

PRESS RELEASE

## ***African American Art and Life***

January 2 – February 28, 2009

Reception: Thursday, Jan. 8, 6-8pm

The exhibit, "African American Art and Life," is an extravaganza of the Flomenhaft Gallery collection, the art of Emma Amos who we represent, and two invited artists, **Camille Billops** and photographer, **Builder Levy**. Artists' works from the gallery collection include **Emma Amos**, **Benny Andrews**, **Romare Bearden**, **Beverly Buchanan**, **Jacob Lawrence**, **Faith Ringgold**, **Charles Lloyd Tucker** and **Carrie Mae Weems**.

With skill and glee, **Camille Billops** uses racial caricatures to lure us into a nasty place as in "Old Black Joe – the Friendship," "Who's Dat Nigga dar a Peepin," and "KKK Boutique." In the latter work, imagine the Ku Klux Klan coming into a black boutique to purchase their silly cloaks and ridiculous headpieces. Billops says that her art and the Hatch-Billops Foundation are about "victory over obscurity and ignorance, and confirmation of herself."

As a young artist in the early 1960s, **Builder Levy** discovered that with photography, more than any other medium, he could express the inspiration he felt in response to the richness and vitality of African American life and culture.



Levy, *March on Washington*, 1963,  
Photographic Print

His richly gold-toned gelatin silver print photograph, *March on Washington*, 1963, an intense and beautiful candid portrait of a woman framed within the multiracial multitude of that momentous demonstration of hope, embodies the enduring humanity of 400 years of the African American freedom struggle.

What makes **Emma Amos'** art so powerful as in "Carnivale," is the sustained tension which follows her work, she borders the painting with African fabrics; others she will weave herself since she is a master weaver.

What more can be said about the cynosure of this exhibit, **Romare Bearden**? It is worth making the pilgrimage if only to see "Up at Mintons," a collage with painted elements for which Bearden was the absolute master. The work offers a microcosmic view of the jazz



musicians' life after their gigs, when they came to Minton's during the Harlem Renaissance days and played their hearts out by the light of the moon. With Bearden's sure hand the elements respond to each other, structuring space, emotion and mood. No wonder it was the work chosen by the Bearden Foundation for a picture puzzle sold in many museums. Another, "*Maternity/Ancestral Legend*," 1972, is a metaphor for motherhood with a compelling power that freezes the images in our minds. When UNICEF was searching for the perfect Madonna and child for Christmas cards, at least 15 years ago, they asked to reproduce this one and it is no wonder they still use it as one of their holiday choices.



Amos, *Carnivale*, 2008, Acrylic on linen canvas with African fabric borders



Bearden, *Maternity/Ancestral Legend*, 1972, Painted Collage

*For more information, please contact Katrina Ellis, at [katrina@flomenhaftgallery.com](mailto:katrina@flomenhaftgallery.com) or by phone.*