

## Coming Home: Friends & Family of Jim Biggers

May 8 – August 14, 2010

This show, guest curated by Jim Biggers, brought together thirteen artists with ties to North Carolina and the Gaston County area. Each artist has his or her own style and medium, but together they express their unique talents and shared heritage. Many of the artists are national and internationally known, with their artwork located in galleries, museums, and private homes all over the world.

“This exhibit is the gathering of a portion of my ‘Artist Family’, for the visual acknowledgement of diversity in our human family. We honor the contributions of our elders who established the paths and gave direction, insight, and the ordering of possibilities to create the foundations that give voice to these visions. Thank you for this opportunity to share this experience with you.”

Jim Biggers



### **Bernard W. Brooks**

*Born: Alexandria, Virginia*

*Education: Howard University, Washington, DC*

*Degrees: B.F.A, Fine Arts*

Bernard Brooks is a second generation artist, his uncle was the first African-American art instructor at the Maryland College of Art. He conveys his art through a variety of mediums: watercolors, mixed mediums, and ink sketching. His collages are an artistic gumbo of fabric, handmade papers, paint, metallic mediums and other materials. The quality of his watercolors is cited in “A History of African-Americans from 1972 to Present,” by Romare Bearden and Harry Henderson.

During stints at the Philadelphia College of Art, University of Maryland and Howard University, Bernard honed his art and printmaking techniques. Howard University holds a special place in his heart because that’s where he earned his Bachelor’s degree with a concentration on design and he was the Chief Medical Illustrator for more than 26 years. He studied under several notable art icons including Lois May-lou Jones and Romare Bearden.

He continues to travel extensively and his visits especially to the Caribbean Islands and France have greatly influenced his work. His art work can be found in many private collections, including those of Maya Angelou, Douglas Wilder (former governor of Virginia), The U.S. Supreme court, and Roy Schneider (former governor of the US Virgin

Islands). His art has also been featured on national television in a variety of programs. He and his wife, artist Gwendolyn Aquí-Brooks, reside in Charlotte, NC and Washington, DC.



### **Carroll Saunders**

*Born: Gastonia, NC*

*Education: Johnson C. Smith University, Charlotte, NC  
and University of North Carolina – Charlotte, NC*

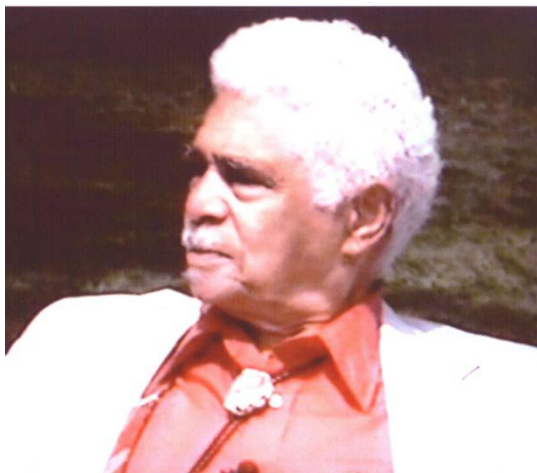
*Degree: B.A., Social Science and Psychology and M.Ed.,  
Education*

Mr. Saunders is a self-taught painter in oils and acrylics. His paintings show a fondness for bold, bright colors and the subject matter often reflects his surroundings and environment. He is particularly fond of works that reflect the neighborhood where he grew up.

Saunders has exhibited locally in Gaston County in the Annual Spring Shows sponsored by the Gaston County Art Guild, where he has received numerous awards.

He has held one-man shows at the Gaston County Museum of Art & History; Davidson College Art Gallery; Johnson C. Smith University; Independence National Bank; The Gaston County Library, and the Art 1 Gallery.

He also has shown his work in galleries and traveling shows throughout North Carolina, including Shelby, Hickory, Wilkesboro, Statesville, Morganton, Asheville, Spartanburg, Smithfield, and Charlotte. He resides in Gastonia, NC.



