

# Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, NC, Offers Glass Works by Black Artists

Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, NC, is presenting *Cultivating Collections: Vitreographs, Glass, and Works by Black Artists*, on view at the WCU Fine Art Museum, at the Bardo Arts Center, through July 29, 2022.

*Cultivating Collections* is a multi-year series of exhibitions that highlights specific areas of the WCU Fine Art Museum's Collection, which includes over 1,800 works of art in a wide range of media by artists of the Americas. This year, *Cultivating Collections* reflects on three areas of the Collection - vitreographs, glass, and works by Black artists. Key works in each area come together to tell the story of past, present, and future collecting directions.

In this multi-year series, student researchers work closely with the Museum's curator to gather information about the artwork in the permanent collection and determine future collecting directions. This year's exhibition highlights three areas of the collection - vitreographs, glass, and works by Black artists. The pieces on view convey the stories of bold innovators and speak to the importance of Western North Carolina in the history of glass and printmaking.

The *Cultivating Collections* series began in 2019 with WCU students enrolled in Exhibition Practicum, an annual course designed to familiarize students with the intricacies of museum spaces. Students developed an exhibition from start to finish by interviewing artists, selecting works for display, and writing labels about the Museum's objects. Since 2019, students have continued this curatorial work, focusing each year on a new area of the collection, which includes over 1,800 works in a wide range of media by artists of the Americas. Input from students brings a fresh perspective to the Museum's holdings and unlocks the potential for the Museum to create a more diverse and inclusive collection. This year's exhibition showcases the combined curatorial efforts of nineteen students who participated in the 2021 and 2022 Exhibition Practicum classes.



James Tanner, "Big South", 2004, vitreograph, image 24 x 18 inches, sheet 29.5 x 22.5 inches, Gift of Harvey K. and Bess Littleton. Image courtesy of Littleton Studios.

The main gallery of *Cultivating Collections* features selections from the WCU Fine Art Museum's vitreograph collection, which consists of over 850 prints made using a glass matrix. It is the largest collection of vitreographs in the world and includes the complete archive of prints produced at Littleton Studios in Spruce Pine, NC, from the mid-1970s through 2008. Harvey and Bess Littleton launched this collection in 2005-2006 when they gifted over 750 vitreographs to the Museum. With the help of the Little-



Fritz Dreisbach, "Trick Cup", 2012, hand-blown glass, 8 x 4.25 x 6.5 inches, Gift of the Artist. Photo by Tina Thames.

ton family, this gift grew in subsequent years, creating an unparalleled collection that tells the story of a distinct period in the history of printmaking, one in which Western North Carolina plays a central role. Artists include Walter Darby Bannard, Frederick Birkhill, Warrington Colescott, Ruth Fine, Nancy Genn, Laura Grosch, Dorothy Simpson Krause, David Dodge Lewis, Bonnie Lhotka, Harvey Littleton, Peter Loewer, Tom Nakashima, Judith O'Rourke, Miklos Pogany, Karin Schminke, Dan Welden, Sandy Wilcox, Ann Wolff, and T.A. Zive.

To celebrate the creativity of Black artists and acknowledge the need for greater representation of artists of color in the collection, this year's student curators felt it was important to create a gallery solely devoted to Black artists. The majority of these artists have vitreographs in the collection and their work is displayed in more than one gallery in the exhibition. James Tanner's *Big South*, for example, is a moving portrait of the artist's uncle Mickey, which he describes as "a mirror image of the Old South." From Tanner's perspective, there is a history reflected in his uncle's solemn gaze that speaks to the racial divides that exist in our country and the individuals that have not been given access to certain opportunities. He created the portrait as a reminder of the histories that will never be told.

Several vitreographs by Tanner will be on view in *Cultivating Collections*, along with work by Arleen Burke-Morgan, Clarence Morgan, Martin Puryear, Therman Statom, and Mildred Thompson.

A third gallery highlights a range of artists who have connections to the history of glass in Western North Carolina. Many of them made significant contributions to the Studio Glass Movement and are teachers, mentors, and innovators who have inspired other artists to work in glass. One notable example is Fritz Dreisbach, who helped build an early glass furnace on the Western Carolina University campus in 1972. Three examples of Dreisbach's work are on view in the exhibition, including an example of sculptural blown glass from 1968/70, a mold-blown mug from 1976 created from an aluminum waffle iron, and a more recent "trick cup" that contains a surprising drinking mechanism. Other exhibiting glass artists include William Bernstein, Shane Fero, Jack King, Robert Levin, Harvey Littleton, David Nichols, Roger Parramore, Richard Ritter, Tadashi Torii, and others.

For further information check our NC Institutional Gallery listings, call the Museum at 828/227-ARTS or visit ([bardoartscenter.wcu.edu](http://bardoartscenter.wcu.edu)).

