



**JOHN RHODEN**

**The Coordinated Art Program of  
the Atlanta University Center**

*Presents*

**Sculptures  
of  
JOHN W. RHODEN**

**Spelman College, Atlanta, Georgia  
April 4-23, 1971**

# Acknowledgement

On behalf of the Coordinated Art Program of the Atlanta University Center Colleges, I am deeply grateful to Mr. and Mrs. John W. Rhoden who worked with me in selecting the pieces for this special exhibition. Also, I want to express our sincere gratitude to the Rhodens for the loan of certain works from their personal collection.

It is the privilege of the Coordinated Art Program of the Atlanta University Center Colleges to present this collection to the general public as its premier exhibition during the 1970-71 school year. We do this not because Rhoden is an Afro-American sculptor, but because he is one of the internationally recognized sculptors whose sculptures represent impeccable technique and international flavor. We feel that Rhoden's creative genius presents an insight into the metaphysical nature of man.

Harry Shello  
Acting Chairman, Spelman Art Department  
Acting Coordinator, Centerswide Art Programs

# Introduction

We have before us the sculptures of a great artist, John W. Rhoden, who tells us that man is the only creature who can and does pause to ponder his own meaning and his relationship to all else. The artist is not the tool of the current, but the devotee, with head bowed in humility before God. The highest aspirations can be seen in all art forms, as the expressions contain hidden meaning. From the Greek sculptors and early Christian painters, the highest ideal is apparent in human form.

John Rhoden was born in 1918 and grew up in Alabama. After his early education, he attended Talladega College for two years. In the late 1930s, he left the South and went to New York in search of creative inspiration and development to liberate himself from the social problems of his early age. There he studied under Richmond Barthe, and later with Grazio Maldoroli, Hugo Rubus and William Zoroch. Eventually, he developed his own techniques of expressing himself. Beginning in 1947, Rhoden earned numerous competitive prizes, awards and fellowships which afforded him the means to travel to Italy and attend the American Academy in Rome.

Upon returning to his New York studio, John worked with a vigor year around which was reflected in the startling evolution of his work to new heights of achievement and assurance. Between 1955-1956, he travelled to Iceland, Finland, Italy, Germany, Turkey, Egypt, Kenya, Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia, Uganda, Tanganyika and Zanzibar showing his sculptures under the auspices of the

United States Department of State. In 1956, he was a member of a four-party artists' delegation which visited the Soviet Union, Poland and Yugoslavia under a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. In 1960, he was sent to India, Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia, Viet Nam, Korea, Japan and Philippines by the Department of State. During 1962, he served as a consultant to Seni Rupe-Institute Teknologi in Bandung, Indonesia.

John is a sculptor by instinct and is unquestionably influenced by various cultures, yet his work is resplendent with vitality and boundless inner inspiration. His natural talent of fine craftsmanship and technique is evident in all of his pieces, and his talents are fused into valid and satisfying statements. His sculptures emerge from a consciousness in a state of restlessness, which finds it necessary to constantly define and redefine existence. His works illustrate his concept of life, the singularity of events and an expression of art based on an emotional and mental world. In his own personal life, John mirrors our period in all its complexity. He stands for the right to express, in perspective, the background of all creative people. As an artist, he believes that he is a **free human being**. As such, he does not think about his color, or so called social ethnic background, while involved in his work. His main concern is to make a visual statement which must reflect more about ourselves.

Ideally, John's sculptures should be viewed while alone—quietly and unhurriedly—to fully realize their visual strength, as they depict a flawless

beauty and hidden force. Some sculptures make us feel deep emotional experiences, some make us seem to live for a moment more intensely aware of our surroundings in a new and pointed way which is intensely exciting. Rhoden's sculptures may appear simple but they unveil a world not only of an individual but which is evocative of everyone. This, John is able to do because he is aware of the many possible levels of consciousness.

