



2 Centuries, 3 Decades, 28 Works by Charles McGee
June 4 - September 24, 2011

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Marshall M. Fredericks Sculpture Museum



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University Center, Michigan 48710
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www.marshallfredericks.org

The word I would use if asked to portray Charles McGee in a single word is prodigious. Both his personality (character and intellect) and his art (sculpture, painting, drawing, and assemblage) are extraordinary and impressive. McGee came to Michigan at age ten from a humble childhood in South Carolina and has lived and worked in Detroit for seventy-seven years. Those first ten years shaped the texture and content of who Charles McGee is today. His accomplishments as an artist and a human being, as an educator and a gallery owner, present an encyclopedic journey from modesty to greatness.

At age eighty-five in 2009, Charles McGee celebrated his life's work with a retrospective exhibition at Eastern Michigan University, a body of work that spanned nearly sixty years. In the exhibition catalogue *Energy: Charles McGee at Eighty-five*, his collage *Celebration* (2007) is referred to by exhibition curator Julie R. Myers as "one of his greatest masterpieces" (p. 81). For the last several months, Charles has worked in his Detroit studio to complete the most recent of his "greatest masterpieces," *Play Patterns II*, one of his largest ever three-dimensional pieces (at 10' x 20'), for the exhibition documented in these pages, *2 Centuries, 3 Decades, 28 Works by Charles McGee*.

In early 2010, shortly after I invited Charles to exhibit his work at the Marshall M. Fredericks Sculpture Museum, he made his first visit to the museum. When we walked into the larger of the two temporary exhibition galleries, he said "I will create a piece for that wall," gesturing to the largest flat surface in the gallery. *Play Patterns II*, a mixed-media collage on enamel, was finished in May 2011, four weeks before the opening of *2 Centuries, 3 Decades, 28 Works by Charles McGee*. It is my hope that following the exhibition this historically significant assemblage will find its way to an American museum or private collection.

In light of his major retrospective at Eastern Michigan University and the mounting of an abbreviated version of that show at Center Galleries at the College for Creative Studies in Detroit less than two years ago, I wanted the focus of this exhibition to be on the second half of Charles's career, thus the title *2 Centuries, 3 Decades, 28 Works by Charles McGee*. In 1980, Charles McGee was fifty-six years of age. During the last thirty years he has produced thousands of drawings and hundreds of paintings and sculptures; taught adult art classes at the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Center for eleven years; been included in numerous solo and group exhibitions in this country and abroad; completed seventeen public art commissions; and was awarded the first Kresge Foundation Eminent Artist Award in 2009.

For this exhibition I selected a range of work in multiple media (assemblage, collage, drawing, painting, sculpture, stoneware) from private and public collections and from the artist's studio, all created in the last three decades. The twenty-eight works in this exhibition represent the exceptional scope of Charles McGee's oeuvre.

Marilyn L. Wheaton
Director, Marshall M. Fredericks Sculpture Museum



Over the time expanse of more than 76 years, I have tried visually to answer the question: What is art? The deeper the probe the more resolute and clear the answer became that all or everything animate and inanimate is art; a series of matter in the form of line, shape, value, texture and color arranged in a signature position which speaks of its time. I stand in constant awe and respect for the logic and vast intelligence that manifests in nature's order. It is from within these broad parameters that my creative imagery finds its form. All animate and inanimate matter acts in the service and replenishment of nature equally. Therefore, I humbly stand before life like an empty pitcher before a full fountain. The system of opposites which governs universal order is the source of energy which fuels all of my creative offerings. *Play Patterns II*, created expressly for this exhibition, speaks passionately for the strength inherent in the equation of togetherness of all things in cosmic order.

Charles McGee

CHARLES MCGEE

See
that first & finally
it is the work, the effort,
that begins,
as all began, w/nature:

the natural world:

birds & beasts,
buds to blossoms:

cycles, sequences,
phases,
rotations of being-

of life-

The records of its centuries
& reasons perceived, pondered,
accepted as being,
as truth,
as inspiration,
for what else is there
that's worth the effort?

It is
as simple as seeing,
listening, learning, trans-
cribing, translating, trans-
posing
from existence into an-
other, a parallel dimension.



Urban Extract II, c. 1980
Wood and mixed media
construction, 96" x 60" x 20"
The Detroit Institute of Arts

Call it,

for lack of a wiser term

art.

