


Opere Recenti

47TH Venice Biennale
 XLVII Edizione della
 Biennale di Venezia

United States Pavilion
 Padiglione degli Stati Uniti

Miriam Roberts,
 United States Commissioner
 Commissario per gli Stati

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**Painter Robert Colescott
 to Represent the United States
 at 47th Venice *Biennale***

For Immediate Release (4/15/97): Arizona-based painter Robert Colescott has been chosen to represent the United States at the 47th Venice *Biennale*, the oldest and most prestigious contemporary art festival in the world. The exhibition opens June 15, 1997.

Colescott is the first African-American artist to represent the United States in a single-artist exhibition at the Venice *Biennale*. The high honor of this occasion marks both a singular personal achievement for the artist and a landmark event in the history of African-American art. Colescott is the first painter to represent the United States since Jasper Johns in 1988.

Colescott's exhibition at the United States Pavilion will include 19 paintings from the past ten years. He is well-known for his energetic and emotionally-charged interpretations of history, race, religion, art and popular culture. His large canvases employ a figurative vocabulary which challenges stereotypes and engenders debate on the state of human relations in the U.S.

Of Colescott's paintings, John Russell wrote in a 1989 article in *The New York Times*, "Though baited with a wild, driving and sometimes apocalyptic humor, [Colescott's] paintings challenge us to cope with serious problems that are overdue for resolution."

U.S. participation in the Venice *Biennale* is made possible through primary support from the Fund For U.S. Artists at International Festivals and Exhibitions, a public/private

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partnership of the United States Information Agency (U.S.I.A.) and the National Endowment for the Arts, the Rockefeller Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts, with administrative support from Arts International, a division of the Institute of International Education.

The Fund solicited proposals for this exhibition nationwide from curators of contemporary art. The Colescott proposal, submitted by independent curator Miriam Roberts, was selected by the Federal Advisory Committee on International Exhibitions (FACIE), through a competitive peer review process. Ms. Roberts now holds the official title of U.S. Commissioner of the Venice *Biennale*. SITE Santa Fe is the facilitating organization for this project. Project management is provided by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of U.S.I.A., in cooperation with the U.S. Embassy in Rome, the International Partnerships Office of the National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, D.C., and the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice, the owner and administrator of the U.S. Pavilion. Additional financial support for the Robert Colescott exhibition and publication has been provided by the Elizabeth Firestone Graham Foundation, Albuquerque, New Mexico; the L.E.F. Foundation, St. Helena, California; the Richard Florsheim Art Fund, Tampa, Florida; Cline LewAllen Contemporary and Cline Fine Art galleries in Santa Fe, New Mexico; Arlene and Harold Schnitzer and the Gordon D. Sondland and Katherine J. Durant Foundation, Portland, Oregon.

Robert Colescott: Recent Paintings begins with works from 1987, as that year marked a turning point for Colescott. Though he continued to use satire and narrative figuration, he moved beyond the controversial images of racial stereotypes for which he had become known. Colescott expanded his range and began exploring universal themes, venturing into the realm of mythological and religious allegory and sophisticated literary allusions. In 1988, Linda McGreevy wrote of his images in *Arts Magazine*, "Colescott proves himself a moralist, a history painter in the deepest sense, whose webs of cultural cause and effect have come full circle to illuminate the present."

A two-year U.S. tour of *Robert Colescott: Recent Paintings*, organized by Ms. Roberts and SITE Santa Fe, is planned following its presentation in Venice. The tour will open

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January 25, 1998 at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota; then travel to The Queens Museum of Art, Queens, New York, opening April 20, 1998; University of Arizona Museum of Art, Tucson, October 20, 1998; Portland Art Museum, Oregon, January 17, 1999; University of California Berkeley Art Museum, May 12, 1999; Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery and Sculpture Garden, University of Nebraska at Lincoln, September 15, 1999 and SITE Santa Fe, New Mexico, opening date to be determined. A full color publication will accompany the exhibition.

Robert Colescott

Robert Colescott is arguably the most important American figurative painter of this generation. Born in Oakland, California, Colescott received his undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University of California, Berkeley. He studied in Paris with Fernand Léger and returned to America to participate in the resurgence of figuration on the West Coast during the 1950s. After living in Cairo in the 1960s, he began depicting his experiences as an African-American. In the following decade his work incorporated images from popular culture and ironic homages to art historical masterpieces that presaged the emergence of postmodernism, neo-expressionism and multiculturalism.

