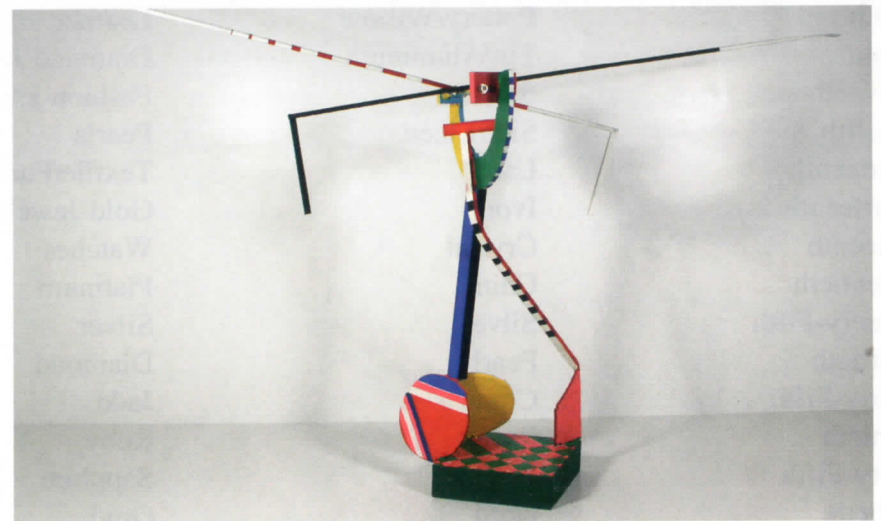


LSU Museum of Art: Beyond Black

By Ashley Herrick

Much has been written about abstract art and its birth, growth, and general acceptance into the American mainstream artistic community. But until recently, a portion of this medium's pioneering figures has been long-overlooked. The LSU Museum of Art is excited to showcase the work of three of these artists while exploring a "faux-pas-of-sorts" in terms of art, art history, and American history. Entitled *Beyond Black: the works of Ed Clark, Eugene Martin and John T. Scott*, this exhibition brings together fifty never-before-seen drawings, paintings, sculptures, collages, and prints from public and private collectors across the U.S., uniting them in LSU MOA's first exhibition recognizing the valuable contributions of three modern African-American abstract artists. *Beyond Black* will be on display from January 30 through May 8, 2011.

In a time when mainstream galleries, museums, and collectors were encouraging artists to push the boundaries of their work with modern, experimental thinking, twentieth century African-American



John T. Scott, *Untitled*, 1984. Painted steel. Courtesy of Arthur Roger Gallery.

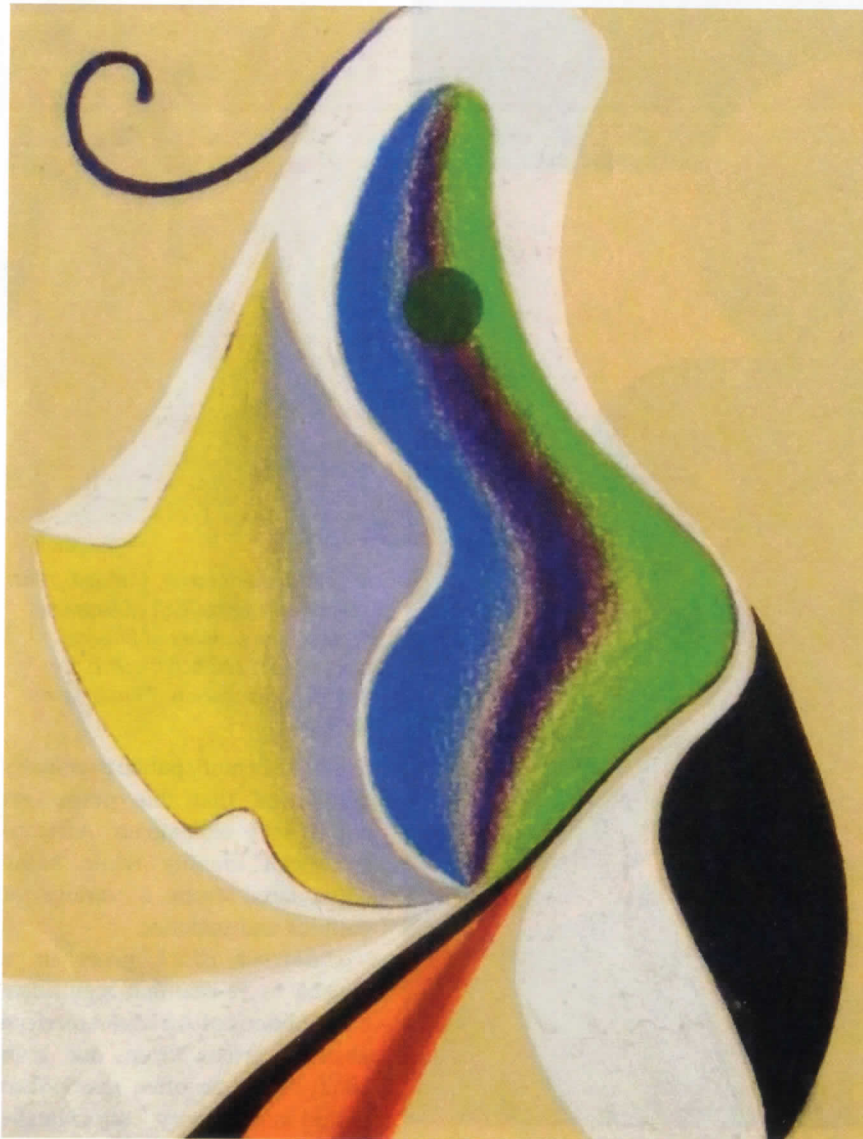
modern artists—abstract expressionists, geometric abstractionists, minimalists—have been studied by countless writers, scholars, art institutions, and historians, the contributions of African-American abstract artists have been largely overlooked, especially those from, or working in, southern states.”

