

THE ADVOCATE MAGAZINE

SECTION **E**
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Arts 4-7E
Books 3E
Travel 8E
Human Condition 2E



Photos provided by the LSU Museum of Art

Ed Clark's untitled piece is one of several of his works showing in the exhibit *Beyond Black: Ed Clark, Eugene Martin and John T. Scott* at the LSU Museum of Art. The three artists have Louisiana ties.

BEYOND BLACK

Exhibit features work of three African-American abstract artists

BY ROBIN MILLER

Arts writer

Lafayette proved to be the perfect home for Eugene Martin, a place where he was free to create his artwork free from everyday worries.

He was happy when he was painting, and Suzanne Fredericq couldn't help joining in the adventure.

That's what his work was to her, an adventure. She never knew what would emerge from the empty canvases, and neither did he.

"Many artists have an idea of what they're going to paint before they make the first stroke on the canvas," Fredericq said. "Eugene didn't. He would just start painting, and he was always excited to see what happened."

The LSU Museum of Art is offering visitors an opportunity to see for themselves what happened when it opens its show *Beyond Black: Ed Clark, Eugene Martin and John T.*

Scott on Sunday, Jan. 30.

The show celebrates three prominent abstract artists who happen to be black. Museum curator Natalie Mault has done extensive research on the three artists, and this is exactly what she discovered.

Each of these artists was interested in abstract art first and foremost.

"But at the time they were starting out, African-American artists were expected to create art reflecting the black experience," Mault said.

A number of artists did create great bodies of work depicting the black experience, Romare Bearden being one.

"Modern artists — abstract expressionists, geometric abstractionists, minimalists — have been studied by numerous scholars and art institutions, but the contributions of African-American



Eugene Martin's untitled piece is part of the current exhibit at the LSU Museum of Art. Martin was born in Washington, D.C., but moved to Lafayette later in life. He died in 2005.

Beyond Black: Ed Clark, Eugene Martin and John T. Scott

WHAT: An exhibit highlighting the work of three black abstract artists with Louisiana ties.

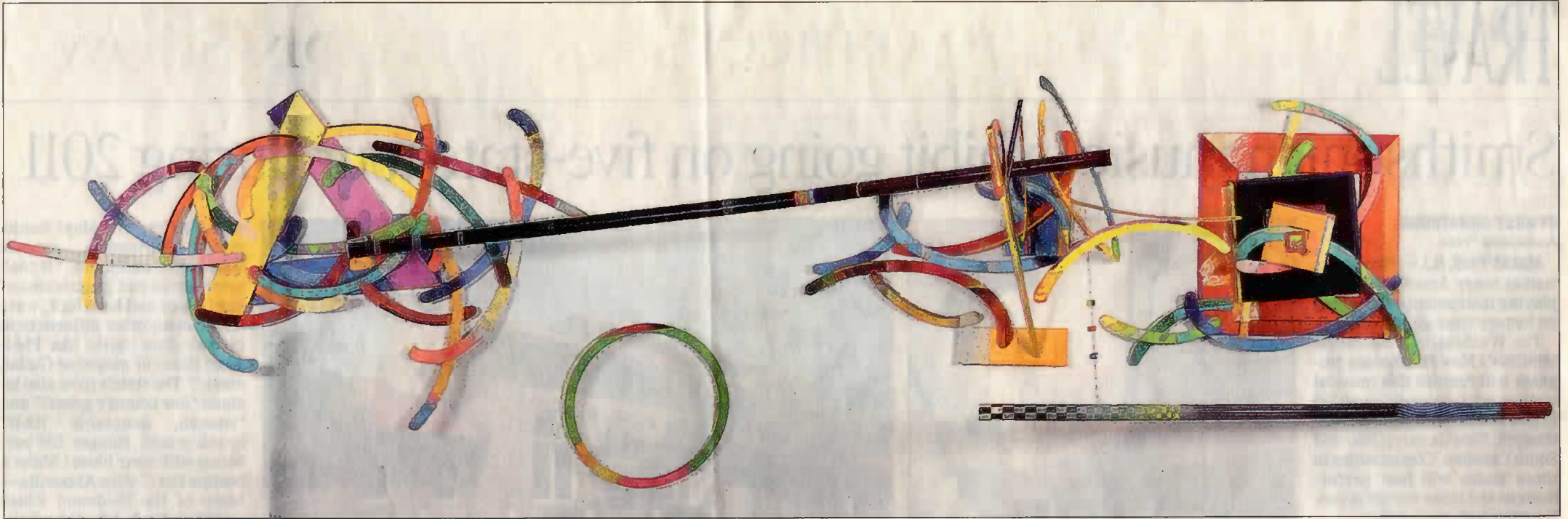
WHEN: Sunday, Jan. 30, through May 8. Hours are 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday; 10 a.m.-8 p.m. Thursday; and 1-5 p.m. Sunday.

