

# Successions: Prints by African-American Artists from the Jean and Robert Steele Collection

November 14 - December 17, 2004

Opening Reception  
Sunday, November 14, 2004  
2:00-4:00 pm



The exhibition, Successions: Prints by African-American Artists From the Jean and Robert Steele Collection will open at the North Carolina Central University Art Museum November 14 and run through December 17, 2004. The Steeles have one of the most important collections of African American art in the United States and it includes works by most of the masters. Elizabeth Catlett, Allan Rohan Crite, Samella Lewis, Benny Andrews, Hughie Lee-Smith, Lois Mailou Jones, Emma Amos, Sam Gilliam, Betty Saar, David Driskell as well as Jacob Lawrence, Romare Bearden and others are among the forty-five artists featured in this exhibition.

Like the New York collectors Vivian and John Hewitt, whose historic collection of African American art is currently on view at the Sonja Stone Haynes Center, the Steeles are people of modest means. He retired as associate dean of the School of Behavioral and Social Sciences at the University of Maryland, College Park, and immediately became the director of UM's David C. Driskell Center; she's a retired executive for Freddie Mac. Their passion for collecting began with the purchase of a small pastel of Malcolm X by a now forgotten artist. They soon realized that even small paintings by artists like Romare Bearden and Elizabeth Catlett were beyond their reach. In prints, however, they discovered an affordable alternative that allowed them to build an aesthetically satisfying collection without breaking the bank.

With a strategic plan, a focused eye and impeccable taste, Jean and Robert Steele have amassed a remarkable collection of prints and works on paper by African American artists. This growing collection is the embodiment of thirty years of learning, collecting and collaborating with friends, artists, dealers, and art historians nationwide. More than a hobby, collecting and curating the works they have assembled is a way of life for the Steele family. The Steeles have come to this impressive range of works through the development of and adherence to a strategy of collecting works not only by African American artists as individuals, but patronizing the workshops and galleries that support them. Because of the care with which the Steeles have followed their plan, the collection provides a unique glimpse into the world of printmaking as well as the processes, institutions, relationships and structures that nourish and sustain it.

Conscious of the important role key workshops have played in the development of printmaking by African American artists, Jean and Robert Steele have targeted their collecting towards the operations that have been established by, or cater to, African American artists. The Steeles are endeavoring to create a systematic structure to support African American art. Although there exist a few significant public and private collections of this nature, the Steeles recognized the need to support black printmakers and the

systems that sustain them in order to ensure the longevity and vitality of this important medium. Toward that end, the Steeles have made a particular effort to patronize Robert Blackburn's Printmaking Workshop, Inc. in New York, NY, Allen Edmunds' Brandywine Workshop in Philadelphia, PA, and Lou Stovall's Workshop, Inc. in Washington, DC, all of which were established by African American artists, but serve a diverse cadre of national and international printmakers. While these institutions have made a qualitative impact on the development of American printmaking in general, they have been integral to opening up this medium to a critical mass of African American artists, many of whom are represented in this exhibition.

The North Carolina Central University Art Museum, located on Lawson Street across from the Farrison-Newton Communications Buildings, is open Tuesday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is free. For general information, call 919-530-6211.