

TV Land Celebrates Black History Month With 'AfriCOBRA: Art For The People' On February 7

Phylicia Rashad Narrates 30-Minute Original Documentary Special Saluting Chicago-Based Artists And Their Work

NEW YORK, Feb. 2, 2011 /PRNewswire via COMTEX/ --

In honor of Black History Month, TV Land is paying tribute to the art and artists of AfriCOBRA with an original special entitled "AfriCOBRA: Art For The People" premiering **Monday, February 7, 2011 at 8:30PM ET/PT**. Narrated by three-time Emmy® Award nominee and Tony Award winner Phylicia Rashad, ("The Cosby Show") this half-hour documentary features an engaging and animated history of the AfriCOBRA group, contemporary interviews with some of the AfriCOBRA artists and an illustrious display of their artwork. After the special airs, it will be offered in its entirety on TVLand.com.

"AfriCOBRA's artwork is visually stunning and radiates unity and possibility," said Larry W. Jones, president, TV Land. "This small and organized movement from Chicago uplifted and educated their struggling community with their own creative aesthetic and positive imagery. We have the very unique opportunity to speak with these artists' firsthand and to share their philosophies and masterpieces which are still being created today."

AfriCOBRA (the African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists) was formed in the 1960s by a group of Chicago-based artists seeking to effect positive change by creating images that affirmed and uplifted the black community. The group continues to create innovative African American artwork today.

"AfriCOBRA: Art For The People" was written, produced and art directed by TV Land and directed by Juan Delcan from Nola Pictures. Delcan recently designed the stage visuals for U2's 360 Tour as well as directed commercials for clients including NBC, Puma, Carolina Herrera, JetBlue and DeBeers among others.

About AfriCOBRA

In the 1960s, a group of talented African American artists called OBAC (Organization for Black American Culture) created the "Wall of Respect" mural in Chicago, IL. The mural depicted African American heroes and leaders of that era. The Wall became a meeting place for many and served as the community's visual affirmation of African American cultural, intellectual and political heritage. When the group disbanded, a new group emerged and became COBRA (Coalition of Black Revolutionary Artists) which later became AfriCOBRA, a name they continue to use today. AfriCOBRA began when America was in an unprecedented racial upheaval and sought to express the dynamic and dramatic views of African Americans. The group was co-founded by Jeff Donaldson, Jae Jarrell, Wadsworth Jarrell, Barbara Jones-Hogu and Gerald Williams.

The artistic vision of the group is to create vibrant works that can start a dialog that is "pro-Black without being 'anti' anything else." The body of work that stretches across a variety of mediums - including paintings and sculptures - follows several aesthetic principles. These include the use of bold, vibrant "coolade" colors, the use of lettering to clarify or extend the visual statement, lost and found line, mimesis at midpoint, and the objective of educating and speaking to African Americans' past, present and future. On the artists' use of these principles founder Jeff Donaldson wrote, "We are a family of image-makers and each member of the family is free to relate and to express our laws in his/her individual way. Dig the diversity in unity. We can be ourselves and be together too."

Bios of AfriCOBRA Artists Profiled on "AfriCOBRA: Art For The People"

Jeff Donaldson

"We hope you can dig it, it's about you and, like Marvin Gaye says, 'You're what's happening in the world today, baby.'"

AfriCOBRA founder Jeff Donaldson was born in Pine Bluff, Arkansas in 1932. He received a B.A. in studio art from the University of Arkansas, Pine Bluff in 1954 after establishing the school's first arts major. He studied under John Howard, who had been a student of Harlem Renaissance painter Hale Woodruff, and who nurtured Donaldson's interest in Afro-centric art. Donaldson went on to complete his M.F.A. at the Institute of Design at the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago in 1963, and a PhD in African and African American Art History at Northwestern University in 1974.