Know,
we
& unfolding generations,
see & savor
his clarity of vision
& precision of presentation,

know it is always about
leaves, rain, sunshine,
procreation & demise,
call & response,

always about doing
as nature does.

What else
finally,
is there to do.

Bill Harris



Noah's Ark: Friends, c. 1984-85
Mixed media and collage on masonite board, 96 ¼" x 48"
Joan Lovell



Screen, mid 1980s
Aluminum, 39" x 46"



Noah's Ark: Time Modules, 1987
Oil marker on masonite board, 24" x 36"
Jennifer Yanover



Patches of Time, 1988-90

Acrylic and mixed media on masonite board, 48" x 32"

April McGee



Ritual Icon #1, 1993
Painted hydrostone, 67" x 35" x 22 ½"
Dr. Elie and Eileen Aboulafia



Bowl, 1993
 Glazed stoneware, 10" x 23" x 25 ½"
 Dr. Elie and Eileen Aboulafia



Transition: Primal Imagery, late 1990s
 Mixed media on watercolor paper and masonite board, 30" x 42"
 Bernard and Florence Schreier



Patches of Time II, c. 2001
Mixed media on canvas and board, 48" x 60"
Art and Tina McCullar



Primal Striations, c. 2001
Dirt and gel medium, 29" x 41"

Everything Is.

Behold
the clarity that awakens,
walks w/wisdom,
w/age.

Behold the experiments that grow
from questions,
that grow from questions,
that grow from questions...

Behold all the doings
of "daily necessities"
dis-
solve

as vision clears
& the work, after a lifetime,
the time of life,
is distilled to 2 dozen + works
lining the walls
or standing alone to be circled.

Evidence
that the rest,
the diversions, asides (now
finally
all but forgotten) were

simply seeking,
for their own needy fulfillments,
to wrest attention from the work
& its needsome processes.

The work, was, is it's own reason,
it's own justification,
it's own worth.

Is the (final) evidence
of the life of the mind,
beyond
the when's & where's,
the blinders & boundaries of
biography.

So,
yes, behold
the insight that rises, walks
w/wisdom,
travels
w/age;

the experiments that grow
from questions,
that grow
from questions, that grow
from questions...

Witness
in themselves
all the needed justification
for the celebration of their exis-
tence.

Bill Harris



Lineage #1, c. 2004
Brushed aluminum, 60" x 184"



Rhapsody in Red, c. 2002
Acrylic and mixed media on masonite board, 48" x 48"
Linda Allen



