AfriCOBRA Meeting Minutes, 1972-1980

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Minutes of the January 9th Meeting
Place: Nap's place.

We opened our meeting with a representative from the Roosevelt Torch newspaper, Pedro Bell. He asked us a few questions as well as remained while we critiqued Bejai's and Gerald's work. Pedro Bell was given a copy of the objectives written by Nelson and the Philosophy written by Jeff.

During the critique we then discussed the cost of printing for a card that Nelson sent out at Christmas time. He mentioned that it cost $55.00 to have a thousand done on white stock. This $55.00 included the camera work and reductions. The paper cost $20.00 making a total of $75.00. There is a different charge for black and white than for a greyed drawing because of the half tones.

Bejai's estimate of her printing job for her New Year's cards provided some comparison. She had a design instant printed for $16.00. The size was 8½ x 14. The company has a maximum size of no more than 8½ x 14. She had 500 copies made. Her paper (50 lb.) sold at $19.99 for 1000 copies.

During a critique of Gerald's work which dealt with a Christian symbol we got off on the subject of the Christian church and its use as a divisive and oppressive agent. I mentioned that I plan to take a leave of absence effective immediately after the next meeting at my house. I will turn over the books and all correspondence to the members of AfriCobra in Chicago. I am interested in trying to do some changeable mural panels based on two of the religious seasons within the context of the church - in the manner of Cobra. I would like to see a program for art to change the surroundings of the church which are rather dismal.

There was also a critique of Mallory's work which was in drawing form. He mentioned that he wants to bring small clay models of the larger piece for the group to criticize at a future meeting.
We then discussed Jeff's special delivery letter. It was decided that the members of Cobra in Chicago should offer the following alternative solution for Jeff to consider:

In the Spirit of harmony, we Africobra, agree to pay $3.25 for the sale of each of Jeff's prints. This is the figure originally requested by mail for "Victory in the Valley of Eshu". Monies for the sale of posters sold in N.Y. should be forwarded to the treasurer of Africobra, Gerald. Jeff will then receive $3.25 for each one of the posters sold to date.

Jeff's prints will remain with the Africobra 11 exhibit until it closes and all future prints will be sent by Gerald, the Africobra treasurer.

Members present:
Bejai
Gerald
Nap
Mallory
Carolyn
Nelson

Secretary,
Carolyn
Correction of the minutes of December 19, 1971 meeting.

Minute Read:

"Nelson mentioned that he has signed to have the show in May."

Correction:

"Nelson signed a contract for space but he has not signed a contract for money."

Secretary
Carolyn Lawrence
Correction of the minutes of November 29, 1971 meeting.

Minutes Read:

"He mentioned that he had sent a slide of the painting he wanted to reproduce and had received no response one way or the other."

Correction:

"He stated that he sent a slide to Napoleon who offered no plausible excuse for withholding the slide from the membership."
Proposal regarding "Victory" posters.

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Dear AFRICOBRA Members:

At our last meeting on July 9, 1977 attended by Wadsworth, Frank, Jeff, Napoleon, James, and myself the following issues were raised and discussed:

1. We will show in Philadelphia, Pa. at the end of October, 1977.

2. We agree to the proposal made by Bro. Nelson that the idea of making reproductions, which was abandoned be continued. The means, methods, and obligations to be worked out.

3. Approximately 40 works 30x40 could be shown.

4. The show would consist of New work conceived and executed around the theme "So We too..." which reflects our grasp of scope of world-wide African survivalism amidst the specter of ever-present Sowetos.

5. We would meet in Massachusetts to draw up plans for the future in the face of Jarrell’s relocation in Athens, Ga., and with full consensus of members ask Bro. John Kendrick to join the AFRICOBRA Movement.

6. Our treasury currently consists of $525.00.

Jerry.

7/29/77
Minutes for AFRI-COBRA Meeting, July 30, 1978

-Meeting opens with critique of Frank Smiths work. When questioned on his use of symbols, Smith says he is trying to picture sound moving, African masks, the sun, and in making units next to each other as well as overlapping series of small images he makes a quilt-like quality.

-The questions of frames, size, strength, portability, gallery and home hanging arise out of the critique. Stevens suggests silk screens the size of doors in aiming towards producing art for a surface that everyone is already in possession of. Donaldson emphasizes the importance of images being available to a lot of people, and AFRI-COBRA’S dedication to produce prints every year. He brings up the importance of symmetry and likens it to the registers in Egyptian art giving it its order. He follows with a story about the hornbill an African symbol. The birds nesting rituals result in the survival of only the strongest offspring. This bird which is found all over Africa, particularly among the Senufo, is associated with strength, endurance and our survival. As the surviving offspring is a super race so should be the survivors of the middle passage.

-In Frank Smiths second work the image of clasped hands is noticed.

-Neal brings up the concept of deep structure in relation to Smiths work, a concept he further explores with Donaldson, who adds the feeling of the subliminal that emanates from the work a wholeness....all making it a very personal piece.

-Anderson notices the circular structure of the work, connotating the wealth that circular forms stand for, the sun, ovaries, the world....

-Auld also confirms the spiraling whirlpool effect of viewing the piece.

-Smith, "Much of my work has to do with spirals, if you start at that orange circle you can spiral out to the edge of the piece."

-Donaldson- The spiral is derived from a register, rhythm, order, a spiral requires an order.

-A spiral can be related to life-the quick pace of youth that broadens out towards middle age.

