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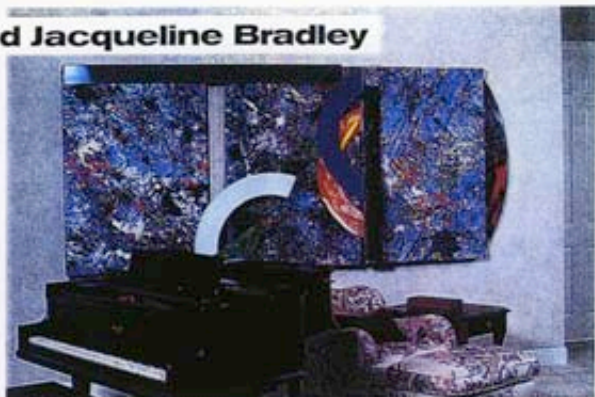
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Clarence Otis and Jacqueline Bradley

"These Works Talk to Each Other"

We thought there was a special role we could play in supporting our culture," says Jacqueline Bradley. She is explaining why she and her husband, Clarence Otis, collect art by African Americans exclusively and have lent out over three-fourths of their 30-piece collection to museum shows. "We identify with the content of the art," Clarence elaborates, "and the life stories and challenges of those artists."

The two were first gripped by the collecting passion in 1983, when they happened upon an exhibition at Harlem's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture of work from the Printmaking Workshop of Robert Blackburn. Newlyweds then living in Hamilton Heights, an upper-middle-class Harlem neighborhood, Clarence and Jacqui (as she is called) had been out for an afternoon stroll. But once inside the center, they



Sam Gilliam created his jazzy triptych, *Now Haven*, by pulling a rake through the wet acrylic paint. The well-placed piano is a kindred spirit to the art.

were powerfully impressed by the prints of such artists as Elizabeth Catlett, Benny Andrews, and Blackburn himself.

"While we had gone to museums," says Jacqui, a tall, cheerful woman who speaks with brisk precision, "we had never seen a large body of work by African American artists."

"I was familiar with modern art from the studio and art-history classes I took in

college," adds Clarence, a Los Angeles native and a 1977 graduate of Williams College in Massachusetts. "My favorites were a lot of postwar artists like de Kooning, Rauschenberg, and Johns, and while I personally knew a lot of African American artists who were just getting started, I was totally unfamiliar with those in their mid- and late careers. Once we started to investigate, I was surprised



LEFT Clarence Otis and Jacqueline Bradley. Above the fireplace is *Untitled (Pink)* by Raymond Saunders. Sam Gilliam's *Mirrored Act* is over the door. ABOVE *Yo Mamadonna and Chile*, a photograph by Renee Cox.

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by how affordable the work was." From Blackburn's studio, they purchased a woodcut they had seen at the Schomburg, *Lovey Twice* (1976) by Catlett, along with several prints by other artists who had been in that show.

In 1995 the couple decided to leave New York, where their collecting instincts had been nurtured by membership in "Contemporary Friends of the Studio Museum of Harlem"—an educational group for art lovers in their 30s and 40s that sets up seminars and studio visits. The two had also sought out the advice of dealer June Kelly and Whitney Museum of American Art curator Thelma Golden.

Still relying on those art-world contacts to help build their collection, Clarence and Jacqui now live with their three children in Windermere, Florida, a lush Orlando suburb. Clarence, an attorney who earned his law degree at Stanford University, is treasurer of Darden Restaurants, Inc. Jacqui, a Yale University alumna and graduate of Columbia University's master's program in business administration, is a commercial banker and first vice-president of Suntrust Bank, where she handles international trade.

Central Florida's warm white light bathes the soaring spaces of the couple's elegant two-story house and eclectic collection. It includes fluid geometric prints by Blackburn, richly textured abstract paintings by Sam Gilliam, floral mixed-media pieces by Raymond Saunders, a lyrical collaged landscape by Romare Bearden, and figurative paintings (contemplative vistas inhabited by solitary individuals) by Hughie Lee Smith. The couple also have recently acquired large, intensely hued photographic self-portraits by Renee Cox and Lyle Ashton Harris, as well as a small pair of black-and-white images by Carrie Mae Weems.

