

An exhibit of

five

photographers

from

Tennessee

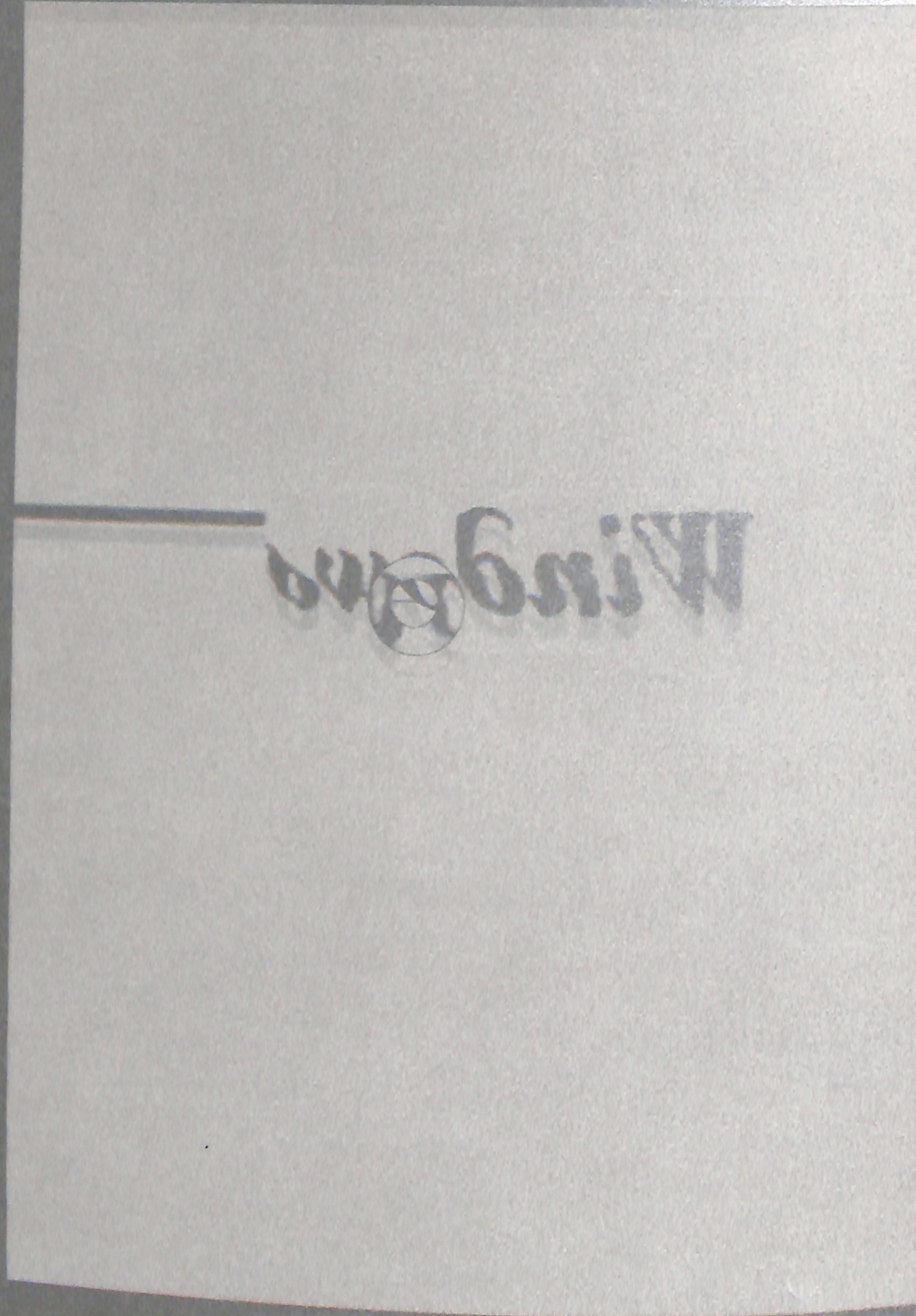
about

Tennessee

Windows

on

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The Ewing Gallery

The University of Tennessee at Knoxville

Windows on Tennessee

... a photograph is not only an image (as a painting is an image), an interpretation of the real; it is also a trace, something directly stenciled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask. While a painting, even one that meets photographic standards of resemblance, is never more than an interpretation, a photograph is never less than the registering of an emanation (light waves reflected by objects)-a material vestige of its subject in a way that no painting can be.

