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Arts & Entertainment

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Black artists showcased in Rowan viewing of Art:21

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Most people can look at a piece of art and make their own assumptions based on their knowledge of the artist, the art form and history. Their interpretation of the piece is never right or wrong. It matters or doesn't matter to the artist. It is the individual's self truth.

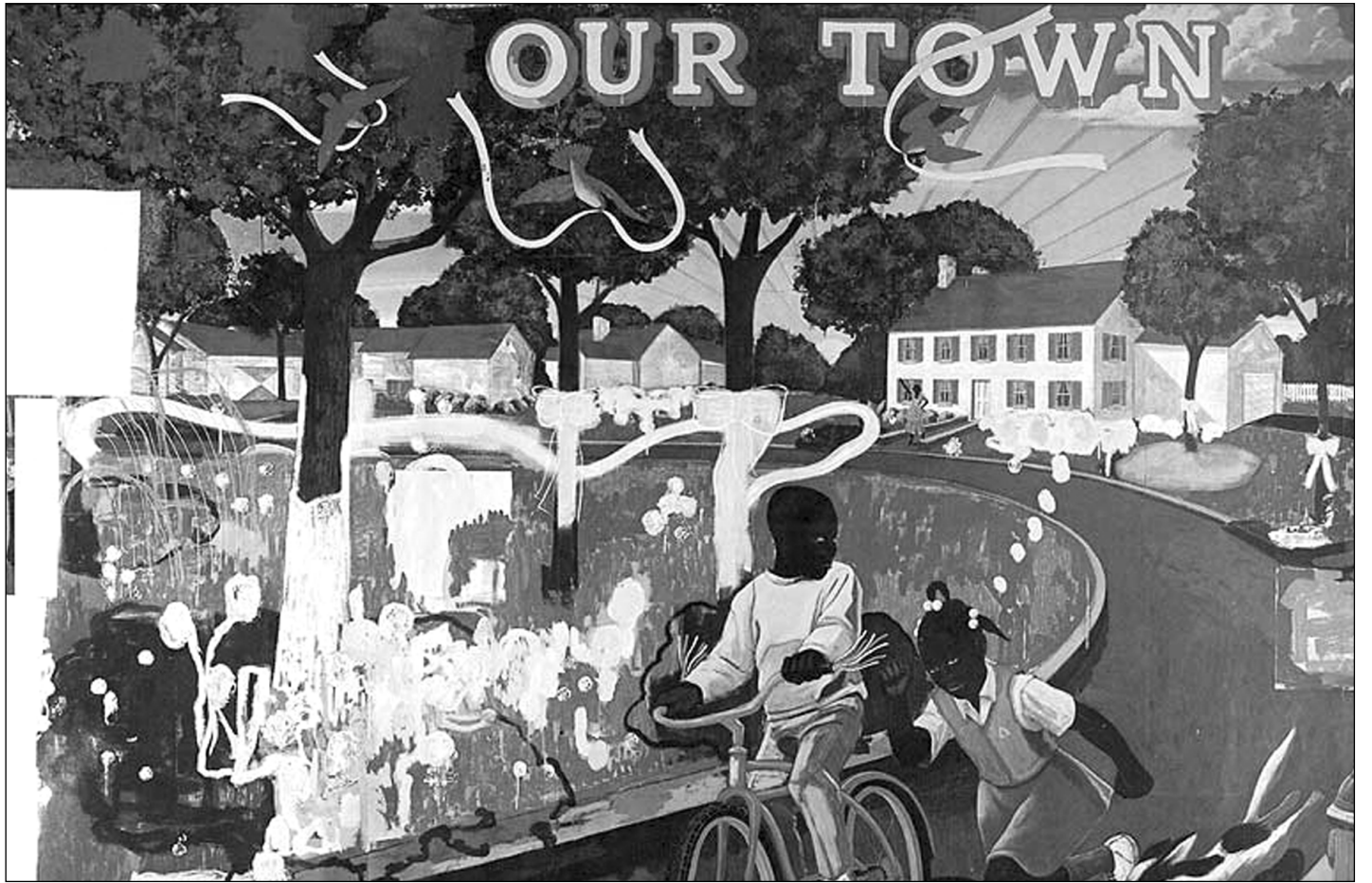
PBS's "Art:21" is a series of interviews with contemporary artists, showing what the artist was actually trying to create and how they came up with their sometimes awe-inspiring pieces.