Now 71, Colescott continues to produce vitally significant work and is an important role model for a younger generation of artists exploring issues of racial identity, power and gender. Most importantly, he has created one of the most powerful bodies of work in recent American art, employing a highly personal combination of narrative figuration blended with an ironic viewpoint addressing the major social issues of his time.

"After painting for 50 years, this is a professional and personal achievement." said Tucson-based Colescott. "I pull the viewer in with humor, but when they begin to understand what they have to deal with in the paintings, they don't know whether to love them or hate them."

Colescott is Emeritus Professor at the University of Arizona, Tucson. He has received numerous awards including grants from the National Endowment of the Arts in 1976, 1980 and 1983 and the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation for Creative Painting and Drawing in 1985.

Colescott is represented in numerous public collections including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, as well as many private collections. He is primarily represented by the Phyllis Kind Gallery of Chicago and New York City. He is also represented by Cline LewAllen Contemporary in Santa Fe, New Mexico and Laura Russo Gallery in Portland, Oregon.

The Venice *Biennale*

The Venice *Biennale* celebrated its centennial in 1995. Exhibitions are organized within 27 separate pavilions owned and operated by individual countries and regions. The United States Pavilion, owned by the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice, is a neoclassical building modeled on Monticello. The largest pavilion is Italy's which, in addition to presenting Italian artists, includes artists from different countries invited by the *Biennale's* Director of Visual Arts. The *Biennale* occurs every other summer. It will open on June 15 and run until November 9, 1997.

Recent representation at the United States Pavilion has included:

- 1995, an installation by California video artist Bill Viola, organized by Marilyn Zeitlin, Director of the Arizona State University Art Museum, Tempe
- 1993, an installation of sculpture by Louise Bourgeois organized by Charlotta Kotik of the Brooklyn Museum, which garnered honorable mention for sculpture
- 1990, an installation by Jenny Holzer, organized by Michael Auping, then of the Albright Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, NY, which won Best Pavilion Prize

The Fund for U.S. Artists at International Festivals and Exhibitions

The Fund for U.S. Artists at International Festivals and Exhibitions enables U.S. artists to participate in major international visual art biennials and performing arts festivals around the world. Supported by two federal agencies, the U.S.I.A. and the National Endowment for the Arts, and by the Rockefeller Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts, The Fund is a public-private partnership established to help ensure that the excellence, diversity and vitality of the arts in the United States are represented internationally. The Fund is based

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at Arts International/Institute of International Education, and makes grants totaling just over \$1 million annually. In its 11 years of existence, The Fund has supported over 11,445 performing artists at festivals in 65 countries and the exhibition of over 142 artists at visual arts biennials worldwide. The Federal Advisory Committee on International Exhibitions, a standing committee of the National Endowment for the Arts, provides advice on the visual arts component of the Fund.

Miriam Roberts

Miriam Roberts is an independent curator in Santa Fe, New Mexico. She has over 20 years' experience as an art historian and museum consultant. Several projects she has worked on have received national recognition, including the first major exhibition and national tour of Colescott's work while she was Chief Curator at the San Jose Museum of Art, California, and the nationally toured exhibition *A Different War: Vietnam in Art* for the Whatcom Museum of History and Art, Bellingham, Washington. She is the first independent curator to organize the exhibition for the U.S. Pavilion at the Venice *Biennale*.

Of *Robert Colescott: Recent Paintings*, Roberts says: "It's exciting to be presenting an exhibition of Colescott's work to an international audience for the first time. No one embodies the vitality of contemporary American art better than Colescott."

SITE Santa Fe

Ms. Roberts is working in association with SITE Santa Fe, a private, nonprofit organization committed to presenting national and international contemporary art in New Mexico. SITE Santa Fe is housed in 20,000 sq. ft. of renovated warehouse space. In addition to visual art exhibitions, SITE Santa Fe presents a variety of multidisciplinary programs. As well as providing organizational support to the Colescott project, SITE Santa Fe will be hosting a special benefit luncheon during the opening festivities in Venice on June 13, 1997. This event will feature a discussion between Robert Colescott and Dr. Lowery S. Sims, Curator of 20th Century Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and a reading by noted African American poet, Quincy Troupe, of a work inspired by Colescott's paintings.