Susan Sontag

An image made from the camera can be viewed either as a graphic pattern on a piece of paper or a window through which a piece of the world has been rendered permanent. A photograph is like all other graphic images in that it traffics in the world of two dimensional relationships: line, surface, shape, color and proportion. But it is photography's direct connection to the reality from which it is derived that is the source of the medium's power and uniqueness. It is not difficult to suspend one's disbelief when standing before a photograph in order to be seduced into believing that what is being seen is not an image, but the world from which it came.

Facts are the sweetest dreams that labor knows.

Robert Frost

If photography were only capable of producing images that were completely faithful to their subjects: (documents), the role of the photographer would be that of a scribe. But photographers since the inception of the medium 150 years ago realized their cameras could not only produce documents, but that these documents had a curious nature. Rather than being uninflected transcriptions from reality, they could become vessels for meanings which come not from the subject, but from the photographer. Such photographers know that they are writers of fiction in the guise of reporters.

On one level, the work of each of the participating photographers can be viewed as a dispassionate document. But when viewed more closely, Mike Smith's images with ornamental lights at night overlooking an Upper East Tennessee mountain landscape become the physical manifestation of a child's sweetest Christmas Eve dream. Meryl Truett's Nashville honky-tonk facade is transformed into a memory whose colors are from imagination's palette. Lawrence Jasud's barbecues and Elvis tributes transcend the bound of everyday ritual to become the myth of America. Carlton Wilkinson's introspective black man is revealed to be shaped by scars and caresses. Baldwin Lee's freckled school child has graduated to the status of monument.

The American South is known for its contributions to literature. The South has also been a rich source for photography. If the literary South has its William Faulkner, its photographic counterpart is Walker Evans. Unlike Faulkner, Evans was not a Southerner describing known primary experience. As an outsider, however, the work he did in the mid-1930's is characterized by a sense of amazement and surprise for the people and situations he encountered for the first time. *Windows on Tennessee* provides the opportunity to showcase the work of Mike Smith from Johnson City, Meryl Truett and Carlton Wilkinson from Nashville, Lawrence Jasud from Memphis and Baldwin Lee from Oak Ridge. Unlike Evans, each of these artists is photographing known territory. Carlton Wilkinson is a true native of Tennessee and the other photographers have lived for more than a decade in this state. Much like Evans, these photographers produce work which persuades us that each of them is experiencing the kind of delight, sadness, or sense of wonder that makes us believe that their subjects are new discoveries.

I thank my colleague Baldwin Lee for his contributions in the formulation of this exhibition and catalog. I am also grateful to Cary Staples for the outstanding design of this catalog and to Cindy Spangler and Jerry Brown of the Ewing Gallery staff for their efforts in the success of this exhibition.

Finally, the East Tennessee Foundation is acknowledged for its support of this publication.

Sam Yates
Director of the Ewing Gallery and
Curator, *Windows on Tennessee*

M e m p h i s

For a good many years now I have been interested in myth. Initially I was captivated by the ancient myths and stories of gods and heroes. Later I read the pioneering work of Heinrich Zimmer and discovered the profound and fundamental function of myths as guides to life. Dragons and wizards, however, didn't seem to have much relevance to modern life until I understood their significance as symbolic rationales and guides to the fundamental questions of life, death and everything else. Unfortunately that still didn't ease my disquieting sense of contemporary life as bereft of this kind of deep wisdom.

So I started looking for our own myths, suspecting that whatever I found would be much degraded and debased. I decided that popular culture was the most vigorous and probably most fertile ground for the search; particularly since my own roots were in pop culture rather than in ancient and moribund European traditions. Everyone, regardless of their class and education, must somehow make a number of metaphysical assumptions that justify their lives and actions. It seemed likely that pop culture's myths would be more immediately visible. Ruling class culture prefers to hide its metaphysics, treating business as the natural human estate and calling quantum physics science rather than creation myth.

So I turned to festive public gatherings like carnivals, Barbecue contests, custom car shows, Pow-Wows and, finally, Graceland, expecting to find all sorts of mythic activity. I find myself both fascinated by what I found and profoundly discouraged by the shallow appropriations of our culture. We have exchanged Coyote and Trickster for Ronald McDonald, and Odysseus for Luke Skywalker. We've traded surface for substance, flash for depth, and profit for profundity. We are walking on thin ice and there's nothing underneath.