As a member of the Organization for Black American Culture (OBAC) in 1967 Donaldson organized the visual art workshop that created Chicago's seminal "Wall of Respect" mural, which depicted black heroes and became an iconic symbol of the black pride movement. He was instrumental in the founding of AfriCOBRA, whose mission he saw as the development of a common aesthetic creed and the impetus for a movement in which artists effected social change by making images of affirmation for the

black community and fostering black pride.

Donaldson described AfriCOBRA's aesthetic principles as: "The expressive awesomeness that one experiences in African Art and life in the USA like the Holiness church...and the demon that is the blues, Alcindor's dunk and Sayer's cut...Summitry that is free, repetition with change, based on African music and African movement... We want the work to look like the creator made it through us... We want the things to shine, to have the rich luster of a just-washed 'Fro, of spit-shined shoes... Color that shines... Color that defines, identifies and directs... Coolade colors for coolade images for the super real people."

Donaldson promoted "TransAfrican" art, explaining that, "African art - the art of Dogon masks, Kasai axes, gold weights - is not art of isolated objects. Everything's together, religion and tradition, oration, dancing and song. James Brown doesn't just stand up there and sing. You can't see AfriCOBRA unless you're in the struggle, unless you hear the music, unless you really know."

As a painter, Donaldson participated in over 200 group and solo exhibitions internationally. He was also an educator and over the course of his career he served as a professor, art department chair and dean of the College of Fine Arts at Howard University.

Jeff Donaldson died in February 2004.

Wadsworth Jarrell

"If you can get to bebop, you can get to me. That is where the truth is."

Founding AfriCOBRA member Wadsworth Jarrell was born in 1929 in Albany, Georgia and moved to Chicago in the mid-1950s. He attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he was awarded a B.F.A. in 1958. As a member of the Organization for Black American Culture (OBAC), he helped execute the famous "Wall of Respect" outdoor mural on the South Side of Chicago in 1967. That same year he married fellow artist Elaine "Jae" Jarrell. In 1968, the Jarrells co-founded the artist collective AfriCOBRA along with Jeff Donaldson, Barbara Jones-Hogu and Gerald Williams.

In 1971, Jarrell began teaching in the art department at Howard University in Washington, D.C., and received his M.F.A. from the university in 1974.

In 1978, Jarrell and his family moved to Athens, Georgia where he taught painting at the University of Georgia. He retired from teaching in 1988. He continues to work as an artist and is represented by several prominent commercial art galleries in the United States.

Jae Jarrell

"You speak through your work. We can all do something. You speak through your medium."

Born in Cleveland, Ohio, Elaine "Jae" Jarrell attended Bowling Green State University in Ohio before moving to Chicago. She attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in the late 1950s and early 1960s. She married artist Wadsworth Jarrell in 1967 and, with her husband, helped form what became the African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists (AfriCOBRA) in 1968. Jarrell was a gifted clothing designer and contributed hand-made and adorned garments to AfriCOBRA exhibitions in the late 1960s and early 1970s. She later took graduate courses at Howard University and the Parsons School of Design in New York. Her original designs of Afro-centric garments were widely exhibited in American museum exhibitions and were featured in magazines including *Ebony* and the *International Review of African American Art*. Jae Jarrell owned a vintage men's clothing shop in New York for many years before moving to Cleveland, Ohio in 2009.

Barbara Jones-Hogu

"Black people, a total people, a total force, Unite, Unite..."

Barbara Jones-Hogu was born in Chicago. She received a B.A. from Howard University in 1959, a B.F.A. from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1964, and a M.S., with a concentration in printmaking, from the Institute of Design at the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago in 1970.

Jones-Hogu is an influential artist associated with the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. As a member of OBAC (Organization for Black American Culture), she was one of the muralists who created the important "Wall of Respect" in 1967 on the South Side of Chicago - a public work that inspired the creation of socially, politically and culturally themed murals across the urban American landscape. In 1968, Jones-Hogu became a founding member of the African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists (AfriCOBRA). As a member of AfriCOBRA she participated in formulating the group's mission statement, which stressed Black independence and artistic self-determination.

