

10-1-1983

## Gallery: Phyllis Cunningham: Rhythms of Vision

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### Recommended Citation

Staff, Editorial (1983) "Gallery: Phyllis Cunningham: Rhythms of Vision," *New Directions*: Vol. 11: Iss. 1, Article 10.

Available at: <https://dh.howard.edu/newdirections/vol11/iss1/10>

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reveals a catholic depth hidden by the constraints of the poetic idiom.

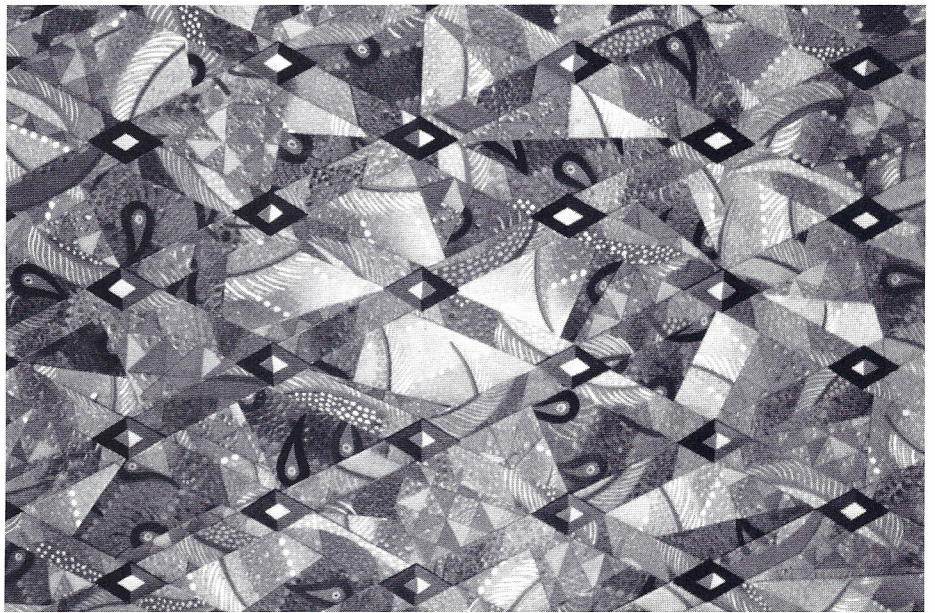
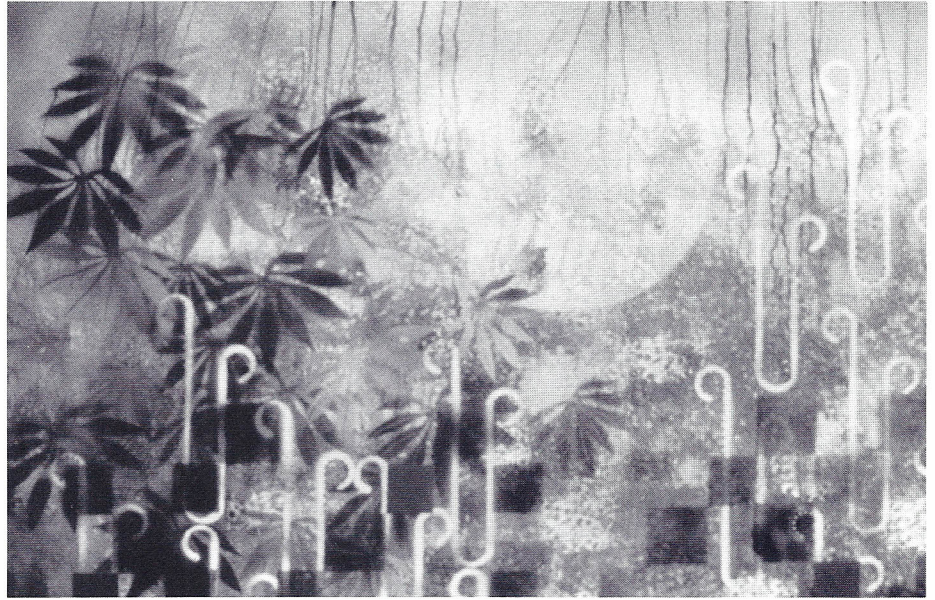
Those of us who have heard her read understand her magnificent and enterprising stage presence. Hers is an act of giving rather than receiving. And in each performance we get a little closer, a microscopic glimpse of all the elements that go into the "impeccable conception" of the poem.

