washington Post* reported attendance of about 150 people for the opening and noted that a “select group of works by American Negro painters is included in the first exhibition....” This group included Henry O. Tanner, whose painting *Flight into Egypt* was given “the place of honor” in the entrance hall; James L. Wells, with a “solidly constructed oil;” and Charles Sebree, “previously shown here at the David Porter Gallery.” Others mentioned were Aaron Douglas, “Chicago painter” William Carter, Hilda Wilkinson Brown, Charles and Elizabeth (Catlett) White, James A. Porter, Lois M. Jones, Hale Woodruff, Frederic Flemister, Malvin Gray Johnson, and Jacob Lawrence, whose painting *Trees* was

²⁶ Elizabeth Catlett’s solo exhibition in 1947 referenced her self-titled print series, “The Negro Woman.” A set of prints from this series is part of the contemporary collection known as Robert L. Johnson from the Barnett Aden Collection, Washington, D.C.

described as “a stylized and striking watercolor.” The works by non-black artists were, according to the *Post*, “by several painters closely identified with the Phillips Memorial Gallery, three excellent small oils by Elliott Orr, a New York painter, a still life with flowers sent by Nicolai Chovsky [*sic*], other good small canvases by Louis Bosa and Ann Brockman.”²⁷ The *Washington Star* mentioned another artist—C. Law Watkins, the new chairman of the art department at nearby American University, and former head of the Phillips Gallery school.²⁸

In organizing this opening exhibition Aden drew on the many contacts made while working as curator at the Howard University Gallery. He borrowed works from Washington sources, including the Phillips Gallery, Whyte Gallery, and private collectors. Aden benefited from the reputation of his mentor, Professor Herring, who often traveled with him to New York and other cities. As David Driskell recalled from conversations with the two founders, “Professor Herring and Mr. Aden would go to New York—they were very good friends with Mrs. Kraushaar of the Kraushaar Galleries. They would borrow works from New York’s ACA Gallery, and they would get Jacob Lawrence’s work from Ms. Edith Halpert. They knew all of those people on a first name basis. They were very highly respected.”²⁹ Aden traveled to New York during the summer of 1943, as evidenced by a letter written to Halpert (of the Downtown Gallery) upon his return. Aden thanked her for her “kind reception and consent to lend the Jacob

²⁷ “New Gallery Emphasizes Negro Art,” *Washington Post*, October 31, 1943. Illustrating this article was a reproduction of Lois Jones’ oil painting *Green Apples*, an award winner at the 1940 Chicago Negro Exposition.

²⁸ “Barnett Aden Gallery Opens Exhibit Tomorrow,” *Washington Star*, October 15, 1943.

²⁹ Driskell, interview, 2002.

Lawrence painting for the opening show.”³⁰ Other New York sources included the Harmon Foundation, the American Federation of Arts, and loans from several artists.³¹

As reported in the local evening *Star*, “Alonzo J. Aden, formerly curator of the Howard University Gallery of Art, will direct the gallery as an educational institution supported largely by memberships to foster the appreciation of art for the home, with an interest in the art of the darker races of the world.”³² A similarly worded statement was repeated in other articles, suggesting that Aden had carefully prepared (probably with advice from Herring and others) this succinct message about the new gallery.³³ By emphasizing the Barnett Aden as an “educational institution,” the statement suggests a noble enterprise, transcending the merely commercial. By including “appreciation of art for the home,” the statement draws attention to the gallery’s unique setting and intended audience, and, finally, while admitting “an interest in art of the darker races,” the statement affirms the anticipated diversity of the offerings.

Significantly, this first exhibition was a group show—specifically an interracial group show, as every group exhibition would be for the next twenty-five years.³⁴ (Fig. 18) By 1943 there had been numerous “Negro art” exhibitions in Washington (and other

³⁰ Aden to Edith Halpert, 4 October 1943, Downtown Gallery Records, Archives of American Art, <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/digitalcollections/collectionsonline/downgall/htmlR5496-964.html>.

³¹ The gallery maintained a lively relationship with all of these institutions and developed many more over the next two decades. Especially helpful during the first few years were small shows organized by the American Federation of Arts, which were shown between shows organized by Aden. For example, in December of 1943, just after the large inaugural show, the Federation lent the gallery 20 works by Chet LaMore and an exhibition of watercolors by Georginia Klitgaard. During the early years the Harmon Foundation and the Works Progress Administration loaned works for exhibitions at the Barnett Aden. Herring had worked with Mary Beattie Brady of the Harmon Foundation since the early thirties, and he and Aden had strong connections with the administrators and artists of the WPA. In 1939 Herring was a supervisor for a WPA “project D.” See “Department of Art,” in *Annual Reports of the College of Liberal Arts* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University, 1938/1939).

³² “Barnett Aden Gallery Opens Exhibit Tomorrow,” *Washington Star*, October 15, 1943.

³³ The repetition of these statements suggests that they came from a press release, although I have not located one.

³⁴ This includes the many exhibitions featuring works from the gallery’s own collection.

large cities), but the practice of consistently showing black artists' work alongside that of mainstream white artists' was still quite rare.³⁵ Mixing of the races could be a risky endeavor in segregated Washington, and the phrase "art for the home" may have been meant (at least partially) to reassure potential white visitors, suggesting that the gallery would not be devoted to unpleasant "racial" art. Leila Mechlin, who wrote the weekly "Art Notes" column for the Sunday *Star*, probably found the phrase "art for the home" reassuring. Mechlin was known for favorably reviewing local art exhibitions featuring pleasant subject matter with no "oddity" of style. (Mechlin would later write of a show at the Barnett Aden, "I cannot imagine any home owner wanting such paintings as....")³⁶

Stressing that this was "art for the small home" also brought attention to the unique setting of the Barnett Aden Gallery. As the *Post* reported, "...the rooms of the private home in which the gallery is located furnish a good illustration of how the group as a whole is right for its purpose."³⁷ Washingtonians were already familiar with one gallery in a home—The Phillips Memorial Gallery—and these promotional statements alluded to the refinement and prestige of that gallery, while at the same time, they set the smaller gallery apart from the grandeur and (comparative) formality of the Phillips. At the Barnett Aden even those of modest means could envision how they, too, could live surrounded by art. Decades later, many still recalled their first impression of the elegant townhouse on Randolph Place. In 1974 artist Charles White wrote, "The occasion of my first visit to Barnett-Aden [*sic*] was a delightful shock.... Its unique quality struck me

³⁵ Occasionally other galleries had integrated shows, sometimes drawing attention to the novelty of the practice in the title of the exhibition. For instance, a 1944 exhibition in New York was titled "Inter-Racial Art." *Inter-Racial Art* (New York: International Print Society, 1944).

³⁶ Leila Mechlin, "26 Americans Offer Art Readily Suited to Homes," *Washington Star*, February 2, 1947. Note the title of this review omits reference to those "undesirable as home decorations."

³⁷ "New Gallery Emphasizes Negro Art," *Washington Post*, October 31, 1943.

immediately. It made so much sense to exhibit works for the home in a home setting. Moreover, it beautifully reflected the personalities of its founders.”³⁸

Of course, what shocked many in the white community was not that the gallery was in a private home, but rather that it was in a “Negro” home. Aden’s statements in the *Washington Post* article that Sunday were an invitation—made across the gaping racial divide—to all Washingtonians, inviting them into a private home within the black community. This radical act might have stirred controversy, were it not for the subtlety of Aden and Herring’s strategy of never mentioning the racial issues of the city and emphasizing only the commonalities of art appreciation. By acting *as if* race did not matter, they made it matter a little less so—if only for a while. One must remember how unusual it was (in the 1940s) for the white press to focus so much attention on a private home in a black neighborhood, and to portray it in such a positive light. The vast majority of white residents had no knowledge of daily life within Washington’s several black neighborhoods, beyond the daily barrage of news reports highlighting the crimes and perceived follies of the black residents.

The attention focused on the inaugural exhibition was repeated every October—for the next seventeen years—with special anniversary exhibitions. These shows marked critical milestones and were cause for celebration. Art galleries were always risky enterprises, but the continued existence of this gallery—the only black-owned gallery in racially divided Washington (or anywhere in the United States)—must have seemed miraculous.

Of the eighteen anniversary exhibitions, ten were group shows. Of these, five featured contemporary American art (1949, 1950, 1956, 1957 and 1960), one featured

³⁸ Charles White, quoted in *Anacostia*, 161.

contemporary religious paintings (1948), one presented artworks purchased by patrons (1952), two featured Washington artists (1953 and 1959), and another presented only New York artists (1954). Eight of the eighteen were solo shows, and these went to Brazilian artist Candido Portinari (1944), local white artists Jack Perlmutter (1945 and 1955) and Herman Maril (1951), Baltimore artist Albert Sangiamo (1961), and three prominent black artists working in New York, Jacob Lawrence (1946), Charles White (1947), and Norman Lewis (1958).

Notably, it was not until the gallery's third anniversary, in 1946, that a black artist, Jacob Lawrence, was the featured solo artist. In retrospect, this curatorial decision, like many others, seems to have been a conscious effort toward inclusiveness, thereby avoiding being labeled as a black art gallery. The first anniversary exhibition presented Candido Portinari, a Brazilian artist who was already known in Washington due to his recent mural commission for the Library of Congress. This show brought a wide range of visitors, including officials and friends within the government. The most esteemed attendee was First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who was photographed signing the guest book with Herring, Aden, and other admirers gathered round. Mrs. Roosevelt knew Herring and Aden from tours of the Howard University Gallery, but her visit to the Barnett Aden—within this black neighborhood—brought national attention and criticism from some. In the coming years, Aden would maintain ties with high ranking friends, such as Mrs. Roosevelt, and make many more.

The second anniversary show, featuring Jack Perlmutter, was significant in several respects. By offering this special exhibition to a local white artist, Aden again demonstrated that the Barnett Aden exhibition program was not exclusively limited to

black artists. In addition, he sent the clear message that he was willing to take a chance on young and relatively unknown artists, including those experimenting with abstract approaches. (Fig. 19) With so few places in the city to show their work, young artists, whatever their race, took notice.

By the third anniversary in 1946, Aden no doubt hoped that his exhibition policy had been established, and that Jacob Lawrence's work would be viewed by the audience and critics in the same spirit of openness as had that of Perlmutter the year before. In the *Washington Post* the title of a feature article referred to Lawrence as "One of the Most Gifted Young Artists Today," and described the "John Brown" series as "stirring." The review was illustrated by the fourth in the series. This was one of the tamer images in the group with the caption "...his ventures failing him, he accepted poverty;" however, the writer describes several of the more violent panels, and calls the series "an original and important contribution to American art."³⁹ In the foreword to the small catalogue for the show, Lawrence's "Life of John Brown" series is described as having an "underlying statement that all races must work together to create a better world..."⁴⁰ This reference to race was unusual, but unavoidable due to the subject matter. In most of the gallery's publications direct references to race were avoided. By alternating between integrated group shows and solo shows featuring artists of distinctly different backgrounds, the Barnett Aden Gallery served to neutralize the effect of so many "Negro" art shows, which had fostered the view that white artists produced American art, but black artists produced only "racial" art. At the Barnett Aden Gallery the primary focus was on

³⁹ Jane Watson Crane, "Lawrence's 'John Brown' Stirring," *Washington Post*, October 6, 1946.

⁴⁰ [Alonzo Aden], foreword to "*The Life of John Brown*" by Jacob Lawrence (Washington, D.C.: Barnett Aden Gallery, 1946).

contemporary American artists, and black artists were incorporated as part of the overall exhibition program.

The tenth anniversary exhibition at the Barnett Aden featured local artists. “Eighteen Washington Artists” included the most prominent artists working in the city, most of whom had shown their work at the gallery before. Newspaper accounts describe a stylistically diverse show. In the foreword to the catalogue, James A. Porter extolled Aden’s ten years of directorship as “both courageous and wise.”⁴¹ Agnes DeLano, in a separate foreword to the catalogue, described the layout. She notes that in “the main gallery” were “four abstractions, each one strong in its individuality.” (These were by Richard Dempsey, Jack Perlmutter, Jacob Kainen and Therese Schwartz.) In the “front hallway” were works by Lois Jones, James A. Porter, and James L. Wells—all Howard professors; on “the staircase” were paintings by Samuel Bookatz, Frank H. Alston, Jr. and Charles Seebree. In the “last Gallery” (probably the dining room) Delano notes a “richly but quietly painted” work by Sarah Baker, a “moodily realized” painting by John Gernand, a portrait painted with “characteristic economy” by Benjamin Abramowitz, and a “semi-abstract” work by Robert Gates, on loan from the Phillips Gallery.⁴²

Although these anniversary exhibitions drew critical attention, they were only one part of a full roster of exhibitions each year. The gallery typically staged six to eight more exhibitions each year, many with accompanying catalogues. Most appear to have been organized by Aden, who procured loans from a multitude of sources. A few were traveling exhibitions organized by other institutions, particularly the American Federation

⁴¹ James A. Porter, foreword to *Eighteen Washington Artists: 10th Anniversary Exhibition* (Washington, D.C.: Barnett Aden Gallery, 1953).

⁴² Agnes DeLano, foreword to *Eighteen Washington Artists: 10th Anniversary Exhibition* (Washington, D.C.: Barnett Aden Gallery, 1953).

of Arts.⁴³ As indicated in the reconstructed record (Appendix), this full schedule continued throughout the 1950s, only slowing for the summer months some years.

Aden and Herring often traveled in the summer, both together and separately, working on various projects; therefore, the summer exhibitions were usually smaller and of shorter duration. After 1950 these summer shows were often selections from the gallery's growing permanent collection. Both Aden and Herring had collected art since the 1930s and had amassed a sizeable print collection by 1943, the year the gallery opened. One reporter at the gallery's first exhibition noted that upstairs there was "an attractive print room, which invites collecting."⁴⁴ It seems this print room was widely known and readily available for viewers, but only a few of the more contemporary prints became part of the organized exhibitions downstairs. The print collection included works by European artists such as Pierre Bonnard, Paul Cezanne, Pablo Picasso, Käthe Kollwitz, and Wassily Kandinsky. There were also prints by American artists, including Thomas Hart Benton, Reginald Marsh, Ralston Crawford, Elizabeth Catlett, Minna Citron, and I. Rice Pereira. These prints were occasionally given as gifts or even sold when funds were scarce, but as late as 1962 the print collection included all of the artists mentioned and many more.

After 1943 the collection grew quickly, with several paintings and small sculptures added each year. This was due to the unique arrangement between the gallery and the artists who had solo exhibitions. All revenue from sales at these shows went entirely to the artist, with the agreement that Aden could keep one work for the gallery's

⁴³ This group sent shows to museums and galleries across the United States and Canada.

⁴⁴ Leila Mechlin, "Pictures for the Home," *Washington Star*, November 14, 1943.

permanent collection.⁴⁵ Much of the collection was stored in the basement of the gallery, but several treasured works, such as Henry O. Tanner's *Flight into Egypt*, were almost always on view.

The reconstructed exhibition record of the gallery (Appendix) also allows—for the first time—a comparison between the program at the Barnett Aden and the program at Howard. Certain differences are immediately obvious. The Howard gallery did show contemporary American art (including the work of many artists who would also show at the Barnett Aden), but the contemporary shows at Howard came between such exhibitions as “Old Master Drawings” and “Indian Paintings, Sculpture, and Textiles from the 2nd to the 18th Century.” At other times one could see Icelandic paintings, Islamic metalwork, pottery and textiles, and “Negro Arts and Crafts” at Howard. Herring also showed African art at the university gallery, displayed as early as 1932.⁴⁶ In addition, there were annual exhibitions of student work, “Advertising Art” (sponsored by the Art Directors Club), “Christian Art from the 15th to the 20th Century” (sponsored by the School of Religion), and “New Spirit—Le Corbusier” (sponsored by the Departments of Art and Architecture).⁴⁷

These types of exhibitions were never part of the program at the Barnett Aden Gallery, where there was a consistent focus on contemporary art and artists. Most artists shown were American, but occasionally the gallery featured work by contemporary

⁴⁵According to most of my interviewees, Aden chose which work to keep from these solo exhibitions; however, Lila Oliver Asher (who was a colleague and good friend of Herring) recalled that it was Herring who chose a work from her 1951 solo show.

⁴⁶In 1932 Elizabeth Catlett saw her first African sculptures, reproductions from the Barnes Collection, at the Howard Gallery of Art. The experience inspired her to travel to Merion, Pennsylvania, to view the Barnes Collection. See Lucinda H. Gideon, ed., *Elizabeth Catlett Sculpture: A Fifty-Year Retrospective* (Purchase, New York: Neuberger Museum of Art, 1998), 105.

⁴⁷James V. Herring, “Department of Art,” in *Annual Reports of the College of Liberal Arts* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University, 1940/41, 1941/42, 1946/47).

artists from other countries, including China, Brazil, Cuba, India, and Tibet. There were no exhibitions featuring architecture, advertising, or anything created prior to the twentieth century. Although several recall seeing African objects at the Randolph Place gallery, I have no evidence of specific African art exhibitions held there.