WHERE: LSU Museum of Art in the Shaw Center for the Arts, 100 Lafayette St.

ADMISSION: \$5, ages 13 and older; university students with ID, children age 12 and younger and museum members are admitted free.

INFORMATION: Call (225) 389-7200 or visit <http://www.lsumoa.com>.

► See **BEYOND**, page 7E



John T. Scott's piece 'Dancing at the Crossroads,' is one of several of his sculptures featured in *Beyond Black: Ed Clark, Eugene Martin and John T. Scott* at the LSU Museum of Art. The exhibit will run through May 8.

Photos provided by the LSU Museum of Art

"It's as if he's still here,"

Fredericq said.

She speaks from the Lafayette home she shared with Martin, the home she still shares with his work.

Fredericq has cataloged and archived all of the pieces in their home. There are probably some 5,000 works altogether.

Fredericq has compiled a binder documenting her husband's work. Mault is using it as a resource during the installation of this exhibition. It is filled with photographs and newspaper articles and reviews, all neatly arranged and easy to follow.

But it's the color that hits the viewer first.

"Look at this," Mault said, turning to a page of photos.

Martin's paintings fill the walls of Fredericq's home. Another photo shows a room with paintings upright on the floor, as if standing in rank and file. Everything is perfectly neat and organized.

"This isn't the only room like this; there are others," Mault said. "It's amazing to see how many paintings Eugene Martin created. And what's even more amazing is that when you walk into their house, you feel his presence. I can honestly say that it's the only instance where I felt the artist was still there."

Fredericq will make the same point. Martin poured not only his heart but his personality into his work. His paintings are filled with bright, bold colors that reflect the times when he was happiest — when he was working.

Fredericq met Martin while visiting Washington, D.C. She'd graduated college in her native Belgium and was staying with a friend in the nation's capital.

"I was on vacation, and I liked it so much that I found a

way to stay," she said.

Her friend had some drawings by Martin and eventually introduced her to the artist.

"I fell in love with his drawings before I met him," she said.

Fredericq earned her master's degree in the D.C. area, then went to the University of North Carolina to earn her doctorate degree in zoology. She and Martin were married the day after she received her degree. They lived in Chapel Hill, where she taught at the university before she was offered the job in Lafayette.

"Eugene loved zydeco music," she said. "One of the first presents he gave me was a cassette of zydeco music. I had never heard of Lafayette before coming here, and Eugene had never been here before. But when he gave me the cassette, he had introduced me to Lafayette before we ever came here."

Martin's life plays out like a book or movie. He was born in Washington, D.C., on July 24, 1938. His father was an itinerant jazz musician. His mother died giving birth to his younger brother Jerry.

The brothers were then placed in foster care, and Martin began running away from home, which landed him in reform school. He eventually was sent to a farm in Clarksburg, Md., where he began drawing.

After a stint in the U.S. Navy, Martin attended the Corcoran School of Art in Washington. He's now known for his abstract paintings, mixed media collages on paper and pencil and pen and ink drawings.

Martin suffered from a brain hemorrhage and stroke in 2001. He died in Lafayette on Jan. 1, 2005.

