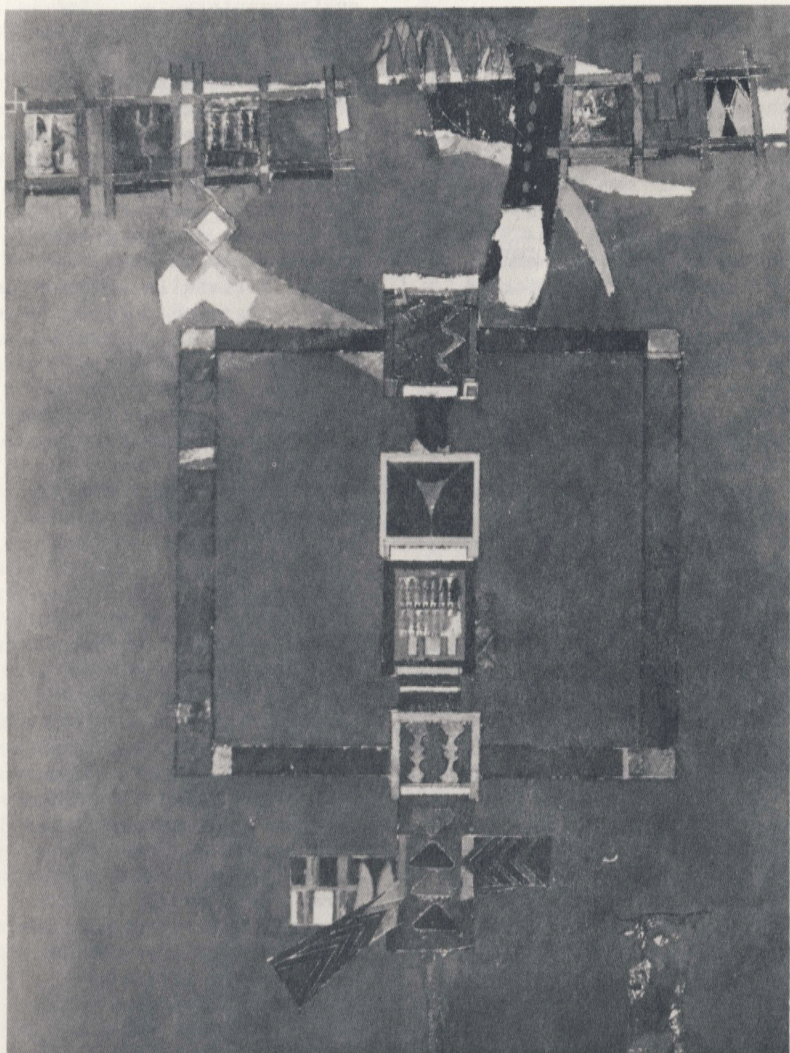


Arthur Carraway  
MATRIX/BERKELEY 60

University Art Museum  
April - mid-May, 1983

Nummo/Niche Series III, 1978-79





Painter Arthur Carraway doesn't find the inspirations for his images in the Campbell Soup cans, Standard Oil signs or Coca-Cola ads that have become the American symbols of unity for so many--a unity that doesn't recognize our differences or diversity. Instead, his paintings contain ideograms, fragments of images from his cultural past stored in what he calls a "genetic memory bank."

During the 1950s Carraway painted in an abstract manner that emphasized the shapes of the individual elements rather than their color. Since then, his travels and research in the American South have brought him closer to understanding the achievement of the early African-American craftsmen whose art forms had made a strong impact on his early childhood in Fort Worth, Texas. Over a period of time, he has also observed African culture in Kenya, Tanzania and Ghana. Combining aspects of both cultures into personal images, Carraway began to create works that more strongly emphasize color and texture. His gouache, collage and mixed-media pieces are reflections of African-American applique and quilting patterns and of African figurative sculpture, shields, masks and textiles.

By working in this manner, Carraway is not attempting to imitate the European arts of collage and assemblage; instead, he is carrying on an African tradition that emerges from memories of his cultural past. The African sculptor thinks in terms of composites, single structures in which a variety of elements--inert and organic,

traditional and contemporary--are combined. Since the Harlem Renaissance that began in the 1920s--a period of intense artistic and political activity that yielded the flowering of African-American (jazz) music and the formation of such organizations as the N.A.A.C.P.--Carraway and other black artists have been following this path, mingling traditional African motifs with images from their own environments.

