

LEROI: LIVING IN COLOR

LeRoi Callwell Johnson Is The First Black Artist To Have A Solo Show In Burchfield's Main Gallery, A Meaningful Solo Exhibition That Inspires The Next Generation Of Artists

LEROI: LIVING IN COLOR, is a befitting title for one of our community's most exhibited international artists, LeRoi C. Johnson.

His exhibition, set to open November 11 at the Burchfield Penney Art Center at SUNY Buffalo State College, will mark the first time an African American artist has ever had a solo show in the Burchfield's Main Gallery in the history of its inception. Seventy-five pieces of Johnson's bold, bright, colorful creations will be on display. And although he has been showcased and recognized in major art centers across the United States and around the world, as the saying goes, there's no place like home.

"The exhibit will be my first major show in a museum and in my hometown of Buffalo which is fitting and most meaningful to me," Johnson said reflecting on the significance of the upcoming show. "Additionally, it will include the works of 40 Buffalo student artists who have produced multimedia, written, and sculptural responses to my work."

"It has been my honor to help them (students) expand their artistic experiences and realize that their talents can lead them to careers."

-The Showcase-

Although he has artwork in the permanent collection at the Burchfield, this artist's first time retrospective will showcase vibrant works created as early as the 1960's to present. LeRoi's intuitive compositions embrace cubism, surrealism, and abstraction to depict dreams and visions that are as multifaceted as his life, with roughly 90% of the pieces in the show that have never been seen in his hometown.

He had special praise for Tiffany Gaines, Burchfield's first Black curator who carefully selected and organized the exhibit; layered with breathtaking, vibrant, afro-whimsical, spiritual works that burst across the canvas in a dense punchy style the artist describes as Electric Primitive.

"Tiffany is a brilliant young curator with a lot on her plate. I was hesitant at first to have somebody so young but when I met her she was so professional I felt comfortable with her immediately. With so many elements that go into a show she's got a good eye for work and she's very good at designing a show of this magnitude," said LeRoi.

His works are influenced by his own personal experiences, the Black community, and drawing on Afro-Brazilian culture and African ancestral roots. The latter was impacted by a close friend and famed Brazilian politician artist activist Abdias do Nascimento.

In totality, LeRoi's art is a conversation for an expansive audience of art lovers, collectors art-curious and even those who may be not be interested in art at all.

"A lot of people aren't into art but my show has a lot of worldly elements that I think people can appreciate," he continued. "My work is a living experience and my interpretation of life experiences, dreams and connectivity, which I think a lot of people can interpret in different ways."

-Sharing His Shining Moment-

Reflecting once again on the local student artists whose works will be part of his upcoming show, he emphasized that it was their involvement that makes this exhibition even more special and endearing. The dynamic collaboration with the 12-17 year old students actually enhance the exhibit's central theme.

"LEROI: LIVING IN COLOR brings together a dynamic selection of works throughout LeRoi's prolific career that addresses important conversations around identity, social justice, and community," curator Tiffany Gaines elaborates. "The communal spirit present in his work is enriched through our educational partnerships and the inclusion of diverse voices from the next generation in the conversation," she continued.

"This project exemplifies the Burchfield Penney's role in our city: a celebration of art as a recognition of accomplishment combined with an educational approach that supports students and cultural partners making a difference in our community," said acting director Scott Propeck.

Students from the youth organizations of Buffalo Center for Art and Technology, Squeaky Wheel Film and Media Art Center, Just Buffalo Literary Center, and the Buffalo Public Schools participated in concentrated workshops from the fall of 2021 through the summer of 2022 to engage with LeRoi's artistic practice.

The daily assistance of local artist educator Jay P. Hawkins, fulfilling LeRoi's direction to guide the students while creating their multimedia works, brings a fresh perspective to what community and giving back means in the arts.

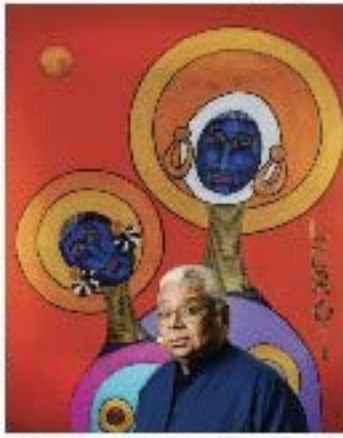
"This entire project with the students could not have happened without the assistance of Jay Hawkins, I am grateful for his dedication," said LeRoi.

Born and raised on Buffalo's East Side, Johnson's artistic awareness is rooted in the very minimal formal training that he himself received as a Buffalo public High School student in a commercial art class while attending Buffalo's Hutchinson Central Technical High School.

LeRoi, an attorney by day, has spent a lifetime dedicated to uplifting the youth.

"I've worked with kids all my life, I've worked with Willie Hutch Jones program for 40 years. I'm always giving back. This group is amazing and extremely creative. It gives you faith in our young people from what I've seen with these scholars working together," he said.

The exhibition opens on November 11, 2022, on M&T Second Friday, the Center's free monthly late-night event, from 5:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. The evening will also feature live music and all-ages art-making. The exhibition will be on view through March 26, 2023, and will incorporate programming, including tours, lectures, and film screenings. Visit burchfieldpenney.org to stay up to date. -L.H.



LeRoi with one of his artworks "Colored People"

LEROI



LeRoi Johnson, *Unbridled* (detail), 2010

Living in Color

Opening

November 11, 2022

5:30 – 8pm

M&T Second Friday

Experience the vibrant

compositions of

international artist

LeRoi Johnson in his first

retrospective exhibition.

 **Burchfield
Penney
Art Center**

at Buffalo State College