**Dr. J. Eugene Grigsby**

*Born: Greensboro, NC*

*Education: Morehouse College, Atlanta, GA; Ohio State University; New York University*

*Degree: B.F.A, Fine Arts; M.F.A., Modern Art; Ph.D., Art*

*Honorary Doctorate awarded from both Philadelphia Scholl of Fine Arts*

*25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Medallion of Merit awarded by the National Gallery of Arts*

Celebrated artist, writer and educator Jefferson Eugene Grigsby was born October 17, 1918 in Greensboro, North Carolina. Grigsby first discovered his love for art after his family

moved to Winston-Salem, North Carolina when he was nine years old. Grigsby went on to obtain his B.A. from Morehouse College, his M.A. in art from Ohio State University and his PhD from New York University.

In 1933, Grigsby attended Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte, NC. Within a year, Grigsby transferred to Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, where he first met his longtime mentor, Hale Woodruff. Under Woodruff's tutelage, Grigsby graduated from Morehouse College in 1938 equipped with extensive artistic experience that he would retain throughout his life.

In 1942, Grigsby volunteered to serve in World War II and became a master sergeant of the 573<sup>rd</sup> Ordinance Ammunition Company under U.S. Army General George Patton during the Battle of the Bulge. In 1943, Grigsby married Rosalyn Thomasena Marshall, a high school biology teacher and social activist. Three years later, at the invitation of the school's principal, W.A. Robinson, Grigsby began working at Carver high School as an art teacher. After the closing of the school in 1954, Grigsby began working at Phoenix Union High School where he remained until 1966.

In 1958, Grigsby was selected by the Museum of Modern Art in New York City to represent the United States as an art teacher at the Children's Creative Center at the Brussels World Fair. This experience inspired Grigsby to initiate a number of art programs in community centers, housing projects and day care centers in the Phoenix area.

Grigsby began teaching at the university level in 1966, working at the School of Art at Arizona State University until 1988. During this time, Grigsby published *Art and Ethics: Background for Teaching Youth in a Pluralistic Society*, the first book ever written for art teachers by an African American artist and author.

In 2001, *The Art of Eugene Grigsby Jr: A 65 Year Retrospective* was featured at the Phoenix Art Museum. The exhibit featured insightful commentary of Grigsby's life and influence on the art and education world by his many colleagues, friends and family.

Grigsby served on the boards of numerous organizations, including the National Art Education Association, the Committee on Minority Concerns and Artists of the Black Community/Arizona. Grigsby has also been awarded numerous times for his outstanding work, including the Arizona Governor's "Tostenrud" Art Award and the NAACP's Man of the Year award.



### **Gwendolyn Aqui-Brooks**

*Born: Washington, DC*

*Education: Howard University and Trinity College, Washington, DC*

*Degree: BFA, Art Education and MA, Education Consulting*

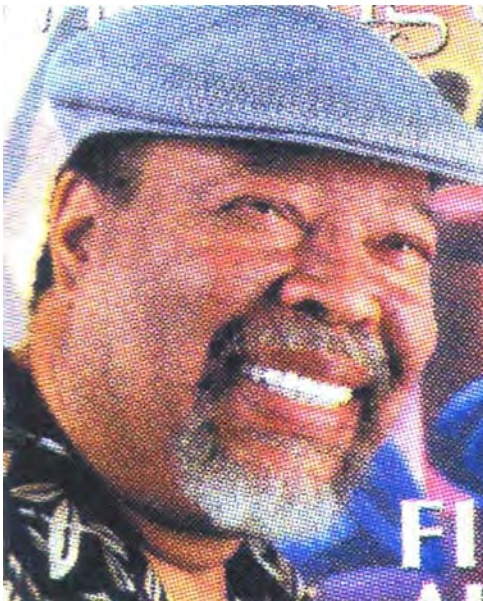
Gwendolyn has been working as an artist for well over thirty years. She is very passionate and determined to make a difference in the world of art. As a mixed media artist, her accomplishments are notable. She is a painter, contemporary quilt-maker and doll designer.