Maquette for *Triad*, c. 2002

Stainless steel brushed with steel wool, 22" x 24"
 Nettie Seabrooks

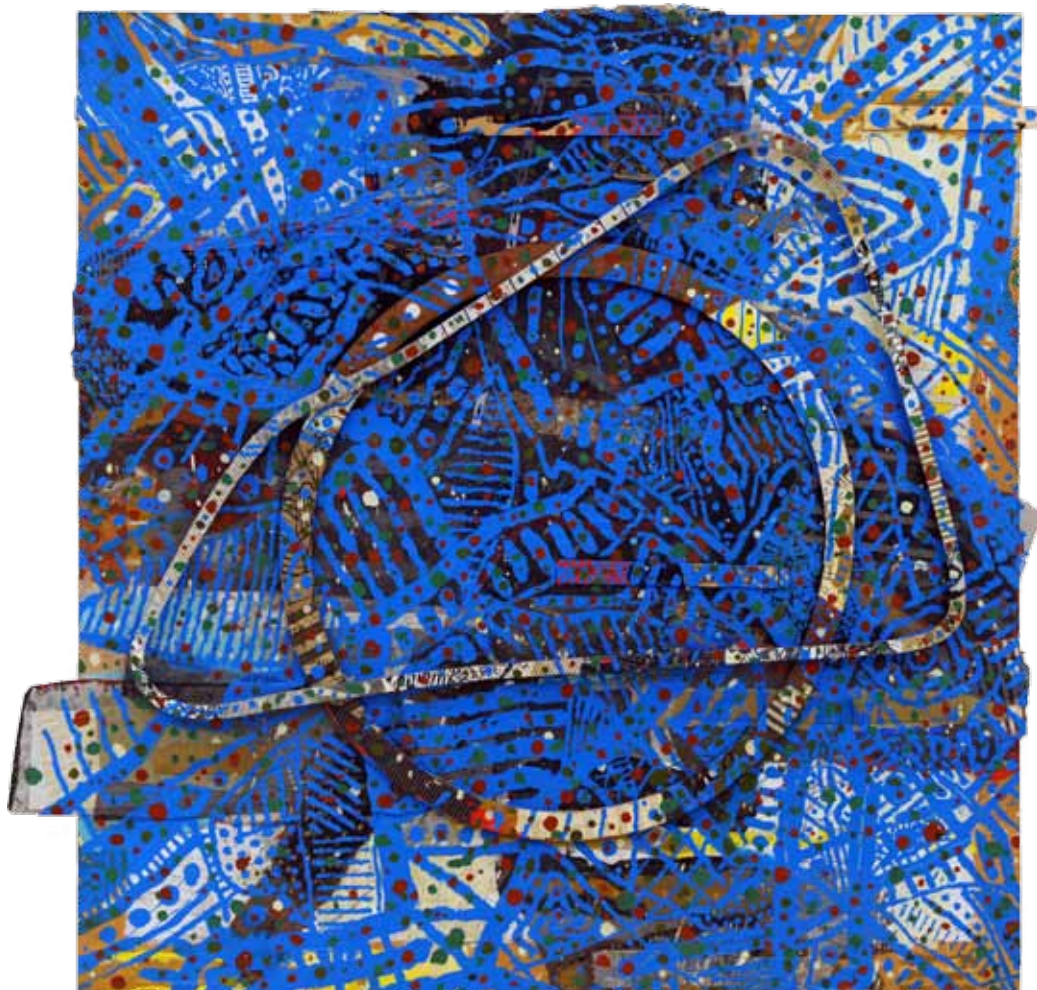


***Trilogy: Yellow*, c. 2002**

Acrylic and mixed media on masonite board, 48" x 48"
 Daniel Hoops



Spectrum, 2001
Mixed media collage and enamel, 48" x 48" each





Nagasaki, 2005
Mixed media and collage on plywood, 31" x 24"



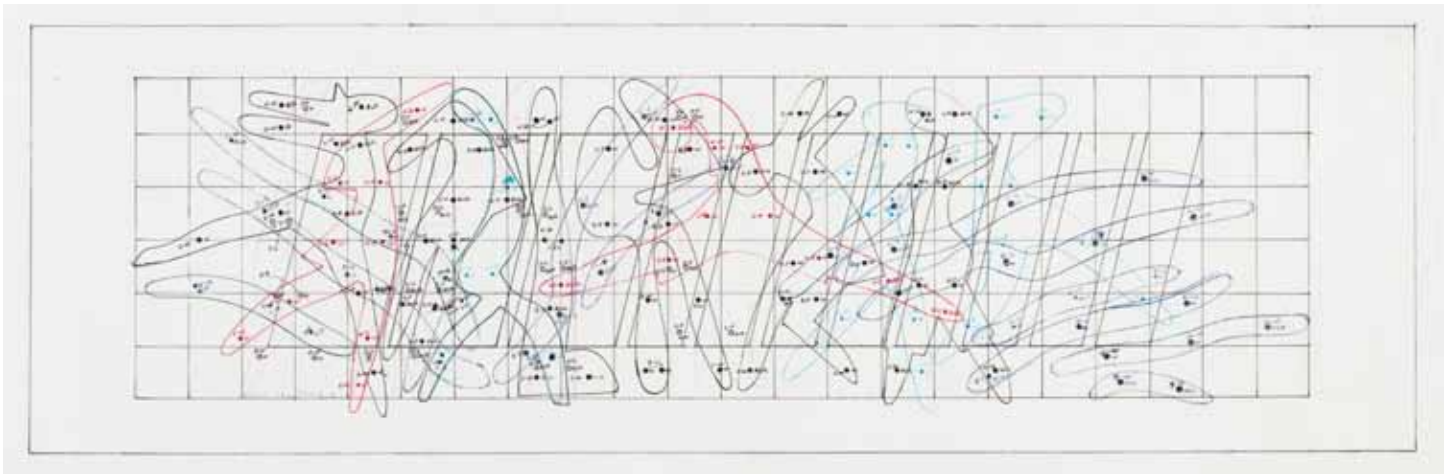
Time Modules II, 2005
Mixed media on Dibond, 33" x 71"