These three artists share not only “innovative artistic approaches, enigmatic aesthetics, and unquenchable desire to create as a definition of self-identity,” but one more important characteristic: unique ties to Louisiana. Both Ed Clark and John T. Scott were born in New Orleans, and though their work was in several of the same exhibitions, they never officially collaborated. John T. Scott was deeply inspired by New Orleans music and culture and chose to delve in a variety of media, while Ed Clark made his mark on modernism by replacing his paintbrush with a push broom in order to portray artistic movement of the body as a whole. Clark also was the first artist to use a shaped canvas. Eugene Martin—known for his biomorphic and structural imagery through collage, pen and ink drawings, oils on canvas, and acrylics on paper—was not born in

artists were expected to do quite the opposite. Both from within and outside their communities, these artists were pushed to create “black art,” a style that was inherently representational of the African-American community and helped to promote the Civil Rights Movement. Because of this strict expectation, African-Americans who diverged into abstraction were considered to be straying from the common goal, weighing down their work unnecessarily, and imitating the mainstream. So when African American artists continuously pushed these limits, the initial reaction was so negative that they were forced to leave the U.S. In Clark’s case, this meant moving to France, where art journals praised abstractionist works without racial judgment. Today, *Beyond Black* examines the notion that good art transcends traditional boundaries.

The title, *Beyond Black*, stems from a play on words--the works in this exhibition are in fact very colorful and go far beyond the twentieth century notion of “black art.” Clark, Martin, and Scott were leaders devoted to experimenting with materials, style, and structure, and it is through them that the mid-

City Social, BR. Jan 2011
pp. 30-33

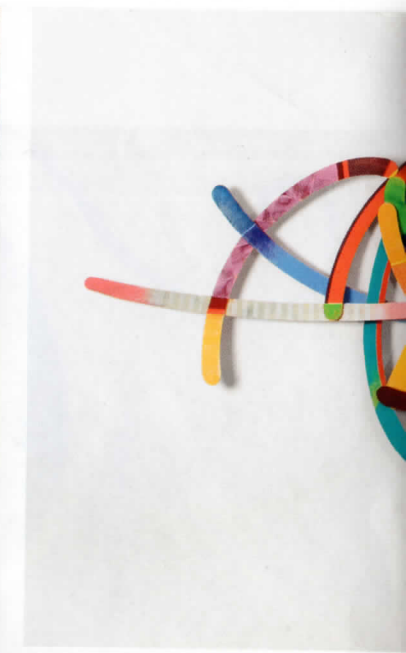


*Ed Clark, Untitled, 1991.
Acrylic on canvas. Collection
of The Art Museum at the
University of Kentucky.*

*Ed Clark, Mexican
Series, no. 10, 2001.
Acrylic on canvas.
Courtesy of Peg Alston/
Peg Alston Fine Arts.*