-?What if people who had something special could "jump a ring"?
- Neal approaches work and points out a snake image, as well as other images within 'units'.
- Donaldson identifies the Gemini quality in the work.
- Stevens to Smith: I can get to the smaller pieces because of the sub division of units. In this large piece, the sub divisions are very much the same- he identifies diverse size, shapes as a strength.
- Donaldson "Full field color-Full field form". Recalling conversations on Smiths 'black porch' about John Coltranes mastery of being able to play the 'whole' song.
- Stevens explains that modular units of the same size become the same weight, when used over every part of a composition. This has the tendency to flatten and produce no central focus.
- Donaldson: "You can't say it's the same because of differences in color, space and intensity.
- Auld- The whole thing reads as one thing.
- The critique concludes with Donaldson commenting on Locke: observation of blacks commitment to surface- "The impressive quality of the facade on African art work that even when accumulating dust and filth maintain an appealing surface". Egyptian art has that all over use of surface space or our concept of 'shine'."
- Anderson raises the question ? Is shine painted in or out? Discussion follows.
- Critique of James Phillips work-
- Haynes: I think imprisonment is in it.
- Auld sees the union of male and female and a whole series of orgasms.
- Neal relates it to a whole feeling of electricity touched on earlier.
- Smith: I think your small work is more energetic.
- Critique: Jeff Donaldsons work-
- Donaldson- Quality. What I want ultimately is a surface that has embellishment. It comes when I am dealing with an area rather than a figure. He asks for input.
- Auld- I get the feeling of figures converging on a central skeletal form of an imperial eagle, a fascist symbol of the Nazis or Americans.
-Anderson asks ways to deal with those images that were stolen from us and used negatively by whites that we now wish to reclaim.
-Donaldson-Suggests making an adjustment so the symbol does convey what we want it to mean. As Malcolm would say 'by any means necessary', necessary to reach the aim.

-Donaldson relates the mouths in his work as deriving from Malangatana compositions.

-Neal feels the mouths set up a conflict of dialogue. Should the teeth be very white?

-Stevens-Bringing up the question of color, how intense are you going to take it? Also the figures I get the feeling of not one figure moving but four or five.

-Donaldson-I wanted to intensify the center but think I may be trying to hard. This is inspired by a hunting scene in an Egyptian tomb, he explains the Egyptian sign of a figures movement, portrayed by the angle of the garment to the body.

-Auld’s comment “what is it with the bun biting, draws attention to the placement of the mouths in the composition.”

-The conversation leads to Stevens declaring the triangle as the simplest unit of measurement. Opposing the Western concept of the square holding this prestigious position. He cites Buckminsterfuller as the sole deviant within this culture, who gives credence to the triangle in his concept of the geodethic dome. But without tracing the origin back to Egypt, its known origins. Stevens projects the position of the angle in a triangle to be action verus the restfulness of horizontals and verticals in the square. He brings up the use of biometric forms inside a rectangle in Donaldson’s painting that takes advantage of this.

-Henderson remarks on the viewing of a painting simultaneously with TV.

-Stevens expounds this topic to reflect on the differences light will make in the viewing a work of art.

-Anderson identifies the jewels as originating in Egyptian art.

-Donaldson verbalizes an idea he has of doing portraits in the near future. His search for the correct materials for his compositions engages much time. Suggestions are given for possible sources of 3 ply board. He reveals the temptation to leave figures out and work just the material.

-Anderson suggests to try it. Begin working and find the figure later.
He terms the use of figures in a piece as 'links to a bridge'.

-Donaldson points out a central photo in the work as the starting point. He continues about how the piece must be sealed [[sealed]] to preserve it.

-Critique of Adger Cowans photostat of a piece-

-Cowans- Request input on the image he is presenting. It was pictured in a dream.

-Donaldson notices areas of solid and relief areas. Cowans does alot [[a lot]] of painting on black he feels it is the sum of all color and uses color on black.

-Phillips-I get the feeling of an ankh [[ankh]] and embellishment. Or a Shango figure.

-The picture has the proportions of pygmies, who in the African tradition where the first people, hence deriving the proportions of a large head area and small body.

-Much discussion followed this concept.

-Critique of Nelson Stevens work-

-Donaldson- You seem to be getting involved with deep space.

-Auld is reminded of medical illustrations.

-Donaldson sees this but claims the piece doesn't rely on it. He inquires about the pelvis bone in recent work.

-Stevens explains that we were the oldest bone on earth. He, trying to find an African American symbol went to a universal symbol of rebirth.

-Cowans likens the color of the bone to daylight.

-Two of Stevens other paintings are put up, discussion follows-

-Donaldson suggest the association of the bone with the macabre, mutilation, amputees, and death

-Stevens feels the bone reads different things depending on the context [[context]] it's presented in. The color distribution, and distribution of static and moving forms comprises this difference.

-Henderson identifies the difference between isolation and incorporation of the pelvic bone as elements making the composition work.
- Steven- I am trying to get a feeling of glass, plastic shapes molded out of plastic sheets, a translucency.

- Criticism arises out of the pedestrian pose of the top figure.

- Donaldson- How are you relating this to Koolaid color? He brings up the example of
Monets work dissolving [[dissolving]] into a sugary mist at the end. We are Koolaid people aren't we he asks?

-Stevens further uncovers the relationship of the pelvic bone to the work of anthropologist who have verified the origin of man in Africa, and the eclipse symbol which represents the union of man and woman/the sun and the moon.

-Auld feels that the absence of a male figure in the composition represents women held in limbo, searching.

-Donaldson expresses the feeling of voluminous [[voluminous]] depth and flesh underneath flesh.

-Discussion continues to include the aura of a person and various artistic methods which record this.

-Cowans suggests we give credence to Buddhist and yogs who also follow this thought.

-Anderson accepts this, but continues to add that mixing our beliefs with those of others might be a dangerous thing, for black people.

-slides of Andersons taken in Africa follow-

-Further directions of the group concluded the meeting-

-edition of prints
-exhibits in colleges and galleries
-printing of an Afri-Cobra brochure
-sending prints to Adger Cowan for March '79 print show, NYC
-possibilities of a touring exhibit in Europe and Africa
-need for public relations agent for group publicity and organization
-O Dukes is suggested and Larry Neal agrees to approach him on the issue

-next meeting will be held the third Sunday in August at Phillips, and every month thereafter.