Although these differences between the two gallery programs are significant, they are not surprising, considering the educational focus necessary for a university gallery. However, there was another—much more dramatic—difference. At the Barnett Aden Gallery there were no “all Negro” group exhibitions, while the Howard Gallery organized many such shows, including “Exhibition of the Work of Negro-Architects” (1931), “Oil Paintings, Watercolors and Prints by Negro Artists” (1939), “Exhibition of Negro Artists of Chicago” (1941), and “American Negro Drawings and Graphics” (1948).⁴⁸ But in the long list of exhibitions held at the Barnett Aden, there are none featuring only “Negro artists.” The group shows were always a mix of races—even those with only four to six artists. The founders’ stated “interest in the art of the darker races” apparently did not mean organizing more segregated “Negro” exhibitions. In fact, I would argue that a decision was made at the Barnett Aden—probably jointly by Aden and Herring—to do just the opposite.

This decision gains significance considering that it came amidst a dramatic upsurge in the popularity of “all Negro” art shows. Richard Powell has noted that between 1936 and 1946 there were at least eleven major “all Negro” art exhibitions.⁴⁹ These included the Texas Centennial in 1936, the Chicago Exposition in 1940,

⁴⁸ There was an “all white” exhibition held at the Howard gallery in 1942. See Howard University Gallery of Art, *Exhibition of Paintings of Negro Subjects by White American Artists* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Gallery of Art, 1942).

⁴⁹ Richard J. Powell, *Black Art: A Cultural History* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2002), 90.

“American Negro Art” at the Downtown Gallery in 1941, “New Names in American Art,” sponsored by the G Place Gallery in Washington, but traveling to Hampton Institute and the Baltimore Museum of Art, and finally “Three Negro Artists” at The Phillips Collection in 1946. The fact that Aden avoided organizing all black shows at his own gallery—despite their relative appeal—is hefty evidence that there was a definitive policy against such exhibitions at the Barnett Aden. This policy marked a significant departure from common exhibition practices, not only at the Howard gallery, but at almost all contemporary galleries and museums. At the Barnett Aden black artists had many opportunities, but they were integrated into the overall exhibition program—no doubt as Herring and Aden hoped these artists would be integrated into the larger realm of American artists. Incidentally there also were no “all white” group shows at the Barnett Aden Gallery. For example, at the seventh anniversary exhibition (1950), fourteen of the twenty works on view were by white artists—all borrowed from the Kraushaar Gallery in New York. To these Aden (pointedly, I would assert) added six works by black artists obtained from other sources.

So why this shift in practice for the Barnett Aden Gallery? After all, Herring and Aden had years of experience organizing exhibitions of black art, not only for the Howard gallery, but for a number of local and national organizations. In the early thirties Herring had been recruited as an advisor to Mary Beattie Brady of the Harmon Foundation and assisted with the Harmon exhibitions of “Negro artists” between 1928 and 1935, serving as a juror on several occasions.⁵⁰ In fact, throughout the thirties and

⁵⁰ The Harmon Foundation showed almost 500 works by 125 African American artists during this period. They showed amateur or student work next to recognized professionals, and were criticized by many for not being strict enough regarding quality. These Harmon shows were crucial in the careers of artists such as Archibald Motley, Richmond Barthé, Allan Rohan Crite, Palmer Hayden, Malvin Gray

forties, leaders of many organizations repeatedly sought Herring's assistance when planning group shows of African American art.⁵¹ In the foreword to a 1937 Howard

Gallery catalogue, Herring seems to note this fact with a degree of weariness:

For several years the Department of Art has aided the Harmon Foundation, the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, the College Art Association and other organizations, schools, and societies in sponsoring exhibitions of Negro art. Again this year the Howard University Gallery of Art is happy to cooperate with the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History by assembling this exhibition of Negro art....⁵²

Considering the financial constraints of the Howard Gallery (as evidenced by Herring's many letters appealing for funding), as well as the authority of these often white-controlled institutions, Herring and Aden would have had difficulty refusing such requests. Both men willingly participated in these early efforts to bring attention to the work of black artists. As light-skinned members of their race, both were accustomed to serving as liaisons between the black community and mainstream institutions. Aden and Herring enjoying mingling in white social circles, and they also enjoyed the status this association brought them within certain parts of the black community. Both used their considerable personal charm to influence those of wealth and power to create opportunities for their race; however, they also witnessed the frustrations of many African American artists, who were often subject to the whims of their wealthy white patrons.

Johnson, Sargent Johnson, William H. Johnson, and many more. For a complete list of artists who participated in the Harmon exhibitions, see Reynolds and Wright, *Against the Odds*, 284-288.

⁵¹ For example, Herring assisted Caresse Crosby and David Porter in the preparations for the "New Names in American Art" exhibition held at the G Place Gallery in 1944 and later at the Baltimore Museum of Art. Morrison, 16.

⁵² James V. Herring, foreword to *The Art of the American Negro*, Howard University Gallery of Art (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Gallery of Art, 1937).

At Howard the “all Negro” exhibitions undoubtedly seemed justified. Such shows were an inspiration for the students, some of whom had never been exposed to fine art, much less art by artists of their own race. Howard students looked first to their esteemed professors as role models, but the university brought many more accomplished African Americans, from a variety of professions, to the campus. Herring’s exhibitions featuring “Negro” artists were considered part of this university-wide effort, but at Howard these “Negro art” shows were interspersed with integrated group exhibitions and solo shows featuring artists of various races.

Even while conscientiously serving as an advisor to the Harmon Foundation, Herring may have had private concerns about the paternalism inherent in that foundation’s support of black artists. (Later a number of black artists would speak out about this—particularly Romare Bearden.) Herring, who served on three of the Harmon selection juries (1930, 1933 and 1935), certainly witnessed the questionable criteria used by some jurors in making their choices. In the catalogue for the 1933 Harmon exhibition, juror Howard Giles wrote,

The jury’s action in judging the works, painting, sculpture, etching and prints submitted to the Harmon Foundation was influenced mainly by the interest and respect now held by all artists for *the rhythm and color sense which the Negro artists of past and present possess congenitally*. The occasional examples in the present showing which displayed these *essential* qualities prompted unanimous acceptance.⁵³ (Italics added.)

Giles’ suggestion that African American artists possess certain innate “essential qualities” was common at this time. In the Foundation’s 1935 exhibition catalogue, Helen Griffiths Harmon (daughter of founder William E. Harmon) described sculptor Richmond Barthé’s work as having “a freely flowing rhythmic quality which seems to spring from

⁵³ Howard Giles, “A Forecast,” in Harmon Foundation, *Exhibition of Productions by Negro Artists* (New York: Harmon Foundation, 1933), 20.

the natural gift for expression so typical of his race.”⁵⁴ At this time Alain Locke was a close advisor on artistic matters to Mary Beattie Brady, the administrator of the Harmon Foundation programs, but Brady soon became troubled by Locke’s emphasis on developing “a truly racial school of art expression.”⁵⁵ In the 1931 catalogue for the Harmon exhibition, Locke wrote: “One of the obvious advances of these successive Harmon exhibitions had been the steadily increasing emphasis upon racial types and characters in the work submitted and displayed.”⁵⁶ Brady was troubled by Locke’s insistence that artists turn toward their African heritage, and by attitudes such as the juror mentioned above. She felt this would move black artists further from the mainstream and that they would suffer as a result. Artist and writer David Driskell, who later served as an advisor to Brady, has written that she “emphasized the need for black artists to show the competency of their art in all styles, media and subject areas. She felt that the art presented in the Harmon exhibition should parallel what was taking place in American art in general.”⁵⁷ It seems Brady’s way of thinking was much more in line with that of Herring (with whom she corresponded frequently).

Aden’s experience organizing black exhibitions also dated to the early thirties, when he worked with Herring at the Howard University Gallery, first as a student assistant and later as a curator. As previously noted, Aden had received considerable acclaim for his work on two large “Negro” art exhibitions, first, at the Texas Centennial Exposition in 1936 and, four years later, at the American Negro Exposition in Chicago.

⁵⁴ Helen Griffiths Harmon, “Two Sculptors,” in *Negro Artists: An Illustrated Review of their Achievements* (New York: Harmon Foundation, 1935), 12.

⁵⁵ Alain Locke, “The African Legacy and the Negro Artist,” in *Exhibition of the Works of Negro Artists* (New York: Harmon Foundation, 1931), 12.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ David Driskell, “Mary Beattie Brady and the Administration of the Harmon Foundation,” in Reynolds and Wright, *Against All Odds*, 65-66.

While these all-black shows (like the earlier Harmon Foundation exhibitions) were extolled as great accomplishments, bringing much needed attention to black artists, they were also segregated exhibitions—apart from the larger realm of American art and artists.⁵⁸ Some writers have suggested these experiences motivated Aden to found his own gallery. If so, they may also have inspired him in a new direction—away from such separate “all Negro” shows. An examination of the exhibition record of the Barnett Aden Gallery strongly suggests that Aden, in partnership with Herring, consistently and purposefully strived to integrate the work of black artists into the mainstream of American art.

Statements and actions by Herring and Aden over the years indicate that this was indeed their sentiment. In 1974 Charles White wrote about the powerful impact of the Chicago exhibition of 1940 and described Aden as a “superbly trained curator.” He also shared insights regarding Aden’s philosophy:

In my personal archives there exists a scrapbook, a pot-pourri [*sic*] of memorabilia related to this period. A treasured item is the catalogue of this exhibition with an inscription “Charles, with all my good wishes for great success amongst American artists” signed Alonzo Aden. The phrase “success amongst American artists” says so much about the philosophy and concerns of Lonnie. He felt black art and artists should be completely integrated into the mainstream of American art.⁵⁹

Kurt Weiner, founder of the Dupont Theater Gallery in Washington, recalled in a 1981 interview with Sandra Fitzpatrick “that Herring often told him that blacks could not

⁵⁸ This segregation was certainly obvious at the 1936 Texas Centennial Exposition in Dallas. The exhibition “Fine Arts Productions by American Negroes” was installed in The Hall of Negro Life, while the “real” centennial art exhibition was held at the Dallas Museum of Art nearby. Richmond Barthé was the only black artist among the ninety-eight listed in the Museum catalogue for the official exhibition. See Texas Centennial Exposition, Department of Fine Arts, *Catalogue of the Exhibition of Paintings, Sculptures, Graphic Arts* (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, 1936), 116.

⁵⁹ Charles White, quoted in Anacostia, 160.

fight segregation and then support separate galleries for black artists.”⁶⁰ In fact, Herring joined artists Hale Woodruff and Romare Bearden in 1947 when they convinced the International Business Machine Corporation (IBM) to eliminate racial designations in publications.⁶¹ In a letter to artist Hughie Lee-Smith, Woodruff optimistically explained “that, in the light of the Negro artist’s present achievements in the general framework of American art today, there does not exist the necessity to continue all Negro exhibitions which tend to isolate him and segregate him from other American artists.”⁶² In retrospect this optimistic vision seems naïve—but surprisingly—this view was shared by a number of African Americans during and just after World War II. Many noted the commendable performance of “Negro battalions” and the widening of job opportunities for African Americans by war contractors.⁶³ In the final chapter of his book *Black Odyssey*, published in 1948, Roi Ottley wrote, “The signs of the times have made the Negro hopeful, more so than at any period in history.”⁶⁴

Undoubtedly disappointed by continued reports of racism, including the murder of dozens of black veterans in the first three years after the war,⁶⁵ Aden and Herring held

⁶⁰ Kurt Weiner, quoted in Sandra McNear Fitzpatrick, “The Path to Creativity: The Life and Career of Alma W. Thomas in Washington, D.C.,” (master’s thesis, George Washington University, 1982), 79.

⁶¹ Powell, 105

⁶² Hale Woodruff to Hughie Lee-Smith, 20 February 1947, Hughie Lee-Smith Papers, Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.

⁶³ President Roosevelt’s Executive Order 8802 was issued June 25, 1941, as a result of a threatened march on Washington to obtain better job opportunities for African Americans. See Rayford W. Logan, *The Negro in the United States: A Brief History* (Princeton, New Jersey: D. Van Nostrand, 1957): 152.

⁶⁴ Roi Ottley, *Black Odyssey: The Story of the Negro in America* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1948): 305.

⁶⁵ In the years after the war (and well into the 1950s and 1960s) African Americans in the South were often confronted by white mobs as they attempted to exercise their right to vote. Specifically between mid-1945 and mid-1947 there were at least twenty-four racial killings in the South. These events occurred in Birmingham, Alabama; Butler County, Georgia; Monroe, Georgia; and Minden, Louisiana. Several victims were murdered just after voting, while others were murdered (sometimes tortured to death) because they were interested in voting. See Nell Irvin Painter, *Creating Black Americans: African-American History and its Meanings, 1619 to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 232-233.

fast to their policy and provided the one gallery where black art could be shown without the overriding label of “racial art.” In this way they could also distinguish their mission from that of their better-known colleague Alain Locke, who had been urging black artists to develop “a racially representative tradition” based on their African heritage since 1925.⁶⁶ Year after year the group exhibitions at the Barnett Aden Gallery pointedly demonstrated that black artists were working in the full spectrum of artistic styles. During the forties there were exhibitions that included several works obviously inspired by African motifs. Ellis Wilson’s solo exhibition in 1946, which featured works inspired by his recent tour of the South, also included a painting titled *African Masks*; and Lois Mailou Jones’ exhibition of Parisian scenes (during the same year) included *Les Fétiches*, *Liberian Abstraction*, and *Fétiche with an Orchid*. Harlan Jackson, whose abstractions revealed African motifs, showed at the Barnett Aden on at least three occasions in the 1950s, but the scarcity of such examples makes clear that this was one approach among many others employed by black artists.

Further analysis of the gallery record suggests that another type of exhibition was deliberately excluded from the program at the Barnett Aden. Just as there were no “Negro” art shows, it appears that there were no “folk” or “primitive” art exhibitions at the Barnett Aden Gallery.⁶⁷ This avoidance of the “folk” or the “primitive” was probably tied to the lingering effects of the earlier “all Negro” exhibitions and the discourse these shows supported. As educators, Herring and Aden would have been especially disturbed by the prevalent (and essentializing) view held by many whites that black artists were primarily intuitive and naïve artists, drawing on certain unique racial attributes rather

⁶⁶ Locke, “The Legacy,” 254-267.

⁶⁷ Herring knew self-trained artist Horace Pippin, according to Driskell, and Pippin’s work was shown in at least one group show at the gallery (in 1948).

than their intellect and artistic training. Even though a folk art show could have featured black and non-black artists, it would likely have invited commentary supporting such troubling stereotypes. This avoidance of folk art exhibitions must have been an intentional strategy, for these folk/primitive art shows were increasingly popular and usually well attended during the forties and fifties. Aden could have easily arranged such exhibitions through his friendship with Edith Halpert, who was both director of the Downtown Gallery in New York, and a co-founder of the American Folk Art Gallery in 1929.⁶⁸ These acts of omission probably went unnoticed by most visitors, but I would label them, borrowing from cultural critic bell hooks, “acts of resistance.” [H]ooks defines these as “cultural practices which transform ways of looking and being in a manner that resists reinscription by prevailing structures of domination.”⁶⁹ The integrated social gatherings, the deliberately mixed exhibitions, the avoidance of “Negro art” shows as well as “primitive art” shows—all may have gone unheralded at the time, but in retrospect, these practices were transformative—making it difficult to (re)categorize art created by African Americans as something apart from (and somehow less than) American art as a whole.

The ongoing program of art exhibitions at the Barnett Aden Gallery ended in 1962, just a few months after Alonzo Aden’s unexpected death. On the morning of October 13, 1961, the 55-year-old Aden was discovered lifeless, upstairs, within the home he shared with Professor Herring. Apparently victim of a heart attack, Aden had

⁶⁸ The American Folk Art Gallery, founded by Halpert, Holger Cahill, and Goldsmith, opened on the second floor of the Downtown Gallery in 1931. Folk art became an important and lucrative feature of the gallery, sometimes subsidizing contemporary exhibitions.

⁶⁹ bell hooks, *Art on my Mind: Visual Politics* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 151.

been working nonstop preparing for the gallery's eighteenth anniversary exhibition.⁷⁰ The Barnett Aden Gallery continued as an institution for another eight years, and exhibitions were held sporadically, but without his enthusiastic partner, Herring was unable to sustain the gallery's continuous exhibition schedule—a schedule Aden had maintained for more than eighteen years.⁷¹

The Artists, 1943-1961

To get a real sense of the Barnett Aden Gallery, one must consider the artists who exhibited there. While conducting research in Washington, D.C., I noticed that some museum professionals were taken aback by my list of artists who showed at the gallery.⁷² They seemed shocked to see that these were the same artists who showed at the Corcoran, the Phillips Gallery, the Franz Bader Gallery, the Dupont Theater Gallery, the Watkins Gallery at American University, and the Jefferson Place Gallery—institutions all widely recognized as part of Washington's history—yet, several of these art professionals knew little about the Barnett Aden Gallery, and some had never heard of it.

⁷⁰ This exhibition, "Paintings by Albert Sangiamo," was postponed until November and extended through December 15. This was Sangiamo's first solo exhibition in Washington, D.C.