*Eugene James Martin, Untitled,
unknown date. Conté on board. Gift
of Suzanne Fredericq in memory of
Eugene Martin, LSU MOA 2008.10.29.
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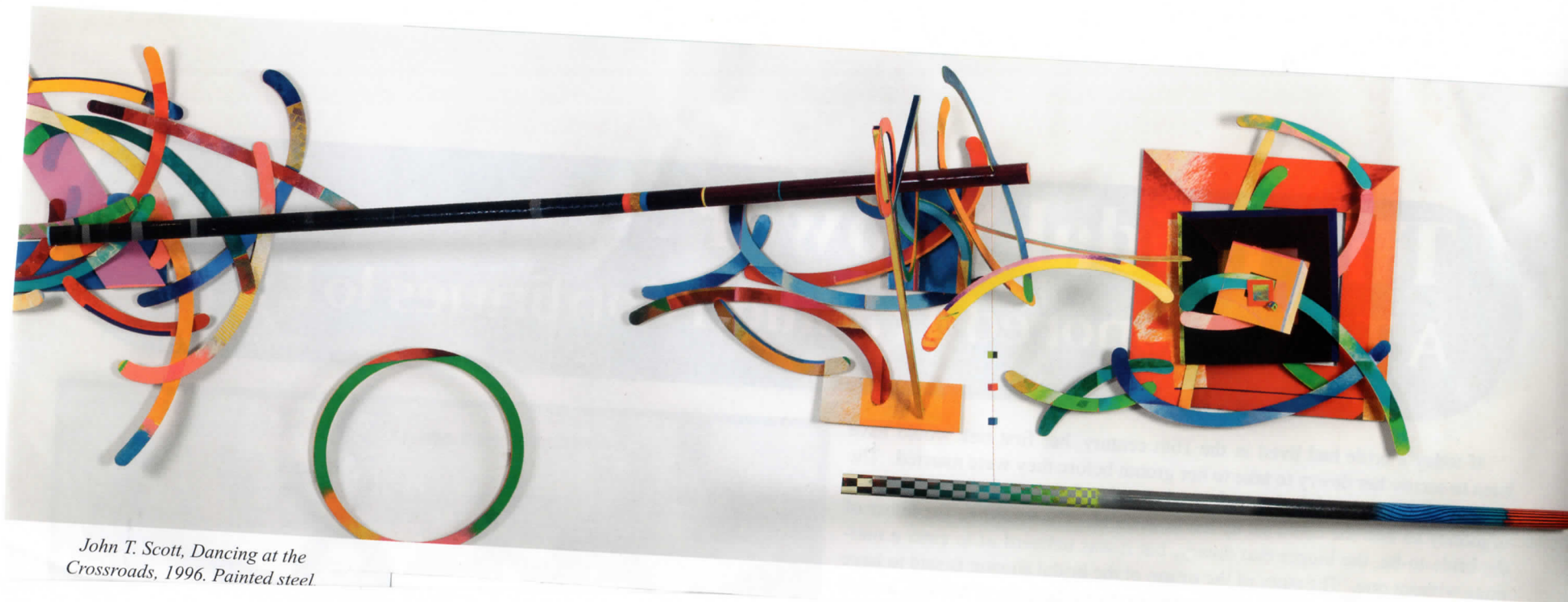




Eugene James Martin, Untitled, 2001. Acrylic on canvas. Gift of Suzanne Fredericq in memory of Eugene Martin, LSU MOA 2008.10.1. © Artists Rights Society. Photo: Kevin Salzman.

twentieth century public eventually discovered that this newer art could still encompass African-American identity while being appreciated from a variety of cultures and societies.

“*Beyond Black* gives us a chance to re-examine significant contributions of African-American abstract artists from our own backyard to an often overlooked period in art history,” says Natalie Mault, Assistant Curator at the LSU Museum of Art. “While



*John T. Scott, Dancing at the
Crossroads, 1996. Painted steel*

Louisiana but moved to Lafayette in 1996 and spent his final years there.

"Though united in their commitment to abstraction, Clark, Martin, and Scott do not fall wholly into one practice or style," Mault says. "Their works are frontal, holistic, and often engaged with geometric or primary forms. They considered both the object and the viewer, engaging space and surface while displaying aesthetic perception and the intersection of color, composition and materials."

Decades later, their innovative techniques are still quietly influencing abstractionists today. And with this combined exhibition, the LSU MOA hopes to bring due credit to each of these visionary artists who helped shape the definition of modernism.

"One of the joys of museum work is to rediscover or redefine the words of artists who deserve greater renown and whose gifts promise to captivate new audiences," says Tom Livesay, Director of the LSU MOA. "It is our hope that this exhibition will deepen existing appreciation of these three artists among those already conversant with them and be revelation for those who are less familiar."

Additional paintings, events, and programming for this exhibit are also presented in partnership with the New Orleans African-American Museum in Tremé, as well as the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities in New Orleans.

LSU MOA is located in the Shaw Center for the Arts downtown. For more information on *Beyond Black* and upcoming exhibits, visit www.lsumoa.com.