Carraway has a highly developed sensitivity to the effect that juxtaposed colors have on one another. In Language Series XXXIII (1979-80), the orange shapes--made up of still smaller intricately designed forms superimposed on each other--expand forcefully against the blue background. In the same way, a Yoruba gelede mask, with its rows of birds, serpents, leopards and chameleons, appears to rise above the celebrants, symbolic of the wearer's inner strength and the spiritual authority of nature.

In Niche/Elmina IV (1977-80), the artist refers to the Portuguese fortress Sao Jorge da Mina (later known as Elmina) constructed in 1482 in the Gold Coast (Ghana) as a holding area for shipments of gold and, later, slaves, to the New World. Carraway uses a window shape frequently as a way of enclosing and classifying forms, as a vessel that can ward off evil spirits. The shapes and colors in this painting are carefully arranged to represent time-windows through which we see or imagine remnants of the former occupants: horns, bones, herbs, chameleons,

blood and other sacrificial substances, all invested with magic powers. Are these the memories of Africa the slaves carried with them to America, later to be transformed into walking sticks, newel posts, bowls, spoons, kitchen utensils, patchwork quilts, dugout canoes and other tools and personal effects?

Today, people almost everywhere see in their own cultural history--a history that only yesterday some seemed ready to abandon--a new defense against some of the evils of modern life and a repository for some of the human values that have always given life its savor. Carraway's art reflects the social bonds that stand between the individual and the power of the modern state--kinship, group loyalties, churches, neighborhood and regional ties--bonds that existed in Africa centuries ago and are still part of the black community today.

Carraway was born in 1927 in Fort Worth, Texas. He attended the Academy of Advertising Art (now the Academy of Art College) and the California School of Fine Arts (now the San Francisco Art Institute). He has taught at San Francisco State University and Contra Costa College, San Pablo, CA and is currently a visiting faculty member in the Afro-American Studies Department of the University of California, Berkeley.

Arthur Monroe  
Guest Curator

Works in MATRIX:

All works in the exhibition are lent by the artist.

Nummo Descending Series I, 1977, gouache/collage, 29-1/4" x 21".

Nummo/Niche Series III, 1978-79, gouache/collage, 32-1/2" x 27-1/2".

Elmina Series I, 1979-80, gouache/collage, 40" x 25-1/2".

Language Series XXXIII, 1979-80, gouache, 30-1/4" x 22".

Niche/Elmina Series II, 1979, gouache/collage, 40" x 25-1/2".

Niche/Elmina Series IV, 1979-80, gouache/collage/pencil, 30" x 22-1/4".

Language Series XXXIV, 1980-82, gouache/collage/mixed-media, 30-1/4" x 22".

Symbols, Visions, & Images I, 1981, gouache/collage/mixed-media, 40-1/4" x 25-1/4".

Symbols, Visions, & Images II, 1982-83, gouache/collage-mixed media, 40-1/4" x 25-1/2".

Symbols, Visions, & Images III, 1982-83, gouache/collage/mixed-media, 40-1/4" x 25-1/2".



Selected one-person exhibitions:

Bank of America World Headquarters, S.F., Retrospective 1952-1972, '72; The Studio Museum in Harlem, NY, '78; San Jose City Art Gallery, CA, '79; Pro Arts, Oakland, CA, '83.

Selected bibliography about Carraway (see also catalogues under group exhibitions):

Cederholm, Theresa  
Dickason, ed. Afro-American Artists: A Bio-bibliographical Directory (Boston: Trustees of the Boston Public Library, '73).  
Willig, Nancy T. "Anger and Heritage," Art News, Dec. '74.

Ploski, Harry A. & Warren Marr II, eds. The Afro-American (bicentennial edition) (NY: Bellwether Co., '76).

Lewis, Samella S. Art: African American (NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., '78).

Selected group exhibitions:

Los Angeles County Fair, '53 (purchase prize and 1st prize); San Francisco Museum of Art, San Francisco Art Association Oil & Sculpture Annuals, '53, '54, '55, '56 (cats. pub.); Oakland Art Museum, CA, Oakland Art Annual, '54 (cat. pub.); The Six Gallery, S.F., '55; Oakland Art Museum, CA, '68 (purchase prize); The New York Cultural Center, Blacks U.S.A., 1973 (cat. pub.); Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, Directions in Afro-American Art, '74 (cat. pub.); Tangeman Fine Arts Gallery, University of Cincinnati, OH, Symbols, Visions & Images, '81 (cat. pub.).

MATRIX is supported in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, a Federal agency.

ERRATUM and ADDENDUM

page 1, paragraph 3:

The National Association for the  
Advancement of Colored People  
was officially founded in 1909.

page 1, paragraph 4:

The gelede mask is made by the  
Yoruba people of Nigeria.