

Black History Month

Zigler plans spirited exhibit

By CARLA TIPPER
Daily News Staff Writer

In recognition of Black History Month, the Zigler Museum will be showing the works of two prominent African-American artists from Louisiana. The exhibit, entitled "Free Men of Color" features paintings by Charles Simms Jr., a native of New Orleans, and Eugene James Martin, a transplant to Lafayette from Washington, D.C.

Zigler Museum Curator Dolores Spears has put together a well thought show, with two artists whose juxtaposing works complement each other. Addressing issues of mind and spirit, sensual and emotional, the exhibit is distinctly African-American but speaks to a universal soul.

Most of Simms' paintings are on a large scale, being four to five feet across. His art is in the impres-

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sionist style — vibrant strokes of color, light, shadow and movement convey the energy of the images he paints. What the viewer sees in Simms' work is through the eyes and experience of an African-American man who has lived in New Orleans his whole life.

Simms' overwhelming talent is his portrayal of the New Orleans downtown community in a way so true to its spirit that even a first time viewer senses something familiar in his work. Use of clouds and shadow convey the closeness of the city's sub-tropical climate. Simms' paintings are full of action and immediate energy. Even the acrylic paint he uses is fast drying and seems to capture the moment, making it ever present. Then, the size of the paintings nearly surround the viewer, enhancing the effect.

Martin's work, on the other hand, reminisces of Miró in its abstraction and use of brilliant colors and weaving shapes. His canvases are more compact than Simms', so rather than surrounding the viewer, they draw you in. The lines in Martin's images are fine but make way for a fullness of design. The patterns in his work are at times segmented, but the

complete images are integrated and harmonious.

Martin's art is filled with psychological suggestion, and though at times it betrays an African-American spirit, it speaks to a more universal part of the viewer. Like Simms' paintings, there is an element of recognition in Martin's work, but rather than being a recognition of place or people, it is a familiarity of the mind.

Without a doubt, the work of both artists could be described as stimulating and spirited. The show expresses soulful elevation, but also a groundedness that comes from the African-American spirit of the artists. Simms portrays the images and energy of the people in his community while Martin, it seems, has understood those same subjects and conveyed what is in their hearts.

Every year one month is set aside to recognize and celebrate black history and the cumulative contributions made by African-Americans to our society. This show, which will exhibit at the Zigler Museum from Jan. 15 to Feb. 20, is one of the best opportunities we have locally to do that.



"The Merry Widow" by Eugene James Martin, pencil and ink on paper, 13.5" x 11", 1987. Martin is a native of Washington, D.C., but currently resides in Lafayette. Fifteen of his works will be shown at the Zigler Museum from Jan. 15 to Feb. 20. He studied at Corcoran School of Arts in the 1960s and has exhibited in Europe as well as the U.S.