

WILLIE COLE : DEEP IMPRESSIONS



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January 16 – March 10, 2012

Rowan University Art Gallery
201 Mullica Hill Road
Westby Hall
Glassboro, NJ 08028

Director's Statement

Rowan University Art Gallery is particularly pleased and privileged to host *Willie Cole: Deep Impressions*. Culled from nearly 30 years of work, the exhibition unites personal history, urban and racial realities, and cultural and religious faith and diversity. Willie Cole's art situates his life-long New Jersey experience in the context of US and global political life and current economic insecurity. Cole's deft and probing drawings, prints, and sculptures ingeniously transform everyday consumer products into images and objects of refreshing energy, beauty, and spirituality. His works mirror the consumer society and the financial anxiety of our times while offering a hint of repose, a measure of hope, humor, and intelligence.

This exhibition highlights the art of New Jersey's best-known and respected living artist and powerfully echoes Rowan University's unique joint commitment to New Jersey and the world. It is hoped that this exhibition will prompt discussion across the range of areas that Cole brilliantly explores and combines in his artistic practice - art, sociology, history, anthropology, multiculturalism, politics, and spiritualism. While Rowan University continues its dramatic growth and redefinition as an interdisciplinary and international center of learning, this project heralds the maturation of the Art Gallery as a cultural destination and potent resource for the Rowan community of students, faculty, staff, and the general public.

My deep gratitude is extended to New York independent curator and former Montclair Art Museum director, Patterson Sims, for his enthusiasm in expanding the show for its presentation at the Rowan University Art Gallery. We are honored that the Rowan University Art Gallery is the first public art space in the South New Jersey region to host a Willie Cole exhibition. The exhibition would not have been possible without the generous loans of the Bronx Museum of the Arts, The Studio Museum in Harlem, the Pilchuck Glass School, and noted private collectors. The majority of these works were lent by the artist and his longtime New York gallery, Alexander and Bonin, whose vital help and counsel made this project possible.

We are further indebted to the support and recognition received from the New Jersey State Council of the Arts that honored the gallery and this exhibition with a Citation of Excellence award. Special thanks are also expressed to the College of Fine and Performing Arts and the Department of Art in support of this programming and to Deanne Farrell for her dedication to funding opportunities in support of the Rowan University Art Gallery.

For the careful attention to the many details of this publication, and for her accessibility and professionalism, we acknowledge the refined design and production contributions of Jenn Thwing, Assistant Professor, Department of Art, Rowan University.

Mary Salvante,
Gallery and Exhibitions Program Director
Rowan University Art Gallery



Self Portrait, ca. 1977

Willie Cole: Deep Impressions covers a period of almost thirty-five years, spanning from his intense pastel self-portrait, ca. 1977, to recent foreboding, graphic novel–like images. It highlights a range of Cole’s prints; from a poster he designed in 1984 to a large-scale, technically innovative latticework piece to other recent complex and more personal narrative editions. A small selection of Cole’s sculptures, the aspect of his multi-faceted creativity for which he is best known, complements and contextualizes the works on paper.

Born in 1955, Willie Cole has lived almost his entire life within thirty miles of Newark, New Jersey. The harsh realities of inner-city life for African Americans—so grimly embodied in the post–World War II urban blight and political corruption of Newark, the state’s poorest and largest city—and their aspirations are the underpinning of his sculpture, canvases, works on paper, writing, and musical compositions. His art powerfully contrasts the dichotomies of life in New Jersey and in the wider landscape of America: affluent suburbs and vast upscale malls existing alongside urban, industrial, and natural wastelands and miles of marginal retail strips. Images of abundant personal wealth enjoyed in a land suffering from economic, racial, and political discord and chronic poverty. Likewise, Cole posits his art between the polar influences of his father and mother and male and female subjects.