Black Opus, 2005
Mixed media on board, 26" x 23"
Mott-Warsh Collection



Celebration, 2007
Enamel, paper and fabric collage, 60" x 84"



Elevation Drawing for Regeneration, c. 2006
Drawing markers and paper, 15" x 30"



Rhapsody in Black & White, 2008
Ultraviolet inkjet spray system on Dibond, 60" x 108"



Wedding Patterns, 2008

India ink and Sharpie marker, 48" x 180"

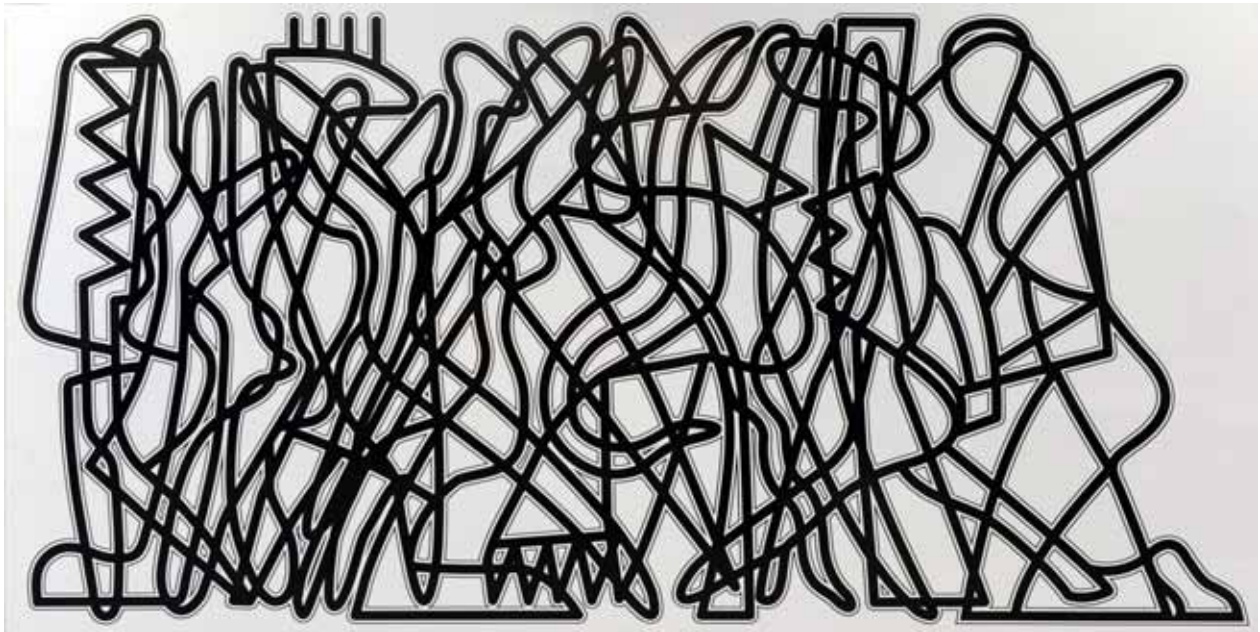
Nick and Leah Sousanis

At its core, all of Charles's art is about life, as he intimately infuses the work with his own endless exuberance for exploring the possibilities life offers. In its movement and rhythm, the composition resonates with the joyous and celebratory nature of the day. The patterns dancing across its surface speak to the ritual of change and renewal that is a wedding as two separate lives transform into a new life together. *Wedding Patterns* is a treasured gift of support and love from a dear friend – whose presence on this earth makes all our lives that much richer.

Nick Sousanis & Leah Keller



Play Patterns I, 2009
Enamel, fabric, and mixed media on Dibond, 120" x 60"



Black Echo IV, 2009
Ultraviolet inkjet spray system on Dibond, 60" x 120"



Essence: Concavex, 2009
Powder coated aluminum, 60" x 108"

Charles McGee

BORN

December 15, 1924
Clemson, South Carolina

EDUCATION

1947- 1957
Society of Arts and Crafts
(now College for Creative
Studies)
Detroit, Michigan

1968
Escuela Massana
Barcelona, Spain

1968
School of Graphics
Barcelona, Spain

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

1962
Detroit Artists Market
Detroit, Michigan

Howard University
Washington, D.C.