Martin's work will be the

first to greet visitors in the LSU Museum of Art's exhibit. The museum staff is in the midst of installing all three artists' works on this particular day, and the front gallery has been dedicated to the artists' early works.

Martin's work sometimes included allusions to animal imagery, which can easily be seen in these earlier works.

"We're going to put one of John Scott's sculptures in the center," Mault explained.

And the scope of Clark's work won't be realized until visitors step into the next gallery.

For it's here where they will realize just how big Clark likes his canvases. And they'll realize that not all abstract artists are the same.

"Ed Clark's work flows," Mault said. "He was the artist who began use of the push broom, and he'd push paint across these giant canvases. Some of the works here seem to be reminiscent of the Louisiana landscapes he saw while he was here."

Clark was born in 1928 in New Orleans' Storyville section. Actually, that sounds like the beginning of a movie, too. Anyone familiar with Storyville knows its history.

Clark served in the U.S. Air Corps in World War II, then studied at the Art Institute of Chicago from 1947 to 1951, after which he left for Paris, where he studied at L'Academie de la Grande Chaumiere.

"Clark received encouragement from two of his instructors, Louis Ritman at the Art Institute of Chicago and Edouard Goerg at the Grande Chaumiere. However, the young Clark's work was most strongly influenced by Nicolas de Staël's painting "The Football Game," which was

exhibited at 'Salon d'Automne' in 1952," states his bio.

The bio is found on his official web site, <http://www.artistedclark.com>. Martin, too, has a web site dedicated to his work, <http://www.eugenemartinart.com>.

Clark also is known for shaping the oval canvas.

"An oval is the shape of the eye, and the oval canvas shows us what the eye sees," Mault said.

One of his oval canvases is included in this show. Clark's bio states that he made his first oval painting in 1968 while living in Vétheuil, France, early home of Claude Monet.

"This was almost a decade after Clark first started using his push broom technique, which allows him to move paint swiftly across the canvas, creating broad bold strokes," his bio continues. "Edward Clark is an abstract painter whose work has drawn accolades internationally for five decades. He is the first painter credited with working on a shaped canvas, an innovation that influenced contemporary art through the 1950s and 1960s."

Clark lived five years in Paris before moving to New York, where, his bio states, he "became a charter member of the Brata gallery on Tenth Street, where artists like George Sugarman, Sal Romano, Al Held, John Krushenick, and Ronald Bladen were shown. It was during this period that he made his celebrated shaped canvas, which appeared in the Brata gallery Christmas group show in 1957. The painting was later to be described in a 1972 Art News article by Lawrence Campbell as generally considered to be the first of its kind."

"These artists' works complement one another," Mault

said. "When you walk into the second gallery, you'll notice the flowing strokes of Ed Clark. On the other side, you'll see the bold, defined colors of John Scott's abstract sculptures, and Eugene Martin's abstract paintings with their brighter colors link the two together. This is really an exciting show for us."

Scott is the only artist among the three who was born in Louisiana and spent his life in the state. He left the state to earn his master's degree in fine art at Michigan State University after earning his bachelor of arts degree from Xavier University in New Orleans. He also studied for a short time in New York, but he returned home to teach at Xavier.

And it was in New Orleans where he became known for creating large woodcut prints and his African-Caribbean-New Orleans-inspired kinetic sculptures.

The Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities offers a permanent exhibit of Scott's work in The Humanities Center in Turners Hall in New Orleans.

"John Scott was one of those rare artistic spirits who let the 'sidewalks of New Orleans' speak to his soul and imagination," the LEH writes.

This description can be found on its web page dedicated to the artist's exhibit, http://www.leh.org/john_scott.

"Through his singular art, he has left us a visual and artistic legacy that will inspire us for generations," the LEH continues. "That is why the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities has embarked on its mission to make the LEH Humanities Center a focal point for Scott's art, for no other artist has captured the cultural spirit and complexities of New Orleans and its people as eloquently."