-Neal submits quotes on symbols and Strategies by Ellison.
ATTENDANCE AFRI COBRA MEETING JULY 30, 1978

ROSE AULD  1519 Monroe st NW Wash DC 20010  234 0843
JAMES PHILLIPS  1700 Harvard st NW Wash DC 20009
NAPOLEON JONES HENDERSON  12 Morley st, Roxbury Ma 02119  617 442 4856
JEFF DONALDSON  3900 16th st NW Wash DC 20011  202 882 7353
ADGER COWANS  136 W.Broadway NYC 10013
HELEN HAYNES  1712 16th st NW #503 DC 20009
FRANK SMITH  3206 Warder st NW DC 20010  726 3902
RON ANDERSON (AKILI ASKIA AMABENEMU)  3426 13th st NW DC 20010  202 232 8541/291 4736
KALIMA SOHANI 300 West 17th st NYC 10011  212 255 5309
Larry Neal  319 East Capitol st SE Washington DC 20003  202 543 1961
Nelson Stevens  319 East Capitol st SE  202 546 9246
Dona L. Jones  "  "

Smithsonian Institution Transcription Center, Archives of American Art
Minutes, September 24, 1978
Afri-Cobra

Guidelines for critiques: seven minutes for the artist to speak three minutes for responses.

Critique of Frank Smith’s Work

Frank is working with quilt-work paintings. He uses sewing thread, and embellishments to produce colorful compositions.

One piece is entitled “Come Sunday” an Ellington tune. This was Frank’s parents favorite song and he includes a portrait of his mother in the painting.

The forms of concentric circles is noticed in the work. This pattern is linked to the Basonge type. He has super imposed the symbolic image of Charlie Parker over the design.

Smith’s works are designed not to have a top or bottom.

James Phillips and Donaldson agree that a rhythmic embellishment would accent the paintings greatly.

Critique of Michael Harris’ Work

“I am working with raw canvas and trying to preserve the tapestry effect of my earlier work. I want these to look like they have been touched by the human hand rather than the total preciseness of before. A sense of depth and shimmer.”

Michael shows three paintings, one entitled “Kalahari’s Edge” another “River Dust”. The work has a linear quality with tonal areas that seem absorbed into the canvas. Some are painted on animal skins.

Frank Smith is excited by the free form shape of the skin and wonders if dying can result in a different effect?

James Phillips suggest the need for more variance in color.

Frank Smith agrees that a texture would also add to the contrast.

Stevens notices the background circle, a new appearance in Harris’ work. He feels that the containment inherent in the circular form is creating a feeling of incompleteness. This could be partially solved by extending the motifs off the canvas.

Stevens suggests added embellishment of areas to gain more contrasts. He also warns about repetition of registers in the works. There must be a link in the design motifs to hold them together. He senses a feeling of incompleteness. This could be partially solved by extending the motifs off the canvas.

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struggling against the horizontality of the design.

Donaldson commends Harris on his sense of color.

Stevens suggests a half circle in place of the full circle to symbolize the sky and land connection.

-Critique of Talibah Fennell's Work

"T" shows a painting that she completed approximately six months ago. It evolved after not painting at all for one and a half years. She used it to experiment with different colors, textures and methods of working. The result is an amalgamation of styles that makes one very successful painting.
Art Beatty sees individual paintings in areas of the piece that could be developed into total works. He points out such areas.

Donaldson stresses the importance of presentation, bringing attention to the matte. He feels that a fine line on the painting's edge would accomplish this.

Stevens agrees that the matte is not the best choice of presenting the painting. He identifies the color of the matte as a problem area. It harmonizes the work rather than complementing it.

-Critique of Rose Auld's Work-

Rose Auld explains that she is an artist and educator. She shows posters she has done as an educational venture to explain Rastafarian culture to Washintonians. Some of the motifs she incorporates are from Ethiopian culture—coptic crosses, from Ghanaian culture—crosses (which represent women). The four prints have words stating the religious doctrines of the Rasta group. The letters INRI appear on the back of the garments worn by the figures. It stands for I Niegus Rule Israel. This also appears on the crosses used to crucify Christ according to Auld.

Rose is presently writing a framework for art education in the D.C. public school system.

She hands around a drawing for a major work she intends on starting. Stevens remarks on the quality of a drawing she has passed around suggesting she not destroy it in her process to produce a finished work.

-Critique of Art Beatty's Work-

Art Beatty sets up a large unstretched canvas that he is working on. He shows the black and white photo collage that is the source of the oil painting. "Dedication to Trane" is the title of the piece. A head and horn of Trane can be seen along side other images, symbols. This symbolism comes to him through dreams, revelations and experiences. They are symbols of nature, strength and spirituality that he has chosen to incorporate into the Trane painting.

Donaldson questions the shift in Beatty's work from this type of oil, to the loose water color collage he also displays. Art feels he has the ability to express himself in many different media and styles and has cultivated this during his stay in Spain.

James feels the need for different shades of blue to relieve the overriding tone used. He also suggests that Beatty dispense with his frequent use of white.

The bull in the Trane painting brings about discussion. The bull fight is a racist sport. Traditionally the toreador represents the white race and the underdog, the bull, the black race.
-Crite of James Phillips Work-

"AWFUL, ALRIGHT AND AWESOME."

James calls these the Echo Series. He displays a large group of large paintings which ilicit the following response. Donaldson feels that minimum of five works must be viewed in order to get a feeling of the groove the artist is in. He feels that Phillips has the consistency to fully explore and area once he gets in that groove. Reminiscent of Lawrence, and all that has gone on since.

(more)
James shows six in the series. Two paintings get the most response. One is a piece that Phillips says encompasses all of his explorations. Another is the last piece which is the consummation of the series/everyone feels that the last piece is very strong.