1964
Grinnell Gallery
Detroit, Michigan

1965
Arts Extended Gallery
Detroit, Michigan

1966
Arwin Galleries
Detroit, Michigan

1968
Oak Park Public Library
Oak Park, Michigan

1970
Eastern Michigan University
Ypsilanti, Michigan

1974
New Works
Gallery 7
Detroit, Michigan

1977
Pontiac Creative Arts Center
Pontiac, Michigan

1980
*Life, Death and the Middle
Ground*
Midland Center for the Arts
Midland, Michigan

1989
A Sustained Vision
Detroit Focus Gallery
Detroit, Michigan

1990
Siena Heights College
Adrian, Michigan

1991
Eastern Michigan University
Ypsilanti, Michigan

1994
Muskegon Museum of Art
Muskegon, Michigan

Seeing Seventy
The Detroit Institute of Arts
Detroit, Michigan

Dennos Museum Center
Traverse City, Michigan

2002
Muskegon Museum of Art
Muskegon, Michigan

2009
*Energy: Charles McGee at
Eighty-Five*
Eastern Michigan University
Ypsilanti, Michigan

2010
*Energy: Charles McGee at
Eighty-Five*
College for Creative Studies
Detroit, Michigan

2011
*2 Centuries, 3 Decades, 28
Works by Charles McGee*
Marshall M. Fredericks
Sculpture Museum
University Center, Michigan