Cole’s lifelong ties to the immediate area and state of his birth have also been a foundation and springboard to global thinking and travel to Africa, Europe, and Brazil. Since 1978 he has held numerous artist residencies and lectured widely across the United States. Fortified by, yet transcending his solid sense of place, Cole’s art makes interconnections, finding ways to fuse the religious and spiritual traditions of Africa and Asia with his personal history and life and deep commitment to his home state, the United States, and the world.

Cole reached his artistic maturity in the mid-1980s with his assemblages of discarded American consumer products: hair dryers, high-heeled shoes, lawn jockeys, ironing boards, and, above all, steam irons, and their scorched or stenciled impressions. Many were found in a deserted area of Newark, the Ironbound district, once dedicated to light industry, near the large, now demolished, former industrial loft building where he lived and worked. In his deft hands these banal salvaged objects were transformed into objects of beauty, balance, and spirituality—first in his Ironbound loft, then thirty miles away in studios in and nearby the Mine Hill, New Jersey, property where he settled with his family in 1994.

Although he remains best known as a sculptor, Cole has actively drawn and worked on paper since he started making art, at first simply responding to the medium’s ready accessibility and low cost. At ten years old he took drawing classes at the Newark Museum. Drawing was a major part of his training at the esteemed Arts High School in Newark, where he recalls making his first prints, silkscreened t-shirts. Drawing classes were also central to his studies at Boston University’s School of Fine Arts and the School of Visual Arts, and the Art Students League in New York City. Trained in graphic design in college, he owned and used a small offset press in the 1980s.

Cole’s representations and abstractions created from everyday consumer objects and their images fuse Pop art and Minimalist concepts. These works employ repetition, intricate designs, and bold color combinations to create what he once called “minimal maximalism” but now thinks of more as “exponentialism,” the capacity to take singular objects like irons, iron scorches, and high-heeled shoes and, by dramatically multiplying their number, turn them into more universal, transcendent statements and compositions. His salvaged products function as potent, multileveled symbols and metaphors.

For many years Willie Cole’s favored motif has been the steam iron. Its multiple manifestations in scorched and stenciled impressions on canvas, wood, and paper are positioned to signify archetypal motifs so that, upright, with the iron point at bottom, they are a human or spirit face; upright, with the point at the top, a house; sideways, a boat; and arrayed at angles, warriors’ shields and armor. Grouped and conjoined, the steam iron’s imprints evoke a range of subjects from spirits of domestic and existential dramas to battling forces to the blossoms of flowers.

Even more than his sculptures, works on paper permit Cole to work in series and explore alternative compositions, colors, and points of view. His drawings and prints also reveal more immediate and intimate sides of his persona and artistic sensibility. Working on paper can be spontaneous, while his sculpture is particularly labor intensive. His drawings have maintained a more traditional artistic approach;

his works in sculpture and other media have been much more unconventional. Printmaking has offered him the chance to have others help him realize his ideas, create more communally, and have his work seen and owned by a wider public. His most recent works on paper, both his prints and drawings, are much more overtly narrative, personal, and symbolic. Seen with his sculptures, they attest to the richness and development of Cole's conversation between his two and three-dimensional art.

Patterson Sims

Notes on the Curator

Patterson Sims, the curator and author of *Willie Cole: Deep Impressions*, organized the most comprehensive survey of Cole's work to date, *Anxious Objects: Willie Cole's Favorite Brands*, for the Montclair Art Museum, Montclair, New Jersey. The exhibition opened in 2006 and traveled through 2008 to the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, Lincoln, Nebraska; the Memorial Art Gallery, Rochester, New York; the Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham, Alabama; the Frye Art Museum, Seattle, Washington; and the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts, Stanford University, Palo Alto, California. Sims is an independent art curator and writer based in New York City.

Notes on Publishers

The majority of Cole's major prints have been produced by the Brodsky Center for Innovative Editions (formerly known as the Rutgers Center for Innovative Print and Paper) of the Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University–New Brunswick, New Jersey, and the Tamarind Institute print workshop, University of New Mexico–Albuquerque. Both of these university print workshops are notable for their innovative techniques and commitment to providing a diverse community of artists with the opportunity to make prints. Alexander and Bonin Publishing, a part of Cole's longtime gallery, Alexander and Bonin, New York City, has also played a vital role in the creation of Cole's prints. In recent years Cole has been approached to work with other print making workshops and intensified his activity as a draftsman and print-maker.