This small representative selection of John's sculptures portrays various periods, Naturalism to Abstraction, with imagination as well as with considerable depth. Thus, John speaks to the present generation out of his experiences of the past, and his vision is a spiritual revolution. He expresses his candid opinions and desires, and the viewer has freedom to interpret his own views or reactions in fully appreciating the aesthetic value of these expressions.

The limited number of works displayed here may not be adequate to illustrate fully my profound respect for this monumental figure, but his abilities can be easily seen through the sensitive eyes of one having some knowledge about sculpture. In studying some pieces the viewers will encounter the expressionist linear rhythmic qualities showing the legacy of the 20th century which will stimulate the inner curiosity and make him want to see more. John's sculptures have profound sensitivity to the elemental forces of growth in nature, enlightened by the interplay of inner forces with plastic form. A rich imagination is revealed, flowering in the sculptures

which have been conceived and executed so far. To illustrate his diversity of interests, he has worked in wood, stone, marble, welded steel and welded bronze. His most recent works are executed in jewel glass, copper and nickel, marked by great power and complete technical mastery.

It is my conviction that Americans need to become better acquainted with figures like John Rhoden. There is increasing evidence, beyond the shadow of doubt, that Afro-American artists have made and are continuing to make substantial cultural, social and economic contributions for the benefit of mankind which give our existence new dimensions and experiences. Their statements are about what has been going on around us should cause us to see, and in comprehending, to reject the bitterness of the past and accept the reality of today. We all stand in the midst of our inner conflicts and should not take refuge in an Ivory tower or in the social establishment. This is an act of resignation we have been performing too long. This is where art, contrary to its critics, justifies itself by proving precisely what is one's enemy. It produces the renaissance which implies justice and liberty. Without it, renaissance would be without form and, consequently, would be nothing. Without culture and the relative freedom it implies, society, even when perfect, is but a jungle.

Hans Bhalla



1



3

# Catalogue

- 1. Victim**  
Bronze, 12"x30", 1964
- 2. Sofari (African Woman)**  
Bronze, 27"x39", 1958
- 3. Dedicated Public Servant**  
Bronze, 12"x40", 1958
- 4. Mother & Child**  
Rosemalla wood, 12"x44", 1962
- 5. Hosanna**  
Bronze, 14", 1963
- 6. African King & Queen**  
Bronze, 18"x12", 1968
- 7. Spirit Regarding Order**  
Bronze, 12", 1958
- 8. Challenge to Jupiter**  
Bronze, 36"H x 15"B, 1954
- 9. Man's Inner Struggle**  
Bronze, 17"x12", 1954
- 10. Honies**  
Bronze, 30"x0", 1968
- 11. Passage**  
Bronze, 27"x8", 1968
- 12. Tansa**  
Rosewood, 26"x9", 1947
- 13. Beastic**  
Bronze, 22"x8", 1970
- 14. The Women**  
Bronze, 25"x6", 1970
- 15. African Mosaic**  
Bronze, 38"x20", 1958
- 16. Search For Truth**  
Bronze, 38"x11", 1953



4



5



# John W. Rhoden

Born in Birmingham, Alabama, on March 13, 1918. Attended Parker High School in Birmingham, Alabama, and later attended Talladega College for two years. Settled in New York, 1936. Studied with Richmond Barthe. After military service he returned to New York, and studied with William Zorach and others at New York University. Awarded a Julius Rosenwald Fellowship, 1947-48; a Fulbright Fellowship, 1951-52; a Prix de Rome, 1952-54; a Guggenheim Fellowship,

1961. Received first prize in sculpture, 1945, Annual Exhibition of Negro Artists, Atlanta University, Atlanta, Georgia. Participated in group exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum, the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, the Art Institute of Chicago, and other institutions. Represented in the Stockholm Museum, the Delaware Museum and many other private collections throughout the U.S.A. and abroad. His commission works are found at Harlem Hospital, Metropolitan Hospital and Philadelphia-Sheraton Hotel. Widely travelled all over the globe under the United States Government sponsored visits and Rockefeller Foundation.









16



13



12



14