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As the northern coordinator for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference from 1960-61 at the invitation of Dr. Martin Luther King, Angelou was politically active at a time when the alliance of art and politics was beginning to be nourished in Black America. It was during this time that she met and married a South African nationalist and went to live in Egypt and then Ghana. She returned to the United States in 1966 where she acted in Jean Anouilh's *Medea* in Hollywood. She also wrote and produced a 10-part PBS series on African traditions in American life. Angelou had never considered writing about herself until a dinner conversation with James Baldwin. Soon after, she found herself writing the story of her childhood, which was to become the award-winning, *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings*. The rest is history.

After Random House published *Caged Bird* in 1970, three more volumes of autobiography followed: *Gather Together In My Name* (1974), *Singing' and Swinging' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas* (1976) and *The Heart of a Woman* (1981).

"I speak to the Black experience," she once explained, "but I am always talking about the human condition — about what we can endure, dream, fail at and still survive." Marguerite Johnson (Maya Angelou) will survive because her writing will. And that's the real prize. □

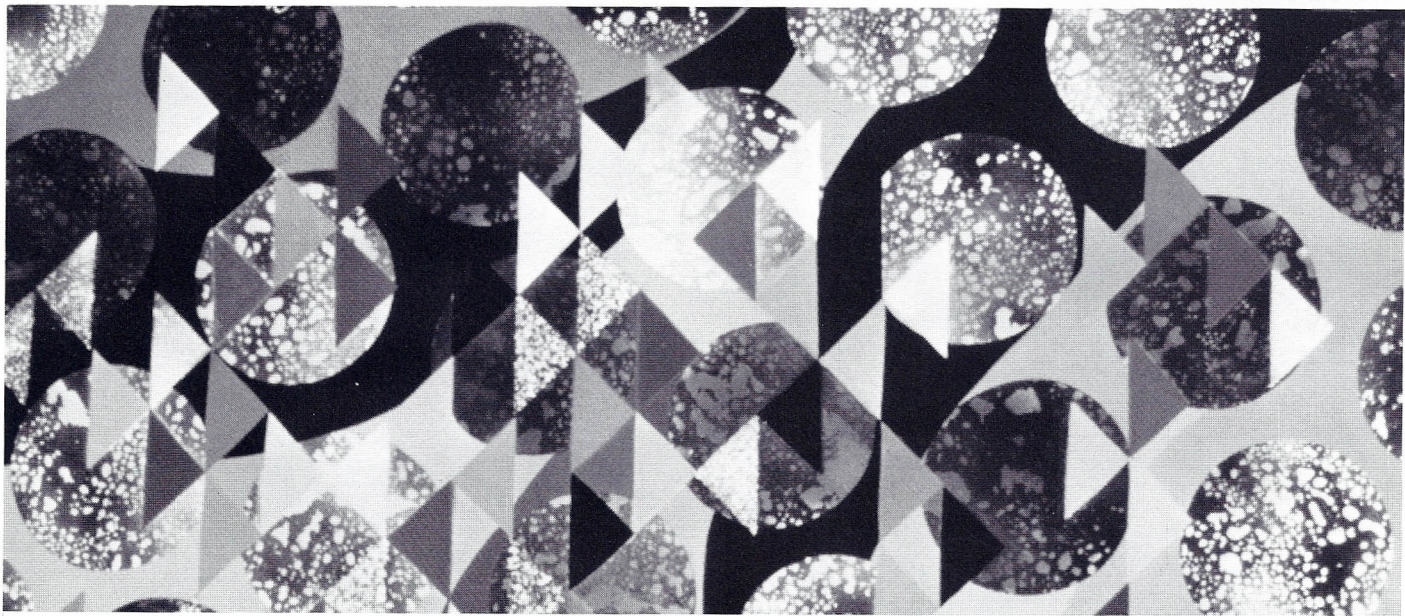
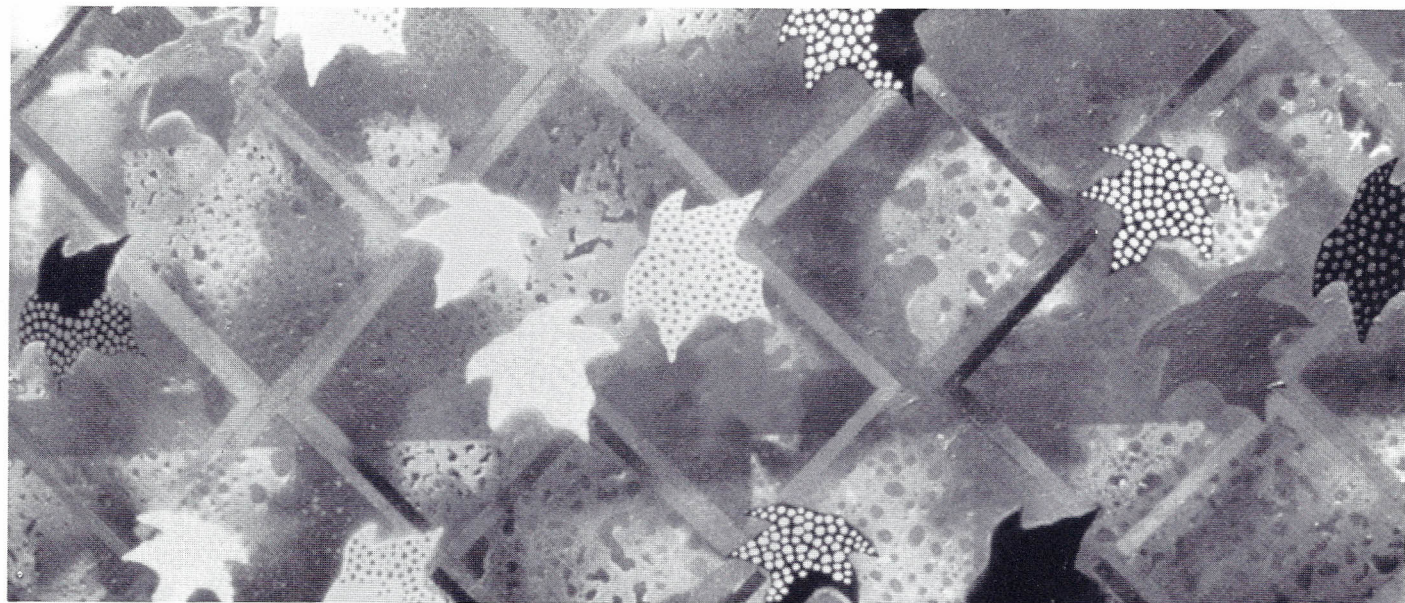


