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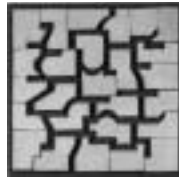
1999/2000

News from

ALJIRA

A Center for
Contemporary Art

Aljira is a non-profit contemporary visual art center. It promotes the work of emerging and under-represented artists and links their work to the communities in which we live.



top to bottom:

Irene Wheeler's
Wall Maze #10, 1985 Stoneware
Clay and oxides 51 x 51 x 15 ins.

Irene Wheeler, Portrait, pg. 3

Richard Klein, Q&A, pg. 5



ALJIRA EXHIBITION SCHEDULE

Through October 22, 1999

Irene Wheeler, Ceramic Sculpture
The Aljira National 5ive

November 4 – December 30, 1999

Matt Chansky, Aljira National Award Winner
Barbara Klein, Paintings and Drawings
David Hewitt, Aljira National Award Winner

January 13 – February 25, 2000

Fattimah Tugar, Solo Exhibition
Donald Locke, Solo Exhibition
Dan Dragan, Aljira National Award Winner

March 9 – April 21, 2000

Emerge 2000, Group Exhibition

May 4 – June 23, 2000

Judith Brodsky, Solo Exhibition
Frank Bowling, Solo Exhibition
Peter Schroth, Solo Exhibition

June 2000 – watch for save the date card

The Aljira Fine Art Auction 2000

DEAR friend

On July 29, the Newark Economic Development Corporation (NEDC) convened a focus group made up of professionals in the arts, education and tourism. I was honored to be invited to be a member of the group that focused on museums and galleries. Also included in my group were Charles Cummings of the Newark Public Library, Dr. Sally Yerkovich of the NJ Historical Society, and Mary Sue Price of the Newark Museum. Our task was to respond to a series of questions that were designed to help the NEDC compile its newest data on Newark, which could prove valuable to investors interested in this region. The following is a review of our ideas.

There was a 40 percent increase in attendance at museums nationally. This trend may be related to the increased demand for specialized local services and symptomatic of a "growth spurt" in this region. The Newark Public Library, for example, is experiencing record increases in attendance particularly in its computer centers.

In terms of visibility, Newark is

doing extremely well, but New York City is still our strongest competition. Raised visibility would help attract more people to our cultural events, but it would also require a far higher level of marketing and promotion than we are currently getting. The wealth of our offerings is often eclipsed by our location —12 miles from New York City. The New Jersey Performing Arts Center, however, is playing a significant role in turning things around.

There is new excitement about Newark — the second largest city in the nation's largest most densely populated metropolitan region with one of the highest per-capita incomes. Culture and the arts have an educated and diverse population from which to draw.

The marketing that we need to do is expensive, but we can build on what we have done in the past and on NJPAC's substantial accomplishments. Newark's new momentum offers a fresh window of opportunity, but we must find ways to help the Chamber of Commerce improve the marketing of the city.

Continued on next page...

right:
An Evening of Poetry and Music with Amiri and Amina Baraka and Blue Ark.
January 22, 1999

far right:
Young community members at The Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth Civil Rights Movement Memoir.
February 26, 1999



PHOTO: BILL MAY

Dear Friend... from front page...

Newark's website needs to reflect the new vitality and growing sophistication of the city. It should also emphasize the city's cultural diversity. The Newark Arts Council needs to develop a plan to successfully market the arts and receive the resources that will be necessary to do it aggressively.

I urge you to contact NEDC and send them a description of your organization and your plans to ensure that the upcoming report will be accurately informed about the arts and culture in the city. Also NEDC needs to more aggressively identify community cultural groups, and organizations that give Newark its special vitality. This is especially important since the vision of this city as a desirable place to work and live is now inex-

tricably linked to its re-emergence as a preeminent center of culture, arts and entertainment.

The NEDC must be complimented for the critical role it is playing in Newark in the region's economic development but its last report, which was published in 1997, failed to mention the following key cultural organizations and events that reflect the city's rich diversity: Rutgers Robeson Gallery, The Portuguese Festival, The Puerto Rican Day Parade, The African American Heritage Day Parade, Newark Festival of People, Kimako's Blues People, Africa/Newark Festival.

Finally, I hope that the impulse to be perceived as "world class" does not lead to the undervaluing of local artists. An observation made by Judith Brodsky at a panel sponsored by The Aljira Fine

Art Auction this fall was instructive: "Wherever I travel I am continuously amazed at the high quality of the regional arts movement today." If a sign of cultural maturity is the ability of a community to export its arts, we are doing that. Important work is happening in this city and region today, and it is crucial that we never forget how important our "home-grown" talent has been to this development.

Another important note: In 1993, Aljira was selected by the Federal Advisory Committee on International Exhibitions to organize the United States' representation at the IV Bial International de Pintura in Cuenca, Ecuador. The project was so successful that it was extended to ten additional countries and 12 cities.