Works in the Exhibition - Works are lent courtesy of the artist and Alexander and Bonin, New York, unless otherwise noted. Photography of artwork is by Orcutt & Van Der Putten or Bill Orcutt, unless otherwise indicated.

Cover Image - Spirit from *Man, Spirit, Mask*, 1999

Art Against Apartheid exhibition poster for The Works Gallery Newark, 1984

Offset print on paper
19 x 12 in / 48 x 30 cm
Edition size unknown

Cole studied graphic design in high school and at the School of Visual Arts and supported himself as a freelance graphic designer in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Along with flyers and other ephemera, he designed this poster for The Works Gallery, which he started and ran out of his loft in central Newark from 1982 until 1987. The Works' community-oriented programs ranged from one-person shows to political gatherings and poetry readings, dance performances and parties. Cole's strong political orientation was particularly evident in the *Art Against Apartheid* show. The poster's central figure was a New Jersey artist friend turned tribal with his palette shield and paintbrush spear. The figure presages the African art motifs of the work Cole began in the late 1980s and his two self-portrait prints of 2004 that conjoin his steam-iron motifs and African ritual and ceremony. Though a thousand copies of this poster were printed, only a few remain.

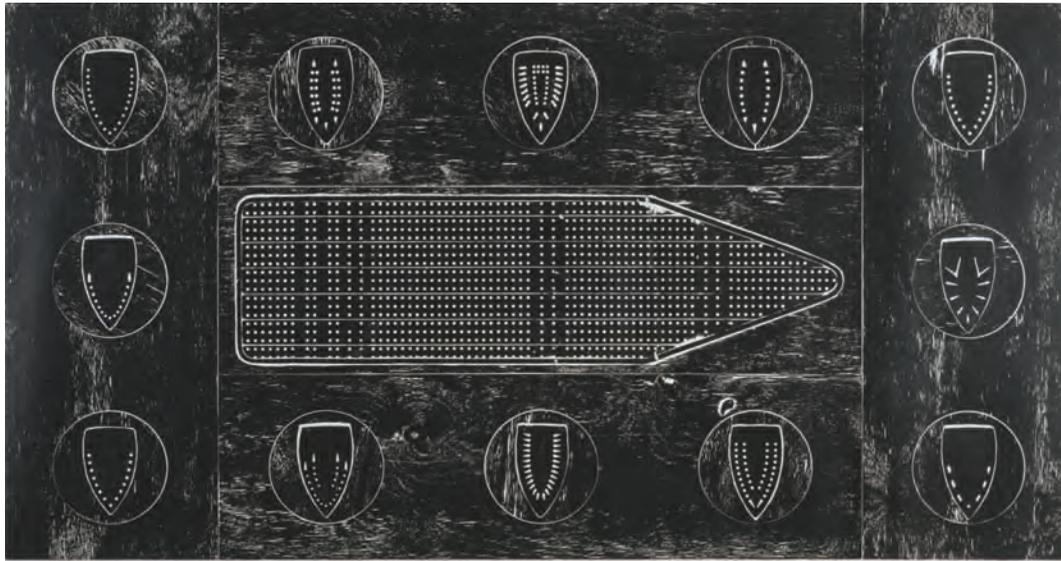


E²1000TM, 1991

Lithograph and chine collé on black Arches paper
41.5 x 30 in / 105.4 x 76.2 cm
Edition of 30
Publisher: Rutgers Center for Innovative
Print and Paper

This was Cole's first art print, made when he was invited to work at the Rutgers Center for Innovative Prints and Paper. At once robotic, anthropologic, and birdlike, it is composed of collaged photocopies of black and white photographs Cole took of the two sides of E²1000TM brand hand-held hair dryers. Color and detail were added with reprints of the product label decals carefully reproduced in chine collé, a special technique in printmaking whereby ink is transferred to tissue-thin ornamental paper that is bonded to a heavier paper support.

