



ABOUT THE ARTIST ALVIN E. BOOTH

Alvin E. Booth, a native of Reading, Pennsylvania, is a self-taught artist. Acrylic on canvas is his preferred medium, and his use of color in landscapes, portraiture and original concepts is highly unusual. His subject matter is the mind, the heart and the soul.

Alvin's work has been displayed in Southern California and Lancaster, Pennsylvania. His recent showings include the Moja Arts Festival in Charleston, South Carolina, The Governor's Awards for the Arts in Pennsylvania and various galleries in the Richmond, Virginia area.

His goals have been and continue to be to create affordable, original art, believing that owning original art should be a possibility for anyone.

Alvin feels that art, like jazz, is best when improvised.



Black artists celebrate heritage

A series of exhibitions, running throughout the month — and some beyond — show off the talents of local African Americans. Sponsored by the African-American Coalition of Reading, the work runs the gamut from the decorative to the deeply personal.

Editor's note: This is the first of two multi-venue reviews of various local art exhibitions sponsored by the African-American Coalition of Reading in celebration of Black History Month.

By Ron Schira

Reading Eagle Correspondent

For Black History Month, the African-American Coalition of Reading is offering a number of exhibits displaying artwork by local black artists. A total of nine venues in all, these shows are scattered throughout the area and express for the most part the social and religious concerns of these artists with an emphasis on heritage and pride.

Participating galleries are Reading Area Community College, Albright College Cultural Center, Reading Public Library, Art Plus Gallery, Berks Arts Council's Pagoda Gallery, City Espresso Coffee Shop, Borders Books, the Police Athletic League and Boscov's North department store.

Whereas the PAL and Boscov's exhibits are centered on the Reading High School student awards for art and African mask-making, the remaining shows are of works by individuals and show for more than one day. The Art Plus and Pagoda shows are open to the public longer than the others, and will be reviewed subsequently.

Some of the artists are shown in more than one location, yet their work varies enough to be seen in separate contexts without overlap or repetition.

Painter Edward Terrell, for



Photo courtesy of Ron Schira

Artist Alvin Booth with his "Crossroads," at the Albright College Cultural Center, 645 Penn St.

ACOR exhibits

Through Feb. 28:

- Reading Public Library, 100 S. Fifth St.
- Borders Books, 1075 Woodland Ave., Wyomissing
- Albright College Cultural Center, 645 Penn St.
- City Espresso Café, 124 S. Fifth St.
- Reading Area Community

College, 10 S. Second St.

Through March 31:

- Berks Arts Council Pagoda Gallery, 98 Duryea Drive, second floor

Through April 2:

- Art Plus Gallery, 604 Penn Ave., Reading

Note: The PAL awards were presented Friday. The Boscov's awards will be presented this Friday, followed by a reception on Feb. 25 from 6 to 8 p.m.

instance, is quite prolific and has work installed in almost every spot. At the Albright College Cultural Center, he has chosen to display his series of colorful mask and African folk-style paintings, but over at RACC he is exhibiting a newer series of brightly painted Americanized figures executed in a vibrant and somewhat linear abstract style.

In yet another grouping shown at City Espresso, 124 S. Fifth St., he completes a cycle of 10 ink drawings honoring great black musicians and political figures. Of course, Martin Luther King is paid tribute as are Malcolm X, Billie Holiday, Miles Davis and Ray Charles, among others.

The reliefs of Enomanren T. Ogbonor have also made their way to multiple locations. More decorative than the other artists and bordering on kitsch, Ogbonor has released a number of wall-hanging editions

based on 3-D castings of such things as Dürer's praying hands and different African warrior masks. Stoic and confident, they act as contemporary icons for an abbreviated culture whose heroes and role models were removed by gaps in time and bouts of oppression. These can be seen at City Espresso, Borders Books, Wyomissing, and the Albright College Cultural Center, 645 Penn St.

At the Reading Public Library, the handmade dolls of Shirley Newton, along with some masks by Terrell, are being shown behind glass doors in a big display case as you walk into the main library. Her work is also at the Albright College Cultural Center — please notice "Abeba" and "Wisdom." The artist is additionally a long-standing member of Art Plus Gallery, where she regularly exhibits.

The paintings of self-taught artist Alvin Booth, also at the Albright College Cultural Cen-

ter, pursue his interests in stark and brilliant color as well as his dedication to religious conviction and moral integrity. Within a title like "The Passion," he envisions the face of Christ in an almost indistinguishable vortex of color, and similarly within "Crossroads" he visually narrates in precisionist detail the fictional story of guitarist Robert Johnson selling his soul and making the choice between the road to Mecca or the barren desert.

His pieces have a cool and mature subtlety to them that varies in style from work to work.

However the paintings of Chad Cortez Everett at Borders



GETTING TO KNOW



Local Artist, JazzWare Ltd.

Alvin Booth

If you've had a chance in the last year to visit Reading's GoggleWorks Center for the Arts, chances are you've seen Alvin Booth or probably heard the sounds of jazz escaping from his fifth floor studio. Booth has worked in Studio 537 since the community arts center opened. A native of Reading and a graduate of Reading High School, he pursued his love of art while living on the west coast. After returning to the area, Booth made a career out of his passion. This month we sat down and talked with the 62 year old, known by some as the mayor of the GoggleWorks. He spoke about his art, jazz and the studio where he creates his "slices of magic."

