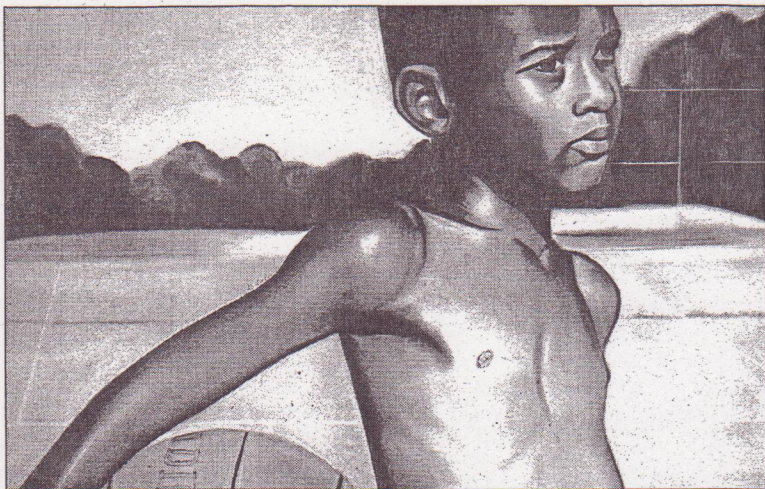


ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT



Al Harris Jr., of Kalamazoo, will show "James' Dreams of Flight," above, as part of an upcoming exhibit by African-American artists at the Urban Institute for Contemporary Arts.

BEYOND BOUNDARIES

Exhibit spotlights African-American artists

By LINDSAY ACKERMAN

"A Celebration of African-American Artists," an exhibit of the work of West Michigan artists Al Harris Jr., Eugenia Marve and Jon McDonald, and Washington D.C. artist Michael Anthony Brown, opens this Friday, and runs through Oct. 9 at the Urban Institute for Contemporary Arts (UICA), 41 Sheldon Blvd. SE.

The idea for the exhibit came from conversations that Rhonda Coleman, owner of local art gallery Room 222, had with others about the lack of African-American artists as role models for aspiring young artists.

"When I would try to put together an exhibit of African-American artists locally, I was hard pressed to come up with enough people," Coleman said. "But the hope is that this exhibit will draw many different people, including educators, parents and kids, and not just African-Americans."

p.m. on Friday, Sept. 15, and will offer an opportunity for people to meet the artists. The four artists will participate in a panel discussion on the influence their African-American heritage has had on their art, and guest speaker Bill Charland, a professor at Grand Valley State University, will talk about the under-representation of African-Americans in post-secondary art education.

"This is a chance for students who might have an interest in art but not much exposure to not only view pieces, but be able to interact with the artists and find out what the hardships were," Coleman said. "This is also a great opportunity for educators to find out things that they can use to help them teach students better."

Jon McDonald has been a professor at Kendall College of Art and Design for more than 20 years, and will be displaying a collection of his art

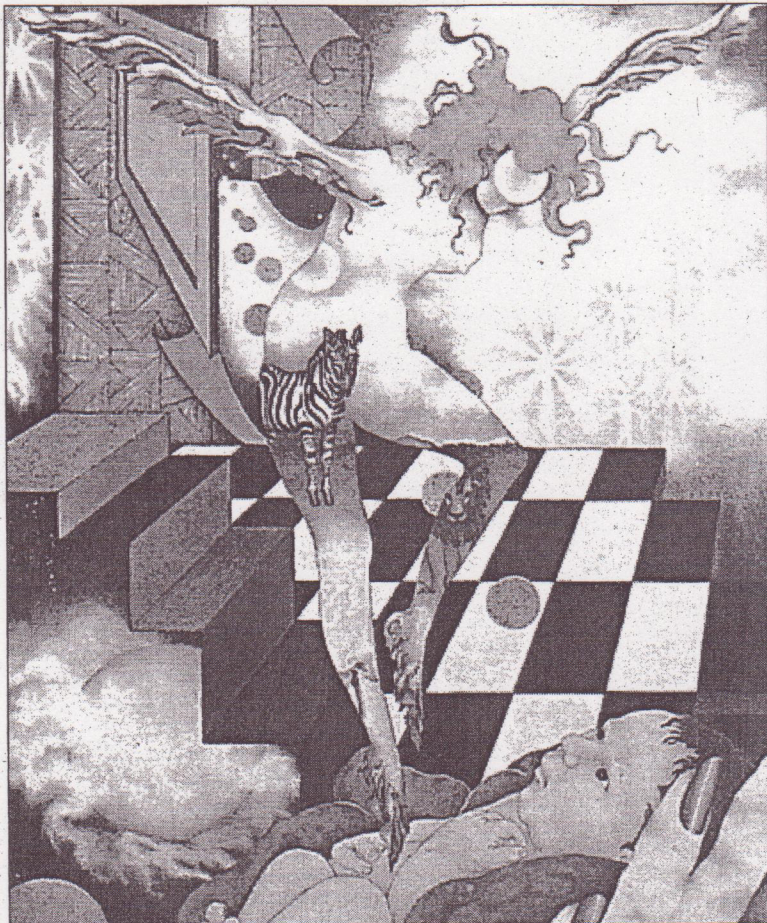
works range from portraits to landscapes, all done in a photo-realist style.

"It is difficult to get black kids interested in formal art, like going to museums, sometimes just because many feel unwelcome in that setting," McDonald said. "But it is important to have exhibits like this to get them interested."

McDonald said that while all his art might not depict specific African-American themes, his life experience is always a part of what he creates.

"Racism confronts you every day of your life when you are black, and whether you can see it or not, it is there in my art," he said. "It doesn't have to come in your mind consciously because it is part of your life, and I think that is a reason for the collective sense of responsibility that African-Americans feel."

Eugenia Marve uses her art to express her belief that spiritual and philosophical



Grand Rapids artist Eugenia Marve's works often feature natural elements, and reflect her belief in world unity. Above is her work "Angel."

impact people on a spiritual, not a religious level, and to draw attention to the rich diversity of thinking and being on this planet, while showing people that there are similarities that can bring us together," she said.

Marve said she is excited to participate in the UICA exhibit and reception.

"I believe that the show and the reception offer a wonderful opportunity to foster understanding. We don't too often play host to really diverse exhibitions, and with the dialogue among artists and visitors we have not only the visuals but the chance to also be learning in an interactive way," she said.

community at large. People need to understand that we all have a voice and a way of saying something, and that creativity, inspiration and thoughtfulness are not relegated to one race."

The UICA exhibit will also feature the work of internationally known artist Michael Anthony Brown, whose lush, surreal paintings and painstakingly detailed sculptures incorporate historical images that reveal the ancestral past of African Americans. Also, Kalamazoo artist Al Harris Jr. will display his pastel portraits.

UICA gallery hours are 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Friday and 11 a.m.



Michael Anthony Brown's sculptures look to the ancestral past of African Americans. Above is "The Ecstasy of Freedom."

more information on the "Celebration of African-American Artists" exhibit, call 268-1111.