PRINTS



Stowage, 1997

*Woodcut on kozo-shi paper
56 x 104 in / 142.2 x 264.2 cm
Edition of 16
Publisher: Alexander and
Bonin Publishing, Inc.
The Bronx Museum of the Arts,
Museum purchase with funds
from Paine Webber Group, Inc.
1998.1.1.*

Stowage is the second and largest and most ambitious print Cole has made thus far. It was the centerpiece of a one-person exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1998. Cole initially developed this print on his own. He worked with master printer Maurice Sanchez's Derriere L'Etoile Studios in New York City to realize the mammoth scale and technical complexity of its final production. The composition is based on a famous illustration/broadside of the horribly overcrowded Brookes slave ship. The broadside was widely distributed in the 1780s to rally support for changing slavery laws in England and the United States. The shape and dense confinement of the slave ship is conveyed by the impression of an ironing board and its tight pattern of air holes. The border of porthole-like circles contains upright iron-scorch "faces." The distinctive patterns are created by the steam openings in sole plates of twelve different steam irons from Cole's large collection, which are arrayed to represent the many tribal clans and communities in West Africa from which the slaves were taken.

P.O.V., 1998

*Iris print on paper
24 x 20 in / 61 x 51 cm
Edition of 5
Publisher: Alexander and Bonin Publishing, Inc.*

P.O.V., i.e., point of view, is a phrase that Cole learned from film script writing. It refers to the camera shots that show where a character is looking. The photo source is one of the many lawn-jockey figures Cole bought to use in sculptures and his large 2001 chessboard installation. Individually, the lawn jockey denotes for him the Western African Yoruba Elegba deity—a messenger, gatekeeper, and presenter of choices and options. The eyes of the figure are "gummy bears," which Cole selected to convey the seemingly sweet, childish, beneficent point of view of his lawn jockey and the jockey's complex, mutable mixture of being a southern antebellum and northern suburban talisman, and an African deity.



The Wayside, 1998

C-print on paper

26 x 20 in / 68.5 x 52 cm

Edition of 5

Publisher: Alexander and Bonin Publishing, Inc.

This doubled close-up of the face of a lawn-jockey figure also seen in *P.O.V.*, 1998 has traditional cowrie shells for eyes, symbols of divination and good fortune. Its stacked structure was intended to suggest a filmstrip. *The Wayside* refers both to Vincent Van Gogh's painting of *The Sower* and its biblical inspiration. Cole spells out his version of the parable on the print: "A sower went forth to sow. And when he sowed. Some seeds fell by the wayside..."



Man Spirit Mask, 1999

Triptych: photo etching; silkscreen;

photo etching with woodcut on paper

Sheet size: each: 39.125 x 26.5 in / 99 x 67.5 cm

Edition of 40

Publisher: Rutgers Center for

Innovative Print and Paper

This print's trio of images depicts, left to right:

Man: the face of the artist (made symmetrical by fusing two center-cut left sides of his head) marked with a scarification pattern of the edge and openings on the sole plate of a Proctor Silex steam iron.

Spirit: a Proctor Silex steam-iron scorch (its blurry edge is the result of lemon juice being applied to the sheet of paper before the scorching and its browned tonality the result of applying a heat gun).

Mask: the handle and top of a vintage iron rests atop a flipped visage of the same dour image of the artist's face seen in the Man panel, with his forehead now at the bottom and shiny ear lobes on the upper sides.



PRINTS

Silex Male. Ritual, 2004

Archival inkjet print on paper

61 x 44 in / 155 x 112 cm

Edition of 12

Publisher: Rutgers Center for Innovative Print and Paper

On the cusp of his fiftieth birthday, Cole used his unclothed, athletic body for a duo of 2004 prints; *Silex Male. Ritual* and *Sunbeam Male. Ceremonial*. A third print, *Men of Iron*, united and compacted the paired figures of the other two.