⁷¹ During 1962 and 1963 there were six exhibitions (for which I have evidence) at the gallery. These included the nineteenth anniversary exhibition—a large show dedicated to the memory of Aden and featuring his print collection. David Driskell, who assisted Herring as associate director after Aden's death, organized a show of his own work in February of 1962 and drew from the gallery's collection for a summer show in 1962. Until at least March 1963 the gallery was listed in the *Washington Post's* "Monthly Art Calendar with gallery hours listed as "Tues-Sat. 1-5, Sun by appointment." See "Monthly Art Calendar," *Washington Post*, March 3, 1963. I did not find another listing for the gallery on this calendar after April 1963; however, an article in the *Washington Afro-American* in January of 1966 describes an exhibition of Haitian popular painters on view at the Barnett Aden Gallery. The article states that the gallery "has been closed for a few years," but the Haitian artists show is described as "the third in a series of six for this year." See "Showcase for Artists," *Washington Afro-American*, January 29, 1966. The gallery hours are listed as "Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and by appointment. During the mid-sixties a young black artist named Carroll Sockwell befriended Herring and reportedly showed his work at the gallery.

⁷² For instance, at the library of the National Gallery of Art, the staff member in charge of vertical files was astounded (after studying my list) that they did not have a file on the Barnett Aden Gallery.

In 1968, Richard Long estimated that the Barnett Aden Gallery had shown the work of “perhaps 400 artists.”⁷³ As I compiled my own list of nearly 300 exhibiting artists, one point was clear early on—this was an integrated gallery. Of the artists, for whom I found evidence of showing at the gallery, only about 25% were African Americans. One might think this misleading, since it does not consider the frequency of exhibition and, yes, there were many black artists who showed repeatedly at the gallery. These included Frank H. Alston, Jr., Romare Bearden, Elizabeth Catlett, Eldzier Cortor, Richard Dempsey, Aaron Douglas, John Farrar, Lois M. Jones, James Porter, John N. Robinson, Charles Sebree, Merton Simpson, Alma Thomas, Laura Wheeler Waring, James L. Wells, Charles White, Ellis Wilson, and Hale Woodruff. However, I discovered an equal number of artists who were not black, whose work was shown at the Barnett Aden just as frequently. These included Jack Berkman, Samuel Bookatz, David Burliuk, William Calfee, Nicolai Cikovsky, Minna Citron, Bernice Cross, Gene Davis, Ruth Galoon, Robert Gates, Robert Gwathmey, Joseph Lasker, Pietro Lazarri, Herman Maril, Irene Rice Pereira, Jack Perlmutter, Therese Schwartz, Theodoros Stamos, Ben L. (Joe) Summerford, Céline Tabary, and Andrea de Zerega.⁷⁴

Focusing on the solo exhibitions held at the gallery provides additional insight. As mentioned previously, about 40% of the shows at the Barnett Aden were solo exhibitions. These solos were almost evenly divided between those featuring black artists and those featuring artists of other ethnic identities.⁷⁵ Aden and Herring would undoubtedly be

⁷³ Long, *Salute*, 1968).

⁷⁴ According to my research, each of these artists showed at the Barnett Aden Gallery on at least four occasions (and probably more). I did not include Henry O. Tanner, whose *Flight into Egypt* ((1916) was owned by the gallery and part of many group shows.

⁷⁵ Of the forty solos on my list, there were nineteen solos featuring a total of sixteen black artists, and twenty-one solos featuring a total of nineteen non-black artists Three black artists (Catlett, Driskell,

appalled by such distinctions, but I believe this accounting is necessary to counter the misconceptions about the exhibition practices of the historic Barnett Aden Gallery. My goal in presenting such statistics is *not* to suggest that the gallery was significant because it showed important white artists—but rather—to correct the record and reveal the innovative exhibition policies of the gallery. Avoiding an overt public focus on race was crucial to the gallery’s mission; however, I believe that racial considerations were an intrinsic part of the exhibition strategy.

Perhaps more surprising—about one-third of these solo exhibitions featured women artists (of various ethnicities). This number gains significance when compared to contemporary art galleries in New York, where women artists were rarely given solo exhibitions during the forties and fifties. Even at the Downtown Gallery, where the indomitable Edith Halpert represented Jacob Lawrence, there were almost no solo exhibitions offered to women artists between 1943 and 1962. In fact, (out of sixty-four) there was only one—Georgia O’Keeffe’s exhibition in 1955.⁷⁶ As noted, Halpert organized the groundbreaking exhibition “American Negro Art” in 1941 and represented Jacob Lawrence (who was given solos shows in 1945, 1950 and 1953), but she did not regularly feature the work of African American artists at her gallery. The only other African American artist to be shown was the folk artist Horace Pippin (1944). While Halpert played a significant role in the history of African American art, her gallery was only rarely a site for diversity. She was generous in her support of the Barnett Aden

and Simpson) had two solos each, and two non-black artists (Perlmutter and Chi-Yuan Wang) had two solos each.

⁷⁶ During this period Lawrence had three solo exhibitions. The only other African American artist to be featured was the folk artist Horace Pippin. See Downtown Gallery Records, Appendix: Downtown Gallery Exhibitions, 1926-1969, Archives of American Art, <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/collectionsonline/downgall/downgall/html#appendix1>.

Gallery and other black institutions, but her gallery only rarely showed the work of black artists (or women artists) as the Barnett Aden Gallery consistently did every year between 1943 and 1961. Of all the galleries in New York and Washington, it was only at the Barnett Aden Gallery that, I would assert, a strategic plan was implemented to integrate black artists into the mainstream of American art.

Some solo shows featured recognized artists, such as Jacob Lawrence and Irene Rice Pereira, but others presented the work of struggling younger artists like Jack Perlmutter. For several it was their first solo exhibition, or at least their first in Washington. Both Lois M. Jones and James Porter, colleagues of Herring at Howard, had solos at the Barnett Aden during the forties—as did Howard graduate Elizabeth Catlett, whose 1947 “The Negro Woman” exhibition was her first major one-person show. Other artists associated with Howard were featured in the fifties, including James L. Wells, David Driskell, and Lila Oliver Asher.

Porter, who was hired by Herring to teach at Howard immediately upon his graduation in 1927, had his first solo exhibition at the Barnett Aden in 1948. Porter had already achieved prominence as a writer and lecturer in the field of black art history, but this exhibition confirmed his status as a visual artist. As Adelyn Breeskin wrote, [H]e now emerges as an artist who is at his best in more intricate compositions of figures and/or scenery...while his expression remains spontaneous and alive.”⁷⁷ Porter’s exhibition, which consisted of paintings and drawings inspired by his recent travels to Cuba and Haiti, was well received in the local press and well attended. Among the notable visitors was the scholar John Hope Franklin, who had joined the Howard

⁷⁷ Adelyn Breeskin, foreword to *Paintings and Drawings by James A. Porter* (Washington, D.C.: Barnett Aden Gallery, 1948).

University Department of History in 1947. In 1992 Franklin recalled this visit: “It was at the Barnett-Aden [*sic*] Gallery that I discovered how fortunate the art historian was if he could also convey, through his own work, the excitement and wonders of the art about which he wrote.”⁷⁸

Lila O. Asher, who was the newest (and youngest) member of the Howard art faculty in 1951, was delighted when Aden arranged her first solo in February of that year.⁷⁹ As she recalled in 2002, “It was very exciting. In those days people dressed up; women wore hats and gloves. You could even park—drive right up to the gallery.” (Fig. 20) Asher also remembered the Barnett Aden Gallery as “the only gallery in Washington.” She explained, “There was the Phillips, of course, but it was not that popular” and the gallery on the balcony at Whyte’s Bookstore, but she added, “[I]t was always so hot up there.”⁸⁰ Over the next five decades Asher had many more exhibitions across the country, and received acclaim for her distinctive use of line, especially in her linocut prints. Asher also continued teaching at Howard—first ceramics and later drawing—and many former students recall her life drawing classes as fundamental to their own development as artists. One of these, Franklin White, went on to teach art classes at the Corcoran Gallery of Art for more than thirty years, where he used the same

⁷⁸ John Hope Franklin, preface to *James A. Porter, Artist and Art Historian: The Memory of the Legacy*, by Starmanda Bullock Featherstone and others (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Gallery of Art, 1992), 8.

⁷⁹ Dr. Franz Rapp, art history professor at Howard, recommended her work to Aden. Rapp, a German refugee, came to Howard in the late thirties and initiated advanced courses in art history and museum studies. According to Scott Baker of Howard University, Rapp was largely responsible for the fact that art history was declared a major in 1940. See Scott W. Baker, “From Freedmen to Fine Arts,” in *A Proud Continuum: Eight Decades of Art at Howard University* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Gallery of Art, 2005), 10. Rapp taught at Howard until his death in 1951, a few months after Asher’s exhibition.

⁸⁰ Asher, interview. Over the years Herring hired a number of white artists to teach in the art department, including Asher, Franz Rapp, and Morris Louis.

“life drawing techniques acquired from Lila Asher.”⁸¹ Another former student, David Driskell, noted in a 2001 review of Asher’s work that her “genuine prowess as teacher and artist par excellence has not waned.”⁸²

For Jack Perlmutter, his solo exhibition at the Barnett Aden in 1945 came at an auspicious moment. It was the first solo show of his career, and Perlmutter recalled that it played a crucial role in his decision to become an artist. “I was quite young then,” as Perlmutter explained to the author in 2003, “and I didn’t know what I was going to be doing with my life at all—painting or not painting. But I was doing some painting and he [Aden] liked them.” Perlmutter discovered the gallery “by accident” (from a listing in the newspaper), but soon became close friends with Aden. By 1952, Perlmutter was a nationally known painter and lithographer, represented in the collections of the Phillips, Corcoran, Watkins, Barnett Aden, and Howard University galleries, as well as the Smithsonian Institution and the Library of Congress. Aden nurtured his early career, as Perlmutter recalled, “Lonnie was like a—cushion—he listened to the artists.” Their friendship continued and the two men often met for lunch—even in “some of the restricted restaurants at the wharf.” As Perlmutter excitedly recalled, “It was just great...to have someone like that sponsor you and appreciate you. It was good for the ego....”⁸³ Although primarily self-taught, Perlmutter quickly embraced modernist techniques, often painting abstract visions of urban life. A prodigious artist, Perlmutter

⁸¹ Teresia Bush, “The Freedom to Create,” in *A Proud Continuum: Eight Decades of Art at Howard University* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Gallery of Art, 2005), 36.

⁸² David Driskell, in *Lila Oliver Asher: Living Line* (Bethesda, Maryland: Strathmore Hall Arts Center, 2001). This catalogue for Asher’s fifty-year retrospective outlines her continuous exhibition record and lists the many permanent collections around the world that include her work.

⁸³ Perlmutter, interview, 2003. Perlmutter also won a Fulbright Scholarship to study in Japan in the late fifties and was given a forty-year retrospective at Watkins Gallery of Art at American University in 2000. Within weeks of this interview, the artist moved to a local retirement home, where he lived until his death in May of 2006.

later taught himself printmaking and became widely known for his lithographs. He also gave art lectures and taught painting and printmaking classes at several locations, including Wilson's Teachers College and the Corcoran Gallery of Art, where he taught from 1960 to 1982.⁸⁴

John Farrar was another young artist promoted at the gallery. Farrar was barely 27-years-old in September 1947 when Aden organized an exhibition of his paintings. (Fig. 21) The small exhibition of ten paintings was well received by visitors and the local press, who fondly recalled this former child prodigy who "loves to paint and make biscuits...."⁸⁵ This celebrated Art Fair winner of the thirties had by now served in the Army and was struggling to support himself as an artist. Herring took the young artist under his wing, obtaining studio and living space for him in a Howard University dormitory. It was from the window of this room that Farrar painted a series of urban landscapes, including *The Couple* and *Grocery Boy* (both 1947), capturing the bustling alley life in the neighborhood around Howard University. Farrar, however, was struggling with episodes of mental illness, which he medicated with alcohol, and was soon expelled from his dormitory studio. Despite the efforts of Herring, Aden, and others (such as Alma Thomas who supported him in the late forties), Farrar's life gradually deteriorated. By 1957 he was spending much of his time at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington, where he was diagnosed with a "chronic schizophrenia" disease. Eventually

⁸⁴ Perlmutter, interview. Perlmutter and his wife operated a printing business from their basement for several years in the 1950s, producing mostly greeting cards, but they also printed several of the Barnett Aden Gallery catalogues.

⁸⁵ Marranzano, "He loves to Paint," *Times-Herald*, June 28, 1943.

confined to the hospital, Farrar continued to paint (and occasionally to exhibit) until his death in 1972.⁸⁶

During the 1940s, a number of one-person shows featured artists from New York, including Harry Sternberg⁸⁷ (1945), Jacob Lawrence (1946), Ellis Wilson (1946), Charles White (1947), Irene Rice Pereira (1949), Sylvia Carewe (1949), and Juanita Marbrook (1949). At this time both Lawrence and White were creating powerful works based on the difficulties and achievements of African Americans. In 1940 both artists were prize winners at the Chicago “Art of the American Negro” exhibition, curated by Aden. Lawrence won Second Award in Water Color for two paintings from his recently completed series “Life of Toussaint L’Ouverture,” and White won First Award in Black and White for *There Were No Crops This Year* (which was featured on the cover of the exhibition catalogue). Ellis Wilson, who was also part of the Chicago exhibition, was awarded Guggenheim Fellowships in 1944 and 1945. Wilson’s one-person show at the Barnett Aden in 1946 featured paintings done from sketches made during this fellowship period, when he traveled to Kentucky and several islands of South Carolina.⁸⁸ Decades later Wilson’s art gained a global audience when his paintings decorated the home of the fictional Huxtable family on the set of “The Cosby Show” (1984-1992). Most prominent, week after week, was Wilson’s *The Funeral Procession*, displayed on the Huxtable

⁸⁶ Jerry Langley, “A Prodigy Dashed by Misfortune: John J. Farrar’s Life in Art,” *International Review of African American Art* 19, no.2 (2003): 19-29.

⁸⁷ Sternberg was an instructor at the Art Students League in New York, where he instructed Charles White in 1942.

⁸⁸ Paintings in this 1946 exhibition included *Old Charleston Houses*, *Bathers*, and *Pigs*. Wilson exhibited in group shows at the gallery during the gallery’s first year (1943/1944) and showed four paintings in a group show in June of 1945. One of these four, *Flower Vendor*, was acquired by the gallery and is now part of the collection known as Robert L. Johnson from the Barnett Aden Collection, Washington, D.C.

mantel. These paintings were selected by David Driskell, curator of the Bill and Camille Cosby Art Collection since the late 1970s.⁸⁹ (Fig. 22)

Driskell, whose own passion for collecting was largely inspired by time spent at the Barnett Aden, had his first solo exhibition at the gallery in 1957. By this time, Driskell had finished his degree at Howard and was teaching in Alabama when he received a letter from Aden. Many years later Driskell recalled receiving a letter from Aden, remembering his exact words, “I’ve always been interested in your art....I’d like for you to prepare for a one-man exhibition at my gallery.”⁹⁰ Well aware of Aden’s high standards, Driskell was deeply honored and vividly recalled attending the opening reception, as well as reading the favorable reviews in the local press. Aden, however, was shocked when he first looked at Driskell’s paintings for the show. He said “Oh, my God!” and immediately retired to his bed (after taking a sedative to quiet himself). Later Aden realized that the light in Alabama was the reason for Driskell’s dramatic new color palette.⁹¹

While Driskell made bold use of color in this early work, his style had not yet veered into total abstraction.⁹² Other solo exhibitions during the fifties featured artists fully engaged in Abstract Expressionism—a style and attitude developed in New York during the late forties. These artists—Therese Schwartz in 1952, Merton Simpson in 1951 and 1956, and Norman Lewis in 1958—are seldom mentioned in canonical accounts of

⁸⁹ Driskell’s friendship with the Cosbys began in the late 1970s when he received a phone call from Bill Cosby, who had just read Driskell’s *Two Centuries of Black American Art*. This book accompanied the landmark 1976 exhibition (curated by Driskell) at the Los Angeles County Museum. (At first Driskell thought the call from Cosby was a prank—perhaps initiated by his brother-in-law.) See David Driskell, *The Other Side of Color: African American Art in the Collection of Camille O. and William H. Cosby Jr.*, (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 2001), 64.

⁹⁰ Alonzo Aden to David Driskell, 1957. This letter no longer exists; it was accidentally destroyed in 1964. The text of the letter was recalled by Driskell in an interview with the author in 2002.

⁹¹ Driskell interview, 2002.