—Victor L. Davson, Executive Director.

MUSIC

BY VICKIE SNOY

If I haven't had the opportunity to greet you and share a few words at an Aljira opening or other event over the past five

years, let me say "Hello" to you now in my new role as board chair. I'd also like to ask you to be a dedicated, involved partner in what the Board and Staff believe to be a defining year in Aljira's history.

At recent meetings and in a June retreat, the Aljira Board of Trustees set and reaffirmed an evolving role for Aljira—to become even more integral to the fabric of the Newark community and its renaissance. Accomplishing this will mean taking a hard look at what we do, where we are, where we want to go and what we want to be. We must also determine what we need to get there.

One thing upon which we all agree is that Aljira lacks visibility. Aljira needs to stake its claim as a leader in the Newark cultural community and to be recognized accordingly. The unique story and capabilities of Aljira Design must be extended to many more clients so that it can play an even greater role in supporting Aljira's work in Newark and the region.

But however energetic and well-intentioned we are, Aljira's staff and board of directors can't develop the organization without the support of our friends, and we welcome that support in many forms. You may want to start by attending Aljira's current exhibition — our national juried show of more than 40 artists coupled with a ceramic sculpture installation

by Irene Wheeler. And be sure to bring along a guest or two to introduce them to our art center.

Our staff, my fellow board members and I will be looking for you. We'll be anxious to hear how you can help us take Aljira to the next level. In return, we will pledge to continue to bring to you and our community some of the best in the arts and public programs. Together, let's create a year filled with excitement. ■

The "Sensation" Crisis

It is unfortunate that there exists a kind of arts illiteracy, even among the educated, that permits the troubling views of a person like Rudolf Giuliani to use the power of government, in the name of offended people, to threaten the existence of an arts institution such as the Brooklyn Museum. Art regularly offends. Let it. If the art is of no moment it will reveal itself as that. The public should make up its own mind. Power is abused when it is used against ideas. —**Bill Jones, Vice Chair Aljira Board of Trustees**

The controversy is not only about Catholicism but it is also about the black image which for Americans looks like Mammy, a Black stereotype. —**Jim Hatch, Hatch/Billops Collection**



PORTRAIT

BY VALERIE WILSON WESLEY

IRENE WHEELER



Irene Wheeler.

Art and social justice have always been essential to Irene Wheeler. Her political activism began early. She was seventeen and working as a sales clerk in a department store in Newark, the city where she grew up, when she got her first taste of politics. “I tried to organize a union, and they fired us all,” she says with a wry smile as she recalls the incident. Her entry into the world of art came later.

Wheeler didn’t become an artist until she was fifty, even though she had always loved art and been surrounded by it. Her husband Herbert was a painter and photographer and two of their closest friends were artists Norman Lewis and Romare Bearden.

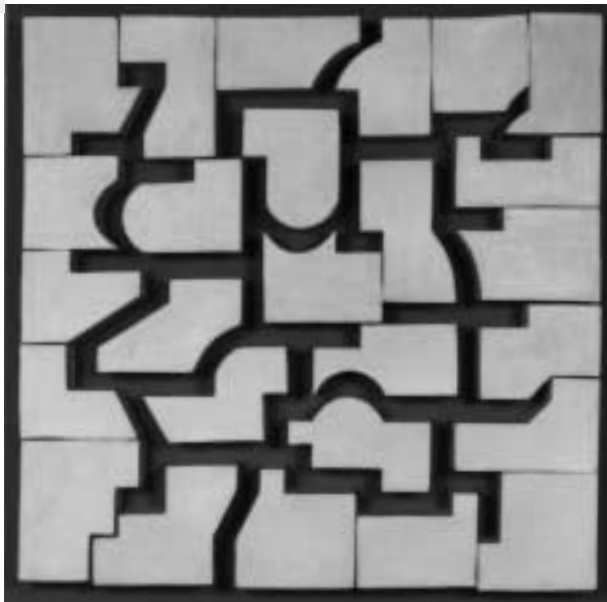
didn’t,” she says of her late husband, who was a renowned photographer and the founder and partner in a successful commercial photography studio. “When the time came, he wasn’t ready but I was.”

So, as many women of her generation were slipping comfortably into middle-age, Wheeler was stepping into a new world. She retired from the

(“Lots of kids, no children,” Wheeler says), she was eager to take on a new challenge. She attended Queens College and received an undergraduate degree in fine arts in 1975, graduating magna cum laude. She taught art in various educational and community programs in New York City. And she began her work in ceramics.

“Clay is the most frustrating and

rewarding medium you can imagine,” Wheeler says of the medium from which she creates her stunning, abstract sculptures. “Sometimes you want to just tear the stuff up when it’s not working for you. It has its own life, and it doesn’t always do what you want it to do. William Mahoney, the head of the art department at Teachers College where I studied, used to remind us that once it was fired it can’t be destroyed and that scientists learn about ancient civilizations by examining pottery shards. Clay is immortal.”