During her artistic career, Gwendolyn has been involved in more than eighty exhibitions, these include both solo and group shows. Her awards and grants include, but are not limited to the following:

- Maryland State Arts Council's 2002 Individual Artist Award
- National Association of Women Artists
- National Museum of African Art (Washington, D.C.)
- Art in Embassies Program
- The Arts Club of Washington, DC
- The Pen and Palette and Pen Award from the Arts and Letters Commission Prince George's County Alumnae Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.
- Art Works were featured on Washington, DC Television Channel 22's "Art Works"
- Her quilt, "Spirit Woman", was featured in the book, "Threads of Faith"
- She received a full fellowship to Vermont Studio Center, Johnson, Vermont to matriculate in fine arts

Gwendolyn has been an arts educator both in the United States and Africa, owner/director of an art gallery, art therapist and a consultant.

Over the years, traveling has influenced her work – especially her trips to Africa, Trinidad, Tobago and Brazil. Her work may best be described as Afro-Caribbean. She and her husband, artist Bernard Brooks, reside in Charlotte, NC and Washington, DC.



### **Ivey Hayes**

Born: North Carolina

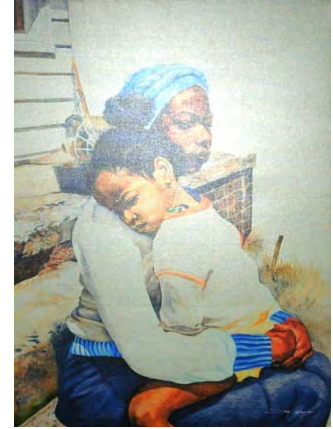
Education: North Carolina Central University;  
University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Degree: B.F.A, art; M.F.A art

Ivey Hayes was born and raised in eastern North Carolina. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree from North Carolina Central University. He went on to study at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and ultimately obtained his Master in Fine Arts at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro in 1975.

Ivey has developed a unique style, always drawing upon his own personal experiences. His use of bright colors to express feeling and emotion makes each of his pieces seem to come to life with their own distinct personality. This is one of the reasons his popularity continues to grow.

Ivey has won numerous awards for his work from Presidential and Celebrity Awards to the North Carolina Azalea Festival Master Arts Exhibit. His artwork has been exhibited throughout his home state of North Carolina, Washington, D.C., Boston and New York as well as various galleries and private collections in the United States.



### **James Converse Biggers**

*Born: Gastonia, NC*

*Education: Appalachian State University*

*Degree: MA, Art Education*

Mr. Biggers has developed a career as a respected educator and visual artist. He works in a variety of media, with special emphasis on painting, drawing and monoprints. Influenced by his uncle, artist John Biggers, he has developed his own personal style.

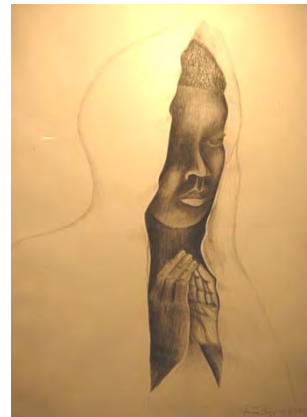
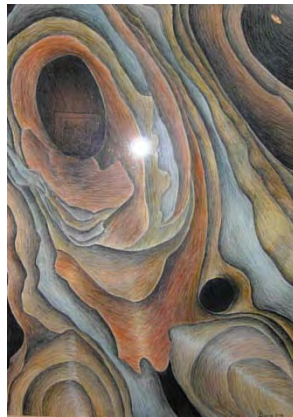
Although his work often reflects his African heritage, his recent creations have incorporated themes derived from his interests in mythology and geometric patterns. For many years, James has incorporated the mathematical fundamentals of the “Geometry of Life” into his work.

In 1977, he received a Fulbright-Hayes grant to tour Japan as part of the North Carolina Art Teachers’ Japan Seminar at Duke University. He has worked closely with the Kennedy Center (Washington, D.C.) on several projects and has held teaching positions in public schools, colleges and a museum within the state of North Carolina.