Abstraction Expressionism's rise to power. As black artists, Simpson and Lewis were precluded from most accounts, as were female artists such as Schwartz. As art historian Ann Gibson explains, "[T]he heroism of the most vaunted abstract art was equated with the identity of its maker," and in post-war American society black artists were seldom celebrated, much less regarded as "heroic."⁹³ She noted that women artists had a similar problem. "If Abstract Expressionism required that the artist and the subject matter be heroic, then a work of art whose maker and object evoked the antiheroic sphere of the domestic and the familiar did not fit in."⁹⁴ That famous photograph of the Abstract Expressionists, titled *The Irascibles*, did not include these artists. (Fig. 23) They, however, described themselves as Abstract Expressionists, and their paintings exemplified the spontaneous expressionistic technique associated with that movement. (Figs. 24, 25, 26)

Because the Howard University Gallery often featured international artists, most have assumed that this was also true of the Barnett Aden; however, the list of solo shows at the gallery includes only a few "international" artists: Candido Portinari of Brazil (1944), Japanese-born James Suzuki⁹⁵ (1957), and Wang Chi-Yuan of China⁹⁶ (1944,

⁹³ Ann Gibson, *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics* (New Haven: Yale University, 1997), 121.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 164-165.

⁹⁵ Suzuki's show at the Barnett Aden in 1957 was one of his first solos—if not his first. An unpublished 1978 list of Suzuki's "selected" one person exhibits (found in his file at the library of the National Gallery of Art) begins with a 1957 show at Graham Gallery in New York. This list, as was so often the case, omits Suzuki's solo show at the Barnett Aden during the same year. Suzuki had more solos in other cities, but it appears that his show at the Barnett Aden Gallery was his only one-person exhibition in Washington. He did participate in several group shows in Washington, including three of the Corcoran Biennial exhibitions (1957, 1959, and 1961) and one group show at the Franz Bader Gallery in 1961. See Peter Hastings Falk and Andrea Ansell Bien, ed., *The Biennial Exhibition Record of the Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1907-1967* (Madison, Conn.: Sound View Press, 1991), 262.

⁹⁶ Wang Chi-Yuan relocated from China to the United States in 1941 after making his reputation as a painter, teacher, and scholar in Shanghai during the 1920s and 1930s. His paintings were first shown in Washington in 1943 at a group show at the Howard University Gallery of Art. This exhibition, titled "Modern Chinese Painting," was organized by the Metropolitan Museum of Art and circulated by the American Federation of Arts.

1959). The infrequency of this type of exhibition suggests an interest in, but certainly not an emphasis on “international” artists. Instead, the Barnett Aden’s exhibition list reveals a much more consistent emphasis on contemporary American artists. This was necessary—I argue—in order to integrate the work of black artists into this field.

Similarly, several artists from Haiti, Cuba, and other parts of the African Diaspora were shown in group shows at the gallery, but apparently they were not featured in either solo exhibitions or collectively in special exhibitions. For instance, Haitian author and visual artist Petion Savain⁹⁷ was part of a group show in 1945, as was Cuban sculptor Theodore Ramos-Blanco⁹⁸ in 1949, but there were no exhibitions featuring exclusively Haitian or Cuban artists at the Barnett Aden between 1943 and 1961.

In fact, it was in organizing and presenting the group shows that the innovative nature of the exhibition program was most obvious. At these one might see the work of Cuban, Haitian, or Brazilian artists, but always—always—one saw the work of black artists alongside that of white artists. These group shows often included artists associated with Howard University, but as many or more were associated with the Phillips Memorial Gallery. These included C. Law Watkins, long-time friend of Duncan Phillips and head of the Phillips Gallery Art School, whose work was shown during the first season at the gallery, and William Calfee, a student of Watkins’ at the Phillips school and his successor at American University in 1945. Others associated with the Phillips Gallery who were part of the group shows at the Barnett Aden included John Gernand, Harold Giese, James

⁹⁷ Savain, whose work celebrated Haiti’s peasant class, was an integral part of Haiti’s “Indigenist” cultural movement of the 1930s. He learned to paint in 1931 when African American artist William E. Scott spent a year in Haiti, teaching and inspiring a whole generation of future artists.

⁹⁸ Ramos-Blanco’s *Guitar Player* may have been on display continuously, as part of the gallery décor. The small, blue-glazed ceramic is visible on the table in the foreground of Robinson’s painting *First Gallery*. In 1940 Ramos-Blanco won a prize at the American Negro Exposition in Chicago, and during that same year received a commission from Howard University to create a bust of Cuban hero Antonio Maceo.

McLaughlin, Louis Bosa, Ann Brockman, Bernice Cross, Robert Gates and Elliott Orr. (Several of these showed at the gallery during its first year.)⁹⁹ Generally described as “progressive” these artists benefited from the vision and legacy of C. Law Watkins, who, as Washington artist Ben L. Summerford has written, “encouraged students to move unprejudiced into contemporary modes of expression without abandoning the lessons of the past.”¹⁰⁰

These artists associated with the Phillips Gallery often referenced nature in their work, but they also experimented with varying degrees of abstraction. Watkins’ student William Calfee was painting abstract visions of nature by the late 1940s, such as *Abstraction, Landscape with Figures*. (Fig. 27). Gates, another student and later an assistant to Watkins, painted landscapes, but after 1945 these became increasingly abstract with large floating blocks of color. (Fig. 28) Another Phillips favorite, Baltimore artist Herman Maril, painted recognizable landscapes, but he consistently simplified these into a series of blocky forms, sometimes outlined in black. (Fig. 29)

No other Washington artist showed more often at the Phillips than Bernice Cross, who had six solo exhibitions there between 1938 and 1953.¹⁰¹ Cross began her training at the Corcoran School of Art in 1932, but she left after one year to study with Watkins at the Phillips school. Sometimes described as a Symbolist, Cross painted mysterious works including many still lifes that have an “almost anthropomorphic intensity.”¹⁰² She was also showing her work in New York at both the Contemporary Arts and Bertha Schaefer

⁹⁹ Barnett Aden Gallery, *Paintings by Candido Portinari of Brazil* (Washington, D.C.: Barnett Aden Gallery, 1944). This first anniversary exhibition catalogue included a list of “exhibiting artists” from the gallery’s first year. Sometimes Aden borrowed these artists’ works from the Phillips gallery; at other times the works were loaned by the artists.

¹⁰⁰ Summerford, in Passantino, *Eye of Duncan Phillips*, 607.

¹⁰¹ Cross also participated in the art fairs of the 1930s. She was part of a small group of local artists that Phillips collected into “units.” Nineteen of her paintings remain in the Phillips collection.

¹⁰² Summerford, in Passantino, *Eye of Duncan Phillips*, 629.

galleries. It is significant that Cross, despite access to these venues, continued to exhibit frequently at the Barnett Aden, where she was part of group exhibitions in 1944, 1949, 1950, 1952, and 1953. *In the Room* was Cross' submission to the Corcoran Biennial Exhibition in 1949 and was subsequently acquired by the Barnett Aden Gallery, where it was displayed later that year at the gallery's sixth anniversary exhibition.¹⁰³

Another Phillips favorite was Russian-born David Burliuk, who came to New York in 1922. Phillips' collection of his work formed one of his "units," and he gave him a solo exhibition in 1939. (As described in the previous chapter, Phillips bought numerous works from certain artists, forming a unit, so that viewers could see the development of an artist's career.) Phillips wrote in the catalogue that Burliuk "came to us with a reputation as the father of modernism in Russian art...as one of the Blue Riders with Kandinsky and Klee and Kampendonck and Marc....He has been part of all the modern movements and has traveled all over the world...."¹⁰⁴ Burliuk also showed at the Barnett Aden Gallery, including group shows in 1947, 1949, 1950, and 1954. His painting *Russian Landscape* was in the Barnett Aden collection from the late 1940s until at least 1968; however, by the 1974 exhibition in Anacostia it was no longer part of the collection.

Artists associated with the Phillips Gallery exhibited frequently at the Barnett Aden—sometimes the loans were from the artists; often they were from the gallery. Even more loans came from a group of New York galleries, including the Associated American Artists, American Contemporary Arts Gallery (ACA), Barone Gallery, Downtown

¹⁰³ It is unclear exactly when or how Cross' *In the Room* was acquired by the gallery, but it remains in the current collection known as Robert L. Johnson from the Barnett Aden Collection, Washington, D.C.

¹⁰⁴ Duncan Phillips, foreword to *An Exhibition of Paintings by David Burliuk: Russian-American Expressionist*, by Phillips Memorial Gallery (Washington, D.C.: Phillips Memorial Gallery, 1939).

Gallery, Grand Central Art Galleries, Kraushaar Galleries, Midtown Galleries, John Heller Gallery, Milch Gallery, and Passedoit Gallery. The most prominent contributors to the Barnett Aden Gallery were the Downtown Gallery, Kraushaar Galleries, and the ACA.

The generosity of these galleries was critical, but the works they loaned to the Barnett Aden exhibitions were almost exclusively by white artists.¹⁰⁵ Aden, however, had no trouble finding a multitude of talented black artists to supplement this group. By 1943 Aden and Herring had met hundreds of black artists through their work at Howard University and through their work organizing black art exhibitions in New York, Chicago, Dallas, and other cities. Both were respected figures within the black art community and word spread quickly about their ambitious new endeavor. The gallery immediately had the support of black artists and friends in the black communities of Washington, New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Atlanta, and other cities. Subsequent press coverage of the gallery's activities (as well as word-of-mouth publicity) expanded the gallery's reputation to the extent that almost every black art professional working in the eastern half of the country knew of it. The local press announced exhibitions at the Barnett Aden and published small reviews, while the African American press—the *New York Amsterdam News*, the *Pittsburgh-Courier*, and the Washington edition of the *Baltimore Afro-American*—occasionally published feature articles on the gallery. Gallery announcements were also placed in popular African American journals, including *Newspic*, *Pulse*, and *Ebony*.

¹⁰⁵ To my knowledge Phillips did not collect African American art beyond the single (but monumental) purchase of one-half of Lawrence's "Migration" series, three paintings by Horace Pippin, and a few works by local black artists, such as Lois Jones, which were purchased from the Christmas regional exhibitions.

Herring's colleagues in the Howard Art Department were enthusiastic early supporters of the new gallery. Not only were they pleased to exhibit at the Barnett Aden, most frequented the gallery and offered support in other ways. During the gallery's first decade (as mentioned earlier) professors Jones, Asher, and Wells had solo shows at the gallery. Professor James Porter's solo exhibition there came four years later, in 1948.

When the gallery opened in 1943, Porter had just published his book *Modern Negro Art*, which quickly became the first real textbook for African American art history. Although Herring and Porter had their differences, they remained congenial colleagues. Porter served as a consultant to the gallery, wrote several forewords for the gallery catalogues, and was a frequent visitor. A photograph from 1961 shows a relaxed and smiling Porter at the Barnett Aden Gallery, sharing a moment with Ann Burwell, James L. Wells, and David Driskell. (Fig. 30) However, one Howard colleague is notably (and always) missing—I found not a single photograph showing Alain Locke at the Barnett Aden Gallery. I also found no mention of Locke's attendance in any of the newspaper accounts of gallery functions, and none of my interviewees recalled Locke's attendance. When I asked Driskell whether Locke ever set foot at the Barnett Aden Gallery, he replied, "I don't know and I suspect not."¹⁰⁶ This pointed avoidance of the only black-owned art gallery in the nation (just down the street from Howard, where Locke was head of the Philosophy department) shows the intensity of the feud between Herring and Locke. Interestingly, it appears that Locke did keep track of the activities at the gallery.

¹⁰⁶ Driskell, interview 2002.

In his papers at Howard University there is an invitation to the inaugural opening of the gallery in October 1943 as well as four catalogues for later exhibitions.¹⁰⁷

Lois Mailou Jones, as discussed in chapter three, was recruited by Herring to teach in the Howard Art Department, where she taught for forty-seven years. Alongside her distinctive teaching career, Jones developed an impressive career as a painter, working in a great variety of styles, and depicting such disparate subjects as Parisian rooftops, Nigerian masks, Haitian street vendors, New England lobsters, and African motifs combined with textile designs.

Jones' work could be seen frequently at Howard and the Barnett Aden Gallery, but she also exhibited in Paris, Atlanta, New York, and Haiti (among other places). In addition, Jones tirelessly contributed to the local art community. In 1930 she arranged a Children's Art Workshop, and in 1945, along with her friend Céline Tabary (whom she met in Paris), she directed a Saturday Morning Art Class for children. She and Tabary established a type of informal salon at the studio-home they shared—sometimes called “Petite Paris.”¹⁰⁸

Throughout her prolific career Jones explored various painting styles. After a sabbatical year in Paris during 1937/1938, Jones returned to teach at Howard University, where she met Alain Locke. Locke admired her Paris-inspired paintings, but according to Jones' friend and biographer, Tritobia Hayes Benjamin, he “[s]trongly encouraged Jones to reevaluate her subject matter and to take her heritage more seriously.”¹⁰⁹ Over the next

¹⁰⁷ The later Barnett Aden catalogues were for exhibitions in May-June 1947, October-November 1948, and December 1951-January 1952. See Alain Locke Papers, Box 164-168, Folder 1, Manuscript Division, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C.

¹⁰⁸ Betty LaDuke, “Lois Mailou Jones: The Grande Dame of African-American Art,” *Woman's Art Journal* 8, no. 2 (Fall-Winter 1987-1988): 28. Céline Tabary came to Washington for a visit in 1940, but, due to the war, she remained for seven years.

¹⁰⁹ Benjamin, *Lois Mailou Jones*, 50.

few years, during what Benjamin called her “Locke Period,”¹¹⁰ Jones painted more works dealing with the African American experience, including *The Janitor* (1939), *Jennie* (1943), *The Banjo Player* (1944) and *Mob Victim, Meditation* (1944). (Fig. 31) She occasionally incorporated African motifs, such as in the painting *Two Faiths* (1944), where Jones created a still-life by combining a small African sculpture, African textiles, and a European sculpture. (Fig. 32) Jones took Locke’s advice seriously, but he was only one of many influences on her work. Jones continued to paint a wide variety of subjects, in styles influenced by French artists such as Emile Bernard (whom she met), Claude Monet, Paul Cezanne, and Maurice Utrillo. As Benjamin noted, “[H]er interpretations of their works are not slavish imitations. Jones was beginning to forge her own style....”¹¹¹ Jones herself spoke of being “personally indebted to the Barnett Aden Gallery, under James V. Herring and Alonzo Aden, for my first important one-woman show in Washington which served to establish the place I now hold among the ranks of American painters.”¹¹²

Scenes of Haiti were another favorite subject, especially after Jones’ marriage to Haitian artist Louis Vergniaud Pierre-Noel in 1953. In 1970 Jones traveled on a research grant to eleven African nations, and was inspired to paint another wave of African inspired works—this time larger scale, acrylic paintings with brilliant colors, sharp edges and a myriad of African textiles designs included.

Another Howard professor, James L. Wells, was a frequent exhibitor at the Barnett Aden throughout the forties and fifties. Wells studied in New York during the

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 50-51. Based on the examples provided by Benjamin, this would be the period roughly between 1939 and 1944.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 30-31.

¹¹² Jones, quoted in *Anacostia*, 157.

1920s, and in the 1930s he worked with the Federal Arts Project, where he gained experience as a printmaker. As mentioned earlier, he was recruited by Herring in 1929 to teach crafts, but Wells soon initiated printmaking into the curriculum and inspired a generation of young black printmakers—perhaps most notably Lou Stovall, who maintains a vibrant printmaking venture in Washington, D.C.¹¹³

Wells' expressive paintings and prints were shown many times at the Barnett Aden Gallery. His work was part of at least eight group shows at the Barnett Aden, including the inaugural exhibition in October 1943, two shows in 1944, and anniversary exhibitions in 1948, 1949, 1952, and 1953. Another show in December 1959 was a duo with sculptor Selma Burke. His work drew praise from Jacob Kainen, then head of the Print Division at the Smithsonian, who described the “breadth, imagination, and depth of feeling” he saw in Wells' work.¹¹⁴ Several have written of Locke's influence on Wells, noting his use of African motifs. As Driskell later wrote, Wells “found comfort, indeed solace, in depicting black African masks in still-life and black genre scenes during the years of the Harlem Renaissance.”¹¹⁵ Other favorite subjects were Bible stories, recalled from his childhood, and the streets and people of Washington, D.C. (Fig. 33)

Although Locke was an admired friend and colleague, Wells was quick to note the profound impact that Herring and later Aden had on African American artists. When interviewed in 1989 by Richard Powell and Jock Reynolds, Wells expressed his high

¹¹³ James L. Wells, interview by Powell and Reynolds, 1989. At Howard Wells first taught clay modeling and metal work (jewelry making) before introducing block printing, etching, and lithography.

¹¹⁴ Jacob Kainen, foreword to *Paintings and Prints by James Lesesne Wells*, by Barnett Aden Gallery (Washington, D.C.: Barnett Aden Gallery, 1950). Wells' duo with the sculptor Selma Burke in December of 1959 was practically a solo exhibition—Wells had twenty-four works on exhibit, while Burke was represented by a single sculpture. See Barnett Aden Gallery, *Exhibition of Religious Paintings and Prints by James L. Wells & Sculpture by Selma Burke*, (Washington, D.C.: Barnett Aden Gallery, 1959).