Wall Maze #10, 1985, Stoneware clay and oxides, 51 x 51 x 15 ins.

The social problems that

Irene Wheeler captures in her art are as enduring as the medium in which she works. Her sculptures speak of poverty and racism, and her “frustrating” medium allows her to capture such complex emotions as despair, hope and desperation. In *Mind’s Eye: South Bronx/Brownsville* she creates a sculpture that suggests the bleak despair often found in poor inner-city neighbor-

Her sculptures speak of poverty and racism...

But it wasn’t until the “fourth stage” of her life that Wheeler claimed the world of art for herself.

“Herbert had always said that he would retire when he was 50, but he

Knickerbocker Dispatch Company, the New York trucking company where she had worked as the company administrator for many years, and since the couple had no dependents,

Continued on next page...

hoods. *Soweto/Auschwitz*, a massive, complex arrangement of cell blocks, speaks of the desolation and repression found within a racist, hate-filled society. When Wheeler's work is exhibited and reviewed, as it has been in innumerable shows in New York and other cities, critics are invariably struck not only by her skill as an artist but by her social conscience.

"Fighting racism and war have been the guiding principles of my life," Wheeler says. "It defines what I am about, what I believe in, where I stand. My sculpture is an outgrowth of my

inner vision, a vision I have always expressed in some way."

Yet Wheeler's work can also be whimsical. She loves to create mazes to visually express feelings and ideas. "I've always been involved with mazes," she says. "I see them as a metaphor, dealing with people's choices and the problem of getting from point A to point B."

Wheeler's ideas come to her in many ways. Often when she begins to sculpt she has a firm sense of where her work is going, but sometimes she simply doesn't know. "I will see where it takes me. Sometimes an idea is completely formulated, sometimes I have no idea at all. Sometimes I

experience the sheer joy of making a piece without any reference, and then only after its over, do I realize where that piece came from. Sometimes, I'm not sure where the titles come from, they just seem to come."

But as with all good art, Irene Wheeler's work grabs the eye and touches the soul of the beholder, no matter how educated or erudite that viewer might be. "An eight-year-old came to one of my shows, saw *Soweto/Auschwitz* and knew immediately what it was," Wheeler says. "She took one look at it and said, 'that's a concentration camp,' and I thought, thank God, it works!" ■

PHOTO: JOE PACK

What's up?

HAPPENINGS

BY CARL E. HAZLEWOOD

The recent art season was interesting for its renewed energy and variousness. A major highlight was the retrospective exhibition of Jackson Pollock's paintings at the Museum of Modern Art which drew much critical and popular attention. It was considered the most complete survey of his work ever mounted.

Paul Gardère, Recent Works 1995—1998 at the Jersey City Museum, was in my view, one of the outstanding shows of the season. Paintings by Aljira's executive director, Victor Davson, in his alternative life as an artist, added to the energy of *Present Continuous*, a well attended show at the Nathan Cummings Foundation in New York City. That exhibition included Aljira board member, Hugo X. Bastidas, and O. Donald Odita whose magazine of interviews, reviews and essays is *CONNECT* located at the Plexus site (<http://www.plexus.org/connect/>). And painter, Grace Graupe-Pillard has entered the busy cyber-world as the

new moderator of Plexus Chalkboard's forum, *ARTSEEN*. Make sure to visit and air your views on a variety of art issues, movies, performances, art-world gossip, etc. Point your browser to: <http://www.plexus.org/chalkboard/artseen/>. The address for other Chalkboard forums is: <http://www.plexus.org/chalkboard/chalk>.

The activities of Aljira-affiliated art practitioners are also being recognized and rewarded on both national and international levels. MacArthur Foundation grants, popularly known as the 'genius awards' have been given to Pepón Osorio and Fred Wilson. Wilson was guest curator for one of Aljira's more memorable shows of the past decade entitled: *Urban Narrative—Evil Empires*. And Aljira was a collaborator with the Newark Museum who commissioned Osorio to produce a work in Newark which resulted in his exhibit, *Project 5: Pepón Osorio—Badge of Honor*. This project was subsequently shown at the Newark Museum, in New York City, and at the Johannesburg Biennial.

Speaking of Biennials, despite small glitches, the 48th Venice International Exhibition of Contemporary Art has garnered good critical reviews by most people I've spoken to who have actually seen the exhibition. The top three prizes given include one to young African American artist Doug Aitken, who received the 'International Award'

for his video installation *Electric Earth*. New York-based Chinese sculptor Cai Guo-Qiang and the Iranian filmmaker and photographer Shirin Neshat were also prize winners.