BCL: What do you like about Reading?

AB: It's home.

BCL: When did you first start painting? And when did you decide to be an artist?

AB: Maybe when I was about 16. My sister is an artist in Puerto Rico. I guess she influenced me. When I was about 26 or 27 I did some murals on the west coast and painted for a bit. Then I went into sales for a while, and then I went back to painting. I guess it's my love. It's just something I like to do.

BCL: Do you remember selling your first piece of art?

AB: Yes, I do. I sold my first piece of work in Lancaster, PA, at Val Hall Galleries. I did a one-man show there when I was 25, and then I was hooked. I figured I could make a living doing it. It was an abstract, an untitled abstract. I do a lot of abstract art.

BCL: What's your medium?

AB: It's acrylic on canvas. I experimented with pen and ink for a while. I took a liking to acrylics, and here I am. Art to me is not "a heavy." It's fun.

BCL: Why?

AB: 'Cause I like to play with visual space. I like to make things work on canvas that don't work in real life. They don't exist. I have a little sign that I put up at my shows. (It reads) "I play with paint because it's what I enjoy. Brushing it, throwing it, dripping it, and blowing it into dreams and visions for others to enjoy. My pictures are meant to be fun and not weighted with meaning. I think of them as slices of magic." They're meant to be taken home and enjoyed. My biggest thing is I always want my art to be affordable. Part of that decision is that I have spent a lifetime going into museums and galleries, seeing things I could never afford. Art belongs to everybody. We're kinda' giving a little gift, and it's not always meant for profit. Sometimes it's meant to pass on. Our gift as artists is being able to spend our life doing what we like to do. What qualifies the \$5,000? Who sets the price? That has always been my argument.

BCL: People strolling through the GoggleWorks on any given day can usually hear the jazz music playing from your studio and smell the incense burning. How important is the atmosphere where you create your pieces?

AB: I'm always here. I'm affectionately called by Diane Labelle (GoggleWorks executive director) the mayor of GoggleWorks. The atmosphere is great. The people that come through are really great. The GoggleWorks gets an "A+" from me. When you come in here, you see the positive working. The positive IS working. Things are starting to change.

BCL: What about jazz?

AB: That is my motivating force. I listen to jazz all day long, every day. My neighbors know me by my music. Do you realize people knock on my door and ask me to turn it up!

BCL: Doesn't jazz get old?

AB: No, probably 'cause I have a really nice, large collection. It just seems to mellow me. It's kind of peaceful if

you listen to it. I never paint without it. It's part of the creation. I always tell people about the art. To me, art is like jazz. It's best when improvised, that is the best way to describe it. I think I'm into jazz 'cause it takes me where I want to go. I don't have to follow it. I can go where I want to go.

BCL: What was the event you recently organized with kids at the art center?

AB: For the Mayor of Reading, I organized the Neighborhood Appreciation Day. We had games for the kids, hot dogs, hamburgers, sodas and ice cream. It was pretty nice. It was a thank you to the neighborhood for welcoming us.

BCL: You have an open door policy at your studio. Tell us why.

AB: 'Cause it's like I got this great life, and it's fun sharing it. How many people get to do what they love everyday? This is a gift. I have to share it. The GoggleWorks is a gift, as far as I'm concerned. You get 360 degrees of Reading right here at the GoggleWorks. You can meet anyone here - a judge, the governor, and even the guy that sells the newspapers here. It's a great place to be. The best part is that you do what you love, and for me people seem to appreciate it. I do pretty well here. I'm on the GoggleWorks board of directors and the Berks Arts Council board of directors. I feel that everybody that is here should have to participate in some way. My philosophy is "you give little, you get less." I just participate. I think life is a sport that you have to participate in.

BCL: What do you hope is your legacy?

AB: I'll be satisfied when I'm gone that I'm missed, just a little bit (laughing). When I'm gone, I hope they say, "Damn, I miss that music," and then I'll be satisfied. It's all about the music. Life has always been good to me. I have no complaints. I'm 62; I've never been sick, and I'm happy and everything is good. I've got to be blessed. It's something beyond me. ■BCL

---an exercise in imaginative perception...

... a circumstance in which zero probability exists that that circumstance will ever recur is, at the very least, unique. However, such a circumstance is at the threshold for those of us who are insightful enough to greet it. This circumstance is that surrounding the birth, growth and maturity of this artist's artistic creativity. The artist, as communicated through his work, is an avant-garde-- an intelligentsia, all by himself, who has developed a vanguard epoch of conceptualism in artistry. The theory behind this art can be characterized as an extension of the artist's personality—an intermediate between realism and nominalism in which universal essences do exist in the mind-- all minds-- as concepts of discourse or as predicates which may be properly affirmed of reality.

... release yourself from the absolute standards and principles that govern your judgement and join this artist and his artistic expression in the realm of surrealism. His ingenious production of fantastic and incongruous imagery is only achieved by means of seemingly supernatural juxtapositions and combinations. To experience the full energy of these creations, you must enter the mind of the artist---become an object in the artwork
--and explore.

Alan C. Basch