Beatty feels that the conglomerate piece has three very separate parts and lacks the completeness of the last work. Rose calls the work a sampler because it is the composite of Phillips last 10 years of painting. Michael Harris sees the 'sampler' as less straightforward it captures the mystic feeling of an ascending spirit.

-Critique of Nelson Stevens work

"I was trying to see what I could do with red and not go to yellow." Nelson explains while displaying a large painting of a head. "I am using red and green primarily and trying to balance them out."

Frank Smith, "I feel some circular planes coming out of the picture surface, like wire sculpture. A lot of volume and space is enclosed."

Donaldson feels that the work registers Stevens old rhythms and is influenced by Washington life rhythms. He also feels that yellows can be dispensed with completely. Less is more and eliminating the yellow would allow more depth and range on the deeper tones present. He covers over part of the painting to demonstrate.

Rose Auld notices that the yellow gives bits and pieces of raw energy to the work. There is no limitation to this energy force.

Donaldson points out that the areas that employ light tones (yellow), rely more on color than form and shape and movement. He mentions Al Smith as another artist who has worked with unnatural colors for skin tone and has been successful. He finally feels that Nelson Stevens is still teaching too much in his work, the public is educated enough to his work to enable diversion from giving so much information.

Stevens says that he is working on a technique to get there. Donaldson points out a concept called 'horror vacui' which explains the tendency for Islamic and primitive cultures to fill up all areas of a composition with design. He site this in relation to economy of materials which imposes itself on cultures. The ability to deal with total color, and max participation. A world view of rounded totality, a sphere with never ending movement. He links this to John Coltrane being able to act as total composer, musician playing every aspect of music. He continues to add that all life is occupied space only the artist can make, create an 'empty' area, if he so chooses.

-Business-

-New York Show- Organized by Ed Spriggs to feature Afri Cobra. The consortium space is identified as too small for entire group to exhibit. Alternatives- only show a few members work, seek larger more appropriate space, (possible space Labor Union Gallery)

-Market Five Gallery- need to contact John at the gallery, show should be scheduled after Feb. when the gallery gets grant to print catalogues.
- Anacostia Gallery- Nelson Stevens will contact regarding showing there.
- Sub committee meeting to be held Wens. Sept 27 to discuss incorporation of AFRI-COBRA, at Nelson Stevens house. At that time we will also decide on party of Black Caucus Weekend.

- Next meeting at Tailbah Fennell's last Sunday in Oct.
- Everyone remember to bring 5 slides, Resume, 50 word personal statement for brochure. ******** also 1 8x10 photo of yourself.
ATTENDANCE FOR AFRI COBRA MEETING
Sept. 24, 1978

ROSE AULD
JAMES PHILLIPS
JEFF DONALDSON new phone 332 7446 504 T st N.W.
NELSON STEVENS
TALIBAH FENNELL
FRANK SMITH
MICHAEL HARRIS
ART BEATTY 1613 Harvard st apt 403 Washington, D.C.
DONA JONES

[[handwritten]] PS Nelson requests the next meeting be scheduled for Sun. Nov 5 due to an opening in Atlanta he must attended the 28. Please give feedback as to convenience of this date. [[/handwritten]]
JEFF

MINUTES OF THE AFRI COBRA MEETING, NOVEMBER 1978

Helen Haynes-(Now teaching at Miami University, Oxford, Ohio), has made application to the Ohio state arts council through the African and Afro American Traditions in American Culture program. Both instate and out-state artists and critics will participate. With Karamu House, Chuck Davis, A.B. Spellman and Afri Cobra (comprising the visual arts component, the program will run tentatively from April 1-30.

Present Budget
transportation
workshops
insurance
publication

 total..............$2,000

Proposed Budget
transportation $1,500
workshops $100 @ 2 = 200
insurance 300
catalog 2,500
fee 500 @ stop 500

 total............$5,000

Ohio locations to be toured include: Central State(Paul Robeson Center) Ohio University (where Robert Peppers will produce 30 minute film of exhibition and workshops), and the Cincinnati Arts Consortium.

Stevens-Suggests additional funding sources coming from other institutions. Youngstown is one possibility.

Anderson-Proposes making prints with the color separations used for the catalog reproductions.

Donaldson-Reports on exhibit at the Market 5 Gallery projected for 2 weeks in the begining of March ’79.

Critique of Rose Auld's Work-
The piece she displays was shown at an earlier meeting, it is now nearing completion.

Akili-When do we know when a piece is finished?

Frank Smith- When to reduce (remove) an element makes it incomplete and to add an element makes it something else.

Donaldson- “Superfluous.” This issue needs to be decided in Afri Cobra on a group level.

He notices the full field color and full field form in the painting.

Auld- Total use of the given areas/ design and embellishment, total interrelatedness of color.
Donaldson-Voidless.

Smith-Full field image.
Donaldson- Notices something in the head that doesn't match the fluidity of the rest of the piece.

Auld- There is a contrast in everything, I was trying to be totally different. Trying to capture the spirit of festivals jubilation, spirits, the feeling of music coming from every angle.

Donaldson- Notices the area with the leader playing an instrument. That area doesn't seem to groove well with the piece.

Stevens- Points out the area at the bottom as being more quiet and angular, solid with large pieces. The width of the black line remains the same throughout.
He suggests using lighter colored lines and varying the width.

Donaldson- The color would vary the width of the line.

Stevens-Line contains, do you think that generates energy?

Smith-Perceives the visual chaos because of the color ranges. The range of hues is just above high intensity and contrasted with a range of browns.

Michael Auld - I've heard much criticism of the line used in Rose's paintings. People seem to equate it with the comic strip kind of thing... Rose uses line for an important reason. The traditional point of view, a flat traditional motivation.

Stevens- Observers are preconditioned to equate line to comic strip. When the colors are side by side they tend to vibrate more than you can stand. The line brings it all together.