## Phyllis Cunningham: Rhythms of Vision

Using a basic visual vocabulary of circles, triangles and squares, Phyllis Cunningham creates rhythmic patterns on canvas.

The rhythmic feeling she communicates through her repetition of these geometric shapes has been inspired by the brilliant overlapping patterns found in the traditional clothing of Senegalese women, by the counterpoints of music and by the precision of mathematics.





Cunningham, who holds both a B.F.A. and M.F.A. from Howard University, recently returned from Senegal where she spent two years as a Fulbright scholar researching traditional African textiles, pattern design and contemporary African art. "I had reached a point in my development where I needed to go to Africa just for more information," she says. "My work was very decorative, very colorful and was leaning toward pattern design. I knew that the cultures that mainly were dealing with geometric pattern were African and I knew that Senegal, in particular, was very big in tapestry-making."

The basic belief underlying Cunningham's art is at once simple and profound: *in all life there is rhythm*. "Being in Africa reinforced this belief," she says, "because there are less distractions there. You're close to the water so you feel the waves coming in and out. . . . You're in an environment where you have constant rhythm but you can separate the rhythm."

While in Senegal, Cunningham held well-received exhibits of her mixed media works [e.g. oil, spray paint, ink, soap and water, acrylic, crayon, wash.] Several of these works are now included in the permanent collections of the American Cultural Center, the United States Embassy and the Leopold Sedar Senghor Foundation, all in Dakar. □

(see more of Cunningham; mixed media paintings on cover 3)