Lawrence Jasud



Ciao Y'All
16" x 20"
type C color print
1992

Carlton Wilkinson

Nashville

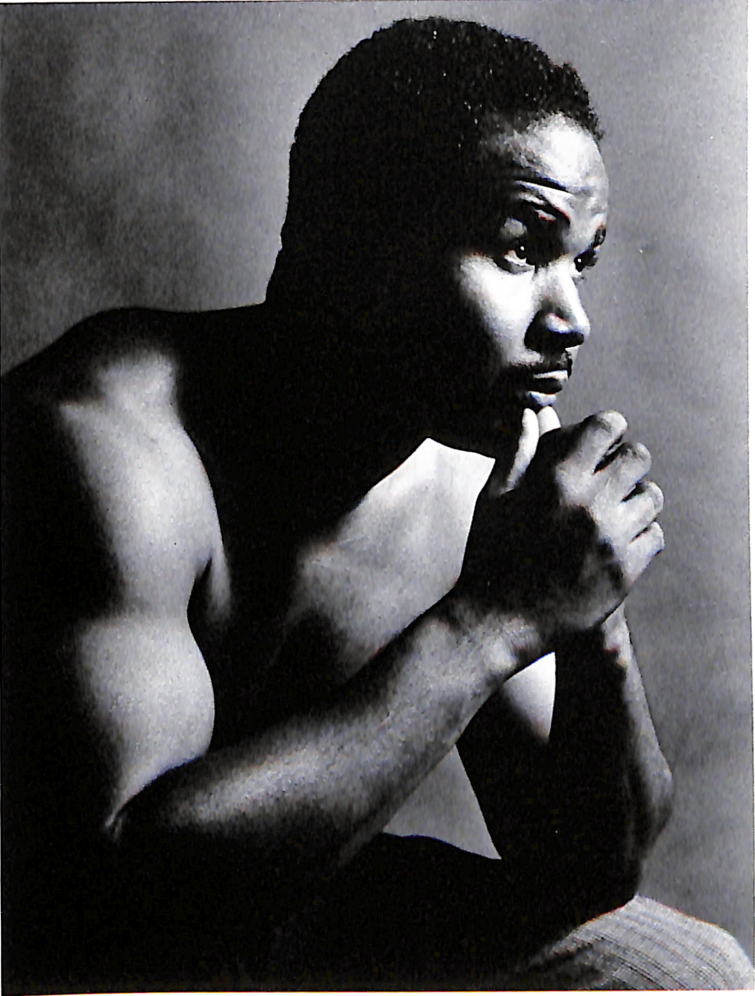
Performing as an artist/photographer has always felt second nature to me and essential to my own well-being. As an artist, I feel the need to explore my world and develop an expressive understanding about the human condition—through photography. As a dedicated art activist, it is important to me that the arts interact with our everyday lives.

My most recent work has been a visual/verbal investigation of African-American males between the ages of 18 - 40. It is my aim to address critical issues surrounding Af-Am males, who have been directly affected by the events of the post - Civil Rights Movement Era of the 1960s-90s.

This designated period has produced unique challenges, objectives and concerns facing this ethnic/gender group. Alarming statistics on issues of health, violence and education are part of this focus. Through the process of oral interview and photography, each subject is able to address his personal views about himself and contemporary issues.

My goal is to complete, at least, 100 interviews for this project.