Talibah- The way Rose uses the line brings it all down to earth.

Donaldson- Has problems with the line changing from organic to geometric.

Attention turns to a circular piece of hide Rose has strung up on a hula hoop structure.

Stevens-It needs to be more precise.

Talibah-There is a disharmonious severity, attributed to extreme black and white and high intensity colors. The colors read as if directly out of the jar.

Auld- The circle is a sacred shape, the hoop of life, we exist in different circles of life. The design for the work came from the Powhatan Indian tribe of N.E. Washington, D.C.
Critique of Tabilah Fennels Work-

She displays one work seen at an earlier meeting and a small geometric piece.

Talibah -I had done some colored pencil on cardboard, applying different colors together- I wanted to keep a brush in my hand for a while-an exercise in color and composition.

Akili- like the color symetry of the larger piece with the differences in design.

Donaldson-The small piece needs embellishment. The illusion of planes is already well structured shapes need to be enhances. The work contains no real place I can jump off from. Color is very advanced in terms of choice and placement.

Talibah-I thought I'd do a series of six to work on color.

Donaldson- Rythm established by shape and color are good. What are you doing beyond color?

Talibah-I have to do a strong sense of balance. A testimony of the area in my consciousness.

Smith-It's a song played four ways.

Akili - Is Afri-Cobra concerned with the figurative?

Donaldson- Yes but T is growing in what she's doing and hasn't moved to figuratively based thing. Her color sense is refined and beautiful Transparencies would be something good to get into.

Smith- I see asymetrical working with symetrical is that going to be resolved?

Talibah - I like to look at my paintings in a dim light so they will be the only light.

-The light is turned off so that the group views the paintings again-

Stevens-The background isn't consistent with the area inside the circles.

Talibah-I like to see the contradiction. The contradiction is the hard geometry and the softer forms with in circles. What is happening with the four parameters is also happening within the ground.

Donaldson-Examines painting to refute the interaction of the "border" area. Most successful areas leave the border idea and incorporate it into the painting.
He unfurls a large rolled up canvas on the floor.

This is from a series. I began cutting them up and combining them. Eventually I want to superimpose different symbols on top of the painting. I've been working on these for a couple of years.

Are you printing on these?

The yellow is silk screen. I have figures of animals and people

Mostly color and shape changes, the original design is blown up in scale. The base coat is tiny circles. I threw pennies on the canvas and sprayed it.

Can they be used in the home as rugs?

Donaldson: Why did you use Kinte cloth to extend?

Kinte cloth is a garment of royalty-I use it to reflect African patterns as theater backdrops and on an album cover.

Expresses Afri Cobra's previous concern with peoples total living spaces.

Shows wooden toys he has made and is producing on a large scale for retailing. They are designed with symbols black children can relate to. A train-elephant on wheels and a puzzle(3d) of Africa.

The piece of sculpture is called Olokun Has Returned

Olokun is the Yoruba god of the sea come to land. It has legs of mudfish, the eel or snake is represented in a circular form (it has to do with the continuity of the earth)

Feels that the bottom goes flat detracting from the rest of the sculpture. He points out that Michael has brought the Caribe and African deities into view, when previous concern has been with Afro-American culture primarily.

Reads the bottom as part of the piece.
Auld - its intended to be a stand, its a resolution of the support of the sculpture.
Auld's second piece is entitled Bambara Woman. The back is similar to a Tiwara sculpture. It deals with a woman in pain. The angles and dislocation of the breasts represent the bringing forth of children into such a world as ours. Its constructed in a wavelike contraction.

[[underline]] Talibah [[/underline]]-I see the linear formation in terms of time.

The meeting continues to include membership considerations. Final decisions are postponed till next morning.

[[underline]] Attendance [[/underline]]

Frank Smith  
Jeff Donaldson  
Nelson Stevens  
Rose Auld  
Michael Auld  
Ron Anderson Akili  
Talibah Fennell  
Dona Jones recorder  

#
Afri-Cobra Meeting November 5, 1978

-Critique of Frank Smith’s Work-

The work is done on buckskin, their [there] are 18 peices [pieces] in the series. Frank points out one piece called “Arising Spirits.” The title is spelled out in the work. It is an aerial view, having no top or bottom, it is designed to work from any angle. The imaginary energy enclosed in the cycle is dispersed, radiating out. This tradition of stitching and quilting is intrinsically Afro-American. Most of the stitching at this point is done by machine.

-Stevens-How do you exhibit them?
-Ron Anderson suggests a plywood suspension.
-Harris- Refers to Cliff Clay a Cleveland artist who also works with stretched skins.
-Nelson Stevens adds the work of Joe Overstreet, who some time ago also worked with free form skin like irregular canvas. On which he painted targets.
-Aturo Lindsay suggests exhibiting them four to five feet from the wall, possibly strung from the ceiling and floor at different levels.
-Stevens notices the black textured areas painted black.
-Frank explains that he first painted the area black with acrylic then incorporated black tiny threads and heavy yarn. This is backed by heavy canvas making the quilted effect. It is a very tactile piece.
-Ron Anderson says the texture around the edge should be continued in the center. He also inquires as to how much metallic thread is being used.
-Frank Smith identifies blue, copper, white, and silver, bronze, gold etc [etc.] as the metallic threads used.
-Stevens sees the extension of this to be metallic wire in addition to the rope.
-Ron points out interest of the frayed edge.
-Art Beauty feels that hanging the yarn off the edge of the piece [piece] would increase interest.

