In the summer of 1988, young art collectors Wesley and Missy Cochran traveled from their home in LaGrange, Georgia to see 1938-1988: The Work of Five Black Women Artists, an exhibition at the Atlanta College of Art held in conjunction with the inaugural National Black Arts Festival (NBAF). Featuring works by Emma Amos, Camille Billops, Lois Mailou Jones, Howardena Pindell, and Faith Ringgold, this retrospective exhibition acknowledged and celebrated these artists and their contributions to the field of American art.

The trip was pivotal for the Cochrans; prior to this moment, works by Andy Warhol and other pop artists comprised the majority of their collection. No strangers to hard work and dedication—Wes worked as a stonemason and Missy taught in the public school system—they decided together to expand the scope of their collection by pursuing works by African American artists. Their goal was to travel exhibitions and make works by Black artists accessible to small museums, cultural and educational institutions, and community organizations throughout the South. Working as a two-person team for the last four decades, they have traveled their collection nationwide. “We always decide, and work, together,” Wes remarked in a 1990 Art Papers interview with Mildred Thompson, an artist-educator who would become a close friend. They had amassed almost 100 works by Black American artists at the time of the interview; now, that number exceeds 500.

The earliest acquisitions were guided by Camille Billops after Howardena Pindell supplied the Cochrans with Billops’ phone number at The Work of Five Black Women. The Cochrans credit Billops with the curation of their collection. Her friendship came with sound advice about what artists to look out for, what books to read, and what to collect. Through Camille, Wes and Missy met Robert Blackburn, a master printmaker whose diverse Chelsea workshop was a hub for emerging and established artists alike. The Cochrans often acquired work on the spot during studio visits. As they built trust with artists, more introductions came. “We have tried to develop a reputation for being dependable, that our checks don’t bounce and that we keep our promises,” said Wes of this period of personal growth and collection expansion. The title Together refers at once to the Cochrans’ collecting philosophy, the guidance of their mentors, and the relationships they formed with artists who became friends.

The collection consists of prominent as well as underrecognized African American artists who explore varied themes reflecting significant social, political, and cultural movements of the 20th century and offers unparalleled opportunities for research and community engagement.

05.18.24 – 08.04.24

In the John Howett Works on Paper Gallery on Level One of the Michael C. Carlos Museum
AFRICAN FANTASY  
1929. Linocut.

UNTITLED  
1934. Graphite on paper.

UNTITLED  

4. Leon Hicks (American, b. 1933)  
LITTLE BIRD  
UNTITLED  

5. Alma Thomas (American, 1891-1978)  
UNTITLED  
SILVER LININGS: THE UNKNOWN  

SOUL SOUND  

7. Betye Saar (American, 1926-2024)  
NO MORE WAR #1  
1 Mavis Pusey (Jamaican-born American, 1928-2019)
MOBILE IMAGES

2 Elizabeth Catlett (American-born Mexican, 1915-2012)
CARTAS
1986. Lithograph.

DEATH AND ORGASM I

4 Valerie Maynard (American, 1937-2022)
UNFINISHED BUSINESS

5 Camille Billops (American, 1933-2019)
FOR JAPANESE WITH MIRRORS
1975. Relief-inked intaglio.

6 Howardena Pindell (American, b. 1943)
ANTARES, AUGUST 2001

7 Camille Billops (American, 1933-2019)
FIGHTER, FIGHTER
1990. Etching.

8 Emma Amos (American, 1937-2020)
AMERICAN GIRL
1974. Lithograph.

CAVERSHAM PRESS, SOUTH AFRICA SERIES
1 Jacob Lawrence (American, 1917-2000)
CONTEMPLATION

2 Sam Gilliam (American, 1933-2022)
FOR XAVIER

3 Radcliffe Bailey (American, 1968-2023)
UNIA

4 Howardena Pindell (American, b. 1943)
UNTITLED 36

5 William Pope.L (American, 1955-2023)
UNEMPLOYMENT
2004. Ink drawing on inside of Tom’s of Maine Natural Moisturizing Soap box.

6 Sonya Clark (American, b. 1967)
AFRO BLUE MATTER

7 Emma Amos (American, 1937-2020)
CAMILLE AND THE CAMEL WALK

8 Alison Saar (American, b. 1956)
FALL
2014. Etching, chine-collé.