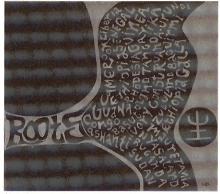
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Gloria Bohanon, Roots, c. 1970

GALLERY 32 AND ITS CIRCLE

Laband Art Gallery, LMU

THE ASSASSINATION of Malcolm X on February 21, 1965 caused a ripple effect upon African American arts communities throughout the United States giving birth to the Black Arts Movement. The exhibition "Gallery 32 and Its Circle" features Los Angeles artists who produced work during this movement. Carolyn Peter and Damon Willick state in the catalogue accompanying the show that in 1968 Suzanne Jackson opened the gallery. Its location was west of downtown Los Angeles, and it closed in 1970. The gallery's name pays tribute to Alfred Stieglitz's "Gallery 291" that showcased European Modernist work to New York audiences during the early part of the 20th century. However, Jackson's mission was to exhibit the work of Los Angeles-based African American artists.

Entering the gallery gave me the rare

opportunity to stand in the presence of work that I only remembered seeing in art history books and catalogues. For example, Charles White's monumental figurative ink drawing caused me to admire not only his masterful skill but also envy those who were taught by him at Otis Art Institute and those Gallery 32 artists that he inspired. Moreover, John Riddle's iron-and-wood assemblage, Nathaniel Bustion's mixed media work, Betye Saar's intaglio prints, the bold posters of Black Panther artist, Emory Douglas, the body prints of David Hammons and the "ancestral" interpretations of John Outterbridge spoke of artists heading toward an aesthetic that could not be dismissed as simply political art.

Gazing further, my attention was kidnapped by Timothy Washington's 1969 work Stabilized Warrior. This 36 x 36 inch engraving on aluminum with added color portraved an African American figure facing viewers while holding an eagle. As each hand held a wing of the eagle, the figure gazed slightly upward. The contrast of light and dark causing the figure to almost fade in the background compliments the carefully rendered hands and wings that receive most of the light. Stabilized Warrior is multi-layered with messages. Appropriating the eagle in front of the figure questions the meaning of such a national symbol in contrast to the treatment of black people throughout the Diaspora. Also, the use of light and dark with the eagle in front speaks of a cultural myopia that places the preservation of inhuman laws and exploitive policy over the fair treatment of human beings. Last, the overall content opens a dialogue for the deconstruction of the work's title. Does Stabilized imply docile, confused, contained or enslaved?

An additional treat was the archival display of artist's photographs, Suzanne Jackson's notes, exhibition brochures and catalogues indicating that Gallery 32 co-existed with other Los Angeles-based arts organization that supported African American artists. These were the Brockman Gallery, founded by Dale Davis and Alonzo Davis as well as the Black Arts Council with Cecil Fergerson and the late Claude Booker as founders. Such a historical exhibition was worth multiple visits which I was only too happy to make.

-Richard May

BOHANON: COLLECTION OF SUZANNE JACK