-Critique of Michael Harris’ Work-

-Michael Harris-“I have been going thru a period of change. Analogous to labor pains. This painting is the head just coming out, freedom from past structure.” The work includes more spatial effects than previous paintings by Harris. He is continuing to use the mandala symbol to express his personal relationship to the sun. One painting is called “Jazz”. Michael begins very intuitively letting the work develop [develop] and “talk to me”.
-Rose Auld-“What kind of skin?”
-Harris- explains he is working on suede leather. Using layers of matte varnish to size it. The softness of the materials give wrinkled effects. He then cut the suede to resemble the shape of Zimbabwe.
-Frank Smith points out that the monting [mounting] doesn’t do the piece justice. It’s not large enough to give the work the space it needs. Plywood is suggested not to be as good as wood mounting.
-Ron Anderson agrees, he adds that the square and rectangle shape limits the free form skin shape.
-Michael Harris feels that the familiar rectangle should emphasize [emphasize] the irregular. He wants to get into using other materials such as nails.
- Art Beatty: "Why don't you leave more of the natural skin exposed?"
- Stevens recalls his own paintings on doors, remembering the process he went through to arrive at incorporating the natural wood.
- Zimbabwe the next piece Harris shows is more successful in mounting.
- Another work displayed "Hot Licks for Satchmo and All Jazz Daddies" is concerned with space, raw canvas, translucencies and under layers showing through. Harris uses caulk to build up raised designs under paint.
- Stevens: "How did you decide on the size of the head?"
- Harris: says it was intuitive, he started with the underpainting and came out with a head the size that would leave the mandala surrounding it.
- Adger Cowans: "I miss the dark blue not appearing again. The blue tones are too light and happy. You need more moody blues, like those evolved in the head area."
- Harris: "I thought that more of the moody blues would be too much against the hot electricity of the rest. Lights change the colors very much."
- Donaldson: "Why do the forms change so drastically when they reach the head?" says Jeff Donaldson. "The forms all stop, as if he were creating all that was going on around him or it creating him. You need a more positive relationship dividing the head from the background. Even though the colors are really singing the head doesn't have to hang on that neck so hard."
- Adger Cowans suggests cutting the wood to the exact shape of the skin. Then mounting on a stand.
- Critique of Ron Anderson's work-
- Anderson: "The small heads were carved 10 years ago at Howard. This is the third piece in a series, two of which have been shown at previous meetings. This one is minus the rafia because it was distracting from the piece."
- Jeff Donaldson: "Suggests stiffening the remaining rafia to reflect the shape underneath the heads."
- Anderson: "I'm trying for a gradual distribution of color and shape. The canvas allows for a sandy texture built up to form structure."
- Aduro Lindsay: "What is happening around the back?"
- Ron: "Not too much as been developed on the back."
- Others express the feeling of wanting to go around the piece.
- Lindsay: The presentation needs to be considered more. The string which the work hangs by is referred to.
- Ron Anderson: "The supporting string is versatile. Depending on the gallery it can be used to hang the piece or just to decorate the work."
- Rose Auld: Feels that the small carved head detracts from the beauty of the total piece.
- Donaldson: Is impressed with color sense achieved through experimenting with 3 dimensional skins and paint. "You are somewhere between 3 dimensional and painting."
- Adger Cowans sees the small carved head an unnecessary reiteration of the background circle which evokes a head anyway.
- Art Beatty: "The piece has a spiritual and mystical presence. "I find it hard to put restrictions on a work like that."
- Donaldson: "An image that no one can read is an uncipherable mark. It must be made by one and understood by another. A symbol proves itself when it is regarded and dealt with by the significant other."
-Critique of Damballah Dolphus Smith's Work-

-Rose Auld sees the drawings displayed by Damballah as [crossed-out] multiple self portraits.
-Damballah- This is an ongoing series celebrating Africa, South America and the East. I use a rapidograph.
-Frank Smith asks about the symbolism in the drawings.
-Donaldson-Explains a feeling of melancholia he gets from the work. Deep heavy contemplation. The Thinker by Rodin is an example of another work which evokes this. In the East it is identified by the Buddha.
-Damballah-“I haven't researched it. The imagery is coming through me. I hope my work isn't meaningless even though I didn't know the specific. I love Makonde sculpture and the allness of man, animal.
-Stevens-“How do you start, with pencil?”
-Damballah-“Sometimes and then sometimes I go directly to the paper with pen.”
-Donaldson-Cortor, Clarke, Papa Tall, Wilfredo Lamb and Nacimento come up as references for his work. “Interesting and a good groove. You have mastered the tool.”
-Damballah- “The drum the musician is playing is evoking the figure on the left.”
-Art Beatty-“The textures are marvelous.”
-Damballah relates the appendages that break in two places to Indonesian art.

-Critique of Nelson Stevens work-

-Nelson Stevens-“I'm working more with connecting symmetrical objects.”
-Donaldson-“I like the looseness and absence of white (chiaroscuro considerations)
-Talibah- “It looks as if you went over everything with a wash to give it a brilliance.”
-Stevens-“There are some transparent areas, only a few, for the most part the picture is solid.”
-Anderson-Notices the distribution of forms and directions. The two solid green shapes, at the nostril and chin distract.
-Talibah- “I like the background, the subtle geometry goes back.”
-Michael Auld- Sees the closeness and distances, having the feeling of a slide projection being focused at different distances.
-Frank Smith notices the tendency of Stevens to be less active in the dark areas as opposed to light.
-Anderson detects the strokes follow the contour of the forms. Stevens- “That comes from life sculpture (sculpture)"
-Talibah senses a ripeness in the work. "How do you start", she asks.
-Stevens- I begin with penciling in the whole form, then I used 5 reds and greens trying to tie strokes across face.
-Donaldson-“Why do you feel constrained to make such realistic faces?”
-Stevens-“I'm aiming for recognizable features.” (black features)
-Frank Smith-“The eyes have a certain definite transparence and much depth.”
-Jeff Donaldson-Suggests thinking in terms of a light source from back of inside.
-Smith feels that the whole piece could use more transparencies.
-Donaldson-“When a/piece [[piece]] become a presence no one but the
artists can tell how its done."
- Nelson Stevens: “We need to identify symbols in Afro American life, and use them in paintings. We need the older symbols such as BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL; they are not out of style.”
- Smith: We have to face the differences between folk culture and the elite culture.