Carlton Wilkinson



Roderick G.
10" x 8"
silver gelatin print
1992

Name : Roderick G.
Born : New York, New York
Age : 27
Education : College Senior, Architectural Engineering
Profession : Motivational Speaker and "Positive Theory" Workshop Coordinator
Living Presently : Nashville, TN
Description : I am 5' 9-3/4" tall, brown skin, short fade cut, a birth mark between my eyes, and a good build. Yes, I would probably tell them that I am black. From the description that I have mentioned, I think that this is a good looking brother. (laughter) I think that my face is attractive and clean cut, but I have an average face. I would say that my build is firm and not fat. At least, that is what my wife tells me, and I see myself.
Family : My father and mother live in Detroit. My father is a construction worker, so he has tough hands and feet. He looks more like an Indian. He has pretty skin and is in good physical shape. He is a good looking guy. My mother is a rape counselor with the Detroit police department. She holds a Masters in Psychology. She is heavy set and has "good" hair. She is so beautiful. She's my mom. (laughter) I have one older brother and younger sister. My sister and I are really close. My brother and I are not so close because of the age difference. I have a wife who is, now, pregnant. We have a future leader in her stomach. Right now, my wife is my all. I love her with all my heart. So that satisfies me, which can blank out almost anything else that I desire.
Racism : There was a time when I would be more reactive because I did not know how to control my emotions. Now, I do know how to do that. I am not the kind of guy who just lets things happen. If someone called me the "N" word I would definitely address that. A lot of people are just ignorant and you have to recognize that and leave it alone. Sometimes, we make it hard for ourselves. So there are two sides to it. Some of our African-American brothers and sisters say the "N" word themselves. It seems that many don't know what they are saying and how hard we have fought to get where we are. Some just don't seem to care.
Religion : When I think of God I don't see it as being religious. That's putting a label on it. I believe that you have to apply it (God) to your life. So, I don't like to separate myself from my brothers and sisters because we are in this game together. So, if I say that I am so religious, more than someone else, that divides us. I just try to follow God and live by his rules to the best of my ability. I am, however, active in the AME church.
Drugs : The drug in my life was alcohol. I was addicted to it until I admitted that I had a problem. I could not face the reality of my situation. I was so lost. I have looked into my family history and there seems to be a cycle of alcohol abuse. I am trying to stop this cycle.
Being Black : Being black is not enough. You come from one place and I another. but where do we connect? You are Black and so am I, but we have not gone through the same things. We need to remember where we came from, and that means all the way back to God. Those Negro spirituals and our faith delivered us from slavery. And the same practice needs to take place today with the drug problem and all.
About Myself : I walk pretty sturdy and have gotten through some pretty rough periods in my life. Due to my past violent nature, I almost lost my life. But, I want people to know that my life for God has gotten me this far. And, I know that. And I got to say, my wife — I love her and my child.

N a s h v i l l e

As a Southerner, my work is about a particular vision of vanishing landscapes and lost causes. My photographic world is filled with fading local watering holes where would-be Country and Western stars toast to forgotten dreams, disappeared landmarks which become gaping holes in the psyche of our cities, and "Meat 'n Three" restaurants where you can still get fried chicken, "real" mashed potatoes, and raisin pudding.

My photographs romanticize the banal and unremarkable through hand tinting and texturizing. They are imbued with nostalgic colors and surfaces that exist only in the South of our memories.

I am currently working on two ongoing projects. One project involves juxtaposing mosaic frames of broken china and found objects with vintage family snap shots taken with a Brownie Hawkeye camera. Working Title: "Mother told me not to break the dishes."

The other project documents religious graffiti and iconography indigenous to the South through hand colored silver prints.

Meryl Truett

Flamingo Lounge
15" x 15"
hand tinted silver gelatin print
1992



O a k R i d g e

When photographers sort their own work their photographs fall into three categories—successes, failures and puzzlements. Successes and failures take care of themselves, but it is this category of puzzlements that resists entry into either portfolio or trash can. These photographs contain clues about unfulfilled interests and ambitions. For me, this category included large numbers of pictures of people's heads. These resisted being successes for a multitude of reasons, yet I kept making them. An answer came in the form of a switch to a larger format camera (from 4x5 to 8x10). I make a decision to go on the road with the 8x10 and 300 sheets of film and would not allow myself to return until I had photographed 300 faces. To my surprise, several turned out to be interesting.

Mug shots are perhaps the most ubiquitous and demeaned form of photography. Every magazine cover, video screen, wanted poster, and I.D. card provide proof. It was my ambition in these photographs to demonstrate that this most common task of photography could yield surprising and original results. The attempt to show something that is already known in a way so as to make it appear new is the challenge.

These photographs were made with the support of a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Baldwin Lee

*Student, Jackaboro Elementary School
54" x 84"
silver gelatin print
1991*



Mike Smith

J o h n s o n C i t y

At the beginning of this work I felt that an absurd description of the holiday's commercial nature could be the only true account of how we celebrate Christmas today. Through this work I discovered that, in East Tennessee, the holiday still inspires the hearts and imaginations of many people.

What I like most about this work is that the actual and the theatrical collide in each frame. The camera knows no difference and processes the information equally giving the viewer the task of making his or her own distinctions. It is playful, humorous, absurd and beautiful work all in one; just like Christmas!