¹¹⁵ David Driskell, *The Other Side of Color: African American Art in the Collection of Camille O. an William H. Cosby Jr.*, (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 2001), 64.

regard for both men. When asked about his time at Howard “with Herring, Porter, Jones—all strong artists with strong personalities,” Wells replied, “Yes, it was both exciting and difficult,” but in the next breathe Wells (who was ill and had trouble speaking) emphasized the critical role played by Herring: “It was the establishment of the department itself—we actually grew out of the Professor’s vision. Herring was the first teacher.... He organized the department and he taught the classes himself.”¹¹⁶ Wells’ interviewers did not follow up on this topic, nor did they comment a few minutes later when Wells again noted Herring’s (and this time Aden’s) contributions. In response to a long, rather tangled question about the “exciting period at Howard when people like Carter Woodson and Locke and others were becoming recognized,” Wells summoned his strength to proclaim:

The gallery was the instrument of getting art—especially Negro art—to the public. Herring and Aden, both at the Barnett Aden and Howard, did a very good job putting on various exhibitions...which were *accepted*. Negroes knew very little about the Negro’s place in art, and they soon would become aware of it through these exhibitions.¹¹⁷

Yet again—neither Powell nor Reynolds followed up on this bold statement. Instead, they redirected Wells’ attention to his association with Locke and Porter.¹¹⁸ Wells was a prodigious artist who exhibited widely until his death in 1993. Several paintings and prints by Wells were in the gallery collection from about 1950 until at least 1974.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Wells, interview.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. I noticed this tendency in other interviews where artists pointedly mentioned the significance of the Barnett Aden Gallery but were not asked to elaborate. Possibly these interviewers knew little about the gallery—except perhaps that it provided a venue for black artists—and assumed that the gallery played no roll in their own specific research topic.

¹¹⁹ Wells’ painting *Wheelbarrows* (or *Two Wheelbarrows*) was added to the collection shortly after his 1950 solo exhibition. At least two other paintings, *Model Resting* (in 1949 group exhibition) and *Market Place* (in 1952 group exhibition), were acquired by the gallery. Prints in the gallery collection included *African Phantasy* (lithograph in 1962 exhibition), *Du Pont Circle* (woodcut in 1968 exhibition), *Georgetown* (woodcut in 1974 exhibition), and *St. Francis and the Birds* (another woodcut in the 1974

After graduating from Howard University in 1937, artist Elizabeth Catlett attended graduate school at the State University of Iowa; however, she always kept her ties to Herring and Aden. It was during her time at Howard that Catlett first became interested in African art. As she recalled, “Professor Herring had an exhibition of African art reproductions, from the Barnes Collection, and that exhibition moved me. So once I went to Philadelphia to see the Barnes Collection, essentially the African sculpture.”¹²⁰ This is notable because most writers assume it was Locke who encouraged her study of African art, but as Catlett later said, “I didn’t have anything to do with Alain Locke at all, because he and James Herring were sworn enemies.”¹²¹

After marrying the artist Charles White in 1941, Catlett moved to New York, where she attended classes at the Art Students League and taught at the George Washington Carver School. During this period both she and Charles White visited and exhibited at the Barnett Aden Gallery. As mentioned, Catlett’s first major solo exhibition was held at the gallery in December of 1947, and her work was included in many group exhibitions.¹²²

Known primarily as a sculptor and printmaker, Catlett has been compared to Käthe Kollwitz, the great German expressionist, known for her sympathetic depictions of mothers and children in crisis. (Fig. 34) Although trained as a fine artist, Catlett never lost interest in depicting and celebrating the humanity of the poor and the suffering. In

exhibition). This information is from Barnett Aden Gallery exhibition catalogues. The contemporary collection does not include Wells’ work.

¹²⁰ Elizabeth Catlett, quoted in Neuberger Museum of Art, *Elizabeth Catlett Sculpture: A Fifty-Year Retrospective*, Essays by Michael Brenson and Lowery Stokes Sims. Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase College. (Purchase, N.J., 1998), 33

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Between 1943 and 1962, Catlett participated in at least seven group shows at the Barnett Aden.

1946 she moved to Cuernavaca, Mexico, where she married Francisco Mora (after her divorce from White) and joined the renowned *Taller de Gráfica Popular*.

In 1959 Catlett became the first woman ever to teach at the National School of Fine Arts in Cuernavaca, Mexico, and subsequently became head of the Sculpture Department at that institution. During the following decades Catlett's work became more overtly tied to her social and political activism, particularly in works such as *Malcolm X Speaks for Us*. (Fig. 35) However, Catlett's social protest could be detected much earlier—in that first solo exhibition—held at the Barnett Aden in 1947/1948. (Fig. 36)

During the 1950s the American government, specifically the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), began harassing Catlett for her former political associations. In 1955 she refused an order to submit a written statement of her political loyalties and to name others for the HUAC blacklist. At that time she was imprisoned by the Mexican government, which was apparently cooperating with the HUAC, as a foreign agitator. After her release, Catlett renounced her American citizenship, and in 1962 she became a Mexican citizen. The United States government summarily listed her as “an undesirable alien” and prevented her from returning to the United States until 1987.¹²³

Throughout the years, it was another Howard graduate—Alma Thomas—who was closest to the activities of the Barnett Aden Gallery, (even though it appears that she did not exhibit there until the 1950s). Thomas' long association with Herring began in 1921 when she enrolled in the Home Economics Department at Howard University, initially to study costume design. As noted earlier, Herring convinced her to change her

¹²³ Lisa E. Farrington, “Women Devoted to Excellence,” in *A Proud Continuum: Eight Decades of Art at Howard University*, ed. Carolyn E. Shuttlesworth (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Gallery of Art, 2005), 47. In 1971, under pressure from African American artists and Howard University officials, Catlett was allowed to attend the opening of her retrospective exhibition at the Studio Museum in Harlem.

major, and she became the first graduate of the newly established Art Department in 1924. (Fig. 37)

During the next few years Thomas and Herring became peers and close friends, although they often fought. Yet, it is clear that they had an abiding respect for each other's work. Thomas served as vice-president of the gallery from 1943 until at least 1966.¹²⁴ She lent her resources and her talent for fundraising to the gallery; and she was no doubt an enthusiastic visitor, especially at the festive openings, which she continued to enjoy into the 1960s. It is difficult to say how large a role Thomas played in the policies of the gallery, but (given her documented outspokenness) she certainly would have expressed her opinions. Even though she had a full-time job teaching at Shaw Junior High School in Washington, it seems that she was always available to help the struggling gallery. When an early exhibition at the Barnett Aden drew artists and friends from other cities, a local reviewer wrote that "Alma Thomas, Delilah W. Pierce, and Lucille D. Roberts...assisted in receiving the week-end guests...."¹²⁵ There are repeated examples of such practical assistance.

Thomas also kept up with contemporary art and ideas. She sought books and journals about art and engaged in endless conversations with artists and art professionals at gallery and museum events across the region. As Adelyn Breeskin recalled,

She was to be seen year after year at almost every opening held by Washington art galleries. Always she was smartly dressed in colorful clothes, for above all Alma Thomas loved color. During the 1960s I often

¹²⁴ "Showcase for Artists," *Washington Afro American* (Washington, D.C.), January 29, 1966. Thomas is listed as the gallery's vice-president in the caption of a photograph published with this article. An additional vice-president, Miss Frances H. Williams, is listed in the Barnett Aden Gallery exhibition catalogues from 1944 through 1963.

¹²⁵ Vivian T. Turner, "Aden Gallery Displaying 'Negro in Art' in Connection with Negro History Week," *Washington Tribune*, February 19, 1944.

saw her with Professor Herring. . . . Although Alma was a tiny person, she stood out in a crowd because of her natural presence and her spontaneous enjoyment of festive occasions.¹²⁶

Thomas began showing her own work at the Barnett Aden in the early 1950s, participating in at least seven group exhibitions during the decade. In 1954 she was featured in a show called “Six Washington Painters” and was singled out by a writer for the *Washington Star*, who said: “Alma Thomas impressed me as the best of the group, with a street scene and two still-life arrangements, naturalistic in forms, but much simplified as to details.”¹²⁷ Thomas was by this time taking evening and weekend classes at American University, where she studied with Robert Gates, Ben Summerford, and Jacob Kainen.¹²⁸ Beginning as a figural painter, she gradually moved toward a more abstract idiom. After a long awaited trip to Europe in 1958, she began to do lively watercolors based on natural phenomena. As Tritobia Benjamin notes: “During these years she leaped from representationalism to Cubism to Abstract Expressionism, arriving finally at the threshold of a signature abstract style marked by colorful responses to nature.”¹²⁹ (Fig. 38)

By 1959, when Thomas was one of four artists featured in the Barnett Aden’s sixteenth anniversary exhibition, some of her paintings had become complete abstractions. Two of her five works on view were titled as such—*Blue Abstraction* and

¹²⁶ Adelyn D. Breeskin, “Alma Thomas: An Appreciation,” in *A Life in Art: Alma Thomas, 1891-1978*, by Merry A. Foresta (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press for the National Museum of American Art, 1981), 7-8.

¹²⁷ “Six Washingtonians,” *Washington Star*, March 28, 1965. The other artists were Theresa Abbott, Gabriel Cherin, Gloria Besser Green, Babette Kasmire, and Anita Wertheim.

¹²⁸ Thomas enrolled at American University in 1950, at age fifty-nine, and continued taking evening and weekend classes for the next ten years.

¹²⁹ Benjamin, *Alma W. Thomas*.

Red Abstraction.¹³⁰ Thomas is best known today for paintings completed after 1966, when she created a group of works for a solo exhibition at Howard University Gallery of Art. These paintings were radically different—with layers of translucent paint hovering behind bright patterns gleaned from nature. (Fig. 39) Later writers grouped these works with those of the Color Field artists, and certainly Thomas was influenced by the work of Louis, Davis, and Noland, but, according to Jacob Kainen, she also studied the work of European artists, especially Lucio Fontana, Giuseppe Capogrossi, and Han Hartung. As Kainen said,

Alma did not fit into the Washington Color School. She did not stain; on the contrary, she painted with loaded brush on sized and primed canvas. She was not interested in flatness pursued to its dogmatic limits....Hers were vertical, horizontal, or circular bands of short, brisk, uneven strokes of paint that partially covered subtle underlying movements.¹³¹

Kainen, as noted earlier, moved to Washington in 1942 to take a job at the Smithsonian, but he remained closely connected to the New York art scene. During his time in New York, Kainen worked tirelessly for progressive causes. He joined the Artists Union and the John Reed Club, participating in activities sponsored by both of these groups. He began writing for *Art Front*, the journal of the Artists Union, in 1935, and he wrote occasionally for the *The Daily Worker* and *The New Masses*. He and several friends, including Alice Neel and Joseph Solman, admired European Expressionism—the emotional stridency, the jarring formal qualities, and much of the subject matter, especially the alienation of city streets. Stylistically, as noted by Berman, Kainen

¹³⁰ There were a number of these “red abstractions,” as Thomas called them. One dated 1959 is now owned by the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

¹³¹ Kainen, “Order and Emotion,” in *Alma W. Thomas: A Retrospective of the Paintings*, Fort Wayne Museum of Art (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 1998), 33.

“explored abstraction and figuration at his own pace,”¹³² yet, by 1942, he was “seemingly on the verge of joining that loose coalition of painters and sculptors who would later make up the New York School.”¹³³

In Washington Kainen held his first solo show at the short-lived G Place Gallery¹³⁴ in 1944, and began exhibiting in group shows at the Barnett Aden Gallery soon thereafter. He was featured in a group show of six artists’ work in 1947, along with Jack Berkman, William Calfee, Pietro Lazzari, Jack Perlmutter, and John N. Robinson. Kainen was represented by four paintings, including *Rose Window*—described in the *Washington Post* as “harmonious” and “outstanding.”¹³⁵ In that same year Kainen was part of the group of artists who established the Washington Workshop Center in 1947. He was friends with Noland and Louis, although he did not consider himself part of the Color School group. During a workshop session in 1954, Kainen was invited to collaborate on staining a canvas, but he declined. “I did not want to sacrifice mass,” he later recalled. “Pouring, soaking in the canvas, you gain something, but you lose something, too, a sense of density and body, which was part of what I had in mind.”¹³⁶

Kainen was represented in the exhibition “Abstractions: New York and Washington Artists” held in 1954 at the Barnett Aden. His painting *Blue Sail* shared the space with works by Louis, Noland, Thomas, Gene Davis, and Irene Rice Pereira.¹³⁷

Kainen was known for his independent type of abstraction. He was familiar with Rothko,

¹³² Berman, 9.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Kainen referred to this as Porter’s gallery at G Place.

¹³⁵ Jane Watson Crane, “Six-Man Show at Barnet-Aden [*sic*] Is Uneven But Never Dull,” *Washington Post*, May 18, 1947.

¹³⁶ Berman, 29.

¹³⁷ Barnett Aden Gallery, *Abstractions: New York and Washington Artists* (Washington D.C.: Barnett Aden Gallery, 1954). Of the twenty-two works in this exhibition, ten were designated as part of the gallery’s collection.

de Kooning, and Pollock, but his studies took him in his own direction. Unlike most abstract expressionist artists, Kainen did not think that it was necessary to paint on a large scale, which to him was a bid for attention.¹³⁸ *Blue Sail* and several other works by Kainen were acquired by the Barnett Aden Gallery and remained part of the collection for several years.¹³⁹ (Fig. 40) Jean Lawlor Cohen dubbed him “the unofficial dean of Washington artists” in 1988, and his esteem has only grown in the years since.¹⁴⁰

Kainen was not the only Washington artist with New York connections. Pietro Lazzari, who showed frequently at the Barnett Aden, was represented in New York by the prestigious (Betty) Parsons Gallery. In fact, Lazzari’s solo show at Parsons in November of 1946 was only the third show at the gallery after its opening on East 57th Street.¹⁴¹ Parsons, who was known as one of the first to exhibit the work of Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, and Clifford Still, was an enthusiastic promoter of Lazzari’s rather unusual work.

In Washington Lazzari began showing at the Barnett Aden Gallery during its first year of operation. In 1947 he was part of the six-person exhibition mentioned above (with Kainen). A local reviewer singled out Lazzari’s work, especially *Things We Don’t Talk About*, which featured “a single eloquent figure.” She noted that Lazzari’s works were “carried out in cement, a feat which has to be seen to be believed. The effect of lightness and plasticity he achieves in this medium is a craftsman’s secret he has worked out for

¹³⁸ Berman, 30.

¹³⁹ Kainen’s work was in the collection as late as 1974, but it is not in the contemporary collection.

¹⁴⁰ “Hall of Fame,” *Koan* (July 1996), 11. In this 1996 poll of readers, Jacob Kainen was voted as the inaugural member of this publication’s (virtual) Hall of Fame for Washington artists. Sam Gilliam was the runner-up.

¹⁴¹ In the early forties Parsons curated shows for the Wakefield Bookshop in New York, but the gallery on East 57th Street was the first to bear her name. The inaugural exhibition was “Northwest Coast Indian Art,” and the second was a solo of works by Ad Reinhardt.

himself.”¹⁴² (Fig. 41) Lazzari’s work was part of the Barnett Aden’s collection from about 1954 until at least 1959, when it was shown in the anniversary exhibition at the gallery.

Several other artists based in New York showed regularly at the Barnett Aden, including Theodoros Stamos, Merton Simpson, Irene Rice Pereira, and Therese Schwartz. Stamos showed at the gallery frequently during the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s. I did not locate evidence of a solo exhibition for Stamos at the Barnett Aden, but it is clear that his work became part of the gallery collection at least as early as 1952.

Usually referred to as the youngest of the “first generation” Abstract Expressionists, Stamos was included in that now famous 1951 photograph taken by Nina Leen for *Life* magazine. (Fig. 23) Before becoming one of “The Irascibles,” Stamos began by exhibiting in New York at Betty Parson’s Wakefield Gallery in 1943. He soon met many of the European artists in exile in the city, such as Arshile Gorky and Fernand Leger. He also met Adolph Gottlieb and Barnett Newman and visited Alfred Steiglitz’ gallery where he admired the work of Arthur Dove. Stamos’ work was purchased by Duncan Phillips as early as 1949, and he became a friend of the Phillips family, staying in their home while in Washington for his first solo exhibition at the Phillips in 1950. Phillips collected numerous works by Stamos, featuring the artist as one of his collection “units,” and at least seven paintings remain in the Phillips Collection.¹⁴³ Stamos not only had the support of Duncan Phillips, he also had the benefit of many influential contacts, including those made while teaching briefly at Black Mountain College in North Carolina in 1950. It was there that he met artist Kenneth Noland and the influential art critic

¹⁴² Crane, “Six-Man Show.”

¹⁴³ Passantino, 394.