Sunbeam Male. Ceremonial, 2004

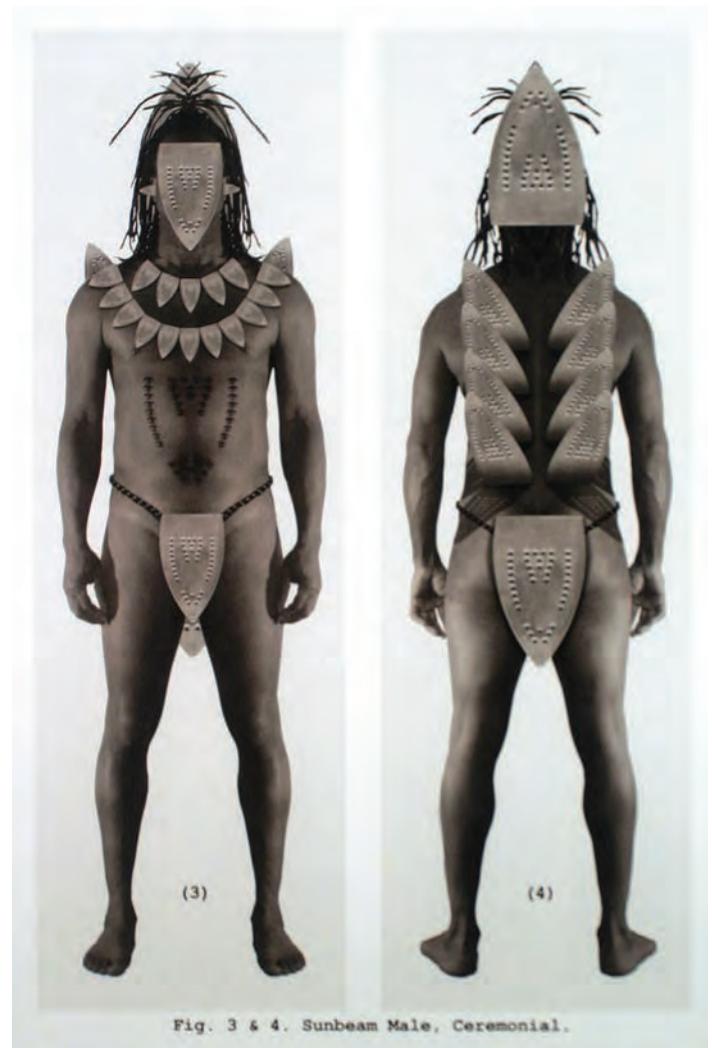
Archival inkjet print on paper

61 x 44 in / 155 x 112 cm

Edition of 12

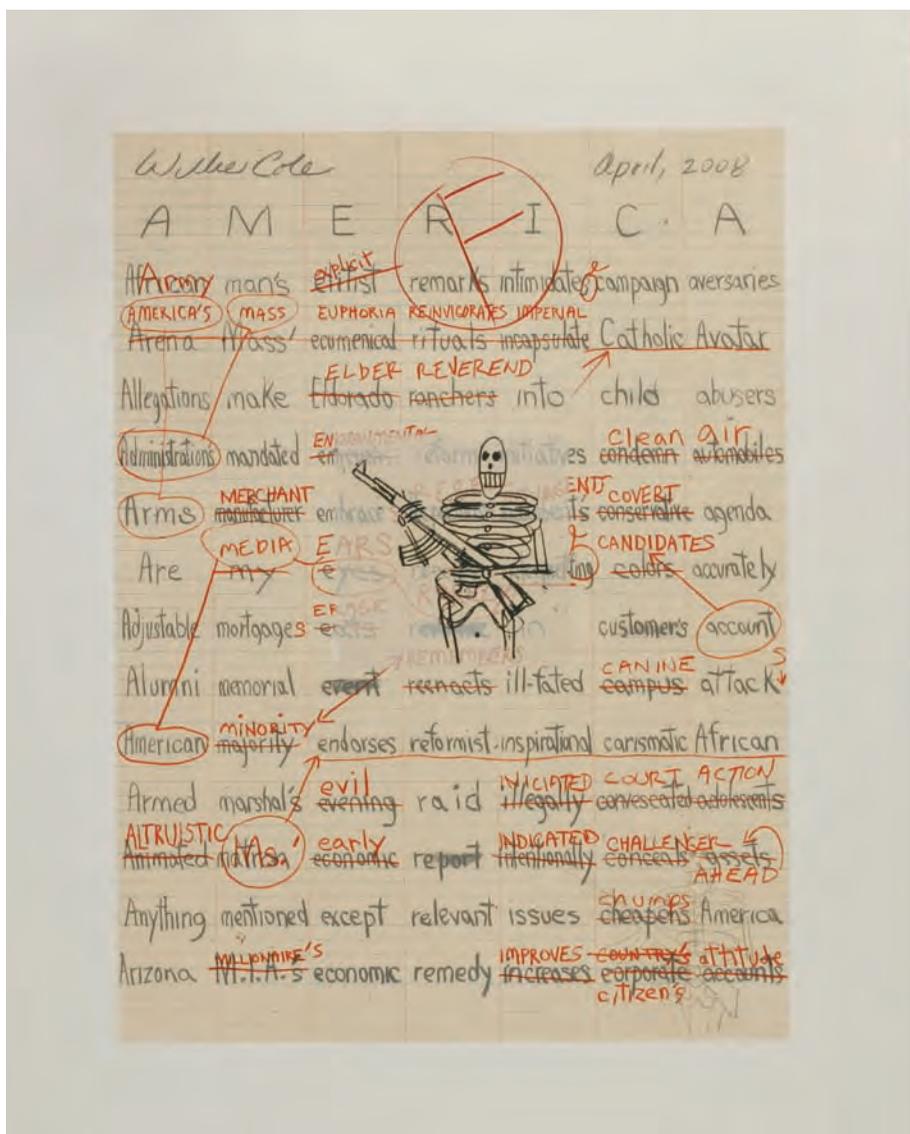
Publisher: Rutgers Center for Innovative Print and Paper

The distinctive and popular *Silex* and *Sunbeam* steam irons plate designs are particular favorites of the artist and, as is apparent in this exhibition, he used them frequently in his steam-iron scorch impressions in various media.



AmeriQuiz, 2008

Lithograph on soft white Somerset paper
with two chine collés
29 x 22.125 in / 75.5 x 56 cm
Edition of 22
Publisher: Tamarind Institute



Incorporating verbiage in his art to express his strong political feelings and critiques is a periodic ingredient of Cole's art. In contrast to the formalism and decorative appeal of the *Rapture* lithographs he was working on at Tamarind during the same visit, Cole's *AmeriQuiz's* much altered responses are based on his taking copious notes as he watched CNN or read the *Sunday New York Times*. His sets of acronyms, overshadowed by a grim skeletal rifleman, have been given — either for the country, the artist, or both — a failing grade.

PRINTS

Mandala 2, 1994

Monotype, paint on paper

22.375 x 29.875 in / 57 x 76 cm

Lent by the Pilchuck Glass School, Seattle and Stanwood, Washington

In the summer of 1994, Cole was invited to be an artist in residence at the esteemed Pilchuck Glass School on their sylvan campus north of Seattle. The summer program's activities had recently expanded to include a print workshop. In addition to the work he did with sandblasted glass, Cole made a small series of mono-prints. This *Mandala* image is the most festive of the few that survive and anticipates the pressed-blossom prints he was to make at the Tamarind Institute in 2005. Its title asserts the spiritual and meditative side of his art.