His works have been exhibited across the state. He has collaborated on several projects with his uncle, including two 30’ tall murals in the O’Kelly Library at Winston-Salem

State University, “Origins” and “Ascension.” In 1992, he again joined his uncle in the design and execution of the Hampton University Murals – “Tree House” and “House of the Turtle” – installed at the William R. and Norma B. Harvey Library at Hampton University in Hampton, Virginia.

In 1993-1994, James created and installed “North Carolina Belongs to Children”, a mural commissioned for the North Carolina Artworks for State Buildings Programs in the North Carolina Legislative building in Raleigh. In 1994-1995, he created the piece “Celebration” at the Charlotte Convention Center for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Arts and Science Council. He also presented a one-man show, “Mythology – I know the Way”, a Cleveland Community College in Shelby, NC. Biggers’ work has recently been featured at a number of regional museums and art centers, including facilities in Fayetteville, Winston-Salem, and Greensboro, NC. Mr. Biggers is an adjunct instructor at Gaston College and Cleveland Community College. He resides in Gastonia, NC with his wife, Ina, two sons and four grandchildren.



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## John Biggers



Dr. John Thomas Biggers first discovered his artistic talents when he was a child. Every year, he and his brothers and sisters would recreate the town of Gastonia out of the clay under their house, complete with streets and buildings, wagons, cars, mules, horses, houses with lawns of moss, streams of real water and Gastonia’s two seven-story skyscrapers.

Biggers was an artist with versatility as a painter, sculptor, graphic artist, printmaker, muralist and educator. His paintings and drawings hang in museums and private collections in the U.S. and Europe. He created works that draw upon the study of arts, religion, the mysteries of Egypt and other African nations and the experiences of the commonality of all human experience.

He often was quoted as saying, “I’m not a big-city artist telling a big-city story; I’m a southern man telling a story about home.”

His murals “Origins” and “Ascension” are displayed at the O’Kelly Library at Winston-Salem State University. His work also is represented in the permanent collections of the Houston Museum of Fine Arts, the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, David C. Driskell Collection at the University of Maryland, Hampton University Museum, California Museum of Afro-American History and Culture, Texas State University African-American Cultural Center and numerous corporate collections.

Biggers spent the last years of his life as chairman of the Art Department at Texas Southern University in Houston where he founded and directed the art program. He retired in 1983 but continued to serve as Professor Emeritus. After a long struggle with diabetes, Biggers died January 25, 2001, in Houston. Biggers and his wife of 51 years, Hazel Hales Biggers, lived in both Gastonia and Houston.



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## **Johnathan French**

### Artist Statement

My work is concentrated on that which has been a daily and constant part of my life everyday. It is based on my comfort zone and love and pride...it is of being of African heritage.