PUBLIC COMMISSIONS

1974
Urban Wall Mural Program
New Detroit, Inc.
Detroit, Michigan

1978
Michigan Arthritis
Foundation
Detroit, Michigan

1978
Michigan Foundation for the
Arts
Midland, Michigan

1982
Eastern Michigan University
Ypsilanti, Michigan

1982
Martin Luther King
Community Center
Detroit, Michigan

1984
The Detroit Institute of Arts
Detroit, Michigan

1985-86
Northern High School
Detroit, Michigan

1987
People Mover Mural,
Broadway Station
Detroit, Michigan

1989
East Lansing City Hall
East Lansing, Michigan

1990
Central Michigan University
Mount Pleasant, Michigan

1990s
Karmanos Cancer Center
Detroit, Michigan

1994
Central State University
Wilberforce, Ohio

1993
Bishop Airport Authority
Flint, Michigan

2004
Beaumont Hospital
Royal Oak, Michigan

2007
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan

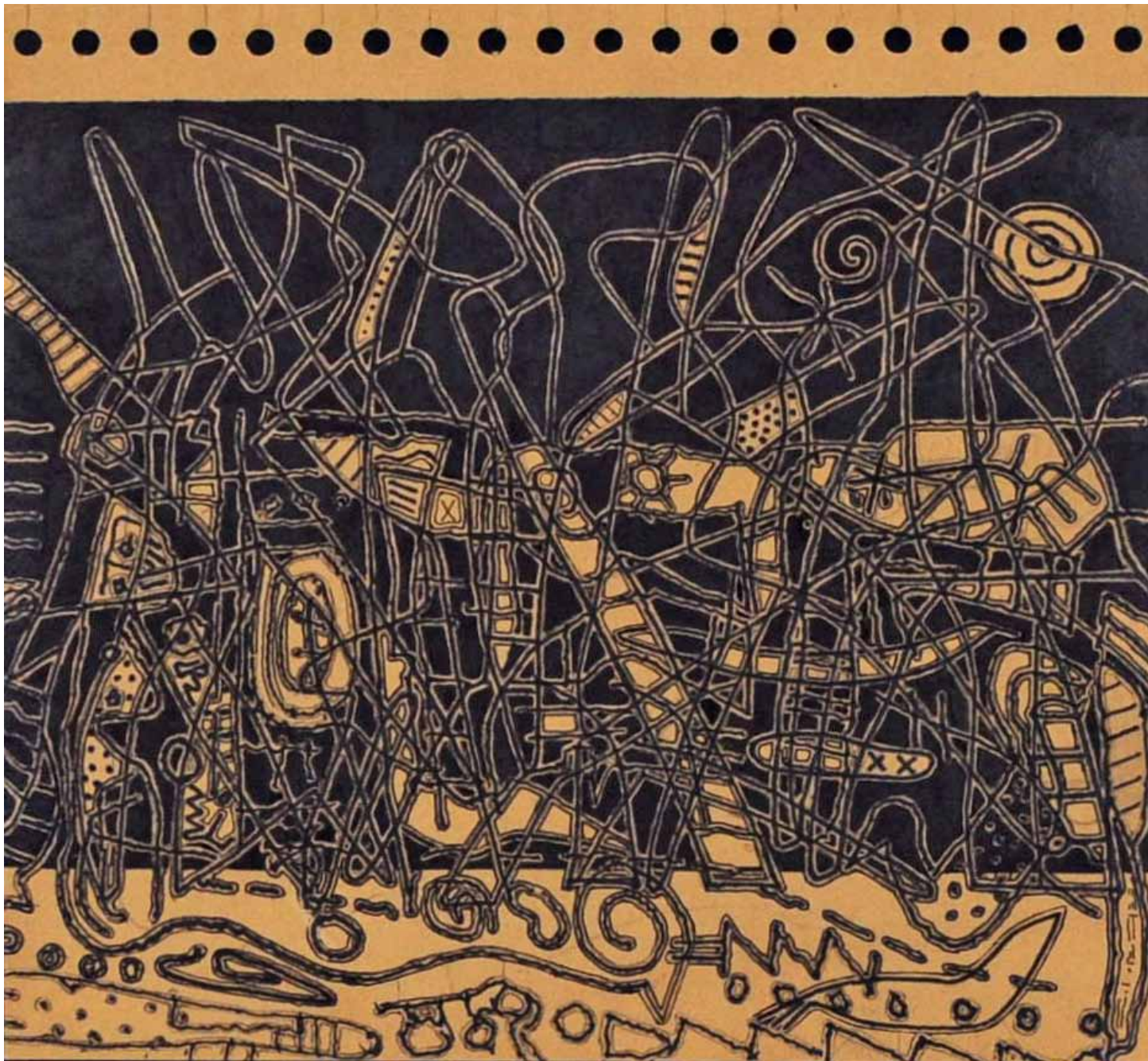
Henry Ford Hospital
Detroit, Michigan

2008
Eastern Michigan University
Ypsilanti, Michigan

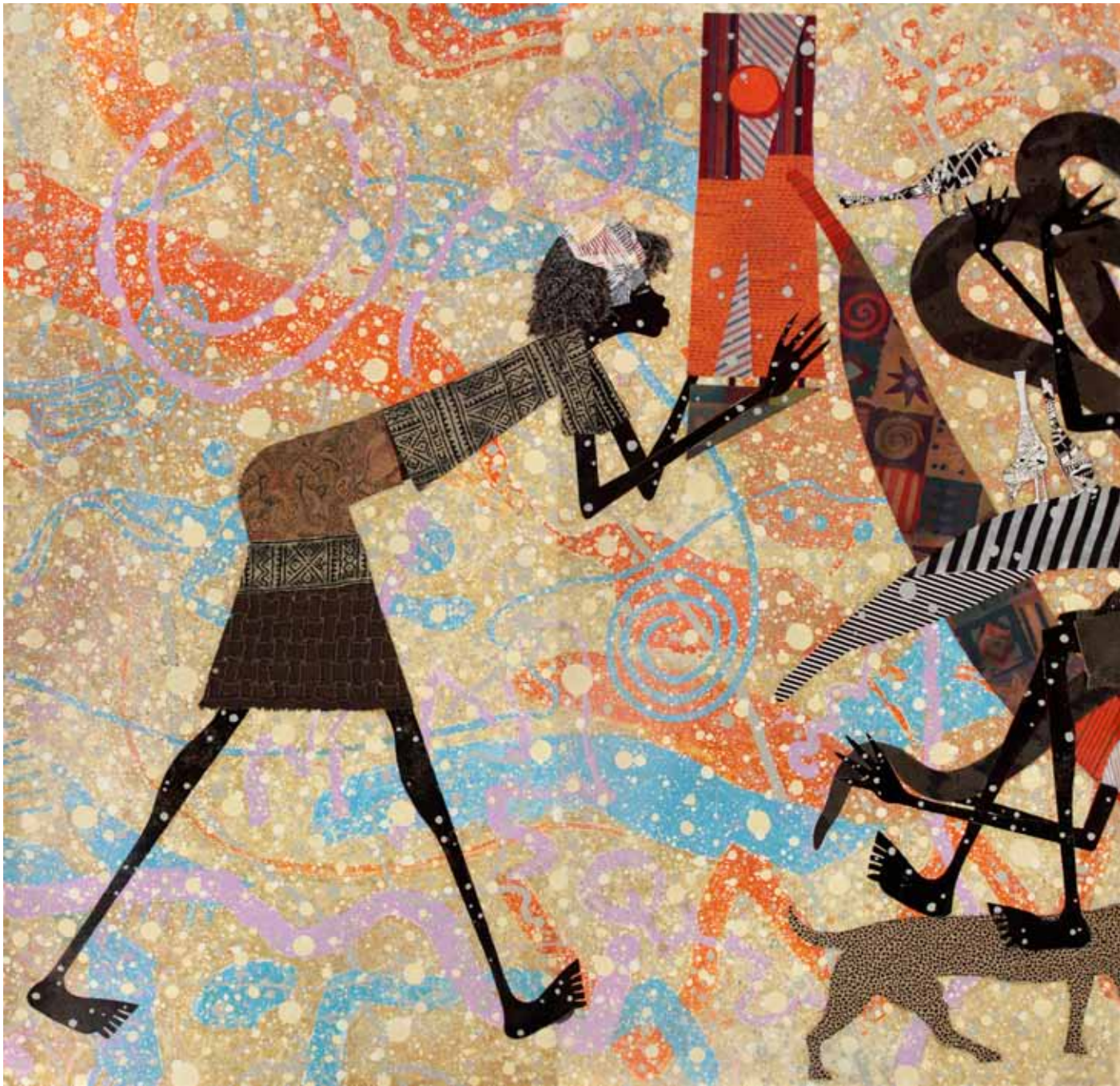
2011
Kresge Foundation for
Art X Detroit
Troy, Michigan



