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A RETROSPECTIVE

RESOURCE GUIDE

Rochelle Nicholas-Booth Curator of Education California Afro-American Museum Los Angeles, California

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Resource Guide

Rochelle Nicholas-Booth, Essayist Nancy McKinney, Editor Studio Kidogo Design, Graphic Design Sammy Davis, Photography

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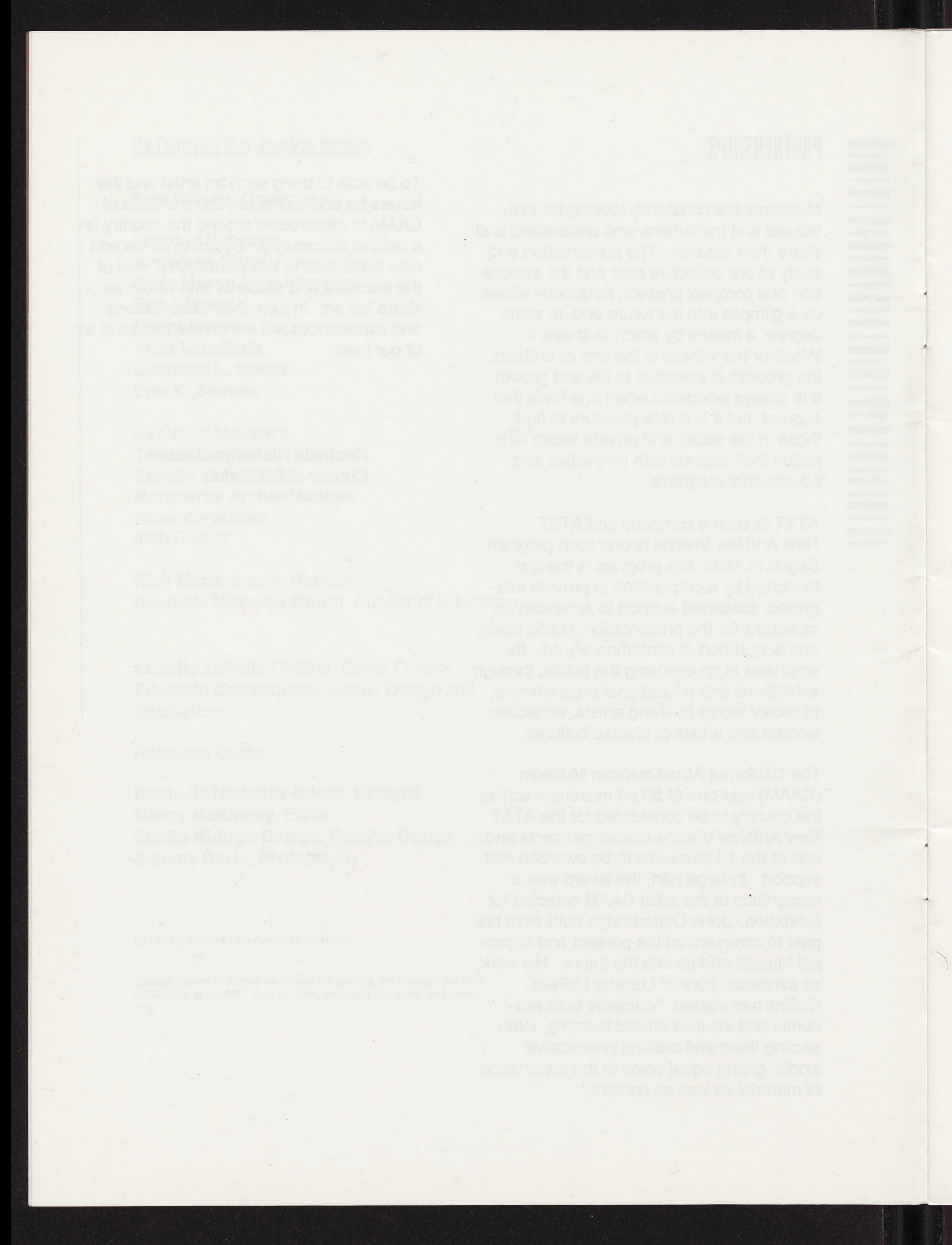
Special thanks to Nancy McKinney for guiding me through my first publication at CAAM. And to John, for being the artist and friend. R.N.

Museums are constantly looking for individuals and institutions who understand and share their mission. The preservation and study of our collective past and the exploration of a complex present, frequently allows us a glimpse into the future and, to some degree, a means by which to shape it. Whether the vehicle is the arts or artifacts, the process is essential to life and growth. It is always wonderful when one finds that support, but it is a rare pleasure to find those in the public and private sector who match their interest with innovative and educational programs. To be able to bring such an artist and the issues he addresses beyond the walls of CAAM to classrooms around the country is a unique opportunity. By doing so we add a new dimension to this partnership, that of the teachers and students with whom we share his art. In turn, their observations and experiences will enrich the texture of all of our lives.

Rochelle Nicholas-Booth Curator of Education

AT&T is such a company and AT&T New Art/New Visions is one such program. Begun in 1992, this program is the first launched by a corporation to provide integrated, sustained support to American art museums for the presentation, public study, and acquisition of contemporary art. Its emphasis is on exposing the public, through exhibitions and educational programming, to recent works by living artists, especially women and artists of diverse cultures.

The California Afro-American Museum (CAAM) was one of 50 art museums across the country to be considered for the AT&T New Art/New Visions challenge grants and one of the 10 museums to be awarded that support. In large part, the award was a recognition of the artist CAAM selected for exhibition. John Outterbridge pulls from his past to comment on the present and to propel himself and us into the future. His work, as exhibition curator Lizzetta LeFalle-Collins has started, "validates both academic and intuitive artistic learning, intersecting them and crafting provocative works, giving equal voice to the importance of material as well as content."





