McKissick Newsletter - Fall 1987

McKissick Museum--University of South Carolina

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Weathervane, early twentieth century, from the "Above the Fall Line" exhibition.
A New Look for McKissick

Renovation Work

During the next twelve months, visitors to McKissick Museum will notice a number of significant changes to the Museum's physical facility. While this construction will reduce the total number of exhibitions planned for the coming year, the long-term benefits of these physical alterations will be tremendous. One of the most important changes in the complex will be the installation of a totally new heating and cooling system, which will provide the Museum with the ability to set proper environmental standards in order to better conserve objects both on exhibit and in storage. This new system has been needed since the McKissick building was transformed into the University's museum in 1976 and will allow us to approach some other museums to borrow objects which have been unavailable to us in the past due to stringent lender requirements for humidity and temperature controls. This renovation will begin in the middle of September and continue for approximately six months. It will coincide with the installation of a completely new roof which has been repaired numerous times during the past six years.

Perhaps the most exciting alteration scheduled to take place at the Museum over the next twelve months is the renovation and modernization of the science gallery on the second floor. The gallery will be restructured to reflect an overall design concept formulated by the staff five years ago. This design is already in place in the history area and allows the curator to produce topical exhibitions more easily and reduce greatly the number of objects on exhibit, making it possible to provide the visitor with more interpretive information about the items on display. Two minigalleries will also be installed at the east end of the science gallery which will allow us to better exhibit our fluorescent minerals and our regionally known gemstone collection. The bulk of the study collection of minerals currently on display in the gallery will be installed in still another new gallery being constructed off of the entrance hallway. This gallery, which will be called the Mineral Library, will allow visitors to see thousands of mineral specimens. Information on each of these minerals will be available to visitors on easily accessed computers located within the gallery. In addition to these significant alterations, we are also constructing another small gallery in the art area and have formulated plans to alter the existing small art gallery to accommodate a permanent exhibition of the Baruch Silver Collection.

All of the gallery renovations are part of a long-term goal of the Museum to upgrade exhibition areas and to tie them together into a unified concept.
Primarily known as an Abstract Expressionist painter, Helen Frankenthaler began composing prints in 1961. Her expressive and spontaneous manipulation of lithography and etching successfully parallels the large stained canvases for which she first gained recognition.

Frankenthaler decided to become an artist very early in her life. Growing up in New York City, she explored the museums and galleries and studied painting at the Dalton School. She continued her education at Bennington College in the Green Mountains of Vermont. The school offered non-resident semesters to students and this allowed her to take advantage of many opportunities. She filled various positions in the art world and studied at the Art Students League and with Wallace Harrison while in New York. At that time her work reflected the cubist influence so prevalent at Bennington. Dark lines and thick scumble characterized much of her work.

In 1950, Frankenthaler met one of the most influential persons in her career — Clement Greenberg. Through their friendship, she stepped into the circles of the Abstract Expressionists. Greenberg encouraged her to focus on the spontaneity and the physical nature of producing art. He accompanied her to her first Arshile Gorky exhibition and introduced her to Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, Jackson Pollock and David Smith. Greenberg also introduced her to John Bernard Myers, a New York gallery owner. In the spring of 1951, Frankenthaler made her debut in Myers' gallery.

The fall of 1952 marked a breakthrough in technique for Frankenthaler. Inspired by Pollock's free application of paint and John Marin's transparent watercolor washes, Frankenthaler developed a procedure of spreading the canvas on the floor and pouring color which bled outward from the point of application. This same translucent and spontaneous quality is reflected in her prints.

In 1961, Tatyana Grosman convinced Frankenthaler to come to Universal Limited Art Editions to make lithographs. While hesitant at first, Frankenthaler has produced numerous prints, all of which retain the spontaneity, gesture and integrity of her paintings. It is interesting in this regard that Frankenthaler separates herself from the technical aspects of lithography. With the exception of mixing her own colors, she prefers to turn over to the professionals the steps of the actual printing. However, once a proof has been printed, she takes the print home to live with it, analyze and improve it before authorizing the printing of the entire edition. This personal involvement in the image is reflected in all her work.

The prints presented at McKissick Museum span the printmaking career of the artist. The techniques used vary: lithographs, silkscreen, etching, and pochoir (soft vinyl stencil). Dream Walk (1977) is a lithograph on handmade rag paper. Muted colors of ochre, red and violet are penetrated by a steel gray base color bleeding to the surface. The "stained" appearance of Frankenthaler's canvases is reiterated in this print through the translucent colors. Cedar Hill (1983), lent by Crown Point Press, represents Frankenthaler's experiments with woodcuts. This ten-colored print was made from thirteen woodblocks and printed on handmade Mingei Momo paper.

The prints of Helen Frankenthaler can be seen from September 25 through October 29.
Above the Fall Line: Folk Art of the Southern Piedmont
Through June 30, 1989
The objects in this exhibition are taken from all facets of the Southern inland experience. Life in the Southern piedmont is characterized by the influence of a number of ethnic traditions on the local craftsmanship that produces these pieces of folk art. This exhibition was funded in part by the National Endowment for the Arts.

