

Press Release

For Immediate Release

Charles "Spinky" Alston

(1907-1977)

Works of art executed from 1936 to 1969

June 15 - August 14, 2004

We are proud to announce the exhibition:

"Charles "Spinky" Alston, works of art executed from 1936 to 1969."

This exhibition featuring 19 works by Charles Alston came about with the desire to include an Alston work within my next African American Artist's catalogue. Painter, muralist, illustrator, sculptor and educator, Alston has contributed much to the annals of American art history. Alston received a B.A. and M.A. from Columbia University and also studied at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn Unlike many Black artists of his era albeit Bearden, Alston's family was middle class and his education was a major importance to his influence within the artists' community. With a solid educational background in the fine arts, Alston became the first Black American to teach at the Art Students League in New York. In the early 1930's, he founded the 306, a center located in Harlem where Black and White artists, writers, actors and musicians met to discuss the social climate. Alston held classes for children and adults with sculptor, Henry Bannarn at the 306. Some of their students included Charles White, Jacob Lawrence and Romare Bearden. Alston was also one of the founders of the Harlem Artist Guild (established in 1935). The Guild encouraged the Federal government to place Black artists into WPA projects.

Works in the exhibition include the exceptional gouache painting, *"Midnight Vigil,"*. This work was possibly used as a study for his *"Magic and Medicine"* mural, created for Harlem hospital in 1936. The striking and mesmerizing painting may have dual meanings. It could be a prayer service for the dying or a tarrying service for the sick. Additionally, we have two canvas works painted in the 1930's. It is rare to have works from this period by an African American artist of Alston's caliber. One of the oils, *"Man Seated with Travel Bag"*, ca.1936, shows a very solemn looking man, possibly on his way to work or leaving town with all his belongings in his bag. The other circa 1930's oil, is *"Portrait of a Young Man"* this work shows a young man, possibly an artist, standing in front of his easel. The large abstract "Black and White # 1" is the first titled painting of his highly important Black and White series. Another very strong and striking

painting in this exhibition is the 1953 painting "*Symbol*" this masterwork, more than any I've seen by Alston, denotes his admiration for and influence of the Mexican masters Rivera, Siqueiros and Orozco. Lastly but in no way the least, is the 1937 plaster "*Head of a Man*" Alston created many sculptures in his lifetime and the plaster here is one of his most important.

Alston served as a member of the Board of Directors of the National Society of Mural Painters and was an active member of Spiral, was also selected by the Museum of Modern Art and the U.S. State Department to coordinate the children's creative center for the Brussels World's Fair.

His works are collected in many museums including the Metropolitan Museum of Art; the Whitney Museum of American Art; Butler Art Institute, Detroit Institute of Art; Clark Atlanta University. Bill Hodges Gallery specializes in historically significant African American and World art. The gallery is located on the 6th floor of 24 West 57th Street between 5th and 6th Avenue. Gallery hours are Tuesday to Friday 10am - 6pm and on Saturday from 12:30pm until 5:30pm. Press viewings can be arranged prior to the exhibition. For more information, or to arrange a viewing, please call Bill Hodges at 212-333-2640. An illustrated catalogue of the exhibition is available.