Her signature use of lettering in her artwork became a hallmark of the AfriCOBRA aesthetic. Her famed screen prints created during her participation in the group were exhibited widely at venues including the Studio Museum in Harlem, Howard University, Cornell University, and the National Center of Afro-American Artists in Boston. Several books and catalogues over the years have included her work, and she is featured in *Creating Their Own Image: The History of African American Women Artists*, the most important text on the subject, published in 2005. *Unite*, perhaps her most well known screen printed image, is included in the permanent collection of the Art Institute of Chicago and the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Napoleon Jones Henderson

"My work in its essence is spiritual; meaning-full. We must be about the business of expressing what is beautiful; ourselves."

Napoleon Jones-Henderson was born in Chicago in 1943. He was awarded a B.F.A. from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1971 and pursued graduate studies at Northern Illinois University in 1974. In 2005, he received a MFA from the Mount Royal School of Art. He has been an active and long-standing member of AfriCOBRA since 1969. During the formative years of AfriCOBRA, Jones-Henderson created large pictorial weavings that were included in the group's important series of exhibitions mounted at the Studio Museum in Harlem in the early 1970s. He has taught in the art departments of several American institutions including Malcolm X College in Chicago, the Massachusetts College of Art, Emerson College in Boston and Benedict College in Columbia, South Carolina.

Michael D. Harris

"Our art is not about destruction, it's about construction. It's about who we are and who we can be."

Michael Harris is an Associate Professor of Art History at Emory University and also serves as the Consulting Curator for the Harvey B. Gantt Center for African American Art and Culture in Charlotte, NC. Previously, Harris was an Associate Professor of African and African-American Art History at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for eleven years. In spring 2004, he served as the Visiting Professor of Art at Dillard University in New Orleans and has taught at Duke University, Georgia State University, Morehouse College and Wellesley College.

He also served as the Consulting Curator for African American Art at the High Museum in Atlanta from 2005 - 2009.

Harris has published extensively and his recent book, *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation*, won two national awards. He was the curator of the exhibition "Transatlantic Dialogue: Contemporary Art In and Out of Africa," which traveled to the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art and to the Tampa Museum of Art, and co-curated "Astonishment and Power" at the National Museum of African Art in 1993. In 1996, Harris completed a doctorate in art history at Yale University, where he had also previously received his Master of Philosophy degree (1991), M.A. in Art History (1990), and M.A., with distinction, in African and African-American studies and Art History (1989). Additionally, he holds his M.F.A. in painting from Howard University and a B.S. in education from Bowling Green State University.

As an artist, Harris has exhibited nationally and internationally and is represented in public and private collections including those of David Driskell and the Hampton University Museum. He has been a member of AfriCOBRA since 1979.

Carolyn Lawrence

"Take the past and the present and make the new image."

Painter Carolyn Lawrence grew up in Houston, Texas and received a degree in Education from the University of Texas in Austin in 1961. She started teaching in Gary, Indiana immediately after graduation, then went on to complete her M.A. in Art Education at the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago. Lawrence was a member of the Organization for Black American Culture (OBAC) and took part in the creation of the "Wall of Respect" mural in Chicago, which sparked an urban mural movement and set off the chain of events that led to the founding of the AfriCOBRA collective. Lawrence joined AfriCOBRA in the spring of 1969, while teaching art at Kenwood Academy High School in Chicago. She contributed to the group's first museum exhibition "10 in Search of a Nation" at the Studio Museum in Harlem in 1970. She continued teaching at Kenwood Academy, where she also served as art department chair, until she retired in 2001. In retirement, Lawrence is getting back to her art and working on refining her craft.

Howard Mallory

"Our offering to the planet is valid enough for us to feel good about ourselves."