Okwui Enwezor, the founder and editor of *Nka, Journal of Contemporary African Art*, was a member of the jury which selected the winners in Venice. African-born, New York bred, he was co-curator with this writer of Aljira's *Modern Life* exhibit a few years ago. Since then, Enwezor has developed a busy international regimen of lectures and curatorial assignments. He worked on projects at the Guggenheim Museum, and the Queens Museum in New York, then was selected for the position as Director of the last Johannesburg Biennial in South Africa. Now, in the wake of many solid accomplishments and a year-long engagement as adjunct curator at the Chicago Art Institute, comes the announcement of Enwezor's appointment to direct the 2002 *DOCUMENTA* in Kassel, Germany.

There is perhaps a symbolic edge to all of this, as various boundaries, national and otherwise, waver or become permeable as we approach the millennium. This aspect of a new globalism or internationalism, seems an important forward step as those once considered "other" begin to control the means of how we envision the world—even in the artistic realm. ■

The Aljira family fondly remembers Henry Hampton (1940–1998) for his humility, warmth and support. (pictured right). In the left corner is Scott McVay, Executive Director Emeritus Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation.



KLEIN

RICHARD



Richard Klein is currently Assistant Director of the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art in Ridgefield Connecticut. He has been selected as guest curator for EMERGE 2000, Aljira's new professional development program for artists that began in September 1999.

Carl Hazlewood: You were born in Newark, New Jersey. How did you become the assistant director of a museum in Connecticut?

Richard Klein: My family was part of the white flight from Newark in the 1960s. We moved around quite a bit and finally ended up in Connecticut.

"..what is most important is finding your own voice."

I taught art for years but eventually got burned out.

C.H.: So you were an artist?

R.K.: Yes, I am a sculptor, but I've always been interested in museums. I came into this world through the back door, not as an art historian. I think there are very few artists working in the museum field. I am especially interested in contemporary art. Working with artists is the best part of what I do, and that's what really interests me rather than simply working with objects. As an artist in the world of museums, I see myself as a guerrilla. The people who run the art establishment, usually don't have a lot of sympathy for artists. They often have other reasons and agendas for supporting the arts. But because I am an artist, I feel I can act as a mediator between the two worlds.

C.H.: That's interesting. Aljira was founded by artists trying to give opportunities and voice to artists trying to make it in the world of museums and commercial galleries. As students, we used to believe that

all we had to do was produce good work, and we would be successful. But these are different times. Aljira's EMERGE 2000 program is an attempt to give artists an edge when they confront the arts establishment. How will it work?

R.K.: One still has to do good work. If you do good work, you have more of a chance for success than people who don't. Since this is a project to support artists, a lot of the participants will be young, so the real question will be:

defining "career" as having gallery representation and a string of museum shows to your credit, although that's the ideal if you go through the academic university system. But what is most important is finding your own voice. If you have found your voice than you will be noticed. That "voice" is what I looked for when selecting participants for EMERGE 2000.

C.H.: In many ways, you are the ideal model for participants in the program.

How do you find your own voice? Unfortunately, there is no support system in art schools that encourages students to find their voice. The proper kind of mentoring and guidance usually aren't there.

The truth is, if you are going to be an artist you must ask yourself, how can I make a career of this? That can mean many things. I am not narrowly

You move through the art world both as an artist and as an art administrator. What will be the greatest strength of the program?

R.K.: This program has been designed to respect the stylistic variations of the artists. Participants will learn from each other as well as from professionals, and that, I believe, will be very positive. ■

CLIPS FROM THE ALJIRA

THE ALJIRA FINE ART AUCTION 1999, Gateway Center, Newark, June 3, 1999.

From left to right: Honorary Co-Chair Donald M. Karp, Chairman of The Board and Chief Executive Officer, Broad National Bank; and Vicky Snoy, Current Chair, Aljira Board of Trustees. Aljira Trustee Marilyn



SNAPSHOTS



Top left:

Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth and William D. Payne, Assemblyman.

Bellow, clockwise from top:

I'll Make Me A World celebrants.

Nina S. Jacobs, Executive Director of Jersey City Museum and Brian C. Doherty, Esq.

Janet Taylor Pickett and Marlene Lewis.

PHOTOS: BILL MAY, ARTHUR PAXTON, AND JOE PACK



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Gallery Hours: Wednesday through Friday, noon to 5 pm. Saturday noon to 4 pm and by appointment.

FINE ART AUCTION 1999

Dore, Esq., Pat Kettenring, Susan Scher, Ward Mintz, and Philemona Williamson. Bruce Dalziel; Janet Rodriguez, Program Officer, Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation; Honorary Co-Chair Esther Silver Parker,

President AT&T Foundation; and Victor L. Davson, Executive Director of Aljira. Susan and John Pilshaw (right and middle) at the Auction. ■

PHOTOS: ARTHUR PAXTON