Mike Smith

An East Tennessee Christmas
20" x 16"
type C print
1992



Lawrence Jasud

Memphis, Tennessee

Associate Professor of Photography, Department of Art,

Memphis State University, Memphis, Tennessee

MA: Photography, The Ohio State University, 1980

Selected Exhibitions:

1992: *Brooks Biennial Invitational*,

Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, Memphis, Tennessee

1992: *Works by Faculty and Graduate Students from South Central*

Universities, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana

1992: *Photographic Book Art in the United States*,

Department of Visual Arts, Texas Women’s University, Denton, Texas

1991: *Photographic Book Art in The United States*,

College of Fine Arts and Humanities, University of Texas at San Antonio

1991: *Cameracases*, Department of Art, University of Arkansas,

Fayetteville, Arkansas

1990: *Magic Silver*, Department of Art, University of Northern Iowa,

Cedar Falls, Iowa

1989: *Myths and Rituals*, Department of Art, University of Arkansas,

Jonesboro, Arkansas

1989: *Southern Survey*, an invitational survey of Southern Photography,

Memphis Center for Contemporary Art, Memphis, Tennessee

1989: *The Persistence of Myth*, Memphis State University Gallery,

Memphis, Tennessee

1988: *Through The Viewfinder: A Look At Vanishing America*, Sarratt

Gallery, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee

1988: *Number Invitational*, Memphis Center for Contemporary Art,

Memphis, Tennessee

1987: *Fellowship Winner’s Exhibition*, Tennessee Arts Commission,

Nashville, Tennessee

Selected Publications:

1993: Taylor & Francis, “A Portfolio of Color Photographs from the series *Myths and Rituals*,” *History of Photography*, Volume 14, Number 4, Winter.

1992: Taylor & Francis, “Reading Minor White: *The Sound of One Hand Clapping*,” *History of Photography*,

Volume 16, Number 2, Summer.

1991: “Will The Perverts In The Audience Please Stand?” commentary

and review of a symposium on “Censorship in Art,” *Number Fourteen*,

a quarterly of the visual arts, Memphis, TN, Summer, 1991.

1989: “Cabbagetown: A Review Essay,” *The Southern Quarterly*,

University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS, VOL. XXVIII,

No. 1, Fall

Baldwin S. Lee

Oak Ridge, Tennessee

Professor of Art,

University of Tennessee/Knoxville

MFA: Yale University School of Art,

New Haven, Connecticut, 1975

Selected Exhibitions:

1993: *Permanent Collection Exhibition*, Museum of Modern Art,

New York, New York

1992: *The Sporting Life*, High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia

1991-1992: *Baldwin Lee, Photographs of Black Southerners*, 1983-

1988, University of Kansas Museum of Art, Lawrence, Kansas

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

1989: *Personae: Contemporary Portraiture and Self-Portraiture*,

Islip Art Museum, Islip, New York,

1989: *New Southern Photography: Beyond Myth and Reality*,

Burden Gallery, New York, New York

1987: *America’s Uncommon Places*, Washington, DC

1878: Recent Acquisitions, Museum of Modern Art,

New York, New York

1986-1987: *Permanent Collection Exhibition*, Museum of Modern Art,

New York, New York

1987: Southeast Center for Contemporary Art,

Winston-Salem, North Carolina

1987: University of North Carolina, Western North Carolina

1983: University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee

1981: Castelli Graphics Group Show, New York, New York

1978: Yale University, Faculty Show, New Haven, Connecticut

1975: Massachusetts Institute of Technology,

Cambridge, Massachusetts

Collections:

Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York

Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut

University of Kentucky Art Museum, Lexington, Kentucky

University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee

University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor, Michigan

National Trust For Historic Preservation

Mike Smith

Johnson City, Tennessee

Associate Professor of Photography,

East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee

MFA: Yale University School of Art,

New Haven, Connecticut, 1981

Selected Exhibitions:

1993: *Nothing Personal*, Mountain Empire Community College,

Big Stone Gap, Virginia

1992: *Nothing Personal*, Tusculum College,

Greenville, Tennessee

1992: *Nothing Personal*, Carroll Reece Museum,

Johnson City, Tennessee

1991: Color Photographs, Eads Gallery, Eads, Tennessee

1990: *Living Artists—Photographers*,

Knoxville Museum of Art, Knoxville, Tennessee

1990: Rose Art Center, Morristown, Tennessee

1989: Arrowmont School of Arts, Gatlinburg, Tennessee

1987: Asheville Museum of Art, Asheville, North Carolina

Collections:

Opryland Hotel Art Purchase Award, Nashville, Tennessee

Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York

Yale University, New Haven Connecticut

Massachusetts College of Art, Boston, Massachusetts

Meryl Truett

Nashville, Tennessee

Executive Director of Sinking Creek Film/Video Festival at

Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee

Master of Media Arts in Photography and Film,

The University of South Carolina, 1979

Selected Exhibitions:

1993: *From the Mountains to the Mississippi*,

Cheekwood Museum of Fine Arts, Nashville, Tennessee

1993: Visual Artist Alliance of Nashville Group Show

1993: Two Person Show, Cumberland Gallery, Nashville, Tennessee

1992: New Work, Two Person Show, Leu Gallery,

Belmont University, Nashville, Tennessee

1992: *Modern Romance*, Group Show, AKA Gallery,

Nashville, Tennessee

1991: P.E.A.C.E. Group Artists Show, Marathon Village, Nashville, TN

1991: Summer Lights Juried Exhibition,

Metro Nashville Arts Commission, Nashville, Tennessee

1990: Film Flam Silent Auction, Sinking Creek Film Festival,

Nashville, Tennessee

1989: Park Avenue Armory, New York, New York

1989: Oakbrook Center Fine Arts Exhibition, Chicago, Illinois

1988: Two Person Show, Appalachian Center for Crafts,

Smithville, Tennessee

1988: Lucky Street Gallery, Group Show, Key West, Florida

1986: Dulin Gallery of Art, National Works on Paper Exhibition,

Knoxville, Tennessee

Selected Publications:

Camera, Austria, Graz/Austria, 1990.

Petersen’s Photographic, 1986.

18th Dulin National Works on Paper Exhibition Catalog, 1986.

Darkroom Magazine, 1984,1986.

Craft Range, 1985.

Art Papers, Atlanta, Georgia, 1984.

Collections:

The University of South Carolina Art Collection, Columbia, SC

Vanderbilt University Art Collection, Nashville, Tennessee

The Ingram Group

Gallery:

Cumberland Gallery, Nashville, Tennessee

Carlton F. Wilkinson

Nashville, Tennessee

Lecturer in Fine Arts, Department of Fine Arts, Vanderbilt University,
Nashville, Tennessee

Proprietor, Art Works Photography Studio and In The Gallery,
Nashville, Tennessee

MFA: University of California, Los Angeles, 1985

Selected Exhibitions:

1993: *Indiana Black Exposition*, Indianapolis, Indiana

1993: *Black Creativity '93*, Museum of Science and Industry,
Chicago, Illinois

1992: Tennessee Arts Comission Gallery, Nashville, Tennessee

1992: Memphis (TN) Arts Festival

1992: *Photographs by Carlton Wilkinson*, Cheekwood Fine Arts Center,
Nashville, Tennessee

1990: Bethune - Cookman College, Daytona Beach, Florida

1989: University of Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana

1989: *Angels of the Arts*, Summer Lights Fundraiser,
Nashville, Tennessee

1988: Van Vechten Gallery, Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee

1988: *National Black Arts Festival: Contemporary Art*, Atlanta, Georgia

1988: Houston Center for Photography, Houston, Texas

1988: Francis Dorris Gallery, Nashville, Tennessee

1988: *National Contemporary Exhibition*, National Black Arts Festival,
Atlanta, Georgia

1988: Frances Dorris Gallery, Nashville, Tennessee

1988: Ohio-Wessley University, Delaware, Ohio

1988: Black Gallery, Los Angeles, California

1988: Market Street Emporium, Nashville, Tennessee

1988: In The Gallery, Nashville, Tennessee

1987: Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee

Collections:

The Grunwald Center of Prints and Photographs,
University of California, Los Angeles

Grand Oak Gallery, Oakland, California

John Nelley CPA and Associates, Nashville, Tennessee

Schomburg Center for Research and Black Culture, New York, New York

Gallery:

Art Works Gallery, Nashville, Tennessee

Windows on Tennessee

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E01.1007.004.94