Clement Greenberg. Yet, Stamos did not abandon his friends at the Barnett Aden Gallery, where he continued to exhibit throughout the 1950s. Several paintings became part of the gallery collection, including *Spotlight on Houses*, a small abstract work boldly signed on the lower right part of the canvas, “For Professor Herring, Stamos.”¹⁴⁴

Merton Simpson, called a “second generation” Abstract Expressionist by art historian Sharon Patton, was part of a group of young black painters who met in Greenwich Village, hanging out at a jazz club called the Five Spot Café. While several mainstream abstract artists hung out at the Cedar Tavern, this group preferred the Five Spot Café, where they could hear jazz played every night. These black artists, including Vincent Smith and Richard Mayhew, became close friends with Simpson, traveling together and studying in Paris for a period of time.¹⁴⁵

Simpson had two solo exhibitions at the Barnett Aden—one in May 1951 and another in March 1956. He was only twenty-three in 1951, and his solo that year was his first ever. In the foreword to the catalogue artist Robert Gwathmey praised the young artist, calling him “an inspiring and original talent.”¹⁴⁶ A writer for the *Washington Post* was equally impressed, and added that Simpson’s style was “somewhat reminiscent of Ryder, despite the total difference in color...”¹⁴⁷

His solo show in 1956 was a group of paintings and collages he called “Sea Things.” The *Washington Post* reviewer described him as a “lyric and poetic” abstract painter, who is “particularly exciting when he paints effects of light, using incandescent

¹⁴⁴ At one time there were at least seven paintings by Stamos in the gallery collection, but *Spotlight on Houses* is the only one that is part of the contemporary collection officially known as Robert L. Johnson from the Barnett Aden Collection, Washington, D.C.

¹⁴⁵ Sharon Patton, *African American Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 176.

¹⁴⁶ Robert Gwathmey, foreword to *Merton Simpson* (Washington, D.C.: Barnett Aden Gallery, 1951).

¹⁴⁷ “At Barnett Aden,” *Washington Post*, May 1951.

yellows and reds against subdued backgrounds.” This show came just after Simpson was featured in the “Younger American Artists” exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in New York in 1955.¹⁴⁸

Irene Rice Pereira resided in New York, but made frequent visits to Washington, where Herring showed her work during the 1930s at Howard University. During the 1940s Pereira began producing canvas paintings as well as multi-layered glass paintings with complex light-filled planes of intricate linear patterning. By the mid-1940s these startling geometric abstractions had become recognized in New York, where museums had begun to collect her work and where she was chosen in 1946 for the important “Fourteen Americans” show at the Museum of Modern Art. In Washington she became one of the “stars” of the Barnett Aden Gallery, where she showed regularly from 1943 through the 1950s, with a solo exhibition at the gallery in December 1948 (through January 1949). This early exposure brought her to the attention of the Phillips and Corcoran galleries, where she was given solo shows in 1952 and 1956 respectively. In fact, all evidence suggests that Phillips not only attended her 1948-1949 solo exhibition at the Barnett Aden Gallery, but that he purchased one of her glass constructions, *Transversion* for his own gallery at this time.¹⁴⁹ (Fig. 42) As Pereira’s friend Therese Schwartz noted, (speaking of the Barnett Aden Gallery):

The gallery was a meeting place for all artists; regular attendants at its openings included the president and faculty of Howard University, local collectors and curators of the Phillips Collection, the Corcoran Gallery and the National Gallery. Both the Phillips and the Corcoran people were

¹⁴⁸ “The Barnett Aden Gallery is holding....” *Washington Post*, April 8, 1956.

¹⁴⁹ Barnett Aden Gallery, *Pereira* (Washington, D.C.: Barnett Aden Gallery, 1948). *Transversion* was listed in this catalogue as one of fourteen works by the artist presented at the gallery “December 12, 1948 through January 1949.” The Phillips Collection currently owns *Transversion* and states that it was “acquired in 1949.” In the 1952 catalogue for an exhibition at the Barnett Aden called “Privately Owned,” *Transversion* is listed as “Lent by the Philips [*sic*] Gallery.”

familiar with Pereira's work, having seen it for years at Barnett Aden [*sic*], and in 1952 she had an extensive one-woman show at the Phillips, with another solo following four years later at the Corcoran. The parties given by Lonnie Aden before and after the openings of these shows were sumptuous, and we all wore our version of evening clothes.¹⁵⁰

Schwartz described their meeting in 1951, just after Pereira's return from a sojourn in England: "Lonnie Aden, as usual, had arranged a party for her."¹⁵¹ A group photograph from 1951 inside the living room at the Randolph Place townhouse probably depicts this occasion. Standing in front of the large bay windows are Professor Herring, James Porter, and Beatrice Rudes. Seated on the floor is Aden—beaming at the camera—and Therese Schwartz, while Pereira is on the sofa, second from the right.¹⁵² At this party Schwartz learned that Herring and Aden "thought of Pereira as 'family,'" adding, "which is the way they also regarded me."¹⁵³

Although Brooklyn-born Schwartz was living in Washington during the early 1950s, she became close friends with the New York artist. This was largely through Pereira's association with and frequent visits to the Barnett Aden Gallery. As he had done for Pereira in the 1930s, Herring offered Schwartz her first solo exhibition at the Howard University Gallery in 1946, and Aden gave her second solo at the Barnett Aden Gallery in 1952.¹⁵⁴ Unlike Pereira, Schwartz did not pursue geometric abstraction, but rather

¹⁵⁰ Therese Schwartz, "De-Mystifying Pereira," *Art in America* 67 (October 1979): 117. The goal of this article, according to Schwartz, was to "set straight" the record about Pereira. She wanted to make sure that Pereira's writings were not used to diminish or distort her "significant place in the history of contemporary American art." My goal in quoting from Schwartz' article is similar—to make sure that the character of the Barnett Aden Gallery is not distorted by subsequent second-hand accounts.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.* Note that Schwartz indicates that there were many "parties" at the Barnett Aden Gallery—not just the gallery's own exhibition openings—but also parties "before and after" artists' exhibitions at other institutions, and "welcome back" parties for returning artists.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 119. Beatrice Rudes had been the director of the Washington Institute for Contemporary Art (see Chapter 2) just prior to this photograph. Others identified in the group include George Reavey, Pereira's husband, seated next her, and Therese Schwartz' husband, David, standing, second from the right.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁵⁴ "Schwartz at Aden," *Washington Star*, March 23, 1952. This article calls the show "her third solo exhibition, her first having been held at Howard University in 1946, and a second at the AVC head

sought a more gestural effect. Both Herring, in his foreword to the exhibition catalogue, and contemporary reviewers describe Schwartz as an abstract expressionist. The *Washington Times-Herald* called her “a transplanted New Yorker,” whose “erudite abstract expressionist approach is rare to Washington.”¹⁵⁵ In her (unidentified) painting that illustrates the exhibition catalogue, one sees a densely marked surface with strong hints of both calligraphy and geometry, (with many small and roughly painted circles and squares). (Fig. 24) A writer for the *Washington Post* noted that “[h]er canvases employ the principles of tension, resolved in closely related areas of space, color and depth.”¹⁵⁶

Schwartz eventually returned to New York, where she pursued a varied artistic and literary career.¹⁵⁷ Her work has been shown in Paris, Basel, and Madrid and is in numerous collections. Schwartz was part of the Barnett Aden collection from 1952 until sometime after 1968, when her work was included in the exhibition at Morgan State College.

It was Schwartz who described the Barnett Aden Gallery in the 1950s as “the most important contemporary gallery south of New York City,” but she did not base this characterization on the simple fact that a few of the later Color School Painters exhibited there (as later writers did). Schwartz acknowledged that Louis and Noland showed at the gallery, but also Hale Woodruff, Lois Mailou Jones, and Theodoros Stamos. Her article did not diminish the import of the gallery’s many exhibitions by focusing on the later Color School movement.

quarters.” I did not locate the solo at Howard in the annual reports of the Art Department, but both she and Herring mentioned in writing this first exhibition. I do have evidence of her participation in at least eight group exhibitions at the Barnett Aden Gallery.

¹⁵⁵ “In a future column, we hope to” *Washington Times-Herald*, March 2, 1952.

¹⁵⁶ “The Barnett Aden Gallery currently is” *Washington Post*, February 3, 1952.

¹⁵⁷ Schwartz is recognized for a series she wrote for *Art in America* called “Politicization of the Avant-Garde.” These articles appeared in 1971 and 1973.

While not over emphasizing these artists, I will document their exhibition record at the Barnett Aden Gallery. As explained in chapter two, the term “Color Painters” was not employed until 1965, when an exhibition at the Washington Gallery of Modern Art featured the work of six artists: Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland, Gene Davis, Thomas Downing, Howard Mehring, and Paul Reed.¹⁵⁸ As noted in the catalogue for that exhibition, several of these “color painters” showed locally at Jefferson Place Gallery beginning in 1957, but what was not mentioned was that three of the six showed at the Barnett Aden as early as 1954.¹⁵⁹

In what may have been their first time showing together, Gene Davis, Morris Louis, and Kenneth Noland exhibited one painting each in the large Barnett Aden show in 1954 titled “Abstractions: New York and Washington Artists.”¹⁶⁰ These three were part of another group show of “Contemporary Artists” at the Barnett Aden in January 1956.¹⁶¹ In fact, Davis exhibited at the gallery at least three times in 1956: in the “Contemporary Artists” show in January, another group show in June, and in the 13th anniversary exhibition held in October. (Figs. 43, 44, 45)

Davis, who was a journalist before initiating an art career in the early 1950s, studied with Jacob Kainen for a number of years, and may have sought artistic advice from Aden during this time. Several recall their friendship; consider the following excerpt from an interview of artist Jacob Kainen by his wife, Ruth Kainen, in 1984:

¹⁵⁸ Washington Gallery of Modern Art, *Color Painters*.

¹⁵⁹ In Morrison’s biography of Louis, he stated Louis showed at the Barnett Aden Gallery in 1952. I have not located information to verify this, but Noland would certainly have visited the gallery prior to 1954. See Morrison.

¹⁶⁰ During this same year, Louis and Noland were part of “new talent” exhibitions at Kootz in New York City.

¹⁶¹ Alma Thomas, whose work is sometimes grouped with that of these “color painters,” was part of this exhibition, although her style remained largely figural in 1956.

RCK [Ruth Kainen]: Alma always claimed that Aden was a strong influence on Davis. She said Aden was very severe with him.

JK [Jacob Kainen]: Aden was severe with him. Gene was undergoing analysis and worried about not getting enough attention and that sort of thing and that's when Aden was severe on him saying, 'You shouldn't be worried about that. Produce a body of work.'"¹⁶²

Unlike Davis, Noland eagerly gave credit to Aden and his work at the gallery. He loaned one of his signature works, *Red Target*, for the 1961 tribute to the Barnett Aden Gallery, held at the Associated Artists' Gallery in Washington, D.C. As described earlier, it was Noland who later told Sam Gilliam that the gallery played a crucial role in the early 1950s by "giving them a chance."

Davis and Louis were all in the gallery collection during the 1950s. This is significant considering that the works of these two Color School artists did not become part of the Phillips Collection until the 1960s, and most even later.¹⁶³

Yet it is important to remember that the Color School painters were part of a vast number of artists pursuing various modes of expression in the 1950s in Washington. Neither Aden nor Herring actively promoted one mode of expression over another. They featured the geometric abstraction of Pereira, but also presented the more gestural abstractions of Schwartz, Simpson, Stamos, and others. One could not anticipate future

¹⁶² Ruth and Jacob Kainen, transcript of unpublished conversation, November 28, 1978, in preparation for talk titled "Art in Washington—1940s-1950s" given at the Women's National Democratic Club on December 6, 1978. Page 9, Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C., Kainen Papers. Davis later became notorious for misrepresenting his early influences. For instance, when interviewed by Barbara Rose for *Artforum* in 1971, Davis recounted his training, but did not mention taking art lessons from Jacob Kainen for seven years. After publication, this interview brought a chastening letter from Cornelia Noland, who claimed that Davis misrepresented his relationship with Kenneth Noland. *Artforum* published this letter in their May 1971 issue. Avis Berman, "Images from a Life," in *Jacob Kainen* (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1994), 41 n.82.

¹⁶³ Gene Davis is represented in the Phillips Collection by three paintings: *Black Flowers*, 1952, *Rain Dance I*, 1960, and *Red Devil*, 1959. All three were gifts to the collection—the first two in 1974 and the later in 1982. Morris Louis is also represented by three paintings: *Approach*, 1962, *Blue Column*, 1960, and *Number 182*, 1961. The first two of these were gifts to the collection in the early 1990s and the later was "acquired" by the collection in 1963. http://www.phillipscollection.org/american_art/index.htm.

visits based on those seen just a few months earlier. For instance, Pereira's solo show in December of 1952 was followed a few months later by the fantastical paintings of Juanita Marbrook. The two women's painting styles could not have been more different, despite the fact that Pereira and Marbrook were sisters.¹⁶⁴ Marbrook, who lived in north Africa for a number of years, painted, according to the noted French art critic Michel Georges-Michel, with "an imagination that is beyond surrealism or abstract painting...."¹⁶⁵ In yet another contrast, later that year the gallery showed the abstract oils of New York artist Sylvia Carewe, whose paintings would (by 1957) become designs for tapestries, woven at an atelier in Aubusson, France, and exhibited in New York galleries.¹⁶⁶ (Fig. 46)

In 1961, in the months preceding his death, Aden was still promoting "new talent" at the gallery. That year began with a solo exhibition (her first) for Miriam Mitchell, who had studied with local artist Andrea Zerega.¹⁶⁷ During the summer months one could see the paintings of Jane Love, an artist known locally for her sculpture, in a first-time exhibition of her painted work. In the *Washington Star* the show was called the "Week's Art Discovery,"¹⁶⁸ and in the *Post*, critic Leslie Judd Ahlander noted the "heavy, rather visceral forms [that] continue to unfold and twist as they push their way skyward."¹⁶⁹

Aden's death came one day before the opening of the eighteenth anniversary exhibition at the gallery. For this important occasion he chose Baltimore artist Albert

¹⁶⁴ Marbrook was Pereira's younger sister. Her name at birth was Anita Rice, but she exhibited under several names, including Nita Rice, Juanita Marbrook, and later Juanita Guccione. (Marbrook was anglicized version of Marbrouk, the surname of her son's Algerian father.)

¹⁶⁵ Michel Georges-Michel, foreword to *Juanita Marbrook* (Washington, D.C.: Barnett Aden Gallery, 1949).

¹⁶⁶ Susan Drysdale, "Sylvia Carew: Tapestry Art," *Art Voices: From Around the World 2* (April 1963): 26-27.

¹⁶⁷ Art reviewers in both the *Post* and the *Star* saw her work as derivative of Zerega. The exhibition catalogue is illustrated by one painting—*The Eggs*—which it seems was chosen for the Barnett Aden Gallery Collection. Barnett Aden Gallery, *Exhibition of Paintings by Miriam Mitchell* (Washington, D.C.: Barnett Aden Gallery, 1960).

¹⁶⁸ Frank Geitlein, "Week's Art Discovery at the Barnett Aden," *Washington Star*, June 18, 1961.

¹⁶⁹ Leslie Judd Ahlander, "Art Notes," *Washington Post*, July 16, 1961.

Sangiama, a graduate (MFA) of Yale School of Art and Architecture, who had just begun a teaching career at the Maryland Institute of Art. The opening was postponed until November, when the *Post* reviewer described the “irridescence” of Sangiamo’s “strong semi-abstract forms,” and praised the artist as “a promising talent and one to watch.”¹⁷⁰ It seems that Aden’s eye for talent was as sharp as ever.

PERSONAL TASTE OF HERRING AND ADEN

It is difficult to ascertain the personal aesthetic taste of Aden or Herring. As discussed in chapter one, the present collection cannot be used in this manner, because its content has changed markedly since the gallery closed. The reconstructed exhibition record (Appendix) is somewhat more revealing, but only in a general manner. For instance, it is clear that the gallery showed primarily living artists, with only a few historic works by deceased black artists. It is also clear that Aden did not champion any particular trend, as some New York galleries did during this time.¹⁷¹ There are many artists working in abstract modes as well as artists exploring narrative or figurative styles documented in the list of exhibitions at the gallery.

The artists listed represent most of the contemporary trends in American art, ranging from the social realism of Phillip Evergood and Prentiss Taylor, to the symbolism of Bernice Cross and Harold Giese, to the geometric abstractions of Pereira, to the precisionism of Ralston Crawford and to the realism of John N. Robinson, Jr. There are landscapes, still lifes, portraits, abstractions, and genre scenes. Within this

¹⁷⁰ Leslie Judd Ahlander, “Egypt’s Treasures at the National,” *Washington Post*, November 5, 1961.

¹⁷¹For instance, the Julien Levy Gallery was known for promoting surrealism. The Betty Parsons Gallery was known for championing the early work of certain Abstract Expressionists.

group of close to 300 artists, there were no doubt favorites, but one can only guess that those who showed more often were personal favorites. In the smaller group of known solo exhibitions the same diversity of artistic style is found. One might assume that those four artists who had two solos at the Barnett Aden Gallery were particular favorites. These were Elizabeth Catlett, David Driskell, Jack Perlmutter, and Merton Simpson. This small group is interesting because there are two black artists and two white, there is one woman and three men, and all four are trained artists dealing with varying degrees of abstraction.