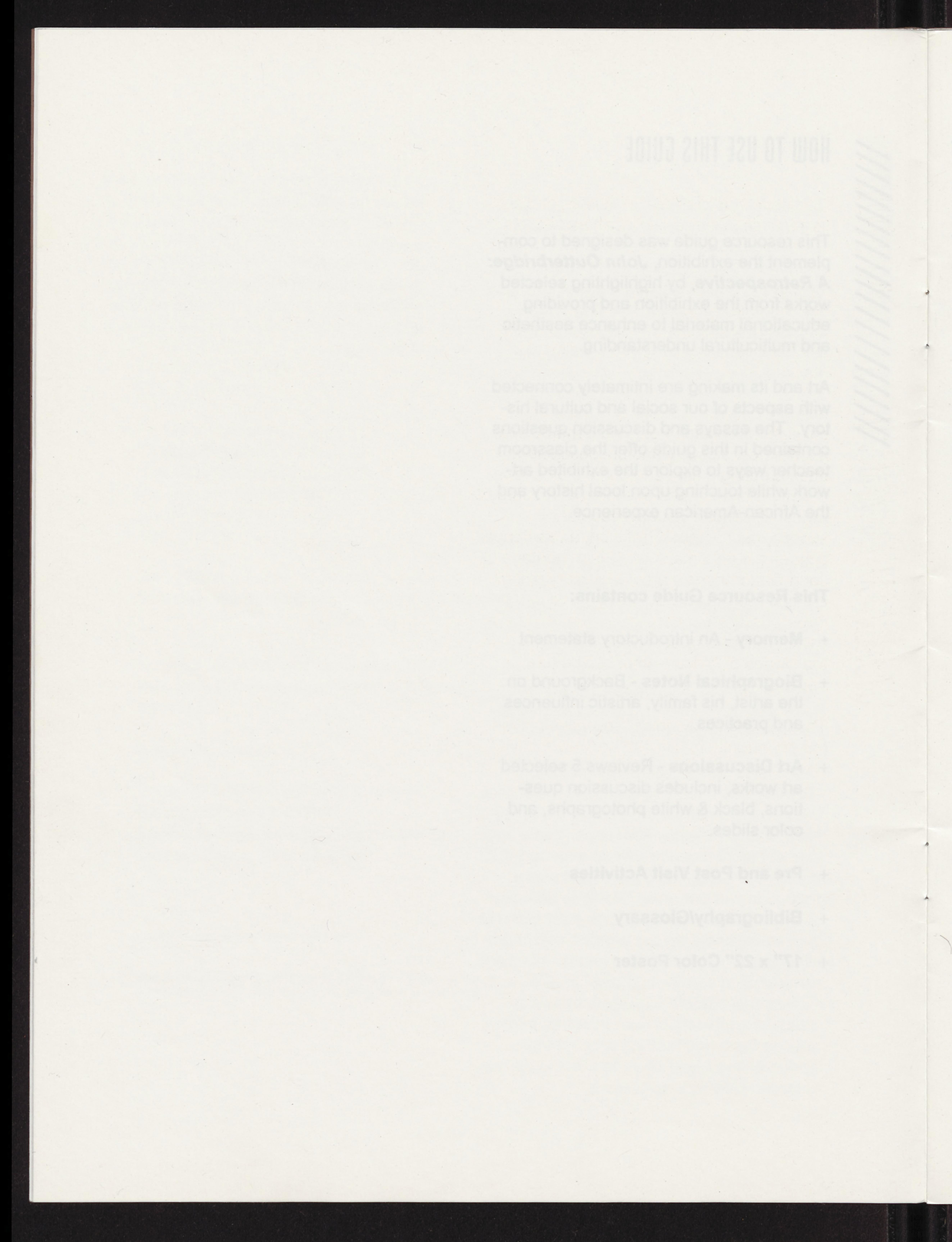
This resource guide was designed to complement the exhibition, *John Outterbridge: A Retrospective*, by highlighting selected works from the exhibition and providing educational material to enhance aesthetic and multicultural understanding.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Art and its making are intimately connected with aspects of our social and cultural history. The essays and discussion questions contained in this guide offer the classroom teacher ways to explore the exhibited artwork while touching upon local history and the African-American experience.

This Resource Guide contains:

- + Memory An introductory statement
- Biographical Notes Background on the artist, his family, artistic influences and practices.
- Art Discussions Reviews 5 selected art works, includes discussion questions, black & white photographs, and color slides.
- + Pre and Post Visit Activities
- + Bibliography/Glossary
- + 17" x 22" Color Poster