Howard Mallory is a sculptor and ceramic artist who joined AfriCOBRA in 1971 and exhibited with the group during their Studio Museum in Harlem exhibition in 1971 and in their Howard University exhibition of 1973. Mallory studied at the Illinois Institute of

Technology, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and Texas Western College. Early in his career he worked as an instructor in ceramics at the Parkway Community House in Chicago and exhibited his work at regional art exhibitions. He continues to work from his home and studio on the South Side of Chicago, where he has installed an outdoor work entitled "The Freedom Train."

Adger Cowans

Painter and photographer Adger W. Cowans attended Ohio University where he received a B.F.A. in photography. He served in the United States Navy as a photographer before moving to New York, where he worked with *Life* magazine photographer Gordon Parks and fashion photographer Henri Clarke. A veteran still photographer in the motion picture industry, Cowans has captured the works of such film directors as Francis Ford Coppola, Bill Duke, Ron Howard, Spike Lee and Sidney Lumet. He is currently an active member of AfriCOBRA.

Kevin Cole

Kevin Cole, born in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, has resided in Atlanta, GA. since 1985 where he has received numerous awards both as an artist and arts educator. Cole works in a range of mediums, using repetitive forms and color to create three-dimensional structures. Cole received his formal education (B.S. Art Education (1982), University of Arkansas, Pine Bluff, AR; M.A. Art Education / Painting (1983), University of Illinois, Champaign, IL; and M.F.A. Drawing (1985), Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL) in fine arts and art education. He is the newest active member of AfriCOBRA.

Frank Smith

Frank Smith was born in Chicago in 1939. He received a B.F.A. from the University of Illinois at Chicago in 1958 and began his teaching career in Chicago Public Schools in 1959. In 1970, Smith became a member of AfriCOBRA, and began a career at Howard University in Washington, D.C. He went on to receive an M.F.A. from Howard University in 1972. Smith combines disjointed rhythms and syncopated patterns of paint and mixed media by sewing the canvas together, using a sewing machine - though he does not deny the process's or end product's resemblance to quilt-making. Smith's work simultaneously pays homage to his African heritage and African art education while serving as a vehicle for his own challenges as a contemporary abstract artist.

Nelson Stevens

Nelson Steven's art is a reflection of elements both physical and spiritual which have their grounding in the African-American experience. His rhythmical, multi-layered reassemble of form and color can be likened to the quality of syncretism inherent in most aspects of our African-American culture. Stevens received a B.F.A. in Painting from Ohio University in 1962, and an M.F.A. in Studio Art/Art History from Kent State University in 1969. He has taught undergraduate and graduate level courses, including Drawing, Printmaking, African American Art History and Publication Production and Design. He has exhibited at the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry, and Howard University among others, and his work may be found in many private and public collections, including the Smithsonian, The Schaumberg Library and Research Center in New York, and the Chicago Institute of Art. He is currently an active member of AfriCOBRA.

Akili Ron Anderson

Akili Ron Anderson is a lifetime resident of Washington, D.C. He has successfully practiced as a full time visual artist for more than thirty years. Mr. Anderson provides for the visual enhancement needs of cultural, religious and public institutions. He designs, fabricates and installs stained glass windows, sculptural forms, fine art paintings and theater sets. His media services include still photography, filmmaking, video, computer graphics, special effects and multi-media presentations. Mr. Anderson attended The Corcoran School of Art (1964-1965) and Howard University, School of Arts and Science, Division of Fine Arts (1965-1969, 2005-2008), B.F.A., M.F.A. He held the position of Artist in Residence for the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities (1971-1973) and was the first chairperson of the Visual Arts Department at the Duke Ellington School of the Arts (Washington, DC 1974-1976). He is currently an active member of AfriCOBRA.

For a gallery of photos, please visit, www.tvland.com.

For more information on the AfriCOBRA group and its artwork, please contact David Lusenhop of the Lusenhop Fine Art Gallery in Chicago. www.lusenhopfineart.com

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