# Caldwell Arts Council in Lenoir, NC, Features Works by Steve Brooks and Joe Lafone

The Caldwell Arts Council in Lenoir, NC, will present *Outside the Lines*, featuring works by Steve Brooks and Joe Lafone, from July 1 through Aug., 2022.



Work by Steve Brooks

Steve Brooks says "A self-described 'tongue in cheek religious painter', Joe Lafone once had a dream where God commanded him to paint endless images of Grandfather Mountain, a credible still life, and to iron his shirts. As Joe Lafone states, 'Two out of three ain't bad.' I have painted and exhibited with Lafone for 18 years. Together we hung shows in street fairs, restaurants, galleries, museums and yes, tattoo parlors."

"Many of these shows were of our collaborations. Coined 'Tag Team Paintings', these works always started with me drawing and making the underpainting and ended with Lafone doing the sizzle on top. I always used specific colors on the under-



Work by Joe Lafone

painting to influence what he would put on top, however, Lafone always managed to surprise me with a fresh mix of his own color choices and outrageous paint handling. Although I never thought of myself as a student, I am tremendously influenced by Lafone. His unique color sense, technique, and philosophy continue to inform my work. Lafone's artistic journey has taken him many places in the Art world, and I am glad to have been along for the ride."

The Caldwell Arts Council is located on College Ave SW in Lenoir, NC.

For further information check our NC Institutional Gallery listings or visit ([www.caldwellarts.com](http://www.caldwellarts.com)).

# Alamance Arts in Graham, NC, Features Works by Eric McRay

Alamance Arts in Graham, NC, will present an exhibit of works by Eric McRay, on view in the Sister Galleries of the 1873 Capt. James & Emma Holt White House, from July 11 through Aug. 20, 2022.

The stars of the art world are usually seen as bad boys with tattoos, piercings, and all the clichés of popular romance. McRay is no cliché. He is an original. He is neither the starving artist nor the profiteering commercial artist. "I am an extraordinary gentleman with an adventurer's heart, but I'm no bohemian!" He is a man that has struggled throughout his career to achieve a high level of technical proficiency, pictorial intelligence, and a sense of artistic legacy.

McRay received a BFA degree at the Maryland Institute, College of Art, where he earned a four-year scholarship for his artistic talent. A native of Washington, DC, McRay moved to North Carolina and has been exhibiting since 1987. In November 1998, he was juried into Raleigh's prestigious Artspace. Since opening his Artspace studio in downtown Raleigh, McRay has served in the offices of Vice-President and President of the Artspace Artists Association, as well as served on Artspace's board of directors and Executive Committee.

McRay's artistic career has been featured on TV and radio programs, and in numerous newspapers, magazines and websites. The *Raleigh News & Observer* named him one of the "Artists to Watch." Numerous times he has been listed among the "Best Local Artist" and "Favorite Local Artist". McRay has received feature articles in *Fortune Small Business*, *Art Business News*, *Our State Magazine* and *Southern Living Magazine*.

Some of his collectors include the SAS Institute, American Tobacco Campus, North Carolina Central University Art Museum, Duke University Medical Center, Duke Health Raleigh Hospital, NC State University, UNC - Chapel Hill and Western Wake Hospital, as well as many private local, national and international collectors. Also, McRay was



Work by Eric McRay

privileged to participate in the Art in Embassies Program, and his works were displayed in the US Embassy in Copenhagen, Denmark.

McRay's guiding principle is — An artist's style is his visual language by which he communicates. Thus, Eric McRay is multilingual. Openness and exploration rather than a dedication to a particular style best characterize his work. "I believe there is no single correct pictorial solution."

Unlike most painters who have a single style, McRay has a range of style and imagery through which he works up and back. He has a powerful pictorial discernment that enables him to go from paintings with a lot of splash and spontaneity to images with a sense of organization and reason. McRay works in themes and variations to empty himself of images.

Perhaps it's his Picassoesque spirit that keeps him on the road to reinvention. His various styles are not exclusive phases in an evolutionary process but options from which he selects according to his expressive goals. "I think great artists are constantly challenging themselves and changing in search of greater truth — look at Picasso and Matisse." So McRay continues to prodigiously produce his paintings, drawings, and collages. He is constantly driven to master the visual language of the next new "McRay."

For further information check our NC Institutional Gallery listings, call 336/226-4495 or view ([www.alamancearts.org](http://www.alamancearts.org)).

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The deadline each month to submit articles, photos and ads is the 24th of the month prior to the next issue. This will be July 24th for the August 2022 issue and Aug. 24 for the September 2022 issue. After that, it's too late unless your exhibit runs into the next month.

But don't wait for the last minute - send your info now.

And where do you send that info?

E-mail to ([info@carolinaarts.com](mailto:info@carolinaarts.com)).