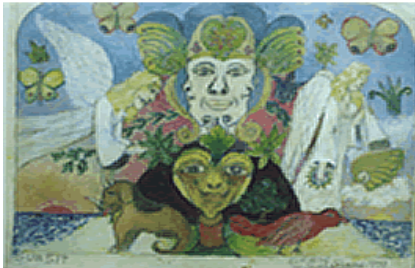


The Dream World of Minnie Evans



Opening Reception: Sunday, February 16, 2003, 2:00 pm



More than thirty works by internationally known recognized visionary artist Minnie Evans will be on view at the North Carolina Central University Art Museum in Durham, NC, February 16 through April 18, 2003. The Dream World of Minnie Evans is an overview of the Wilmington based self-taught artist who said "no one can teach me because no one knows what to teach me."

Minnie Evans, who died in 1987 at age 95, was born in 1890, the only child of Joseph and Ella Kelley, farmers who lived in rural Pender County, North Carolina, near Wilmington. Evans' parents moved to Wilmington during her early childhood, and she attended school there through the sixth grade. She married Julius Evans of Wilmington and had three sons. Evans traced her background to a maternal ancestor who was brought to the United States from Trinidad as a slave.



The dream world of Minnie Evans received its earliest visual manifestations on Good Friday 1925 when she completed two small pen-and-ink drawings on paper dominated by concentric circles and semicircles against background of unidentifiable motifs. Evans always placed a good deal of significance on these early drawings. Evans first paintings were done entirely in wax crayons and resemble an exercise employing every color in a gigantic box of Crayolas. The colors included greens shaded from light to deep, purples from mauve to pink, rose, and royal, and full ranges of reds, blues, and yellows with a sparing use of black and white. Evans' complex designs reveal an unaccountable presence of Caribbean, East Indian, Chinese, and Western elements in color and subject matter. Her own explanation of her work was that "this artist that I have put out has come from the nations I suppose might have been destroyed before the flood....No one knows anything about them, but God has given it to me to bring them back into the world."

Minnie Evans lived among us unnoticed as a servant, a black woman, a sounder who sold clams and oysters door-to-door and a lady who minded the gate at Airlie Gardens. But behind that ordinary face burned fantastic visions. In the mid 1960's , Jo Kallenborn read a

newspaper article about an elderly black woman who took tickets at the gate at Airlie Gardens and painted fabulous pictures she said were gifts from God. She frequently gave visitors her paintings for free, but as people became aware of her talent, they started paying for her paintings. Determined to meet her, Kallenborn visited the gatehouse, fell in love with the painter, and wrote a short article on her for Southern Living magazine. The article generated a great deal of interest in Mrs. Evans. Letters poured in from around the nation and she had her first gallery exhibition in New York City in 1966.



The central motif in many of Evans' paintings is a human face surrounded by curvilinear and spiral plant and animal forms and eyes merging with foliate patterns. Minnie Evans has scant explanation for any of these images or symbols. In fact she said "My work is just as strange to me as they are to anyone else." She equated eyes with the omniscience of God and the concept of the eye as the window of the soul. The figures in her designs are sometimes portraits of ancient wise men and women who peopled her visions, ancestral visitors from some spiritual order, or angels, demons, and chimerical creatures.

Today Minnie Evans is famous, "a major visionary artist of the 20th century," according to Ann Brennan of the Louise Wells Cameron Museum in Wilmington. Her work has hung in the country's finest museums and two of the North Carolina Central University Art Museum's will be included in the exhibition. The Covenant and Jesus Christ will join works lent by the North Carolina Museum of Art, The Weatherspoon Art Museum, The North Carolina Museum of History, The Ackland Art Museum and the Louise Wells Cameron Museum.

"The paintings and colored drawings of Minnie Evans are surrealistic and reveal psychic revelations inspired by dreams where angels, demons, animals and hybrid plants appear before the all-seeing eye of God. Visitors to this exhibit should prepare for a truly awe-inspiring sensory experience," said Kenneth G. Rodgers, Director of the North Carolina Central University Art Museum.

The North Carolina Central University Art Museum, located on Lawson Street across from the Farrison-Newton Communications Buildings, is open Tuesday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is free. For general information, call (919)530-6211.