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Acts of Art in Greenwich Village

Bertha and Karl Leubsdorf Gallery

Hunter College

November 7, 2024 – March 22, 2025

Curated by Howard Singerman and students in the Advanced Curatorial Certificate Seminar with Katie Hood Morgan, Chief Curator and Deputy Director, Hunter College Art Galleries

Acts of Art in Greenwich Village presents the six-year history of the gallery Acts of Art, founded in downtown Manhattan by artists Nigel Jackson and Patricia Gray in 1969 to showcase the work of Black artists “outside of the ghetto areas.” The gallery was first located on Bedford Street and moved in January 1971 to 15 Charles Street, near Waverly Place where it operated until it closed in November 1975. There has been scant art historical research into the gallery or its community of artists and if Acts of Art is known at all, it is as the site of the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition’s *Rebuttal to the Whitney Museum Exhibition* in 1971—their response to the Whitney’s *Contemporary Black Artists in America*. The *Rebuttal* was the subject of a 2018 exhibition at Hunter’s Leubsdorf Gallery entitled *Acts of Art and Rebuttal in 1971*. The Greenwich Village gallery also hosted the first exhibition of the Black women artists collective *Where We At*, which featured work by fourteen artists, including Kay Brown, Pat Davis, Dindga McCannon, and Faith Ringgold.

In addition to these important group exhibitions, Acts of Art presented one- and two-person exhibitions by some thirty different artists in its six years, from solo exhibitions in 1970 by Benny Andrews and James Denmark, the artist most closely associated with the gallery, to significant surveys later highlighting the work of older, established but still under-recognized African American artists such as Reginald Gammon, Harlan Jackson, Lois Mailou Jones, and Hale Woodruff. Acts of Art also hosted evenings with musicians such as Hugh Masekela and poets Sonia Sanchez and Bruce Wright (better known as a judge and later justice of the New York State Supreme Court and a vocal critic of racism in the criminal justice system), and lent its space and support to various groups and causes including the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition, the Interracial Council for Business Opportunity, and the Prison Justice Committee on behalf of the Tombs 7.

The first comprehensive look at the gallery, its milieu, and its role within communities of Black artists in New York City and beyond, *Acts of Art in Greenwich Village* will feature works from the late 1960s and 1970s, most originally shown at the gallery, by Benny Andrews, James Denmark, Reginald Gammon, Harlan Jackson, Nigel Jackson, Ben Jones, Lois Mailou Jones, Dindga McCannon, Ademola Olugebefola, Enid Richardson Moore, Ann Tanksley, Lloyd Toone, Frank Wimberley, and Hale Woodruff. The exhibition will be accompanied by a full-color catalogue co-published with Hirmer Publishers and distributed in North America by the University of Chicago Press. In addition to an introductory essay and complete exhibition history, the volume will include biographies of the gallery’s key artists and entries on important group exhibitions, events, and affiliated organizations.

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