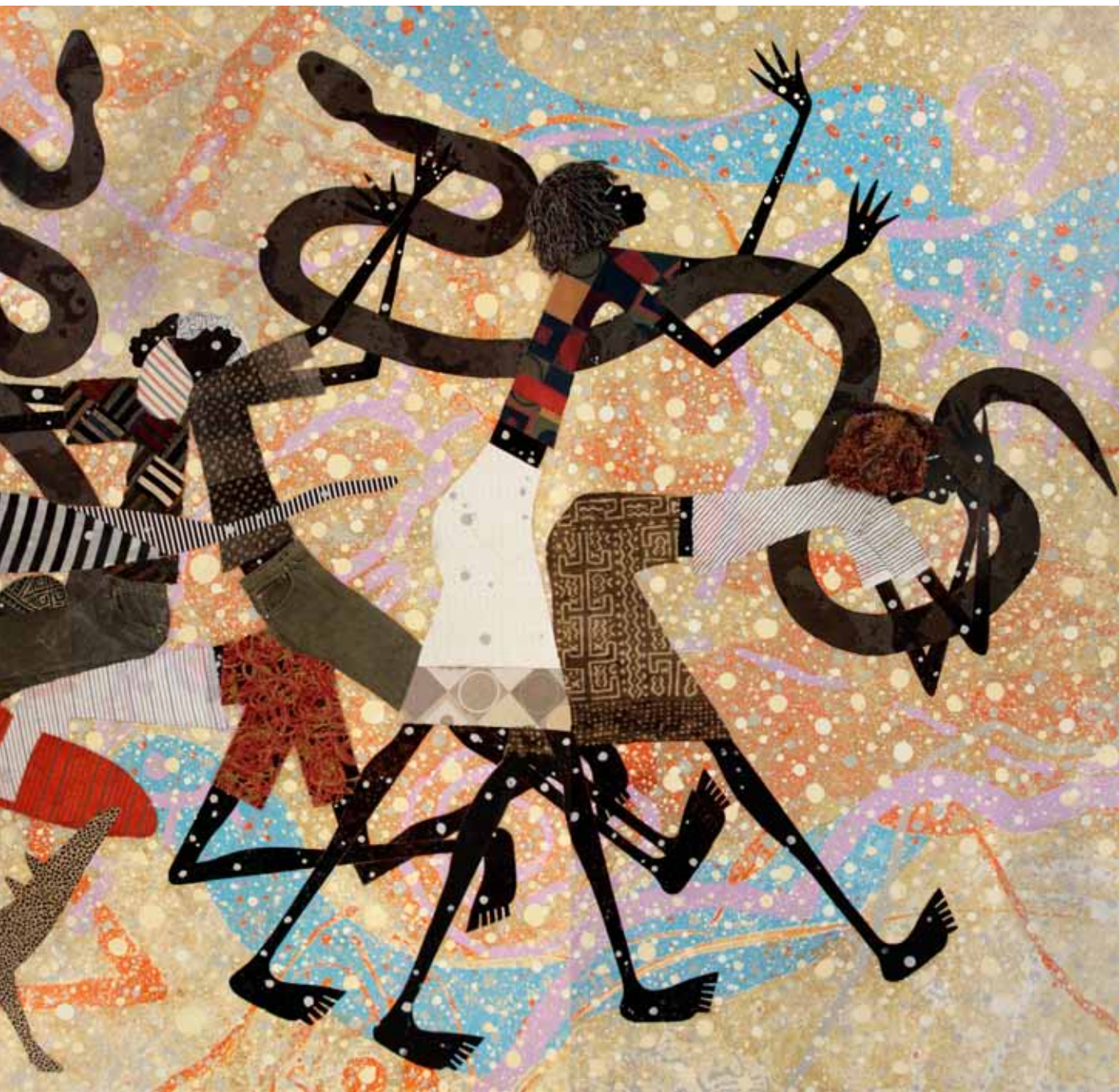
Night Whispers I, 2010
Ink drawing, 9 3/4" x 10"