On Monday, Feb. 4, Westby Art Gallery and African American Studies hosted part one of a two-part Black History Month screening of "Art:21" for Rowan students and community members, focusing on contemporary black artists.

"I think it's an artists responsibility to know what's out there," said Kathryn McFadden, the Westby art gallery director. The show gives viewers an inside look at what is going on in the art world. It allows viewers to see what contemporary artists are creating and how they are doing so where their motivation comes from.

The first artist segment was about Kerry James Marshall, a Texan artist who creates his art in the form of painting and installments. Every piece, every minute detail is preconceived and purposeful. His plan is to create an illusion of Eden, a sense of home and comfort. Even though all his pieces are different, in medium as well as in concept, they all relate in a universal manner. While he works mainly with installments, he creates each piece and they become works of art in themselves. Some of his works focus on the premise of taking historic tribal African symbols and turning them into the heroic classic comic icon. All of his work is a visual representation of his life and influences.

Michael Ray Charles, also a Texas artist, focuses his art on the taboos of racism and the subconscious ideas in American history. With the use of taboo black symbols, Charles tries to explore the question of "What is blackness" and how these symbols are used in history. His paintings, which are usually feet by feet in measurement, are a tribute to past history of racism and the hopeful future of change. "These concepts continue to affect us and the issues are just as much white as black," said Charles during his interview on the show.



Photos courtesy of pbs.org

The artwork of several black artists (above, Kerry James Marshall's "Our Town" and below, Kara Walker's "Darkytown Rebellion") was featured in Art:21, which had a showing on campus on Feb. 4.

Kara Walker, whose work has come to be known as very controversial in the art world, is a young black artist who tells stories with her art. Mainly using silhouettes, Walker plays with the concept of illusion of the past and illusion of what her subjects actually are. She uses walls and rotundas to place her black paper silhouettes in a scene that the viewer can become a part of. There are many stories being told, but they all seem to be themed in the old south "Gone With the Wind" time era. Along with illusion, Walker focuses on the exchanges of power, wanting to be the heroine and wanting to kill the heroine. Her art is an examination of American race relations as well as a representation of her world.

The last and the most eccentric artist spotlighted in the "Art:21" screening was Trenton Doyle Hancock, and unlike the other artists, the focal point of his work is not based on American history, but rather religious and self history. Using a surrealist approach, Hancock creates an alternate reality, where half-human, half-plant creatures called mounds, exist as the primary inhabitant. He usually

does large-scale paintings and sometimes whole concept shows of many pieces that tell a complete and unusual story, tying in the ideas of life and death, and biblical stories such as Noah's ark and the Holy Trinity. The idea of a savior is played by Torpedo Boy, Hancock's alter-ego. He is the super hero that saves earth and protects the mounds, but is completely flawed at the same time. Through these concepts, Hancock creates elaborate collage-like scenes that can only be explained as overwhelming and creatively exciting.

Part two of this Black History Month Celebration will be held on Thursday, Feb. 14th from 5-6 p.m. in Westby Art Gallery. There will be refreshments.



Beat Briefs

Photos from Dennis Dougherty, rowan.edu, and learningstages.org



The conclusion of the 38th Annual Rowan Jazz Festival will take place on Friday, Feb. 8 at 8 p.m. in Rowan University's Pfleeger Concert Hall. The concert will feature the acclaimed drummer and instrumentalist Richard De Rosa as a guest artist, who will share the stage with Rowan's Lab and Jazz Bands for this event. Tickets for the concert are \$15 each and are available the night of the concert or by calling (856) 256-4545 or go to rowan.edu for additional information.



The Faculty Spotlight Series presented by the Rowan University College of Fine & Performing Arts continues when Robert Rawlins leads a night of jazz with "A Tribute to Tadd Dameron" on Wednesday, Feb. 13, at 8 p.m. in Boyd Recital Hall. All Faculty Spotlight Series events are free and open to the public. For directions or additional information, call the box office at (856) 256-4545 or visit www.rowan.edu/fpa.



Seven Rowan alumni and faculty will write, practice, and perform five new plays in 24 hours in February with the local non-profit organization, Learning Stages. Rowan alumni, along with Rowan theater faculty Melanie Stewart, Dr. Elizabeth Hostetter and David Sullivan, will be taking part in the event. Come and see Learning Stages' "Up All Night" Play in a Day Festival at the Memorial Presbyterian Church in Wenonah, NJ on Feb. 9 at 7:30 p.m. To reserve tickets please call 856-430-3145. Tickets are \$10.