Visitors to Clarence and Jacqui's home first step through double doors gleaming with baroque designs in leaded and beveled glass. The glass acts like a prism, breaking up the outdoor panorama of a verdant Florida landscape and dreamy blue sky into glittering shards of color.

That view finds a sweet echo in the emerald and azure tones of Bearden's *Evening of Egrets* (1986), which hangs in the gray marble and tile foyer. The artist made this collaged watercolor two years before his death. With brisk economy, it shows snowy egrets fluttering amid fading sunlight as a lone black figure wades through a watery, Edenic refuge.

A few steps from the foyer is the



After the Benediction of the Rain: Altar Shield No. 1 by Colin Chase evokes both everyday tool and ceremonial artifact.

couple's sunken living room, which is dominated by a grand piano and a grandly proportioned triptych by Gilliam, called *New Haven* (1989). Ribbons of colored aluminum thread together energetic brushstrokes of juicy reds, yellows, and blues, created when the wet acrylic paint was literally raked into slashing furrows. The Bradleys also own Gilliam's *Mirrored Act* (1992). Hanging in the family room, it's made up of five panels, with red and yellow paint applied over swatches of blue and purple tie-dyed fabric, all jostling in a kind of syncopation with oval and triangular forms.

The couple's conversation easily turns to younger artists, with whom they've developed friendships. Many of these artists work with closely related materials. Gilliam's use of a rake nicely connects with *After the Benediction of the Rain: Altar Shield No. 1* (1992) by Colin Chase. This sculpture, placed in the guest bedroom, is crafted from a standard wood-and-steel shovel. A hybrid Duchampian device, it incorporates a receptacle for burning incense and a symmetrical display of turkey feathers. The piece evokes both everyday tool and ceremonial artifact. Clarence and Jacqui believe it reflects a spiritual sensibility found in African and Native American art.

Farming tools are also implicit in an etching entitled *Garden V* (1990) by Maren Hassinger, who has made installa-

tions of coiled wire, reminiscent of growing plants, for the Studio Museum of Harlem. This poetic piece shows a grid of snippets of twine, a material that has, explains Jacqui, "an agrarian feel. My grandparents had a huge farm in West Virginia, and when I see her work, it looks like something subtly beginning to sprout." For her, the work radiates "the strength you can have from your inner self in an environment lacking support."

The rhythmic textile patterns that animate *Mirrored Act* also turn up in the photograph *Yo Mamadonna and Chile* (1994) by Renee Cox. Cox uses fabric to fashion a subversive take on art-historical icons. Holding her 18-month-old son in her arms, she poses in a gown of brilliant colors and bold design. "You're used to seeing the Aryan Madonna and Child. She's substituted black subjects where they were traditionally white," says Jacqui. Here, Cox evokes a queenly figure that is swathed in African kente cloth.

Clarence and Jacqui have placed some of the most affecting work in their master bedroom and adjoining den, where the sleek, dark wood furniture has a pared-down look that is intended by the couple to highlight the art. The largest piece here is Saunders's beautifully meditative, collaged canvas *Title to Follow #2* (1993-94). The painting is replete with abstract passages of black and white, calligraphic gestures, and tilting images of tulips. "You usually think of black as a non-color, but Saunders is so effective in making black have a color sense for us, through his use of texture," says Jacqui.

On an adjacent wall, the self-portraits *Saint Michael Stewart* and *Toussaint L'Ouverture*, by Lyle Ashton Harris, have an arch 1990s grittiness. In the first, named for a young black man who died in police custody, Harris poses in a police uniform, his face elaborately made up with mascara and lipstick. In the second portrait, of the leader of Haiti's momentous 1791 slave revolt, Harris provocatively combines military garb with the glossy banality of advertising.

The couple believe that the active social consciousness guiding their approach sets an example for other patrons. Their collecting, says Jacqui, is about "being able to understand the passion and unique sensibility that African American artists bring to their art. These works talk to each other." **ELISA TURNER**

Elisa Turner is ARTnews's Miami correspondent.