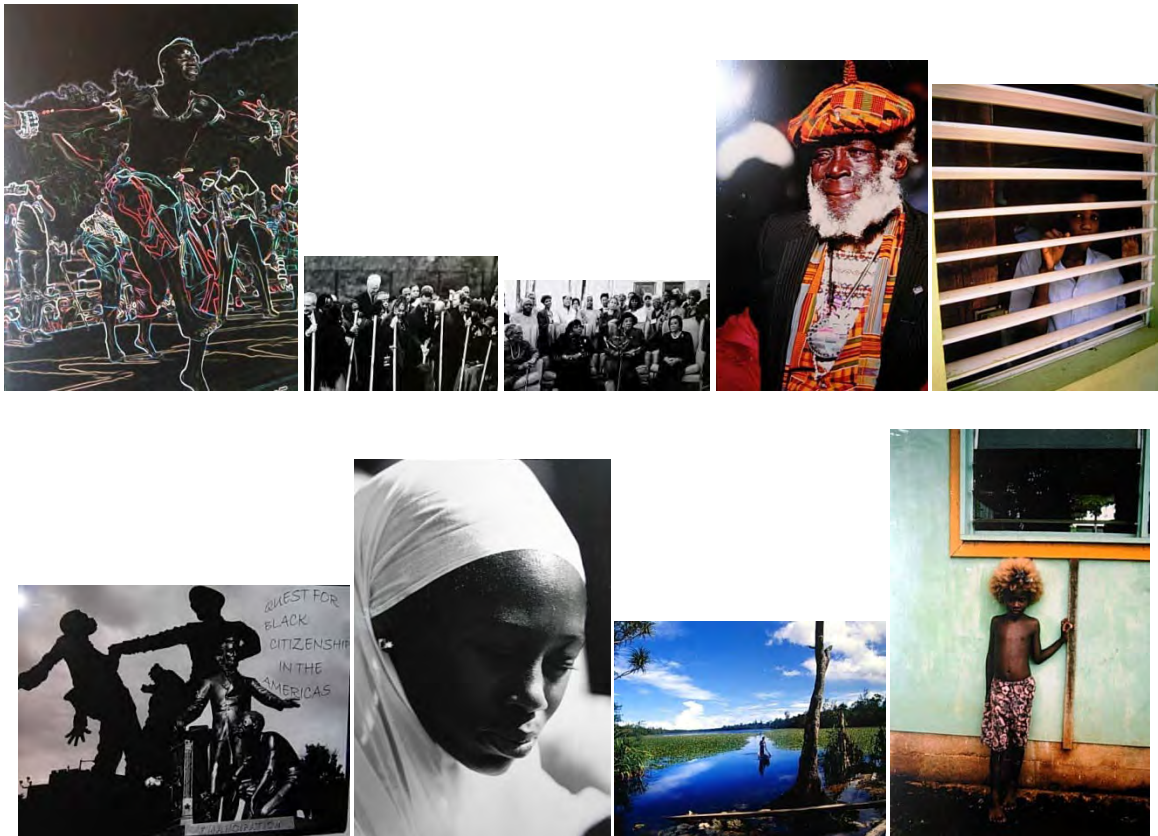
In the early 1980s I visited Senegal and the “Door of no Return” on Goree Island. I watched as people cried and wept for the cruelty their ancestors had to endure. I felt proud of my ancestors knowing that everything unheard of, of inhumane treatment inflicted upon them, yet they survived and we are a living proof of their perseverance.

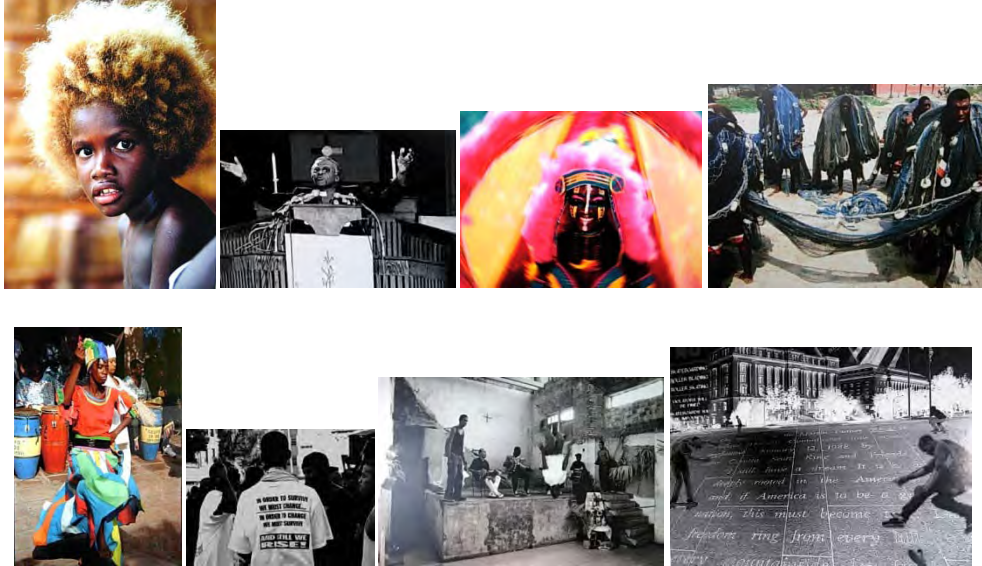
Standing in the “Door of no Return” a friend and I asked ourselves “where did they all go”? Attending a “Black Family Reunion” in 1996 in Costa Rica my question was answered. Being in the company of Dr. John Henrik Clarke, Asa Hilliard, and Runuko Rashidi and many other, I met Blacks from various parts of the Americas. This began my