Pressed Iron Blossom No. 2, 2005

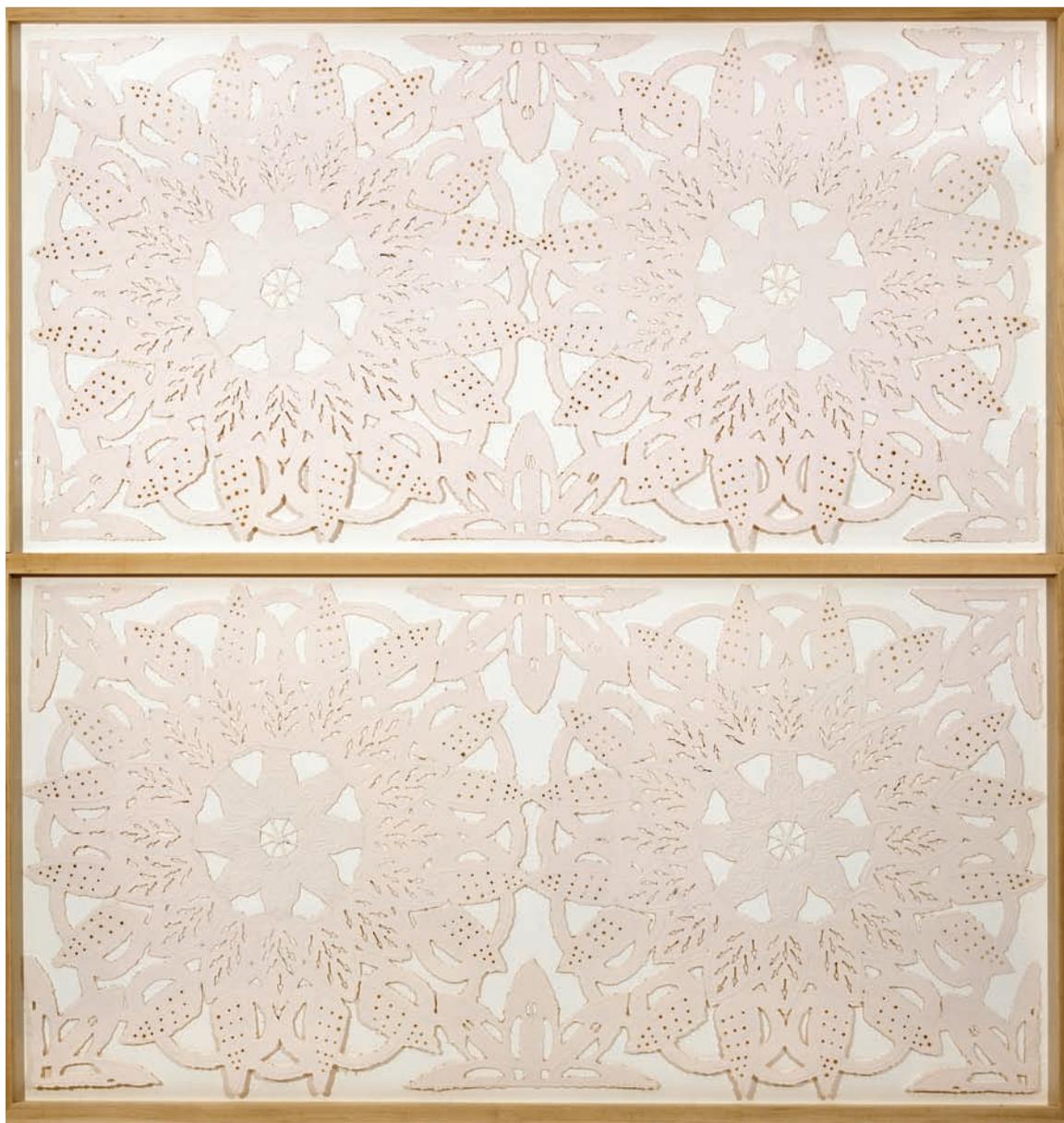
Lithograph on Rives BFK paper

22.125 x 30 in / 56.2 x 76.2 cm

Edition of 90

Publisher: Tamarind Institute

The arid landscape of New Mexico was the source and locus for a series of prints that used steam-iron impressions to create arrays of blossom-like patterns. The notion of making his iron scorches and stencil motifs into large-scale patterns on canvas started in 1990; and, in 1994, Cole fashioned a large *Sunflower* of iron scorches on canvas. He became increasingly adept at manipulating the tonality, fragmentation, and designs of these works. Whereas brown tones were the inevitable by-product of the way the iron scorched paper, cloth, and plywood, were created, for his prints the artist could pick and vary his colors with great freedom. Although vivid coloration livens the *Pressed Iron Blossom* print series, he created gray-black toned versions in the series.



Por La Mesa de Mi Abuelita x 4, 2008

*Pale pink pigmented cotton-linter singed paper with embossing,