And the LEH continues, offering the most vivid descriptions of Scott's work:

"Throughout his long career as an artist, Scott drew upon the city's rich African-Caribbean culture and musical heritage in creating his vibrant kinetic sculptures that often explored themes such as the 'diddley bow' from West African mythology or rhythms and movements inspired by early 19th century African slave dances in the city's famous Congo Square."

Scott's public sculptures can be seen in New Orleans' Woldenberg Park and in Gen-

tilly, as well as in Kansas City, Mo.

"We have the sketches and instructions he wrote out for his 'Spirit House' sculpture in Gentilly in the exhibit," Mault said. "Of course, the sculpture couldn't be shown here, so we'll have a picture of it hanging beside the sketches to show visitors what it looks like."

In the catalog that accompanied his 2005 retrospective at the New Orleans Museum of Art, Scott used the words "jazz thinking" in describing his mindset while creating his art:

"If you listen to a really good jazz group three things are always evident," he said "Jazz musicians are always in the 'now' while you're hearing it, but these guys are incredibly aware of where they have been and have an unbelievable anticipation of where they are going. To me that's jazz thinking. It's improvisational thinking in the sense that I don't have to contrive some system of connecting two things that don't seem related because I understand the relationship."

In describing the constant influence the culture, music and streets of New Orleans had on his work, Scott often said, "New Orleans is the only city that I've been in that if you listen the sidewalks will speak to you."

Scott died on Sept. 1, 2007, after two double lung transplants and long struggle with pulmonary fibrosis. He was 67.

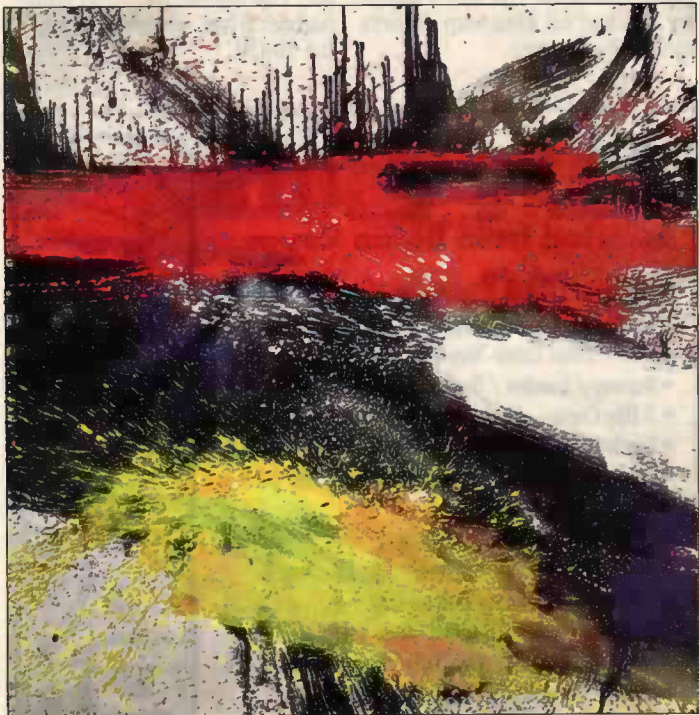
The LSU Museum of Art, meantime, is partnering with the New Orleans African-American Museum in Tremé on programming, events and as a venue with additional paintings by Eugene Martin, and with the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities in New Orleans, a venue with additional works on display by John T. Scott.

"It is impossible to encompass the revolutionary movement of American abstraction without the works of Ed Clark, Eugene Martin and John T. Scott. Come view artworks that are characterized by high-energy color and a bold physicality that refused to be overlooked," Mault said.

And Fredericq is determined that her husband's works will not be forgotten. And they won't be.

Because Martin's presence is still here, as are those of his fellow artists.

They live through their work.



Ed Clark's 'Wasted Land' is featured in the LSU Museum of Art exhibit. Clark was born in New Orleans, studied in Paris and now lives in New York. He originated the push broom method of spreading paint, along with the use of shaped canvases.