journey to visit various Black communities in the “Americas. In my mind I had a vision of the epic chronicle of Jacob Lawrence, “The Migration of the Negro”, sixty paintings that portray the 20<sup>th</sup> century exodus of Blacks from the rural south. The series to me depicted scenes of despair, alternating with visions of hope and excitement. These scenes played out in my mind as I would visit these communities.

For too long, wide watery oceans and barren information deserts had kept apart Descendants of Africa in the Americas. For too long, history has made invisible the communities of Africans in the Americas to many of us in the United States. There has been little interaction, as far as I am concerned with these communities and we Blacks in the United States. These communities also have left an indelible mark in the physiognomy and character of the Americas.

I have alternated in calling my body of work, “Same Boat, Different Stop” and “Strange Faces in Strange Places” but no matter what title...my desire is to introduce my audience to those that built the Americas. It is impossible to completely understand the history and culture of the Atlantic World without an examination of the remarkable role Africans and their descendants have played. To those that are represented in my works I hope to create a path to empowering their communities and to foster cross-cultural friendship with all people of African Heritage.





**Nellie Ashford Rawls**

Born: Charlotte, NC

Education: Carver Junior College, North Carolina Central University, Durham, NC, and Show University, Raleigh, NC

Degree: B.S. Psychology and Social Science

She uses acrylic paints of bright colors along with found objects of fabric, sand, wood shavings, and other natural things to create her paintings. “I began to paint because of my third oldest grandson. I paint about people, places and things that don’t matter to anyone anymore. I am a folk artist and the advantage is that I tell people I am allowed to break the rules that the trained artist would not dare do.”

Her works can be located in a variety of places in the US, Canada and Swaziland, Africa. In North Carolina you can find her works in Charlotte galleries, Picture Perfect Framing, Studio 7, and Coffey & Thompson Gallery, Unity Place in St. Stephens AME Zion Church, Gastonia. The Foster’s Art and Frame Gallery, Huntersville, Red Piano Gallery Too, St. Helena’s Island, and La Benson’s Art Gallery, Beauford, SC. Her works have been commissioned by a number of organizations in Charlotte, NC. She also has been a guest of friends of the arts in New Orleans, Louisiana. Most recently, the Afro American Cultural Center in Charlotte, NC presented her with the Artist Achievement Award. She resides in a rural area in Charlotte where she paints in her home.



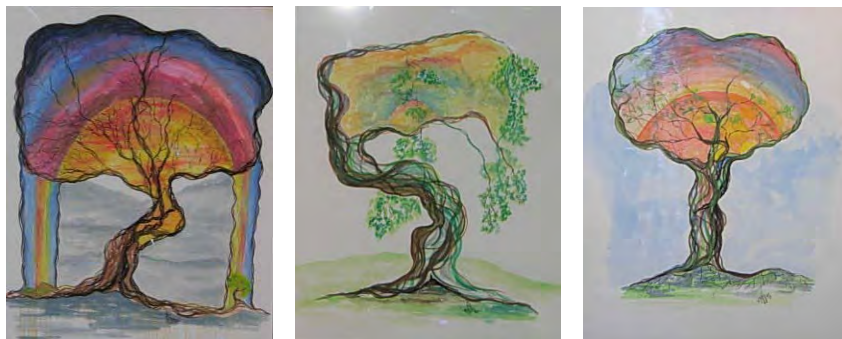
### **Roy Lindsay Woods**

I'm Roy Woods and I sign my work 'Roy Lindsay', my middle name. I hope you enjoy viewing my work – it comes from deep feelings and my personal observations. There is a sign on my studio door that says “imagination is more valuable than money”. When I am working on my art, I thank God for giving me a rich imagination.