Objects and Implications by Olivia Parker
July 1 - August 17
The highly individualized photographs of Olivia Parker emphasize unique and intricately constructed still lifes of found objects. The images evoke haunting and ambiguous responses. The exhibition is sponsored by Polaroid.

Artists for Amnesty
August 23 - September 14
This series of graphics by fifteen internationally known artists was originally organized by Amnesty International in 1977, the year they received the Nobel Peace Prize. The series includes works by David Hockney, Joan Miró and Alexander Calder. Though diverse in style, each image speaks to a common human concern for freedom.

Helen Frankenthaler: Graphic Works
September 25 - October 29
The prints on view span the career of Helen Frankenthaler. A variety of print-making techniques are represented.

Roman Cieslewics, "amnesty international"
Mana Hewitt: Schooled in Pattern  
September 27 - October 29  
These brightly patterned paintings by Columbia artist Mana Hewitt are inspired by the oriental art of body tattooing. Their intricate surface patterns subtly change as they wrap around the figures.

McKissick Midday Concert  
Russell House Plaza  
October 1, 12:30 - 1:30  
Enjoy lunchtime entertainment with old-time radio singers Dolly and Evelyn Kittrell, The Carolina Sweethearts.

McKissick Midday Concert  
Russell House Plaza  
October 9, 2:00 - 3:00  
Let the Lucas Family Gospel Band bring you Bluegrass Gospel music for your lunchtime entertainment.

McKissick Midday Concert  
Russell House Plaza  
October 15, 12:30 - 1:30  
Early country music duets by Whitey and Hogan. Bring your lunch.

McKissick Midday Concert  
Russell House Plaza  
October 23, 2:00 - 3:00  
The authentic a cappella Gospel sounds performed by The Four Seasons.

McKissick Midday Concert  
Russell House Plaza  
October 29, 12:30 - 1:30  
Enjoy music of Edna Shivers and the China Poplin Band for your lunchtime entertainment.

Brush Paintings by Zhao Qiuo  
October 31 - November 3  
Zhao is an art professor at Shanxi University in China. His work features expansive landscapes of towering mountains, stately evergreen trees and the Yellow River. The brush paintings in this exhibit were created using a water-based ink on absorbent rice paper, a technique which is more than 2,000 years old. This traveling exhibition is being sponsored by South Carolina National Bank.
McKissick Midday Concerts

Traditional music of South Carolina will be featured in the fall, 1987 series of McKissick Midday concerts, which will be held on Thursdays at 12:30, September 24, October 1, October 15 and October 29th, and on Fridays at 2:00, October 9 and October 23rd. Each concert at the Russell House Plaza will be a performance of gospel, blues, bluegrass, or country music played in the South Carolina style by a group of palmetto musicians.

The series will include two concerts of gospel music. This popular, non-denominational form of religious music flourishes today in many forms around the state. The Four Seasons are one of the last black gospel quartets who sang a cappella. They sing in a style reminiscent of the Golden Gate Quartet, Capital City Jubilee Quartet and the Brown Brothers, which were extremely popular musical groups in South Carolina during the 1920s and 30s. The Lucas Family Band from Gaston will perform bluegrass gospel. Bluegrass is a post World War II adaptation of earlier rural upcountry dance music that flourished in the Carolinas before its popularity spread across the South and the rest of the United States. Indeed, it was over the radio in Charlotte, Spartanburg, and Columbia that the combination of instruments, vocal harmonies, and songs we associate with bluegrass began to be heard.

Drink Small, the Blues Doctor, will entertain us with the blues as they developed in the Carolinas. In this region the blues were strongly influenced by the Afro-American piano styles of ragtime and boogie-woogie — they contain the complex chords yet are oriented to the guitar and a powerful emotional experience that gives the blues a special intensity.

Traditional country music includes songs which have their origins in the ballads of the early settlers. "Country music" as a genre appeared in the early twentieth century and has steadily increased in popularity around the nation. During the 1930s many of the old love songs and ballads were modernized by men playing mandolin and guitar. Whitey and Hogan were one of the most popular duet teams during their long tenure on WBT Charlotte. Dolly and Evelyn, the Carolina Sweethearts, began singing on WCOS in Columbia when they were still in high school. They perform as a duet with the accordion and guitar and sing the cowboy yodeling songs that were as popular in the Carolinas as in Colorado during the Depression. The China Poplin Band will play country music that is more specifically South Carolina style. They play tunes learned in Sumter County, as well as performing some of the beautiful songs that Edna Poplin Shivers wrote, and other songs that they learned from commercial recordings.

Each concert in the McKissick Midday series presents a rare opportunity to see and hear a part of the best of traditional music in South Carolina. These concerts are jointly sponsored by McKissick Museum and the Carolina Program Union with additional funding from the National Endowment for the Arts. We hope you'll mark your calendar and join us.

Mana Hewitt: Schooled in Pattern
September 27 - October 29

"The patterns you see in my work make a statement about me as well as the colors. I'm not quiet, not withdrawn, you would think that I'm spontaneous, but actually I'm very methodical in anything that is important to me. The patterns are a part of that. Doing them is very meditative," explained Mana Hewitt when asked to comment on her paintings.