**BUSINESS**

The January show by Ed Spriggs has been cancelled. Ed suggests contacting The Henry O. Tanner Gallery through Ted.

- Ron will organize a Afri Cobra slide library.

- Frank Smith: Has arranged with Helen Haynes an Afri-Cobra exhibit with the Ohio Arts Council, Miami University, Central State and Arts Consortium in Cincinnati. The shows will be around April ’79.

- Other exhibit possibilities are
  - Walks of Peachtree Gallery-Atlanta
  - University of Georgia in Athens through Jarrell
  - Karamu House
  - Southside Community Center
  - Edsel Reid in Chicago

**ATTENDANCE**

Nelson Stevens
Jeff Donaldson
Frank Smith
Michael Harris
Talibah Fennell
Ron Anderson (Akili)
Michael and Rose Auld
Damballah Dolphus Smith
Aturo Lindsay
Barbara Hudson
Art Beatty
Adger Cowans
Donna L. Jones (secretary)
AFRICOBRA MEETING

December 9, 1979

In Attendance:

R. Auld
M. Auld
N. Henderson
J. Phillips
N. Stevens
M. Harris
F. Smith
A. Cowans
J. Donaldson
E. Spriggs
H. Haynes
Akili Amaberemy

Guests: Rosalind Jeffries Barbara Hudson

I. POSSIBLE 1980 EXHIBITION - DISCUSSION

(E. Spriggs)

Possible Show

A. Jamaica Art Center (N.Y.) January 15-28
B. Bronx Museum (N.Y.) March 12-April 27

Bronx Museum - 3 shows will run currently

“Development of Afro-American Art” - theme

Show 1) Harmon Foundation (James Porter, Lois Jones, Archibald Motley, etc.

Show 2) Africobra segment - to show where they are now.

Show 3) Linda Bryant, Suzanne Jackson, Conwell, etc.

The Bronx Museum show will be a Black History Month function. Lowery Sims originally was to be the curator, organizer etc. of the show. She was to be responsible for written definitive prices about the work in the show. 21 Africobra pieces are to be shown. Location of the Bronx Museum is close to the area of Yankee Stadium and the Bronx Courthouse. Africobra will be projected after 10 years of being in existence as part of the “avant garde” movement - there will be a catalogue printed from the show. The gallery space is large. N. Stevens raised questions about the catalogue.

(N. Henderson) Will the catalogue contain color? A long discussion ensued.

(E. Spriggs) He can't negotiate for the group.

-an insurance broker is needed. Spriggs will call back after receiving response from organizers.
From Detroit - a formal letter of invitation to show was received from Shirley Woodson. The show would be set tentatively for May.

*N.C.A. is coming to Washington, D.C. in April.

(N. Henderson) - there needs to be a standard of letter of information stating the conditions under which the group will show - so as to generate "business".

A development committee should organized. Henderson has access to color xeroxing material, etc. A printed pocket folder is needed.
II. Critiques of Work

A. Helen Haynes Critique

H. Haynes - 3 paintings (acrylic) 1 pen and 1 ink drawing

Stevens-“Cocks Piece” control has really improved, also her ability to user color - especially reds.

Haynes- is involved with patterns and rhythm in her work.

her affinity to music is reflected in her changing rhythms, which have a quality of music.

She is in the process of working over her old pieces.

She sees herself primarily as a figurative artist. Her use of decorative embellishments is on the increase.

The spirit of her subject is projected in her Rastafarian piece. Organic forms are used in the work - natural forms and rhythms. Energy patterns interject suggestion of other things that are happening as opposed to larger pieces.

Stevens - overdrawing on the face should not look like applied patterns - they should work with the form.

B. Rose Auld Critique

2 circular acrylic paintings on leather 4x4 diptych

Auld - Use of Afro-Asian “symbologies” analogy of Native American condition with that of the South African. Traditional Asian and African symbols are used to underline the commonality of the “stranger in one’s own land” problem as opposed to the Black American “stranger in a strange land concept.” Relates her affinity for using all areas in her work for embellishment and design.

(Donaldson) That’s called “horror vacui” literally, “fear or avoidance of empty space - a basic Africobra - Farafindugu principle.

(Donaldson) (reaction to Aulds plans for mounting the piece on a woodburned plywood round) “Do you feel that woodburning the background will be compatible with the precision of the piece?”

(Henderson) There is a pattern already in the wood that burning will vie with.

(Smith) Alligator section of the work reminds one of an aerial section of a loaded slave ship.
C. Mike Auld Critique

Piece #1 working life-sized model head of African design-inspired playground equipment. The entire playground is to be constructed piece by piece, and used as prototype for future mass production.

Piece #2 The dimensions of the wood enclosed metal piece is 10 feet by 8 feet. The piece is modeled off of an African harp - redesigned in the form of playground swings. Other components include scale models of each piece of playground equipment, and an orchestrated scale model of the entire playground concept.

Donaldson - suggested color application to the basically plain wood-stained surface.

Henderson - suggested the use of decorative beads set in plastic for the purpose of indestructibility.

Donaldson - add baby swings so that all levels of children can enjoy the equipment.

Henderson - use the lost wax process idea for embedding beadwork in the wood body.

Auld - the idea is not just to be African only - but an ethnic identity move.

D. Michael Harris' Critique

Harris - "spirit series" dealing with African ritualistic concepts. The theme evolved out of the death of his father and other life events. Media used - acrylic paint, ric rac, beads, cords, fibers.

Male and female images are utilized.

Male - sharp or hard lines and forms
Female - soft and curved lines and forms

"Homage to Ollie" paper bags - rag content printing paper is used in his later work.

"Libation For Those Who Are Not Here"

"Tribute to Trane" - brown wrapping paper, ric rac.