Night Whispers II, 2010
Ink drawing, 9 3/4" x 10"



Play Patterns II, 2010-2011
Enamel, fabric, and mixed media on Dibond, 120" x 240"



Acknowledgments

I wish to thank the many collectors of Charles McGee's work who loaned one or more works of art to the exhibition: Dr. Elie and Eileen Aboulafia, Linda Allen, The Detroit Institute of Arts, Daniel Hoops, Joan Lovell, Art and Tina McCullar, Charles McGee, April McGee, the Mott-Warsh Collection, Bernard and Florence Schreier, Nettie Seabrooks, Nick and Leah Sousanis, and Jennifer Yanover. Your generosity makes this exhibition memorable.

I also want to thank Julie R. Myers, curator and author of *Energy: Charles McGee at Eighty-five*, for her support and willingness to assist me with identifying these collectors.

Shortly after Bill Harris agreed to write a poetic essay for the catalogue, he was awarded the Kresge Foundation's 2011 Eminent Artist Award, joining Charles McGee in a prestigious lineup of just three such awards to date. I am honored and proud to have these two distinguished artists represented through images and words on the preceding pages.

I am very grateful to Labadie Auto Company for assistance in getting the clear coating applied to *Play Patterns II* once it left McGee's studio and for transporting it to the Museum.

As with every exhibition, financial support is a requirement. This exhibition would not have been possible without generous support from the Bay Area Community Foundation, the Midland Area Community Foundation, and the Saginaw Community Foundation.

Marilyn L. Wheaton

Director, Marshall M. Fredericks Sculpture Museum

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While in the process of creating *Play Patterns II*, a 10' x 20' mixed media work of art, I was hospitalized due to a stroke. The pressure of a June 1, 2011 deadline for the completion of this artwork was most troubling for me. Aware of my predicament, many students and friends volunteered to assist in any way possible.

To Linda Allen, Christina Haylett and Sarah Kalikow who volunteered to work with me so diligently and with such dedication, I owe many special thanks and a thousand debts of gratitude for a job well done.

Charles McGee

Credits

Writers

Bill Harris

Charles McGee

Nick Sousanis and Leah Keller

Marilyn L. Wheaton

Catalog Design

Andrea Ondish

Photography

Michelle Andonian

Photograph appearing on the front cover.

Adam Baudoux

Photographs appearing on pages 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 21, 22, 24, 25

Geoffe Haney

Photographs appearing on pages 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 20, 26, 27

Loretta Markell

Photograph appearing on page 3.

Tim Thayer

Photographs appearing on page 19 and 22.

The Detroit Institute of Arts

Photograph appearing on page 4.

The Detroit News Archives

Photograph appearing on the back cover.

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Midland Area Community Foundation

Saginaw Community Foundation

Unless otherwise noted, all works reproduced in this catalog are in the collection of Charles McGee.

All dimensions are given with height preceding width preceding depth unless otherwise noted.



Marshall M. Fredericks
SCULPTURE MUSEUM

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www.marshallfredericks.org
Museum hours: Monday-Saturday, 12-5 pm