

DEC. 1974

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Dear Mrs Stoetling:

This is just to inform you that I have mailed to you several pieces of literature which I hope you can find useful in your study. Among them is a statement on the Atlanta period. It follows as nearly as possible the outline which you had sent.

I am indeed sorry for the long delay in getting this material off to you. You are naturally free to omit ~~the~~ any of it and edit it as you see fit as long as the basic substance is retained. Good luck to you and

best wishes for the coming year.

Very sincerely,

Hale Woodruff

December 6, 1974. (1)

The late Dr. John Hope, then Pres. of Atlanta University, invited me to come to A.U. in 1931 to assume position of Teacher of art. My primary assignment was the Laboratory School which functioned on the high school level as a demonstration school for those in the A.U. system who would eventually go into teaching. Also students from Spelman & Morehouse came under my guidance for art instruction on the college level. In addition I taught art in the elementary classes at the Oglethorpe school. These classes began at the 1st. grade and continued on up to 9-10-11^{grades} levels; as I now remember, I was a "one-man" art department, so to speak.

The students from Morehouse & Spelman were very serious & purposeful. They had always wanted to study art and this they took advantage of; the first art offerings in the then new A.U. "affiliation". Many of these students went on to distinguish

themselves in some areas of the arts: (2)

Josephine Harrell Love, Carol Blanton, Marjorie Wheeler Brown, Ernestine Coles, Wilma Jennings, Curtis Cage, Eugene Grigsby, etc etc. Also Vernon Winslow the Weaver brothers, Mary Parks, Jennie Walden, and many others.

Some years later the Lab. School was discontinued and I devoted my time only to the college students. The program I conducted included, drawing, painting, print making, art history, stage craft, lettering, design. Most if not all of these "courses" were offered in the basement of Laura Spelman Hall, and were held "simultaneously," that is, everything in the form of studio art went on at the same time during the class. For at the time most of the classes were relatively small in size.

On those days when weather permitted a group of the students and I would go on sketching + painting trips into the areas

in and around Atlanta. In the country (3)
-side we noted the prevalence of the "out-
houses". Some how we always seemed to
include one in our paintings. Later "Time"
magazine when learning of this, called it
(us) the "out house" school of art. ~~It~~

The late Ralph McGill, then editor
of the Atlanta Constitution was always
sympathetic to our efforts and frequently
carried articles on us. ~~He~~ We did at-
tract a small degree of attention.

During the first weeks of my being in
Atlanta I made inquiries about the Art
Museum. I was directed to the High
Museum which was then housed in an old
residence bldg. Upon arrival there I was
to meet the then Director, a Mr. McKee, I
believe. He was most cordial and we had
a long chat which lasted nearly 2 hours.
Upon leaving the bldg. the janitor was on
the outside sweeping the sidewalk. As I
bade him good by he said, "you know that
beside me you are the first colored man

to walk through that front door during ⁽⁴⁾
the whole 20 years I've been working here."
My reply to him was, "that may be so but
I doubt that I'll be the last one."

Contact with the High Museum con-
tinued, tho' spottily. I took my own
classes there on occasion and lectured
to them on exhibits which were held. At
one time the late Grant Wood ("American
Gothic" painter) came to lecture there. I
called to inquire about a "ticket" of admis-
sion to the lecture and was told I could
not come. Upon learning of this Grant Wood
called me a day or two later and asked to
visit me at Spelman. He came and we
spent the day together. He apologized for the
turn of events, appearing not to understand
why I could not attend his lecture at the
High Museum.

As time went on we continued to have our student shows at The A. U. Library. In addition we were able to book travelling shows circulated by the American Federation of Arts and from other sources.

I had always been aware of the absence of work by Negro Artists, however. This situation led me to the idea of an all-Negro Annual to be held at A. U. for the purpose of (1) offering the Negro Artist a place to show (2) giving him an opportunity to earn a little money thru purchase prizes and (3) to establish a collection of art by Negroes at A. U. which would be available to students, schools & other institutions thru-out the country. Behind all this I envisioned A. U. (system) eventually becoming a center of national importance in the arts. Spelman also had a fine program in Music as well as the Theatre. But while we were essentially involved at the time in education for the Negro, I believed, as I had always done, in the notions and concepts of

integration. During these years (decades) ⁽⁶⁾ it
was the goal in most Negroes' lives to achieve
a full measure of integration in American life.
There was the question of how to achieve it.
I saw the Arts (art) as being important
and feasible in this effort. Also how comes
the Negro seek integration in the larger
scheme of things without practicing it in
his own enterprises? In this regard I had
asked the president of A. U. to let down the
bars and invite white artists to submit
their art to our Annual Show of Negro Artists.
This was never agreed to - as the history of
the A. U. Annuals will ~~show~~ ^{indicate}. Also it is a
fact that many Negro Artists refused to con-
tinue to send work to the shows because
of its (A. U.) policy of Negro exclusiveness.

As early as the late 1930's I had pro-
posed to the president of A. U. the idea of

~~expanding the scope of the annuals to include white artists~~

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Painting a mural on the walls of the A. U. Library. This was met with a kind of "let's wait and see" attitude. I persisted. It was in the mid-1940's that I got the green light. A series of sketches was submitted by me and approved by the administration & Trustees. But upon undertaking the production of the murals, I felt differently about the idea I was to develop and got a new concept. It was approved by the president without my submitting new sketches. The present mural(s) now in the Library consist of that new concept. I consider it the better of those murals I have painted. It is useful here to state why I chose the theme of "Art of the Negro" for the murals.

(1) I felt that this subject would evoke interest on the part of all students in the A. U. Center since so little was known of it.

(2) It was a kind of homage or gesture.

To the African artist of the past in recognition of his genius and artistry as a sculptor whose work (3.) is on a par with all great sculpture of all time. It ranks with the best that history has given us. It is the Negro's heritage of which he should be eternally proud.

Much is said today about Black art. In any opinion the only true Black art is that produced by the African altho it is not called black art. It is true in the sense that it is unique as an art form and it derives essentially from a true African (black) point of view. In America there are black artists - but their art does not possess the uniqueness of the African artist. Which is not to say our art should look like that of the African. But rather it should have some kind of distinguishing features so to it as an art form in its own unique sense.

in order to be referred to, justifiably, as Black. (9)

It should be noted that A. U. never had, as a separate educational institution, an art program in studio art or art history during the years I taught in Atlanta. The Negro Annual art shows were initiated as a result of a felt need - not out of any existing art program which I or anyone else was conducting at that University.

All the arts were offered at Spelman. Because of the affiliation students from Morehouse also took courses at Spelman and their credits transferred to their records at Morehouse. My appointment was essentially to Spelman except for those few years when I also taught at Oglethorpe elementary and Laboratory High schools. Oglethorpe and Lab. High were conducted under the aegis of the A. U. administration.

The A. U. art Annuals should be remembered as contributing to a great extent to the encouragement and recognition of the Negro artist today in America. Many of them were, in a sense, "launched" into varying degrees of prominence thru the Annuals.

NYC, December, 1974

- Helen Woodruff