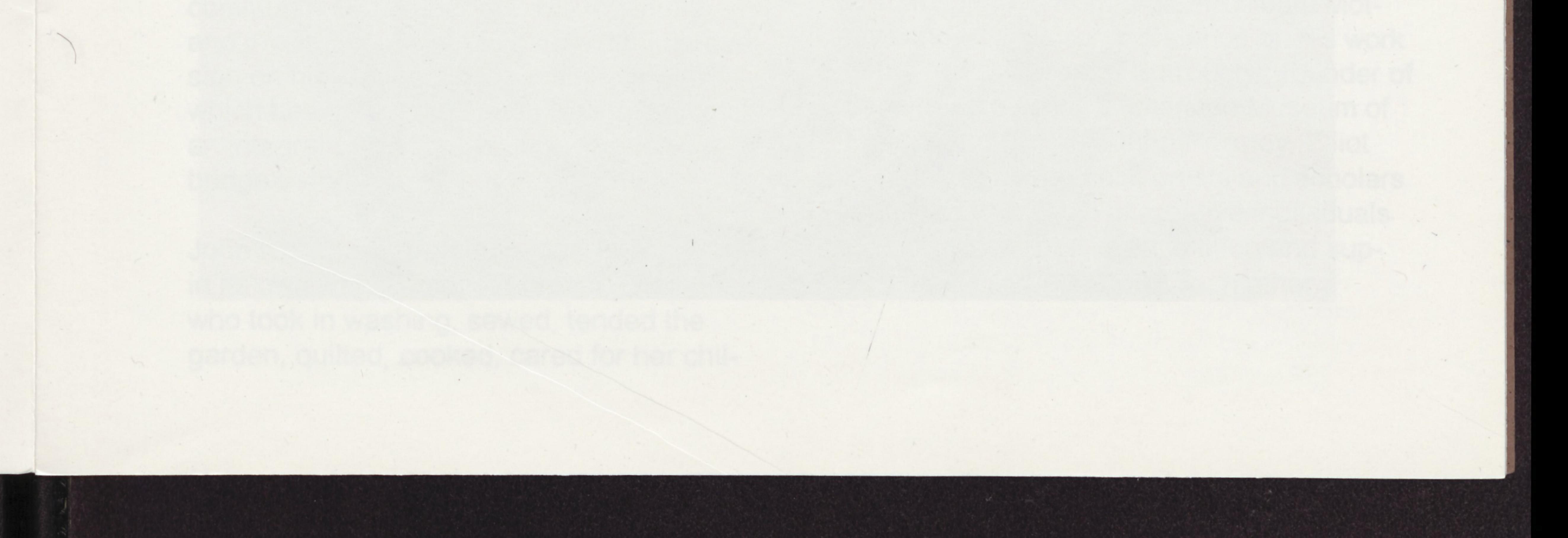


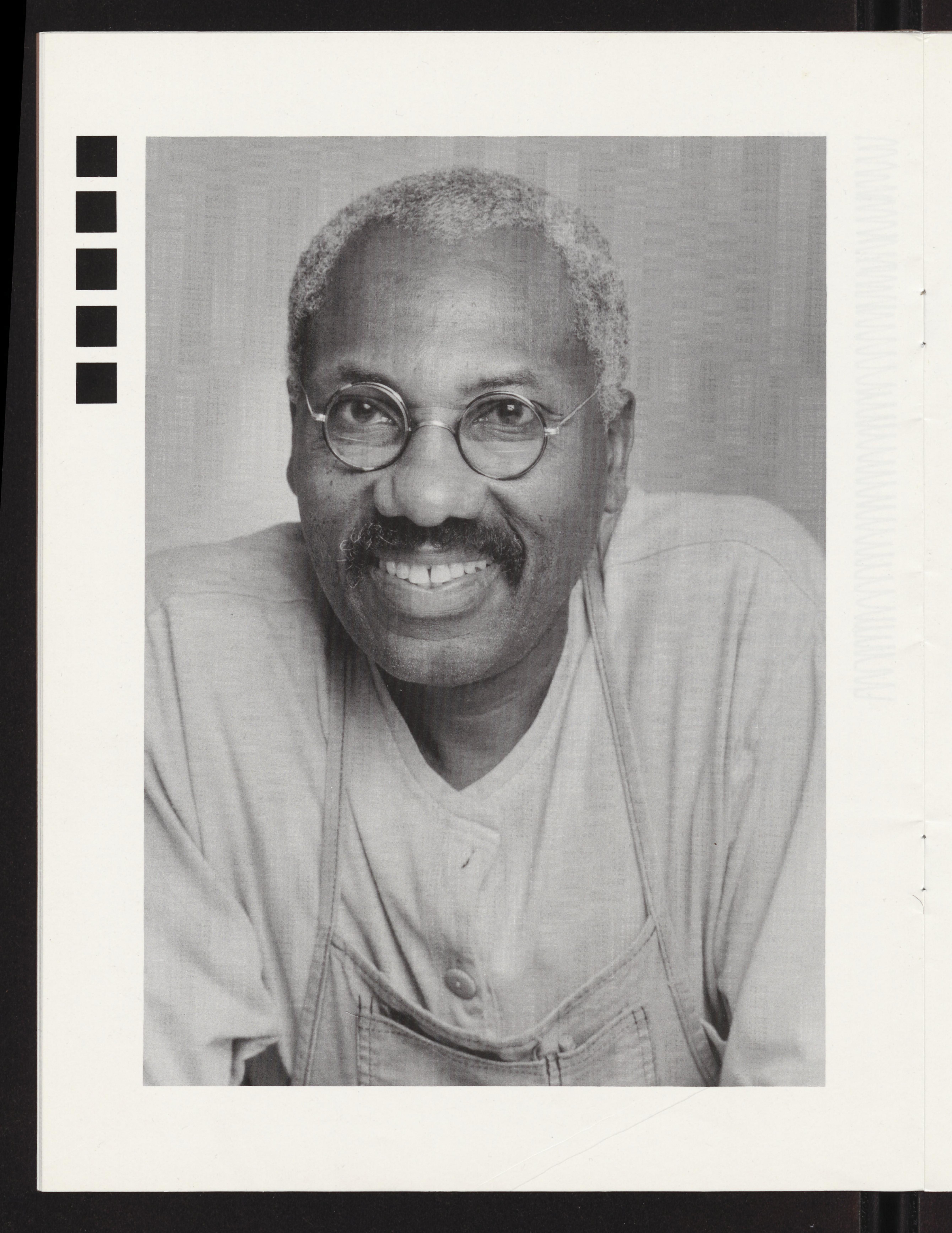
MEMORY

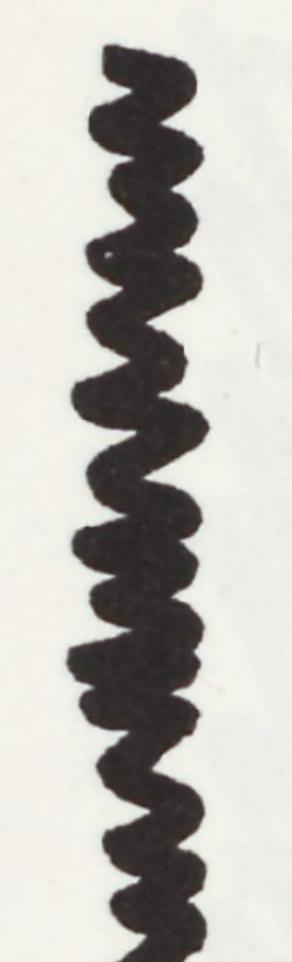
Our memory is our lifeline. It is an ancient storehouse in which we secret all aspects of ourselves and from which we constantly reclaim that which defines us. Memory is . . . my mother's eyes, my father's hair, my grandmother's intelligence, my grandfather's way of doing things; it is the anthem and the heart beat by which we discover our world.

Memory bridges the past with the present, passing information from one generation to another, consciously and unconsciously, often creating a time and context of its own. Creativity draws upon this internal resource. African American visual vocabulary, speech, dance, music, religion, and science echoes the rhythms of its African heritage. John Outterbridge's artistic memory discovers and rediscovers this heritage root, through subject and material. He crafts visual narratives of a personal history that hold the stories of African-American culture, never forgetting the magic or the pain.

Through this study guide, you will be given the opportunity to glimpse not only the life and work of one man, but the legacy of countless others.







BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES John Outterbridge

John Outterbridge's beginnings are grounded in the southern matrix where elements of African culture were richly retained in small, rural, continuously Black communities. dren, and still found the time to write poetry and play the piano. The intermingling of life/work/art by both parents fits the improvisation of a creative moment and laid a fertile ground for their son's artistic growth.

Outterbridge's formal training in art began in high school in North Carolina where he studied art history and took part in craft fairs. He studied engineering in college but after one year, he postponed his studies to join the United States Army. While stationed in Europe for two years, he was greatly influenced by his surroundings: the art, architecture, and museums. He was able to continue his study and practice of art in a very practical way, by painting in the streets and providing art for military installations.

Born in Greenville, North Carolina in 1933, Outterbridge was nurtured by an environment rich in patina, sound and form - Tar River, gospel choirs, tin-roofed, weathered houses, Beethoven, babies crying, old folk telling tales, laughter, Scott Joplin and craft fairs.



The first son of eight siblings, 3 girls and 5 boys, he was always in the embrace of an extended family community. It is within this context that Black families, like the Outterbridges, survived the harsh pre civil rights era in the United States. After his return to the United States, he would later move to Chicago to attend the American Academy of Art, strengthening his fine and applied art skills. (The fine arts had Eurocentric beginnings in the United States. The range of acceptable subjects, processes and aesthetic assumptions, coupled with attitudes of racial distinction, were restrictive for African and African American visual expression. It became essential for Black artists to rely on each other and a shared vision in order to validate and work out their artistic philosophies.)

The senior Outterbride, John Ivery, was an entrepreneur and an independent thinker at a time when the only available employment for African-American men was sharecropping, servitude, or more infrequently, a factory job. Self-employed, he supported his family through hauling, salvaging and refurbishing discarded materials and objects, then making them available to the community when needed. His ingenuity and inventiveness made a marked impression on his son as did the materials with which he worked, and each was to become an integral part of the younger Outterbridge's work.

Chicago in 1956, was a meeting place for artists, writers, poets and musicians. While attending the Academy, Outterbridge gathered inspiration from artist Archibald Motley, who had a strong influence on his work at the time. Margaret Burroughs, founder of the DuSable African-American Museum of History and Culture, John Pinkney, Elliot Hunter and other Black artists and scholars were part of a circle of creative individuals who provided artistic stimulation and support for Outterbridge and each other.

John Ivery's self-determination was match in its own way by that of his wife, Olivia, who took in washing, sewed, tended the garden, quilted, cooked, cared for her chil-



Outterbridge moved to the Los Angeles suburb of Altadena in 1965 with his wife, Beverly McKissick. He began working in urban Los Angeles during the height of the direct-action civil rights era. For many African-American artists, this era reaffirmed their desire to use artistic expression as a means of articulating community concerns.

creator. As a modern art form, this means of making art is called assemblage.

Assemblage is interdisciplinary. It is the process of transforming non-art objects and found materials into sculptures (relief or three dimensional). Often the work can be seen as narratives, meant to tell a story or to comment on the society, frequently emphasizing surrealistic juxtapositions or otherworld qualities.

In Los Angeles emerged a very progressive group of artists who attended to the community, as scholars, advocates, and entrepreneurs. Dr. Samella Lewis became historian, documenting the works of African-American artists. Artist/teacher David Hammonds pushed the parameters of the mono-print, making explosive social commentaries. Alonzo Davis and his brother Dale were co-owners of one of the first Black fine art galleries. Noah Purifoy, who many see as the father of assemblage art among African Americans and a major influence on the movement as a whole, used "artifacts" (in this case debris) from the 1965 Watts Revolt (66 Signs of Neon) to pave the way for "re-invention." Dan Concholar, Van Slater, Betye Saar, Susan Jackson, Elliot Pinkney and John Riddle were all a part of this upward surge, as was John Outterbridge, griot/teacher/artist.

For John Outterbridge, this mix of media and form holds to a tradition which energetically connect personal memory and the stories of our social history with the challenges of today. After sharing his gift for over twenty years as director of two urban community arts centers, Compton Communicative Arts Academy and the Watts Towers Arts Center, he retired as arts administrator in 1992, and is now working on his art full time in his South Central Los Angeles studio/home.

Outterbridge has long been recognized for his skill in creating art from found objects and discarded materials. This manner of art making utilizes the available resources of one's environment, no matter how limited. It is a practice of selection and recovery and speaks to an individual's ability to

survive and create under less than ideal circumstances.

The practice of gathering existing materials and assembling them into new forms has its beginnings in Africa and can be seen in other cultures around the world. Objects created in this manner were often done so with both an aesthetic, ritual/utilitarian purpose and held special meaning for its

SELECTED WORKS

John Outterbridge's assemblages present dualities. They are mysterious, personal compositions that are at the same time familiar and based on our collective history. The earth materials, power icons, ancestral images and themes emerging from Outterbridge's work realize a spiritual and stylistic continuance of the African impulse.

JOHN IVERY: HAULING AWAY TRAPS AND KEEPING YAMS

John Ivery's Truck: Hauling Away Traps and Keeping Yams, is the second of the new ancestral works Outterbridge created in 1993 as a part of a libation ritual to honor his family. The sculpture is a wooden truck, carved of jelotong wood, with found objects used to represent individuals sitting in the cab. The bed of the truck is carrying a cargo of bags and animal traps "symbolic of pitfalls and obstacles in our lives." The truck is a symbol for the father's independence and mobility. Removed from its personal meaning, the truck becomes a pervasive symbol for commerce and industry.

ETHNIC HERITAGE GROUP

CULTURAL CONTEXT

The Ethnic Heritage group consists of ancestral representations which range from personal, family assemblages to more encompassing sculptures that speak to the history of Black American and the African diaspora. This series includes three categories:

Trucks are enduring vehicles. They are a mode of transportation designed to haul various cargo such as rocks, fruit, equipment and sometimes, to carry passengers. The truck, like the train and boat, is a reoccurring symbol in African-American fine and folk art narratives, representing voyage, freedom, escape, movement or a journey of some kind. John Ivery's truck offered freedom of choice and an independent means by which to support his family and to help his friends.

Captive Image, Tribal Dolls, and Ancestors.

John Ivery: Hauling Away Traps and Keeping Yams, 1993



MEDIUM - Mixed

The truck is a wooden, hand-hewed, toylike sculpture. Rather than assembling found materials, Outterbridge has carved the body and wheels. The truck is both urban and suburban, vintage 1940, warmly weathered, and carries a dusty cargo. It is anthropomorphic in composition (the grill of the truck becoming a human face, or an Ibo mask). integration of recognizable human and animal shapes are viewed as an amplification or extension of the essence or spirit of life.

MEDIUM - Mixed

The small irons were constructed from wood and metal, and were painted to look

DISCUSSION

Discuss the impact of the family group.

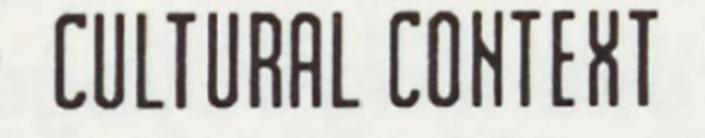
What elements, objects or practices maintain and transfer social history and culture from one generation to another? like old pressing irons. The wooden ironing board and stand are also hand carved.

DISCUSSION

Why are ancestors important?

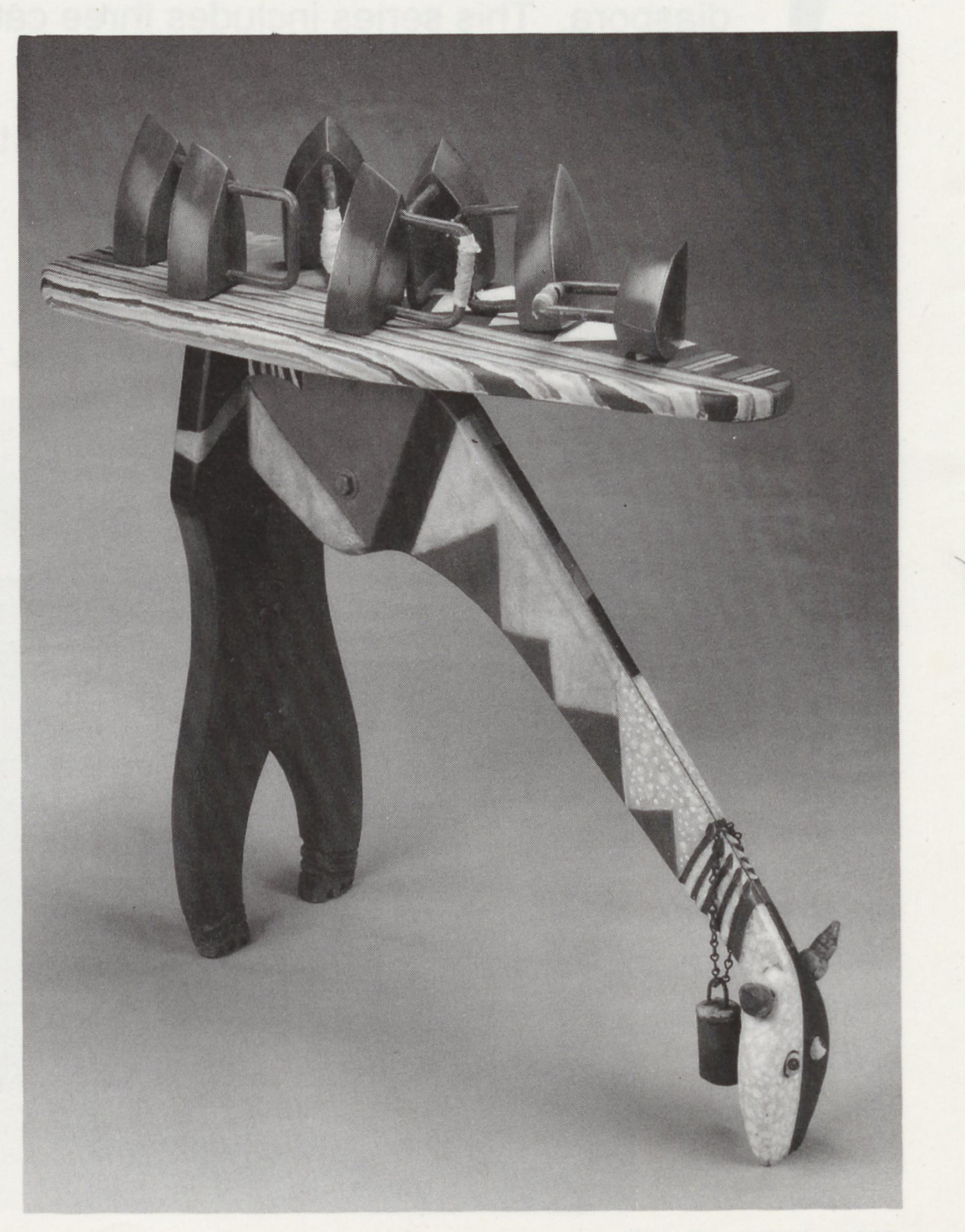
Encourage students to explore their personal and cultural identity by bringing in an object that holds special meaning. Have students discuss and speculate about the meaning and source of various objects.

Create an art work using personal symbols.



FIRST POET, OLIVIA

Included in this packet is the First Poet, Olivia. It is the first work of the new Ancestor series and is in homage to the artist's mother. The work represents the "homemaker" mother, tied to domestic work, yet connected to another, very natural rhythm of self expression. The ironing board takes the form of a stylized enchanted animal with seven irons resting on its back. (The animal form represents a goat that the artist's father received as "a barter payment" for a job he performed. He gave it to his children.) The "goat," shown in a peaceful grazing stance, does not seem at all to be burdened by the weight of the irons.



Here, Outterbridge's use of animal forms is akin to the tradition of West African sculptures, masks and instruments, where the

First Poet, Olivia, 1993

CAPTIVE IMAGE SERIES

CULTURAL CONTEXT

Captive Image is a series within the Ethic Heritage Group. The works are painfully provocative and startlingly real soft sculptures, fashioned from rags, painted canvas, metal and natural fibers. In general, they are truncated, ragged, blindfolded and bound dolls which Outterbridge says "speaks symbolically and from a deep historical/spiritual source about restrictions and possessions." The five sculpture/dolls were created for Outterbridge's daughter to help tell the difficult story of slavery in a manner the artist felt a child could more easily comprehend.

case or radio transmitter. One of the dancer's legs is severed, ending at the knee with a metal and wood prosthesis. The other leg, intact, is delicately touching the ground en pointe. The upper torso of the doll is armless and made of shiny metal parts.

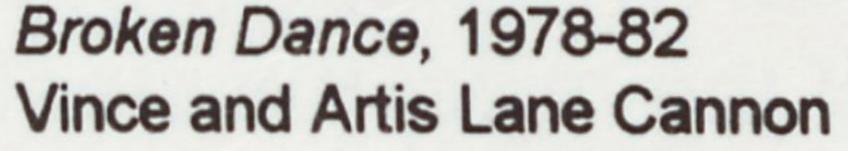
Broken Dance is one of the doll-like sculptures in this series. It is a strong-legged female African dancer seated on top of what seems to be a metal bench, an ammunition

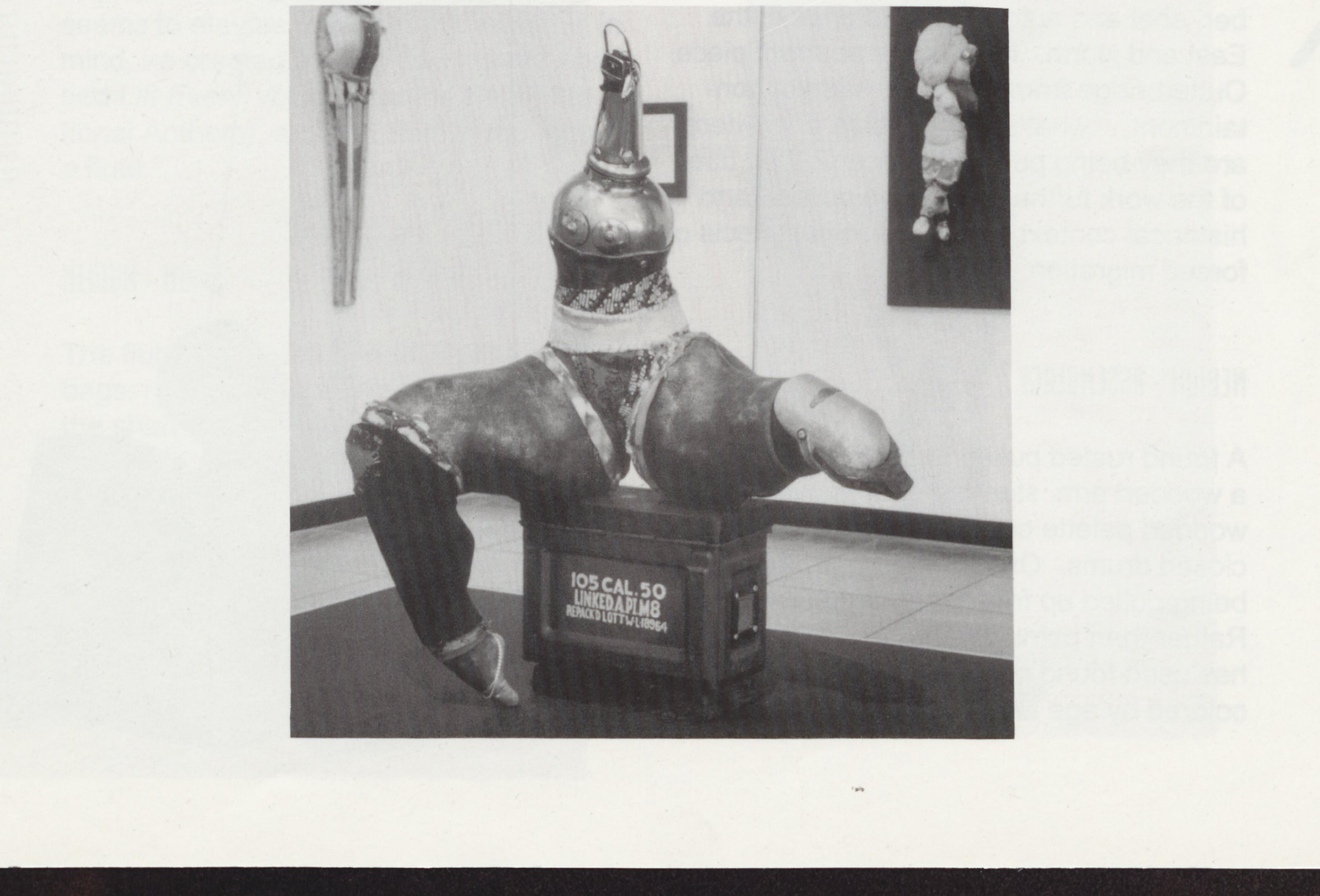
This doll, although mended, is not able to dance.

DISCUSSION

Many of Outterbridge's works make reference to his own life while others draw from historical events and issues. Can you separate the two?

What is the cultural function of toys in our society?





AESTHETICS OF URBAN BLIGHT: A STILL, Steel drum song

CULTURAL CONTEXT

The Aesthetics of Urban Blight series looks at the contrast, quality and impact of ur-

DISCUSSION

Discuss landscape as a reflection of understanding our world. What issues and visual images come to mind when you discuss your landscape or living environment?

banization on our lives. Outterbridge worked in an urban industrial area for many years, and lived for 28 years in the suburbs. Traveling from one region to the other highlighted the contrasts for the artist: asphalt vs. grass, corrugated metal beside picket fences, billboards and palm trees, factories next to homes, parking lots instead of parks and playgrounds, open space vs. closed. The making of *The Aesthetics of Urban Blight* series includes walls, windows and other three dimensional forms.

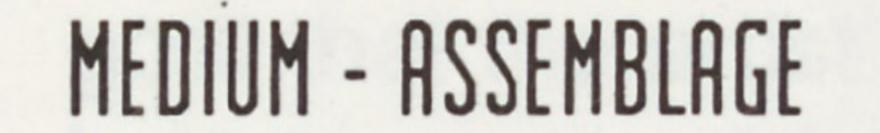
The A Still, Steel, Drum Song, speaks to

Explore the walls and window pieces of the *Urban Blight* series. Discuss the concerns of artists when creating a landscape. Take into consideration what the artist is trying to convey with the use of light, color, and texture.

John Outterbridge consciously titles his work. How does the title of this work relate to the piece and to your understanding of what he is trying to convey?

A Still, Steel, Drum Song, 1993

growth of industry and its dramatic effect on the African-American population. It embodies the cadence of the mills, the steel, lumber, coal and automobile factories of the East and North. It is a more abstract piece. Outterbridge frames the question of containment. . .what's in the drums and where are they being pulled or placed? The title of the work further suggest a cultural and historical context, the sociological effects of forced migration.

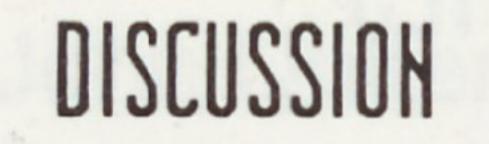




A found rusted pulley with hoist, attached to a wooden arm, stands 3 feet above a wooden palette covered by seven steel, closed drums. One of the drums is either being pulled up from or placed in the pile. Rather than painting the surfaces, the artist has used found materials that have been colored by age and oxidation.

LIFT EVERY VOICE

In 1984, John Outterbridge was invited to participate in the inaugural exhibition for the new, 44,000 sq. ft. facility housing the California Afro-American Museum. It was a very special event for African-Americans across the nation. It marked the continued growth of the first state mandated museum dedicated to the preservation of African-American art, history and culture, and one of the largest African-American museums in the nation. Outterbridge wanted to created something special and something that had personal meaning for him.

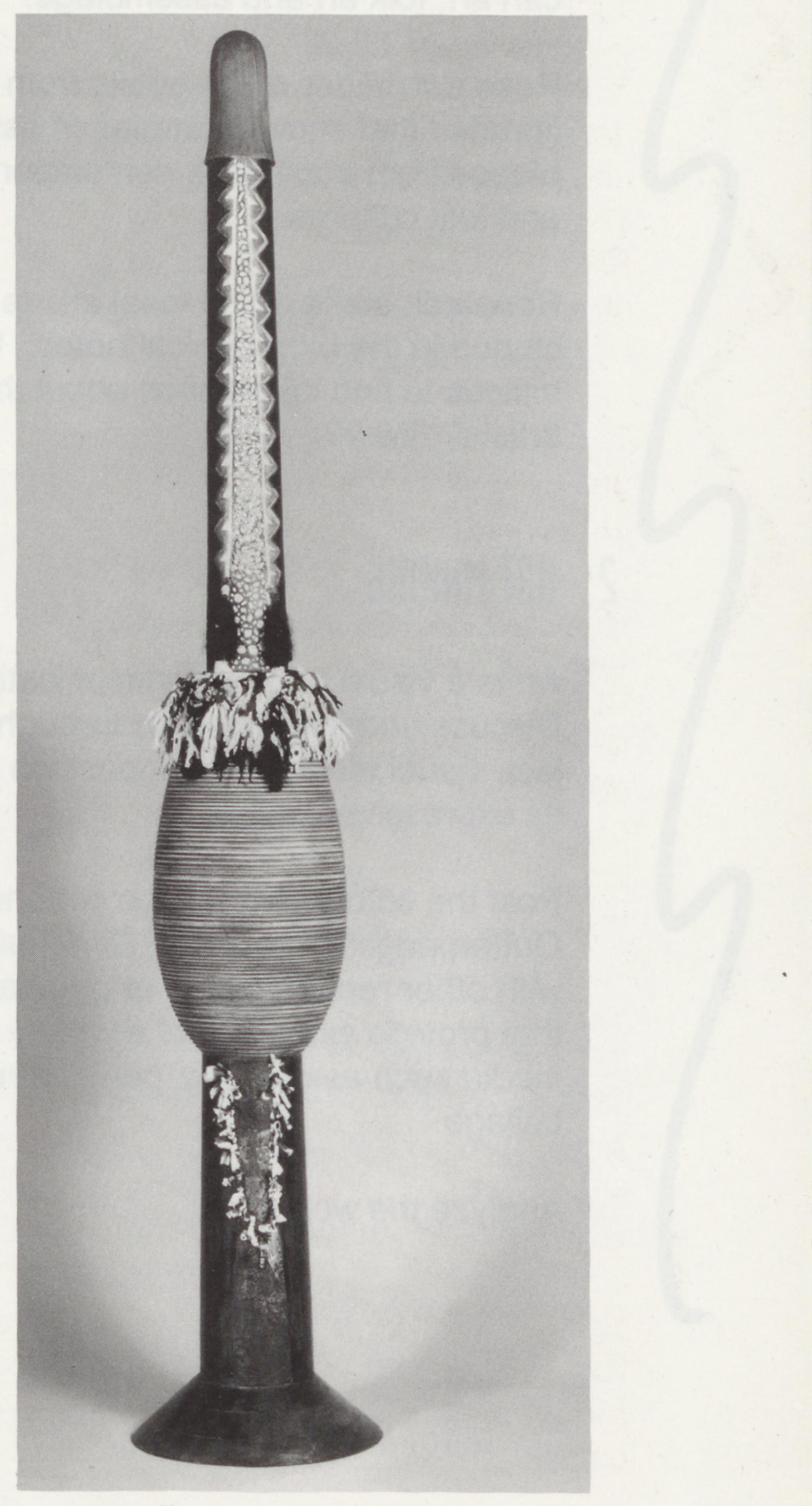


Think about the music of today. What song would you select to reflect you or your generation?

What icon of today's society (musical instrument, book, play, automobile, etc.) would you chose to celebrate your life?

Music has always been an aspect of Out-terbridge's creative expression. He creates music and collects a variety of miscellaneous flutes. Flutes are one of the earliest instruments found in all cultures, and may _____ be constructed from available materials such as bamboo, wood, clay and earth. The artist has stated, "the voice of the flute seems to elevate the spirit...." With this in mind, he created a celebratory piece entitled Lift Every Voice (after the Negro National Anthem), a giant totem in the form of a flute.

Lift Every Voice, 1984 **California Afro-American Museum Foundation**



The flute is wooden and fetish-like, with juju bags, rags, cowrie shells and hair encircling

the shaft. The title of the piece layers a reference of African-American spiritual language with that of African symbols. Lift Every Voice is in the permanent collection of the California Afro-American Museum.

PRE AND POST UISIT ACTIVITIES

ART HISTORY

What do you see? What are the actions of the characters? Where is it taking place?

UISUAL ELEMENTS:

SUBJECT MATTER:

Review the slides in the package. Give the students background information on the artist and medium.

What colors are used? How do they make

Visit the exhibition and seek out related exhibits of African-American artists, African art, folk art and assemblage.

Research slides or art books from local libraries that show examples of assemblages from traditional, contemporary and folk cultures.

Research some of the local artists included in the biographical notes. Was it difficult to find information about these artists? Why?

you feel? What are the materials used (paint, pencil, found objects, wood etc.)? Are the surfaces hard, shinny, flat, etc.? What are the sizes of the pieces?

How are things arranged?

EXPRESSIVE CONTENT:

What kind of mood is created (happy, somber, warm, etc.)? Define the following art terms: collage, mixed media, found art, as-

2. ART MAKING

Art is a visual form of communication. Discuss understanding art through subject, visual elements, composition and its expressive content.

Post the color reproduction of John Outterbridge's First Poet, Olivia, along with other reproductions or original art that provide examples of a variety of media such as drawing, print, painting or semblage, and installation.

Outterbridge utilizes a mixed media and assemblage approach in the development of his sculptural forms, both relief and three dimensional. It is a process of selection and reformation (re-assembling old to new).

Review the materials that John Outterbridge has used for his work. Develop a list of found objects that exhibit different qualities (see art analysis).

Collect materials needed for the production of the sculpture you will create. Take into

collage.

Analyze the works

consideration the time, place, mood and effect you wish to convey. Make an assemblage.

3. SOCIAL HISTORY

John Outterbridge worked in Los Angeles during the direct-action civil rights era.

Discuss the Civil Rights era. Set aside time to see the award-winning video "Eyes On The Prize," which overviews this tumultuous period in our nation's history. What does "direct action" mean? What are some of other social movement that have helped to better our lives? John Outterbridge was born in the rural South and later lived and worked in urban Los Angeles. His work captures both of these environments.

Define urban and rural. Develop a word list that describes the differences and similarities in the two environments.

What actions were taken to bring about social change?

In the biographical notes the author mentions "artifacts" from the Watts Revolt of 1965.

What is a revolt? What was the Watts

Utilizing your list, write a short story about life in each environment.

Revolt and how was that historical event similar to the 1992 uprising in Los Ange-les?

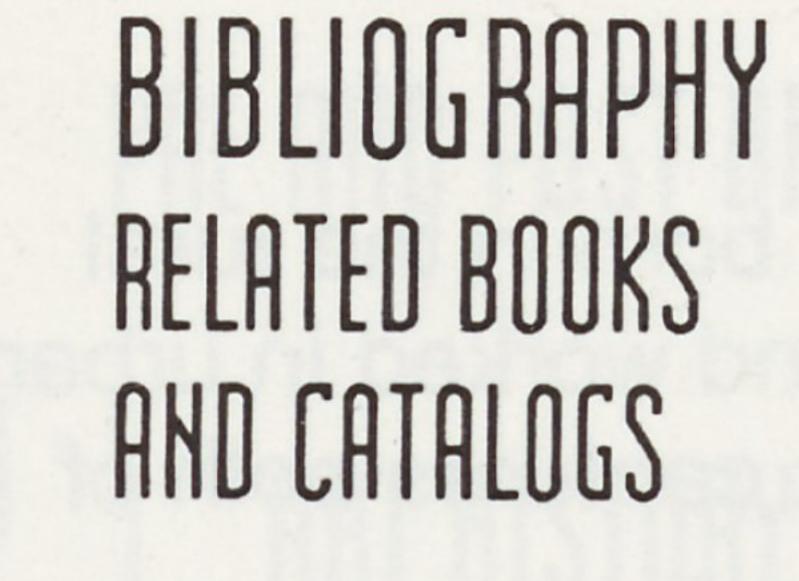
4. CREATIVE WRITING

Copy the Biographical Notes in this resource guide and read the essay written in the handout about the exhibition.

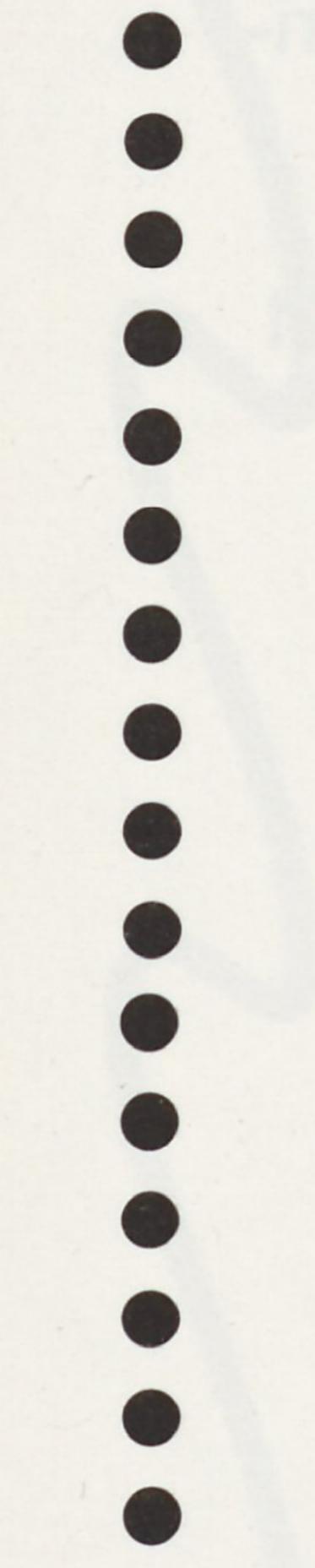
Did both documents have the same content? How were they different?

Discuss different styles of writing. Ask students to write a poem or short story that recreates the character or environment of a person, place, or thing close to them.

Contrast that exercise with a straight forward journalistic essay about the same subject.



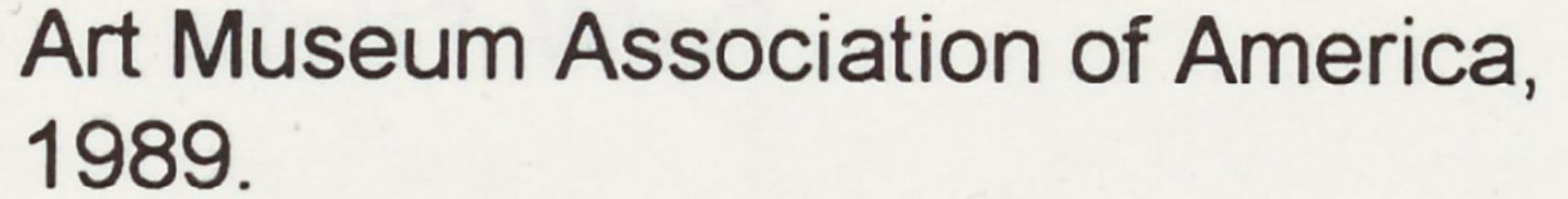
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Collins, Lizzetta LeFalle. 19sixties: A Cultural Awakening, Re-evaluated, 1965-1975. Los Angeles: California Afro-American Museum Foundation, 1989

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.

Dallas Museum of Art, 1989.

GLOSSARY

AESTHETIC relating to, dealing with beauty

ANTHROPOMORPHIC described or thought of as having human form or attributes

CULTURE

the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious or social group

ENTREPRENEUR

one who organizes, manages, and assumes the risks of a business or enterprise

GRIOT

African storyteller

IMPROVISE

to compose, recite, play or sing extemporaneously

INHERITANCE the reception of genetic qualities by transmission from parent to offspring. Tradition.

LIBATION an act of pouring an offering

MATRIX

something within which something else originates or develops. A mold

ONTOLOGY

a particular theory about the nature of being or kinds of existence

PATINA

surface appearance or sheen produced by age

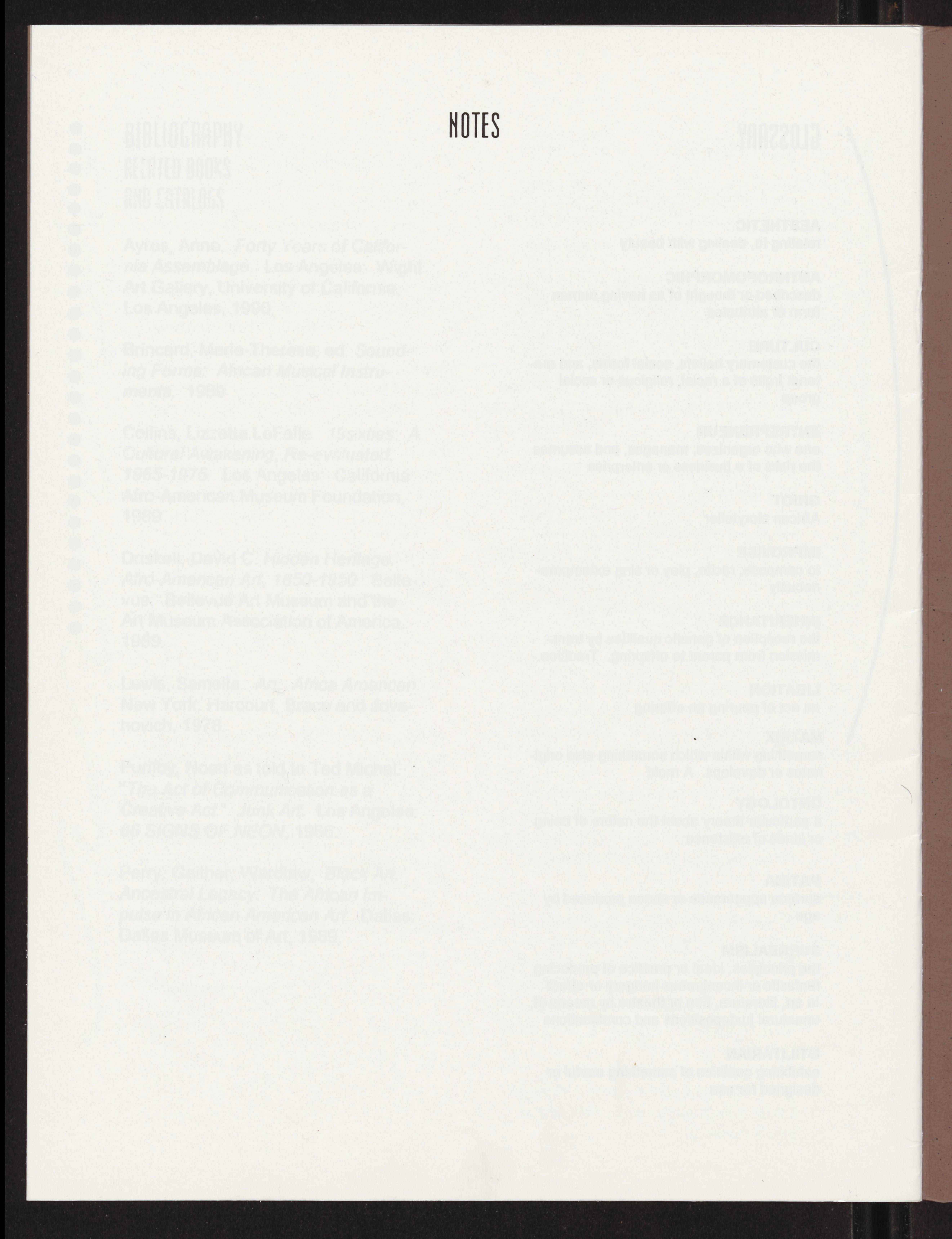
SURREALISM

the principles, ideal or practice of producing fantastic or incongruous imagery or effect in art, literature, film or theatre by means of unnatural juxtapositions and combinations

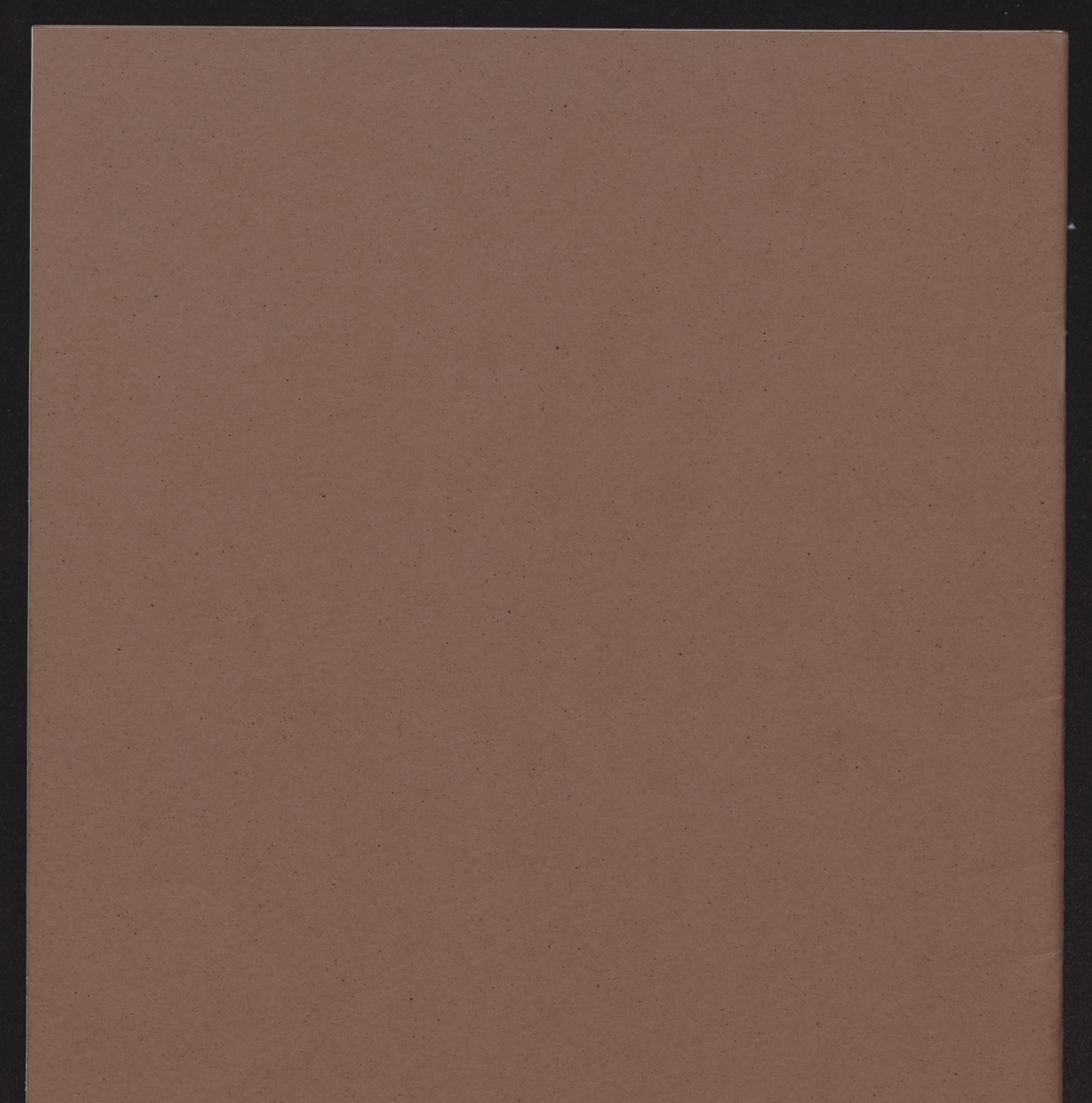
UTILITARIAN

exhibiting qualities of something useful or designed for use

. Bed







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