His movements are getting more involved with presentations/visualizations of figural images. He is not just using floating heads.

"Azania Will Be Ours" - 100% rag paper.
This tone is grayer - new color relationships have evolved. The number
of works in the spirit series is unknown at this time. He is using more pencil to get works and colors, etc. The work is spacious, yet not empty. There are a lot of metallic paints in the pieces - golds, bronzes, etc. Sun image in the background is a Mandala "Hathor" vibrations are significant.

"Bird" - symbol of the soul into the New World. Design movements imanate [emanate] in and out of the spiritual forms used.

E. Akili's Critique
oil paint on Bainbridge board.

Serpentine forms are used to transform all manners of human and animal forms. Triangular structural components define the forms in a prismatic idiom. Colors and design are strong and pure. His work is like a jewel - the group was in agreement with the "jewel" concept.

F. Jeff Donaldson's Critique
Large TriWall piece in the midst of preparation for painting. The work is the first in a series of twenty women he will have known/he has yet to know than/they shall be revealed to him. The pieces will address themselves to the following -

a. repetition and change (32 view of a sister's "foundation" in a variety of attitudes" were
b. horror vacui
c. facets and registers
d. each will have images in different images
e. each composition will concern itself with one woman.

Problem - how to name the works and present them in such a way so as not to be derogatory.

He wants to idealize the specific and varied wonders of the black woman's anatomical splendor and to elevate the subject to the point of aesthetic analysis and polite discussion.

G. Adger Cowans' Critique
Black and white photography

A set of 3 black and white photographs were shown. They form a self-portrait concept. All of the pictures are from a self-portrait series he is working on. The size just happened visually. There is a dream world atmosphere in the work. He set up the props for the background by taping tissue paper butterflies over a window and waiting for a "perfect light". The pictures were inverted, turned sideways, etc. The work is very conceptual and suggestive of personal associative meaning for the individual viewer.
H. Napoleon Henderson's Critique

Drawings for tapestries to be made for Atlanta International Airport Commission (21,000). 2 panels each are to be constructed. Each will measure 14x10 feet. The completion date is August 1, 1980. The work is primarily organized in curvilinear forms based around a central pyramid—and the compositional form of a woman. A collective process for the sketches was used—different people worked on them. The figures in the compositions are mainly female.

A thumbsucking figure raised a lot of discussion as to its positive/negative connotation.

Stevens - the left side of the sketch needs to be developed further.

Henderson - related the inspiration and symbolic meanings of each section of his sketches.

I. Frank Smith's Critique

Acrylic painting/patchwork/applique on fabrics. Main compositional elements:

a. use of inverted images
b. "void" areas have eyes and designs
c. 3 systems of "folks" - snake - like figures

figures with heads turned outward
figures with heads turned inward

He makes use of "design patches" to make his quilts. The works are a mixture of applique, in a variety of joining techniques-stitches, painting, etc.

"sleepwalker" dream patterns-some are just imagined
"Nefertiti" [[Nefertiti]]

White areas in the works will be "closed down" definition - closing down - filling in void areas with patterns.

The work has a child-like appearance. A big, radiating bulb is suggested by his use of fringes.

*Nelson Stevens - mural in Tuskegee [[Tuskegee]] Alabama. Help is needed from February to June.

Total size 70x35 feet. The mural will be painted on 4x8 feet panels.

***DUES ARE DUE!! $5.00 per month/$50 per year
NOTE

RE: 1980 EXHIBIT SCHEDULE

WE ARE IN THE PROCESS OF FINALIZING AGREEMENTS WITH THE FOLLOWING:

City
Buffalo - Museum of African and African-American Art and Antiquities - March 5-30

Chicago - Better Boys Foundation Lamont Zeno Gallery - Apr 11-May 11

Detroit - Pyramid Gallery - May - June

NYC - United Nations - June 16th - July 16th

*Bring or send three (3) recent works to February 3, 1980 Meeting;

Affiliate Members - 1 work to be selected

Associate Members - 1 work to be selected

Regular Members - Maximum of 2 works to be selected

*Members unable to attend must send slides to arrive before Feb. 3, 1980.

*Work selected must be at collection point (504 T Street, N.W.-D.C.) by Feb. 15.

AFRICOBRA - FARAFINDUGU
Annual Work Selection Meeting
February 3, 1980
1-4 p.m.

Akil's
3426 13th St. N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20010
202-232-8541
ADDENDUM

Status Update as result of Renew Process

*From Affiliate to Associate Membership
  .Michael Auld (12-9-79)
  .Rose Auld (12-9-79)
  .M. Talibah Fennel (1-6-80)
  .Helen Haynes (12-9-79)

*From Associate to Regular Membership
  .Akili Amabemenu (12-9-79)
  .Michael Harris (12-9-79)
AFRICOBRA - FARAFINDUGU
NOTICE OF MEETING

1/2 1980

DATE: January 6, 1980

PLACE:
JEFF DONALDSON
504 T ST NW

TIME: 1-3 P.M.

PHONE: 332-7446

AGENDA

1. REVIEW OF TALIBAH & WENDY'S WORK
2. UPDATE, DISCUSSION & DECISION ON 1980 EXHIBITION
   DATES/SITES
3. REVIEW OF MEMBERS IN-PROGRESS WORK
4. DISCUSSION OF NATIONAL MEETING DATES
5. OLD/NEW BUSINESS

For the AFRICOBRA-FARAFINDUGU
The mission of the Smithsonian is the increase and diffusion of knowledge - shaping the future by preserving our heritage, discovering new knowledge, and sharing our resources with the world. Founded in 1846, the Smithsonian is the world's largest museum and research complex, consisting of 19 museums and galleries, the National Zoological Park, and nine research facilities. Become an active part of our mission through the Transcription Center. Together, we are discovering secrets hidden deep inside our collections that illuminate our history and our world.

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