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BLACK ART NEWS TODAY

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Featured Artists

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Frank Frazier

The Artist

I am a Black artist first. Until we become recognized in the world of the arts as just artists, then we have to keep identified for our children and our people

With artistic ability that is self-taught and talent that is God-given, artist Frank Frazier composes masterful creations adapted from his explorations in a variety of media and styles. All true to his personal history and vision of the inherent dignity and worth of his people, Frazier paints them—the people he knows best.

In a career that has endured 25 years of perseverance and aspirations, Frazier, the child of Harlem, veteran of Vietnam, and activist of minority artists—whom mainstream recognition and rewards still elude—has mined these depths and others within himself, and his commitment is unceasing.

The critic seeking unifying elements by which to identify the artist will find consistency in his content and themes of Black heritage—social justice, Black pride, and family unity. The observer seeking unifying elements by which to identify the man will find consistency in his loyalty to what he believes in and his and faith in what he creates. Not an attempt at naturalism, much of Frazier's art is stylized, revealing a sense of the abstract with enough realism to grant universal appeal.

In the early '70s, after spending over a year in the hospital recovering from war injuries, Frazier made his first professional artistic debut with a series of oil paintings that took nearly a year to complete. The paintings were exhibited at Hunter College in New York City. Although Frazier's art was inspired by real-life Vietnam experiences, the public was not prepared for what his creations revealed. His canvassed expressions were too frightening and depressing. It was also during this time that the artist embraced the familiarity and flexibility of paper, and began developing his unique, expressive style of giving life to social themes that remain the focus of his work today.

- Sheats Repousse
- Carolyn L. Mazloomi
- Frank Morrison
- Phyllis Stephens
- Jega International
- Jacob Arts
- Michele Wood
- Eugene Thomas
- Justin Bua
- Ernie Barnes
- Annie Lee
- Redfern Fine Art
- Woodrow Nash
- Faith Ringgold
- Mari Hall
- Burnett Curtis Grayson III
- CJ Fletcher
- Karen Y. Buster
- Kelvin W. Henderson
- LaShun Beal
- Romare Bearden
- Sidney Carter
- Tom Feelings
- Twin Hicks



Rappin' In The Ghetto

All these pieces have some story of meaning behind them. It isn't worth doing unless it says something.

Using pen and ink and acrylics to exploit the drama of black and white, Frazier gave life to the Stick People. It was a disarmingly, simple genre—poster-like, as it has been penned—matched to a simplistic theme: man's quest for freedom. The series, Rappin' in the Ghetto, was thus born, a paeon to rising Black pride.

These painting depict tiny, black stick figures partially engulfed in a maze of stark boxes. The symbolism is deliberately ambiguous. The boxes—city blocks joined together. The message—people trying to move up and out of the ghetto.

Simultaneously, Frazier was creating the Street Corner People series. Adding powerful watercolor accents to the pen and ink and acrylics, the artist portrayed scenes of street life in Harlem: The Original Market; The Numbers Stand; The Subway.

The paintings pulsate with movement and flow with passionate energy. Frazier's characters seem familiar as they "move" on the canvass in a fluid breeze while others are barely outlined by the artist's light stroke. Some characters appear lethargic in their watercolor-wash, while balloons float freely in some of the paintings. These pieces of Frazier's artwork transmit feelings of gaiety and frivolity. Frivolity that is often mistaken for the social

symbolism of the creations. A balloon floats about aimlessly in search of freedom and pops—never finding that sought after emancipation.

Tribal Series

People think Tribal Series came out of my trips to Africa. Actually, I had started doing them in the early 80s in inks, acrylics, and oils on paper. Then a friend gave me this beautiful Kente cloth she had brought from Africa. I just had it here in the studio. One day, I was working and spilled some ink on the paper. I cut a piece of the cloth and put over the spill like a dress. It looked good. And that's how I started doing the collages

Major life changes dictated that Frank Frazier relocate from New York City to Dallas, Texas. Tribal Series, then, was an apt turning point in the artist's career. Philosophically, Frazier began to explore and express a latent Pan-Africanism through images of the Motherland—a theme that continues to dominate his work today. Stylistically, he created a distinctive statement with explosions of color and rich detail, combined with bold geometric figures, evocative of the ancient African arts that so influenced many world-renowned modern Western artists. And professionally, Frazier began to focus on his long-held dreams of artistic self-support and expanded distribution of his work.

The first Tribals set the basic theme—beauty, dignity and unity of the Black family. Majestic, richly clothed figures are, in essence, Black “Everymen,” representative of “the spirit and values of the ancestors which live on through us today.”

As they evolved from one-dimensional paintings to collages, the Tribals spurred Frazier's first African journey where, in Senegal, the artist would meet and study weavers of the colorful and dynamic Kente cloth.

Frazier's return to Dallas spawned the third generation of Tribals, which became increasingly sophisticated with the addition of miniature gold masks, feathers and fibers.

Professionally, the maturation of this period for Frazier included the development of key collaborative efforts with jewelry makers, David and Jennifer Morales, and sculptor, Audrey Berry to design and create compelling miniature masks.

Subsequent works by Frazier bear the fruits of Frazier's second

voyage to Africa. This trip would introduced him to Senegalese craftsmen who would execute his sketched designs to create miniature masks etched from ebony wood and ivory, all hand-carved by artisans working with replicas of homemade wooden hammers and chisels used by their ancestors thousands of years ago.

Ultimately, Tribal Series led the artist to further explore other materials such as silkscreen and prints. Concerned that his work should remain accessible to a wide audience, especially novice collectors, Frazier began collaborations with fellow Dallas artist, Charles Bible, to construct prints and silkscreens of the popular Tribals.



Apartheid

We don't live in a vacuum. Even though we have serious problems here in America, we need to know and care about the problems in South Africa and all of Africa

Frazier's annual excursions to Africa found him dwelling among and cultivating with villagers, fishermen and artisans in Senegal, Gambia, Mali and Sierre Leone. Such intimacy fueled the admittedly political nature of recent works such as Apartheid, an intense watercolor overflowing with symbolism of

lost generations. The presentation of an Apartheid print to South African Bishop Desmond Tutu in 1986, sparked a friendship with the Bishop's daughter, Mpho Tutu, and her consequent sponsorship of several Frazier exhibits.

In 1987, at one of the noted exhibitions, Frazier produced a silkscreen poster of Apartheid that became so popular, it was printed three times. This was a way for the artist make a vast audience aware of Apartheid tragedies. Proceeds from continuing sales of the favored poster now provide a contribution to the

Bishop Tutu Southern African Refugee Scholarship Fund, directed by Ms. Tutu.

The success of the Apartheid poster quickly attracted other poster commissions for Frazier. He reveals, "My posters are original works of art. They are silkscreened by hand, while most posters are machine-printed. Plus, I do them from the bottom of my heart."

Black Visions

I left home at 16 to try to become an artist. Now, no longer do I have to say, 'I want to be an artist.' I am an artist. And I'm standing on my own two feet

The threshold of another decade finds Frank Frazier still dreaming. Black Visions then, has dual meaning both professionally and creatively for the prolific artist. Professionally, Black Visions encompasses the Frazier family company. Black Visions has served as an avenue for the artist to branch into such popular media as posters, t-shirts and notecard collections that are accessible and supportive of numerous causes through special commissions and editions. Additionally, several Frazier creations have received exposure on television ("Frank's Place," "Bustin' Loose," "CNN") and film ("Coming to America"). The artist explains, "My goal is to see our company self-sufficient. My wife, Judy, has officially become part of the company, which I'm thrilled about." He proudly adds, "and the children all help out. We can learn from other close-knit cultures. It's about family being in control of what's ours."

Creatively, the Black Visions series of silkscreens brought Frazier's work full-circle—a return to the drama of black and white, first witnessed in Rappin' in the Ghetto, an extension of the community-of-family themes from Tribal Series and Apartheid, all which depict a new realism in the tribal figures that reprises the movement and activity seen in Street Corner People and other earlier works.

The artist's fascination with adornment emerges in explicit details of dress in people of Black Visions. Power and grace speaks loudly in the poses of family groupings and couples. Also, following a now-familiar progression, the artist later added color, more vibrantly hued than in any of his other works, and new themes of African village life.

A milestone in Frazier's artistic career came with the production of an exclusive edition of signed and numbered serigraphs of these

richly complex pieces of art. It is a pinnacle he views with pride as only massive evolution could bring to such investments.

The Man

"My greatest desire is to see Black artists make it, put there by our people—Black people"

Master artist, Frank Frazier, is a man whose personal and professional lives intertwine. What he accepts from his people in images and inspiration, he gives back in beauty and pride of ownership. Fame and fortune has surrendered to him, yet he remains a dreamer. His past led him to bear many roles where each hat, he wore to perfection. Still tackling his passion as an artist, he continues to define the man and the artist through his craft as an artist.

Delmetria L. Millener
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Frank's Place

Career Highlights

Gallery Affiliations

Ebony Fine Arts	Dallas
Black Heritage Gallery	Houston
Frames & Fine Arts	Atlanta
Savacou	New York City
Firehouse Gallery	New York City
Sun Gallery	Washington, D.C.
Armour J. Blackburn Gallery,	
Howard University	Washington, D.C.
Gallery Plus	Los Angeles
Gallery Tanner	Los Angeles
Samuell Gallery	Oakland
American International College	Springfield, Massachusetts
Pyramid Gallery	Little Rock, Arkansas

Selected Exhibitions

Ramses The Great, Dallas, 1989
Arlington Community Museum, Arlington, Texas, 1989

Black Art Festival, Atlanta, 1988
The Black Art Collection, New Orleans, 1988
Pyramid Gallery, Little Rock, Arkansas, 1988
Michigan State Capitol, Lansing, Michigan, 1987
The African-American Museum, Hempstead, New York, Visions in Black, 1987
Armour J. Blackburn Gallery, Howard University, Washington, D. C., Visions in Black, 1987
The Black Heritage Gallery, Houston, Texas, Visions, 1986
The Martin Luther King, Jr. Library, Dallas, sponsored by Southwest Black Artists Guild, 1981
the Museum of African-American Life and Culture, Dallas, Reflections from the East, 1981
Great Neck Library, Great Neck, New York, Contemporary Black Artists in America, 1977
Art Workshop and Gallery Museum (A.W.G.), Roosevelt, New York, 1977
The Brooklyn Museum, New York, 1975
Hunter College, New York, 1971

Commissioned Posters

U.S. Congress, The Black Caucus, 1988, 1989
U.S. Congress, High School Committee, 1988
State of Michigan, Black Caucus, 1988, 1989
Association of Black Catholics (Texas), 1988
National Black Policemen's Association, 1988
National Medical Association, 1989
Juneteenth Celebration (Ft. Worth, Texas), 1989
Bishop Tutu Southern African Refugee Scholarship Fund, 1989
National Conference of Artists, 1989
National Black History Month (Washington, D.C.), 1988

Professional Experiences

Film and television credits—Coming To America, Frank's Place, Bustin' Loose
Travel and study in West Africa, including Senegal, Kenya, Gambia and Mali, annually since 1985
Assistant Curator, Springfield Science Museum, Springfield, Massachusetts, 1978-1979
Director and Curator, Art Workshop and Gallery Museum (A.W.G.), Roosevelt, New York, 1974-1978
Lecture series on African-American art at universities and art institutions nationwide, 1976-1977

Community Affiliations

The Bishop Tutu Southern African Refugee Scholarship Fund
National Conference of Black Artists
Black History Museum of New York
Sickle Cell Anemia Foundation of Texas
Dallas Black Chamber of Commerce
NAACP

Visions In Black Gallery
Custom Framing
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