Many relate that Aden was sympathetic and encouraging to young artists and offered them solo exhibitions when he felt they had created a significant body of work. Aden himself said, “We have two aims: to help new talent and to bring art of superior quality to the community.”¹⁷² Many commented on Aden’s high standards for the gallery. For instance, Leslie Judd Portner, the art critic for the *Post*, wrote, upon the occasion of the gallery’s tenth anniversary:

The Barnett Aden Gallery has been one of the decisive influences on the development of art in Washington over the past ten years, and has pioneered in presenting new and exciting personalities to the local scene. Its door has stayed open in spite of many adversities, but it has never compromised with the standards it has set itself.¹⁷³

It is probable that on more than one occasion the gallery showed art that Herring or Aden personally disliked. It seems that Herring admired abstract art more than Aden did. Driskell recalled an incident from the early 1950s when Morris Louis came by the

¹⁷² Aden, quoted in “Washington Galleries,” *Washington Post*, October 14, 1961. Here “quality” is used in a more general sense than certain New York critics used the term. Ann Gibson describes how, during the 1930s and 1940s, the term quality was increasingly used as a “period concept” identified with abstraction and “denied to art with narrative and even symbolic meanings.” See Gibson, *Abstract Expressionism*, xx.

¹⁷³ Leslie Judd Portner, “Barnett Aden Celebrates its 10th Birthday,” *Washington Post*, November 22, 1953.

gallery, carrying one of his characteristic “veil” paintings, with the intention of donating the painting to the gallery collection. Aden, however, met him at the door and said, “But I do not like your paintings!” Professor Herring defused the situation by asking Driskell, who was working at the gallery, to take the painting and put it in the basement. “So I very carefully carried the painting downstairs, where I worked, and put it on a hot water pipe and a cold water pipe running the length of the basement. And it was stored there until after Mr. Aden’s death.”¹⁷⁴

The great variety of artists shown at the gallery suggests that Aden’s goal was to exhibit the full range of contemporary art and, pointedly, to include African American artists at every juncture. This goal obscured, for the most part, any personal likes or dislikes of the gallery owners.

¹⁷⁴ Driskell, interview by author, April 2002.

CONCLUSION

In March of 1961 an exhibition was held at the Associated Artists' Gallery in Washington that paid tribute to the Barnett Aden Gallery. In the foreword of the exhibition catalogue, Robert Richman (then director of the Institute of Contemporary Arts in Washington), noted how unusual it was for one gallery to honor another gallery in this fashion, with the participation of more than fifty artists. Richman praised Aden for the risks he took in creating the gallery and for the high standards of quality that he maintained through the years. He added, "It is because of galleries such as Aden's, galleries that had to answer to no trustees, no purchasing committees, that modern art has flourished."¹ Richman explained further,

When one gallery and more than fifty artists join in tribute to another gallery and its Director, there are reasons of considerable substance. One is to honor a pioneer in Washington who sought new talent when there was a risk in that search. Another is to approve his standards of quality when the standards in the visual arts themselves were changing and inconstant. Still another is to praise the perseverance of Alonzo Aden, its Director, who in creating his gallery steadfastly took the risks and sought the best.²

The artists in this exhibition were meant to represent those shown over the years and included many of those mentioned in the previous chapter, as well as Antonia Bader, Marjorie Phillips, Sargent Johnson, Bill Taylor, and Gloria Marquez. Individuals loaned works for the exhibition, as well as galleries, including the Franz Bader, Jefferson Place, and Phillips in Washington; and the Willard, Emmerich, Parma, and "G" galleries in New York. The show included twenty of the most acclaimed black artists in the nation, both

¹ Robert Richman, quoted in William McPherson, "Alonzo Aden Wins Gallery Accolade," *Washington Post*, March 9, 1961.

² Robert Richman, foreword to *Exhibition of Contemporary Artists Assembled in Tribute to the Barnett Aden Gallery* (Washington, DC: Associated Artists' Gallery, 1961)

those working locally such as Jones, Wells, Porter, Driskell, Bill Taylor, Thomas, Dempsey, and Charles Sebree, as well as those who worked primarily in New York, including Lawrence, Simpson, White, Lewis, Bearden, and Burke. Other black artists were Harold Cousins, who had just returned from Africa, and Chicago artists Joseph Kersey and Hughie Lee-Smith. There was one work by the sculptor Sargent Johnson, suggesting that this California artist may have exhibited at the Barnett Aden. The white artists included most of the familiar Washington names such as Perlmutter, Samuel Bookatz, Jacob Kainen, Kenneth Noland, Helen Reddie, and Robert Gates. Along with these were New York artists Theodoros Stamos, I Rice Pereira, Hans Hofmann, and Therese Schwartz.

The exhibition was well attended, with guests including Secretary of Labor, Arthur Goldberg, Mrs. Dean Rusk (wife of the Secretary of State), and Lillian Evanti, the first African American opera star. Aden himself was “slightly overwhelmed.” He said, “This is an experience I didn’t anticipate, and because it comes from another gallery it’s doubly felt.”³ This “lifetime achievement award” for Aden and the Barnett Aden Gallery may have seemed premature to some, but in retrospect the tribute was both timely and poignant. Aden died suddenly just five months later on October 13, one day before the opening of the eighteenth anniversary exhibition at the Barnett Aden Gallery. The gallery continued under the leadership of Herring, his friend and former student David Driskell, and sporadic assistance from others, including black artist Carroll Sockwell, but Aden’s death brought to a close the continuous exhibition schedule that had been maintained for eighteen years.

³ Alonzo Aden, quoted in William McPherson, “Alonzo Aden Wins Gallery Accolade,” *Washington Post*, March 9, 1961.

In this concluding chapter, I would like to address why the gallery and Aden were held in such high esteem by such a great number of artists and patrons. The gallery went far beyond the traditional functions of a gallery and carried out significant psychological and ideological tasks for the artists, the patrons, the gallery owners, and the art community of Washington, D.C. This small private gallery filled certain needs not met by other art institutions, and in the process became a unique cultural space, where strict racial, social, and artistic boundaries collapsed—or at least became porous—allowing for a measure of cultural diversity not realized again until much later in the twentieth century.

By providing an exhibition space for local artists, the Barnett Aden helped fill a critical void in Washington, D.C. The owners reached out to artists of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, but an underlying objective was to show the work of deserving African American artists, who faced both subtle and overt prejudice at traditional institutions.⁴ Government support had aided many black artists during the 1930s, but by 1943 this support had ended and most had nowhere to show their work. As Washington artist James L. Wells noted in 1974: “The Barnett-Aden Gallery showed the works of artists regardless of race, creed or color at a time when it was nearly impossible for the Negro artist to gain entrance to other galleries local or national.”⁵

While ambitious white artists might venture from Washington to New York for gallery exposure, African American artists found that racism, more than geography, shut

⁴ For instance, Lois Mailou Jones asked her white friend Celine Tabary to take her work to competitive exhibitions at the Corcoran and other institutions, where Jones subsequently won many prizes, which, she felt, would have been denied her had it been known the artist was black. Betty LaDuke, “Lois Mailou Jones: The Grande Dame of African-American Art,” *Woman’s Art Journal* 8 (Fall/Winter 1987/88): 28.

⁵ James L. Wells, quoted in *Anacostia*, 159-60.

them out of the art world. What a thrill it must have been to find the Barnett Aden Gallery, where Herring and Aden encouraged black artists and showed their work in complete parity with that of white artists. The gallery validated the artistic identity of black artists by placing their work alongside that of honored black predecessors, such as Henry Ossawa Tanner, Edward Bannister, and Meta Warrick Fuller. Black artists' work was contextualized within an historical tradition, (in the same way that public museums had always done for white artists). As discussed previously the gallery showed the work of such now well-known black artists as Jacob Lawrence, Lois Mailou Jones, Hale Woodruff, William H. Johnson, and Romare Bearden. Several, including Elizabeth Catlett and David Driskell, had their first major one-person show at the Barnett Aden Gallery.

For African American visitors, the gallery provided an opportunity to see themselves as cultural participants and as subjects (rather than denigrated objects) of representation. Carol Duncan has argued that historically museums have served as “powerful identity-defining machines,” and that the experience of visiting a museum became a “ritual of citizenship.”⁶ However, this was not the case for nonwhite citizens, who found that the racist practices at most museums and galleries only enhanced their sense of disenfranchisement. Not so at the Barnett Aden Gallery, where black visitors saw a more inclusive vision of culture. Attendance at the many openings even attained a certain ritual quality, requiring an invitation and special attire—the artist Therese Schwartz said, “We all wore our version of evening clothes.”⁷ There was special music (always classical) and special food (both Herring and Aden were excellent cooks).

⁶ Duncan,, 100.

⁷ Therese Schwartz, 117.

Leading black figures, such as Langston Hughes and the poet Georgia Douglas Johnson, mingled with foreign ambassadors, members of the President's cabinet, and even Eleanor Roosevelt, who was photographed signing the guestbook. For the African American visitors, these were affirming experiences, validating their participation in culture and society.

At the same time white artists and visitors were afforded a rare opportunity to see contemporary African American art, and (just as rare) to enjoy an interracial social group within a black-owned home. They learned that African American art could not be pigeonholed into a neat racial category, since black artists clearly were employing a wide range of styles and subject matter. Certain works disrupted their normative white viewpoint. Paintings such as Lois Jones' *Mob Victim* and John Farrar's *Grocery Boy* brought them face to face with the effects of racism. White visitors surely viewed these with heightened awareness in the integrated atmosphere of the Barnett Aden. In fact the gracious atmosphere of the gallery served to "naturalize" the idea of integration, just as legal, political, and social forces persistently tried to "naturalize" segregation throughout the rest of Washington, D.C.

For the founders of the gallery—Professor Herring and Mr. Aden—the gallery conferred more status than income. The gallery survived largely on small membership fees and donations from numerous friends and supporters. In this respect it functioned much like a small museum, but the owners, through their wide range of connections, did serve as dealers for several artists. David Driskell described what he called "gentleman's agreements" with artists who were offered one-person exhibitions. All sales from these shows went to the individual artists, but one work was donated to the gallery collection.

However, the Barnett Aden Gallery did something even more significant for James Herring and Alonzo Aden. It distinguished them as art professionals, separate from the insulating world of Howard University. The gallery enhanced their status as respected members of the black intellectual elite of Washington, and their work with young artists and students showed their dedication to the black community at large.

By reaching out to mainstream institutions, Herring and Aden achieved a certain status within the white community as well, proving themselves social partners at a time when most discourse treated African Americans primarily as “social problems.” There is an oft-repeated story that, during the thirties, Professor Herring accompanied Duncan Phillips, director of the Phillips Collection, on some of his buying trips to New York City. Some have even suggested that Herring was influential in Phillips’ decision to purchase half of Jacob Lawrence’s great multi-paneled series called *The Migration of the Negro*. And perhaps the Phillips Collection itself, housed within a sumptuous mansion near Dupont Circle in Washington, inspired Herring’s own more modest gallery-within-a-home.

I would also suggest that for Herring and Aden, as single men sharing a home in a middle-class neighborhood, the gallery served an additional function. The gallery provided a legitimizing framework for their personal relationship—important in what was then (even more than now) a dangerously homophobic society. The gallery also provided regular excuses for the two men to entertain—as business partners. The invitation-only openings effectively functioned as private parties, where Professor Herring and Mr. Aden showed off their home and continental lifestyle.

For the larger community the Barnett Aden Gallery served as a crossroads. Herring and Aden attracted museum directors and gallery owners from around the region, introducing them to black art and inspiring some to organize their own black exhibitions. In 1944, with the assistance of James Herring and Alain Locke, the tiny G. Place Gallery of Washington organized an exhibition of African American art called “New Names in American Art.” Adelyn Breeskin subsequently took this show to the Baltimore Museum of Art.

So what was it that allowed this little gallery to accomplish such a complex network of tasks? By now, some of the crucial factors should be obvious. First and foremost, the interracial exhibition program provided a cross-cultural experience, unique for the time period. As Keith Morrison has noted, this encouraged “exploration of a wider world view of art,” which was an important thematic concept in the development of modernism.⁸ At the Barnett Aden Gallery black art was integrated into the narrative of American art in a way that was celebratory but not patronizing.

Another critical factor was the force of the two personalities who founded the Barnett Aden Gallery. Many have commented that people came to the gallery as much for the company of Herring and Aden as they did for the art. The dapper and gregarious Alonzo Aden and the calm but regal Professor Herring were perfect hosts. Both men had built solid reputations at Howard University, and both, incidentally, were light-skinned, enabling them to move discreetly within the white community when necessary.

Finally, I’d like to comment more at length on the significance of the location of the gallery and the space created within. I would argue that this created space allowed for a type of interaction impossible anywhere else in Washington. Located in an African

⁸ Morrison, 11.

American neighborhood, it was a space where black visitors felt safe—both physically and psychically—from the abuse of the larger society. It was also a space where whites were comfortable, due to the reputation of the hosts and (what was called) the particular “niceness” of the neighborhood—after all, as one white artist noted “it was on the edge of the black neighborhood.”⁹

Overall, the Barnett Aden Gallery was a fascinating mixture of the public and the private. The gallery was public in the sense that it was open to the public during certain hours each day, but this public was limited by several factors. First, since the gallery was located within a black neighborhood; white patrons had to choose to make a visit. Second, there was no sign out front—only a small plaque beside the front door identified the residence as a gallery. Third, the gallery did not advertise. The only announcements to the public were short listings in the art sections of local papers. Finally, the openings were by invitation only, and Professor Herring was not above denying admittance to those “not invited.” All of these factors encouraged a certain type of visitor and provided a degree of insulation from the surrounding racist society.

Inside the gallery there were no clear boundaries between the private and public areas. Certain elements suggested the business aspect of the home (including the impressive round desk), but the private functions of the space were never far from mind. Visitors arranged themselves on the comfortable sofa, crowded around the dining table for hors d'oeuvres, and even ventured upstairs to view the print collection. Students often used Professor Herring's personal library, and needy students rented rooms on occasion.

⁹ Asher, interview.

Professor Herring and Mr. Aden expanded the limitations of the small space by melding the activities of the gallery into their daily life.

Visitors found this combination of home and gallery appealing. Photographs from openings show the gallery crowded with people. The small rooms and the festive atmosphere forced a sense of intimacy and encouraged social interaction. This ambience contrasted sharply with contemporary theories of exhibition. Brian O’Doherty describes the ideal gallery of the period as a white cube—“unshadowed, white, clean, and artificial,” devoid of furniture, where “eyes and minds are welcome,” but “space occupying bodies are not.”¹⁰ In direct contrast, at the Barnett Aden Gallery, the gracious domestic setting was an integral part of the spectator’s experience. Visitors became even more aware of their own bodily presence, as well as the significance of the harmonious interracial atmosphere.

This created space within a private home resonated deeply with some African American visitors. Quoting the artist Charles White:

The occasion of my first visit to the Barnett-Aden in 1943 was a delightful shock. I was hardly prepared by experience or knowledge to walk through a Gallery that was in a home. Its unique quality struck me immediately. It made so much sense to exhibit works for the home in a home setting. Moreover, it beautifully reflected the personalities of its founders.¹¹

For many African Americans the concept of home was something almost sacred. Not only was home ownership a treasured ideal—it went much deeper. In her essay “Homeplace: A Site of Resistance” bell hooks described how generations of black women created homes that were safe havens—places for healing and respite in the midst of an oppressive reality. The popularity of the Barnett Aden Gallery, safely ensconced in

¹⁰ O’Doherty, 15.

¹¹ Charles White, quoted in Anacostia, 160.

a quiet black neighborhood, reflected on this powerful trope of the home. Inside all was elegant and orderly, watched over by the sometimes imperious Professor Herring, whom Charles White called the very “personification of stability.”¹²

Toni Morrison also uses the metaphor of home in a 1997 essay in which she explores the utopian idea of a “world-in-which-race-does-not-matter.” Morrison explains that she uses the trope of home as a way to clarify her thoughts and to “domesticate the racial project.” As she says to “make it a doable, modern human activity.”¹³ Drawing upon Morrison’s essay, I would argue that Professor Herring and Mr. Aden attempted such a “doable, modern human activity” at the Barnett Aden Gallery. During the 1940s, the obstacles facing African Americans artists must have seemed insurmountable, but Herring and Aden, in creating their own little gallery, found something “doable.” In a sense they quite literally brought home or “domesticated” their own specific racial project—that is, their hope for an art world “in-which-race-does-not-matter.”

In conclusion I would like to point out how all these factors allowed the created space at the Barnett Aden Gallery to attain a particularly “porous” quality. Just as the public and private spaces of the gallery were mingled—the boundaries between white and black art became blurred. Similarly, social space became permeable—visitors transgressed the entrenched racial divides of the city. And as a result, discourse became porous—visitors from diverse backgrounds risked experiencing art and each other in new and unexpected ways. It was this crucial permeability that encouraged the development of a surprisingly intercultural art community in Washington, D.C.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Toni Morrison, “Home,” in *The House that Race Built: black Americans, U.S. Terrain*, ed. Wahneema Lubiano, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997), 3-12.