Hewitt's most recent paintings reflect the practice of the "Oriental mafia" who cover their bodies with tattoos. Her brightly colored, geometrically patterned canvases reveal, after careful study, graceful torsos emerging from the background. The intricate patterns subtly change as they wrap around the sexless figures.

A graduate of the University of South Carolina's Department of Art, Hewitt is currently an art instructor at Columbia College. Her paintings will be on exhibit from September 27 through October 29.
New Programs

1987 is proving to be another banner year for McKissick Museum in terms of grant projects that have been funded. Leading the list is a joint project of the Museum and the University's Earth Sciences and Resources Institute that was awarded $300,000 by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and will result in an exhibition entitled "The First Egyptians." The exhibition will be the first to introduce the public to the world of the Predynastic peoples who laid the foundations of one of the world's earliest and most enduring civilizations. Recent important archaeological discoveries, conducted by a University expedition led by adjunct professor Michael A. Hoffman, include Egypt's earliest temple. These discoveries will highlight the two major interrelated themes of the exhibition — the nature of interdisciplinary research and the study of the origins of civilization in the Nile Valley. "The First Egyptians" will open at McKissick on April 8, 1988 and run until June 17 of that year. The exhibition will then travel nationally to six museums from July of 1988 until March of 1990, concluding at the National Museum of Natural History at the Smithsonian Institution.

McKissick is traveling its "Row Upon Row" exhibition of sea grass baskets of the South Carolina lowcountry to six other museums over a period of three years. These baskets are an important part of the history and contemporary structure of the Afro-American communities along the coastal South. NEH has awarded the Museum a grant that will enable McKissick to develop an interpretative program of educational materials that will broaden and intensify the impact this exhibition will have on museum audiences. These materials will aid in the understanding of the implications of this tradition and will support the integration of the exhibition into core curriculum at the primary and secondary school levels.

Another project funded by NEH will allow for the planning of an exhibition on the alkaline-glazed stoneware pottery tradition in South Carolina and the influence of this tradition upon stoneware production in the South. The exhibition will focus on the unique geographical, social and cultural factors that came together in the old Edgefield District (which includes present-day Edgefield, Aiken and Greenwood counties) in the early nineteenth century to produce a new pottery tradition. McKissick owns a few pieces of Edgefield pottery but will borrow most of the pieces from private collectors. After opening at McKissick, the exhibition will tour museums throughout the country from 1990 to 1992.

A grant for an archaeological survey of the remains of nineteenth century stoneware pottery manufacturing sites in the old Edgefield District has been awarded to the Museum by the South Carolina Department of Archives and History, with funding through the National Park Service, a division of the U.S. Department of the Interior. The study will enable McKissick to map factory layouts to determine exactly how these operations were set up. McKissick's staff has been studying the Edgefield pottery tradition and its impact on stoneware production throughout the South since 1984, when the Museum received its first NEH grant for this purpose.

The Museum has been awarded a grant from the South Carolina Arts Commission that will enable it to issue a publication, entitled "A Guide to South Carolina Folk Art," that will serve as an introduction to the traditional arts of the state. The guide will be authored by Dr. Gary Stanton, South Carolina's Folk Arts Coordinator, and will be a valuable tool for individuals and local organizations wishing to support and promote the folk arts of their communities. It will also give a history of folk traditions within the state and list many of the artists who are still practicing those traditions. South Carolina will be joining the ranks of a number of other states that have produced publications of this nature.

The University of South Carolina Archives, a division of McKissick Museum, has been awarded grant support from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission that enables the Museum to immediately establish the position of University Records Manager and to establish another position, Assistant University Archivist, next year. The grant project will initiate a dynamic and permanent program involving a broad range of archives and records management activities that will insure the preservation of records that document the rise of the University from a small Southern college to one of the nation's leading institutions of higher education in the areas of research and international cooperation.

Through grants such as the ones described above, McKissick Museum is able to continually expand the programs and services it can offer the University community and the public it serves in the Columbia metropolitan area, the rest of the state and the nation.
McKissick Museum will be bringing programs to classrooms in the Richland and Lexington County areas from October through March. There will be no programs for schools at the Museum during this period while the heating and cooling systems are being replaced. The natural science area will also be undergoing major renovations. However, the Museum will be open to the general public.

These programs are designed to be presented to one class at a time and will be conducted by trained Museum volunteers. The materials and activities will involve the children in small groups with artifacts and specimens from the Museum’s collections.

“Above the Fall Line” will feature a slide introduction to the people and land of the lower piedmont region, which includes the northwestern area of South Carolina. Objects will be used to further interpret the lives of the early settlers in this area.

The life and culture of the southeastern Indians will be presented through a hands-on session examining projectile points, Catawba pottery, legends, toys and games.

Science classes will examine and identify a variety of mineral specimens. There will be an introductory discussion and small group exploratory exercises.

These programs run 45 minutes to one hour and will be available at 10:00 and 11:00 a.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays.