



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

DAVID C. DRISKELL CENTER
FOR THE STUDY OF THE VISUAL ARTS AND CULTURE OF
AFRICAN AMERICANS AND THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

1214 Cole Student Activities Building
College Park, Maryland 20742
301.314.2615 TEL 301.314.0679 FAX
driskellcenter@umd.edu
www.driskellcenter.umd.edu

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NEWS RELEASE

Date: February 10, 2009

Contact: Dorit Yaron

Title: Deputy Director

Phone: 301.405.2615

Email: driskellcenter@umd.edu

THE DAVID C. DRISKELL CENTER RECEIVES A MAJOR GIFT OF WORKS OF ART BY AFRICAN AMERICAN ARTISTS FROM THE JEAN AND ROBERT STEELE COLLECTION

COLLEGE PARK, MD – A generous and valuable gift of 227 works of art by more than 120 African American artists from the Jean and Robert Steele Collection will enhance the permanent art collection of the David C. Driskell Center for the Study of the Visual Arts and Culture of African Americans and the African Diaspora at the University of Maryland, College Park [UMCP] as it becomes a national leader in the field of African American art. This gift will help to ensure the strength and vitality of the Driskell Center art collection for future generations of scholars, students, artists and the general public.

For almost four decades, the Steeles have amassed a collection of over 1,000 prints and works on paper by African American artists of the 20th century. Identified as “one of the significant African American art collections in the country” by the National Museum of African American History and Culture’s Plan for Action Presidential Commission, the Steeles’ gift complements the existing Driskell Center art collection which spans the years from the 1880’s to 2008 and includes works by such artists as Edward Bannister, Romare Bearden, Aaron Douglas, Meta Warrick Fuller, and Jacob Lawrence.

Dr. Steele, who serves as the Executive Director of the David C. Driskell Center, said that this gift is “designed to expand the Center’s holdings and ensure that the Center plays a principle role in shaping the field’s [African American art] future.” The core of the Driskell Center’s

<<<OVER>>>

permanent collection came from an initial gift of artwork from Prof. Driskell and provided a solid foundation for a representative collection of African American art. Since 2001, additional works were donated by artists, their estates or representatives, as well as donors, such as the Steeles. The Center's collection also includes works purchased through a special acquisition fund set aside by Mr. Eddie and Mrs. Sylvia Brown.

The Steeles' gift exemplifies their unique approach to collecting works on paper by established, mid-career, and emerging African American artists. Among the nationally well-known artists whose work are included in the gift are Emma Amos, Romare Bearden, David C. Driskell, Sam Gilliam, and Faith Ringgold. Works by mid-career artists including Kofi Bailey, Kevin Cole, and Willie Cole compose about one-third of the works in the gift; and there are works by emerging artists such as Mayla Freelon, Eric Mack, and Mathew Wead.

Another unique aspect of the Steeles' collecting method is their patronage of printmaking workshops which have been established by, and focus on, African American artists around the nation. Moreover, the Steeles have one of the largest number of works printed at the Allan Edmunds' Brandywine Workshop in Philadelphia, PA, in any private collection in the country. In addition to works printed at Brandywine, other works in the collection were printed at Bob Blackburn's Printmaking Workshop, Inc. in New York City; Lou Stovall's Workshop, Inc. in Washington, DC; and Curlee Holton's Experimental Printmaking Institute at Lafayette College, Easton, PA.

Finally, Jean and Robert Steele made a conscious decision to collect art by artists who have been connected to Prof. Driskell during the last five decades. For example, the gift includes two works by Jefferson Pinder who was the first M.F.A. student to complete a year of fellowship at the Driskell Center; Pinder is currently serving as an Assistant Professor of Art in the Department of Art at UMCP. Other artists whose work included in this category are Lou Stovall, a student of Prof. Driskell at Howard University; Lila Asher and James Wells who taught David C. Driskell while he was a student at Howard University; and Keith Morrison and Stephanie E. Pogue, both colleagues of Driskell at Fisk University and later at UMCP.

Jean and Robert Steele have been longstanding supportive members of the UMCP community since Dr. Steele joined the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences in 1975 after receiving his Ph.D. from Yale University. In 2004, after he retired as Associate Dean, Dr. Steele was recruited to head the David C. Driskell Center. Drawing from his administrative experience and years of

involvement in the art world, Dr. Steele has provided strong leadership and new vision to the David C. Driskell Center.

About the David C. Driskell Center

The David C. Driskell Center for the Study of the Visual Arts and Culture of African Americans and the African Diaspora at the University of Maryland, College Park celebrates the legacy of David C. Driskell – Distinguished University Professor Emeritus of Art, Artist, Art Historian, Collector, and Curator – by preserving the rich heritage of African American visual art and culture. Established in 2001, the Center provides an intellectual home for artists, museum professionals, art administrators, and scholars of color, broadening the field of African diasporic studies. The Driskell Center is committed to collecting, documenting, and presenting African American art as well as replenishing and expanding the field of African American art.

For more information on the David C. Driskell Center, please call 301-314-2615, email driskellcenter@umd.edu, or visit www.driskellcenter.umd.edu.

###