I hope that this case study of the Barnett Aden Gallery has demonstrated the dramatic possibilities of a private art gallery. By filling needs not met by other institutions, a gallery can do more than sell pictures—it can become something completely new—it can even become an instrument for change, or at least for understanding. In Washington, James Herring and Alonzo Aden had the courage (quoting Toni Morrison) to “step outside established boundaries of the racial imaginary.”¹⁴ Using their own modest home and limited means, they challenged the exclusionary practices of most art institutions, not through direct protest, but by creating an alternative—a special place where one could at least entertain the concept of an art world where-race-did-not-matter.

¹⁴ Ibid., 9.

APPENDIX CHRONOLOGY OF EXHIBITIONS

The following is a list of exhibitions held at the Barnett Aden Gallery between 1943 and 1961. For group shows names of participating artists are provided when known. A question mark indicates that a precise date could not be verified. My sources included exhibition catalogues, invitations, and announcements found in a variety of locations around Washington, D.C..

1943

October 16, 1943-January 31, 1944.

“American Paintings for the Home.”

Louis Bosa, Ann Brockman, Hilda Wilkinson Brown, William Carter, Elizabeth Catlett, Nicolai Cikovski, Aaron Douglas, Malvin Gray Johnson, Lois Mailou Jones, Jacob Lawrence, Elliott Orr, James A. Porter, Betty Graves Reyneau, Charles Sebree, Celine Tabary, Henry Ossawa Tanner, C. Law Watkins, James L. Wells, Charles White, Hale Woodruff.

December

“Pets and Personages.”

Georgina Klitgaard, Chet La More.

1944

February

“The Negro in Art.”

Alice Acheson, Richmond Barthé, William Carter, Elizabeth Catlett, Tony Cornetti, Eldzier Cortor, Allan Rohan Crite, Aaron Douglas, Frederick C. Flemister, Margaret Goss, Lois Mailou Jones, Edward Loper, Frank Neal, James A. Porter, David Ross, James L. Wells, Charles White, Hale Woodruff, Andrea de Zerega.

April-May

“Tibetan Banners and Small Bronzes.”

“Bamboo Paintings by Dr. Wang Chi-Yuan”

June

“American Paintings for American Homes.”

June 16-July 15

“Creative paintings by children and junior members of Lois Jones’ Saturday morning class.”

September-October 15

“American Paintings for the Home.”

Aaron Douglas, Lois Mailou Jones, James A. Porter, Betsy Graves Reyneau, Celine Tabary, James L. Wells, Hale Woodruff.

October 15-December

“Candido Portinari.” First anniversary exhibition.

1945

February-March

[Group show]

William H. Johnson, Lois Mailou Jones, James S. Porter, John N. Robinson, Celine Tabary, Prentiss Taylor, Hale Woodruff.

June-?

[Group show with 20 artists]

Alice Acheson, Tony Cornetti, Nicolai Cikovski, Eldzier Cortor, John Farrar, Robert Jackson, Petion Savain, Anthony Sisti, Henry Ossawa Tanner, Ellis Wilson, and 10 more.

September 30-October 21

[14 serigraph portraits]

Harry Sternberg

November-December

“Jack Perlmutter” Second anniversary exhibition.

1946

January

[Group show to honor Cecil Patrick Wilson.]

Jack Berman, Richard Dempsey, Aaron Douglas, Robert Jackson, Lois M. Jones, Herman Maril, Jack Perlmutter, John Robinson, Celine Tabary, Laura Wheeler Waring, Ellis Wilson.

February-March

“Samuel J. Brown”

April-May

“Paintings by Lois Mailou Jones”

October 1-October 13

“The Life of John Brown” Third anniversary exhibition.

Jacob Lawrence.

November-December

“Paintings by Ellis Wilson”

1947

January-February

“January and February”

Frank H. Alston, Jr., Paul T. Arlt, Jack I. Berkman, Samuel J. Brown, David Burluik, Calvin Burnett, Calvin Burnett, Elizabeth Catlett, Nicolai Cikovsky, Minna Citron, Eldzier Cortor, Ralston Crawford, Charles Davis, Thelma W. DeAtley, Edguard Freeman, John Gerard, Malvin Gray Johnson, William H. Johnson, Jacob Lawrence, Herman Maril, I. Rice Pereira, Jack Perlmutter, James A. Porter, John N. Robinson, Laura Wheeler Waring, Ellis Wilson, Hale Woodruff.

March-April

“Abstract Paintings”

April

[Watercolor exhibition]

Alice Acheson, Phillip Bell, Douglas Brown, Nicolai Cikovsky, Adolf Dehn, George Grosz, Lois Mailou Jones, Eliot O’Hara, Rudolph Von Ripper, Prentice Taylor.

May-July

“Paintings by Berkman, Calfee, Kainen, Lazzari, Perlmutter, Robinson”

Jack Berkman, William Calfee, Jacob Kainen, Pietro Lazzari, Jack Perlmutter, John N. Robinson.

September 7-October 15

“Twelve Paintings by Twelve Artists”

Benjamin Abramowitz, Oded Bourla, Glenn O. Coleman, Charles Davis, Lawrence Lebduska, Peppino Mangravite, Archibald Motley, James A Porter, Laura Wheeler Waring.

[Solo exhibition with 10 paintings]

John Farrar

October-November

“Recent Paintings by Charles White” Fourth anniversary exhibition.

December 6, 1947-January 26, 1948

“Paintings, Sculpture, and Prints of The Negro Woman”

Elizabeth Catlett

1948

January

[Elizabeth Catlett continued]

February 7-March

“Paintings and Drawings by James A. Porter”

April-May

[Benjamin Abramowitz show]

June-August

“Contemporary American Paintings”

August 1-September 30

“Contemporary American Paintings”

Jack Berkman, Eldzier Cortor, Aaron Douglas, James Farrar, Frederick Flemister, Lois Mailou Jones, I. Rice Pereira, James A. Porter, John N. Robinson, Anthony Siste, Henry O. Tanner, Laura Wheeler Waring, Charles White, Ellis Wilson, Hale Woodruff.

September 11-October 11

“Exhibition of Paintings and Watercolors”

Frank H. Alston, Jr.

October 17-November

“Contemporary Religious Paintings” Fifth anniversary exhibition

Romare Bearden, Jean Charlot, Gen-Paul (Eugene Paul), Max Jacob, Hilde B. Kayn, Hildreth Meiere, Kenneth Hayes Miller, Fred Nagler, B. J. O. Nordfeldt, Horace Pippin, Boardman Robinson, Augustus Vincent Tack, Henry O. Tanner, Louis di Valentin, James L. Wells, Robert Winthrop White.

December 12, 1948-January 1949

“Pereira”

1949

January

[Pereira continued]

April-May

“Juanita Marbrook”

September

[Barnett Aden Gallery acquisitions over the last six years.]

Theodoro Ramos-Blanco, Henry O. Tanner.

October 15-November

“Contemporary American Art” Sixth anniversary exhibition

Romare Bearden, Louis Bouche, David Burliuk, Bernice Cross, Kenneth Evett, Robert Gwathmey, John Edward Heliker, Whitney Hoyt, S. Lev Landau, I. Rice

Pereira, Jack Perlmutter, James Penney, Iver Rose, Moses Sawyer, Vernon Smith, Stamos, Tromka, Jakov Volovich, James L. Wells, Ellis Wilson.

December 10, 1949-January 31, 1950

“Sylvia Carewe”

1950

January

[Sylvia Carewe continued]

February-March

[exhibition of six Washington artists]

Romare Bearden, Samuel Bookatz, Bernice Cross, Robert Gates, Norma Mazo, James A. Porter.

April-May

“Paintings and Prints by James Lesesne Wells”

August-September

[Works from the permanent collection and works loaned by Herbert Benevy]

Romare Bearden, Samuel Bookatz, James Broady, William Calfee, James Farrar, Jack Perlmutter, Merton Simpson.

October 14-November

“Contemporary American Art: For the Home” Seventh Anniversary Exhibition.

Gifford Beal, Louis Bouche, Edward Bruce, David Burliuk, Eldzier Cortor, Russell Cowles, Kenneth Evett, John Heliker, Robert Gwathmey, Whitney Hoyt, John Koch, Joseph Lasker, James Penny, Sidney Raynes, Andree Ruellan, Iver Rose, Hugh Lee Smith, Vernon Smith, Henry O. Tanner, Esther Williams.

1951

January

“Three Washington Artists”

Richard Dempsey, Sam Herman, Jack Perlmutter

February 10-March

“Lila Oliver Asher: Paintings, Graphic Arts, Sculpture”

May

[Merton Simpson solo exhibition] Eighth Anniversary Exhibition

October 14-November

“Herman Maril: Paintings in Retrospect, 1931-1951”

December 8, 1951-January 31, 1952

“Recent Haitian American Paintings by Richard Dempsey”

1952

January

[Richard Dempsey continued]

February 3-March 31

“Therese M. Schwartz”

August-September

“Contemporary American Paintings from the Permanent Collection”

Robert Gwathmey, Peppino Mangravite, I. Rice Pereira, Merton Simpson, Theodoros Stamos.

October 18-November

“Privately Owned: Paintings Purchased by Patrons, 1943-1952” Ninth Anniversary Exhibition

Frank H. Alston, Jr., Elizabeth Catlett, Nicolai Cikovsky, Bernice Cross, Richard Dempsey, Robin Jackson, Lois M. Jones, Herman Maril, I Rice Pereira, Jack Perlmutter, James A. Porter, Candido Portinari, John N. Robinson, Theresa Schwartz, Merton Simpson, Theo Stamos, James L. Wells, Ellis Wilson

1953

January

[Some favorites from the collection]

Samuel Bookatz, Cameny, Daylis, Richard Dempsey, Robert Gwathmey, Joseph Lasker, Margaret Stark, Henry O. Tanner.

February-May

“Contemporary American Paintings

October 17-December

“Eighteen Washington Artists” Tenth Anniversary Exhibition.

Benjamin Abramowitz, Frank H. Alston, Jr., Sarah Baker, Samuel Bookatz, William Calfee, Bernice Cross, Richard Dempsey, Robert Gates, John Gernand, Lois M. Jones, Jacob Kainen, James McLaughlin, Jack Perlmutter, Marjorie Phillips, James a. Porter, Theresa Schwartz, Charles Seebree, James L. Wells

1954

February 7-March

“Six Washington Painters”

Theresa Abbott, Gabriel Cherin, Gloria Besser Green, Babette Kasmir, Alma W. Thomas, Anita Wertheim

May 15-September

“Abstractions: New York and Washington Artists”

Leon Berkowitz, James A. Broady, Jr., Gene Davis, Richard Dempsey, Peggy Goldstein, Albert Henriques, Harlan Jackson, Robert Jackson, Jacob Kainen, Pietro Lazzari, Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland, I. Rice Pereira, Jack Perlmutter, James A. Porter, Therese Schwartz, Merton D. Simpson, Stamos, Margaret Stark, Joe Summerford.

October-January 15, 1955

“Paintings by New York Artists” Eleventh anniversary exhibition.

David Burliuk, Silvia Carewe, Minna Citron, Russell Cowles, Kenneth Evett, Walter Feldman, Robert Gwathmey, John Heliker, Joe Lasker, I. Rice Pereira, Andree Ruellen, Karl Schrag, Therese Schwartz, Merton Simpson, Vernon Smith, Theodoros Stamos, Charles White, Ellis Wilson, Yuen Yuey Chin, Maguerite Zorach.

1955

January

[“New York Artists” continued]

February 5-April

“Ruth Galoon”

May-September

“Contemporary American Painting: New York and Washington Artists”

October 15-November

“Jack Perlmutter” Twelfth anniversary exhibition.

1956

January 7-February

“Contemporary Artists Group”

Mimi Dubois Bolton, Gene Davis, Richard Dempsey, Ruth Galoon, Robert Gates, Carmelo Gonzales, Albert Henriques, Pietro Lazzari, Morris Louis, Leonard Maurer, Kenneth Noland, I. Rice Pereira, Easton Pribble, Peter L. Robinson, Jr., Therese M. Schwartz, Merton D. Simpson, Theodoros Stamos, Joe Summerford, Alma W. Thomas, William Walton.

March 3-April

“Merton D. Simpson”

June

[New group show for the summer]

Aaron Bohrod, Selma Burke, William Calfee, Mina Citron, Gene Davis, Maxim Elias, Clare Fontanini, Ruth Galoon, Robert Gates, Peggy Goldstein, Ernesto

Gonzales, Harlan Jackson, Antonio Salemme, Therese Schwartz, Merton Simpson, Charles Sebree, Theodoros Stamos, Bill Turner.

October 14, 1956-January 1957

“Contemporary American Artist Group: New York and Washington”

Thirteenth anniversary exhibition.

“Romare Bearden, Yuen Yuey Chinn, Gene Davis, Richard Dempsey, David Driskell, Ruth Galoon, Robert Gates, S. Felrath Hines, Joe Lasker, John Laurent, John Chapman Lewis, Pietro Lazzari, Mary Orwen, I. Rice Pereira, Charles Sebree, Bella Schwartz, Therese M. Schwartz, Merton D. Simpson, Theodoros Stamos, Alma W. Thomas.

1957

January

[**“Contemporary American” continued**]

February 2-April

“David C. Driskell: Exhibition of Paintings”

August-September 15

“Countess Grabowski”

October 12-January 12, 1958

“Contemporary American Art” Fourteenth anniversary exhibition.

Bernard Arnett, Mimi DuBois Bolton, Laura Douglas, Ruth Galoon, S. Felrath Hines, Joseph Kalfel, John Laurent, Carl Morris, James Penney, I. Rice Pereira, Merton D. Simpson, Hughie Lee Smith, Theodoros Stamos, Earl Stroh, Joe Summerford, Alma Thomas, Laura Wheeler Waring.

1958

January

[**“Contemporary American” continued**]

February

[**group show**]

March 15-April

“Suzuki”

June 15-September

[**group show**]

October 11-December

“Norman Lewis: Paintings”

1959

February-March

“Calligraphy and Drawings by Wang Chi-Yuan”

April 18-May

“Exhibition of Contemporary Art of Hollin Hills and Washington”

Frank Buffmire, Dorothy Fall, Louis Gross, Jacqueline Hammer, Sonia Hodson, Hilda Shapiro, Frank Spagnola, Alma Thomas, Lorraine Weaver, Dorothy Weintraub.

October 17-November

“Exhibition of Paintings by Pietro Lazzari, Helen Rennie, Alma Thomas, Andrea Zerega” Sixteenth anniversary exhibition.

December 5-February 1960

“Exhibition of Religious Paintings and Prints by James L. Wells and Sculpture by Selma Burke”**1960**

January-February

[“Wells and Burke” continued]

April

“Andrea Zerega and Former Students”

July-September

[New work by Washington painters]

George Bayless, Mimi Bolton, Robert Gates, Jack Lewis, Helene McKinsey, Hilda Shapiro, Helen Rennie, Joe Summerford, Alma Thomas.

October 14-November

“American Contemporary Art, 1930 to 1960”

Richmond Barthé, Selma Burke, Elizabeth Catlett, Harold Cousins, Guy Du Bois, Philip Evergood, Clare Fontanini, Robert Gwathmey, Hans Hoffman, Hughie Lee-Smith, I Rice Periera, Merton Simpson, Theodoros Stamos, Charles White.

December 3-January 1961

“Exhibition of Paintings by Miriam Mitchell”**1961**

January

[Miriam Mitchell continued]

February-April

“Contemporary American Paintings”

May

[Preview of paintings by Jane Love]

June 10-July

“Exhibition of Paintings by Jane Love”

October-December 15

“Paintings by Albert Sangiamo”

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Lila Oliver Asher, Chevy Chase, Md., August 2002.

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David C. Driskell, Hyattsville, Md., April 2002.

David C. Driskell, Hyattsville, Md., January 2003.

John Hope Franklin, telephone interview, January 2003.

Sam Gilliam, telephone interview, February 2002.

Samuel Green, Baltimore, Md., January 2003.

Carroll Greene, Savannah, Ga., June 2002.

Edward L. Loper, Sr., Wilmington, Del., January 2003.

Jack Perlmutter, Bethesda, Md., June 2003.

Peter L. Robinson, Jr., Washington, D.C., June 2006.

Bill Taylor, telephone interview, August 2002.

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Teaching Experience

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1998-2001 Teaching Assistant, The Pennsylvania State University
6 semesters, Instructor of Record for Western Art II for 2 semesters

1995-1998 Teaching Assistant, The University of North Texas
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Selected Conference Papers and Presentations

2003 District of Columbia Historical Studies Conference, The City Museum of Washington, D.C., Letitia Woods Brown Memorial Lecture: "The Barnett Aden Gallery: A Home for Diversity in a Segregated City"

2003 College Art Association Conference, New York. "The Barnett Aden Gallery: A Pioneering Venture in Cultural Diversity"

Museum Experience

2000-2001 Graduate Assistant, Palmer Museum of Art, The Pennsylvania State University. Assisted curators and staff with various tasks, including researching artists, designing exhibitions, and presenting "gallery talks."

1997 Intern, Dallas Museum of Art, Academic and Public Programs Department
Prepared and presented talks to community groups.

Grants/Fellowships/Awards

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