The sign also says “being original is harder than it looks”.

As you view my work, you will see that I use mixed media which challenges me to be original and to try many different approaches in my work.

Art is given from God to the artist to share with the viewer - a gift to all of us. The artist does not own it; he just signs it. When you buy it, you help the artist continue giving the gift that God gave.





**Sandra Biggers Byers**

*Born: Gastonia, NC*

*Education: Frank L. Ashley High School; Bands Beauty College, Charlotte, NC; Gaston College, Dallas, NC*

*Degree: Certification for Nurse Assistant*

Sandra Biggers Byers is a self taught artist who was introduced to watercolor by her late uncle, Dr. John T. Biggers in 1998.

Creations from her art include painting in watercolor, oils and acrylics and hand painted bookmarks and cards. Some of the competitions and exhibits that she has participated in include: United Negro College Fund Auction for the Maya Angelo Women Who Lead Luncheon, Charlotte, NC; The Artist Friend Gallery, Winston-Salem, NC; I Am Women Show, Kings

Mountain, NC; and exhibitions at the Gaston County Library, Gastonia, NC; Saint Paul Baptist Church, Gastonia, NC; The Vision, Gastonia, NC; The Elegant Ladies Tea and Luncheon and White Rose Luncheon Links, Inc., Cramer Mountain Country Club, Cramerton, NC.

She lives in her hometown of Gastonia and has three adult daughters, three grandsons and one granddaughter.



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**THEODORE H. BROOKS**

Theodore Brooks was born in Sanford, NC in 1936, the first of two sons of a Baptist minister and an elementary school teacher. He received his early education variously in NC, GA, and PA. He attended under-graduate school at Howard University in Washington, DC before doing a stint with the US Army where he learned photography. He had always been interested in the visual arts and photography provided a medium for entering this area. He prefers available light and his favorite approach to photography is candid portraiture considering the fact that people are more natural when there is no knowledge that a camera is nearby. His photography has won awards in military service and later an honorable mention in Maryland's second annual Chesapeake Appreciation Photographic Contest. After completing military service he entered dental college where

he earned the DDS degree. He returned to NC where he directed the dental clinic at Durham's Health Department until retiring in 2001. After retiring, Ted continues to work but no longer does any "drilling, filling or pulling." Retirement gives him the time to pursue two of his favorite passions: traveling and photography.



**Vandorn Hinnant**

Born: Greensboro, NC

Education: North Carolina A&T State University, Durham, NC and University of North Carolina, Greensboro, NC

Degree: B.A. Art Design

Vandorn Hinnant studied visual art at NC A&T State University, and sculpture at UNC-Greensboro, before moving to New York City to work as an intaglio printer

for the Czechoslovakian born German artist Josef Werner. His original works of art are in numerous public and private collections in Africa and Europe. He has guest curated art exhibitions, served as a curator at NC A&T State University's African Heritage Center, taught studio art courses at Winston-Salem State University, and has lectured at colleges and universities in the Southeastern USA. Along with being a studio artist, Vandorn serves as an educational consultant working with youth and adult learners. In the early 1990s, he taught in Artist-In-Schools program through The Green Hill Center for NC Art and is currently teaching a class at Duke University's Osher Life Long Learning Institute through the Department of Continuing Education. He lives in Durham, NC.

Vandorn proclaimed himself an artist when he was a second-grader. "I work with color as a form of communication, and my work speaks to many individuals on different levels". His influences are varied and include painter Edith Brown, of Akron, Ohio, and push broom painter Edward Clark, of New York. "He's real interested in the spiritual effects that sacred geometry can have, and he explores those effects," said Brooke Anderson, director of the Diggs Gallery.