cut by water steaming*

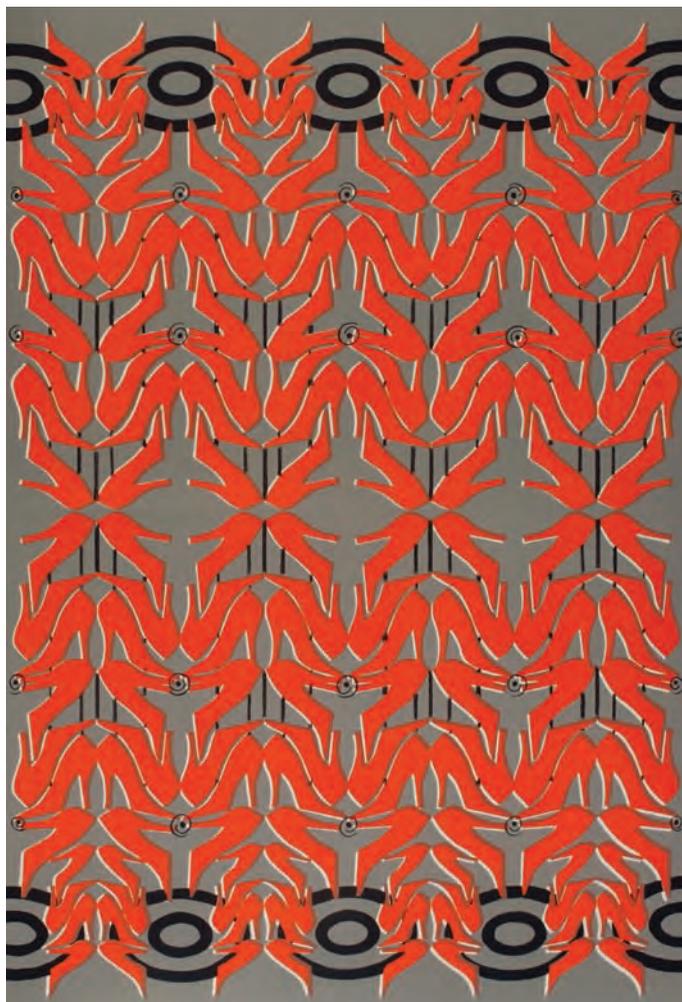
80 x 80 in / 203.2 x 203.2 cm

Edition of 10

Publisher: Brodsky Center for Innovative Editions

This unusually large and complex, editioned paper piece puts together four units of its single source print, *Por La Mesa de Mi Abuelita*, also made at the Brodsky Center. The original work was laid over a black ground that boldly silhouettes its steam-iron cutout design. The titles and subjects for both editions underscore Cole's Spanish bonds. Part of his family has connections with Cuba and Spanish culture, and his youngest daughter is Latina. Due to this and growing up in Newark, Cole speaks some Spanish. The print's title translates as "for the table of my grandmother" and elegantly honors the elaborate, Spanish-style embroidery and lacework tablecloths made and ironed by his maternal grandmother and great-grandmother. Within the center of each of the four segments of the print note the rings of images of a woman ironing.

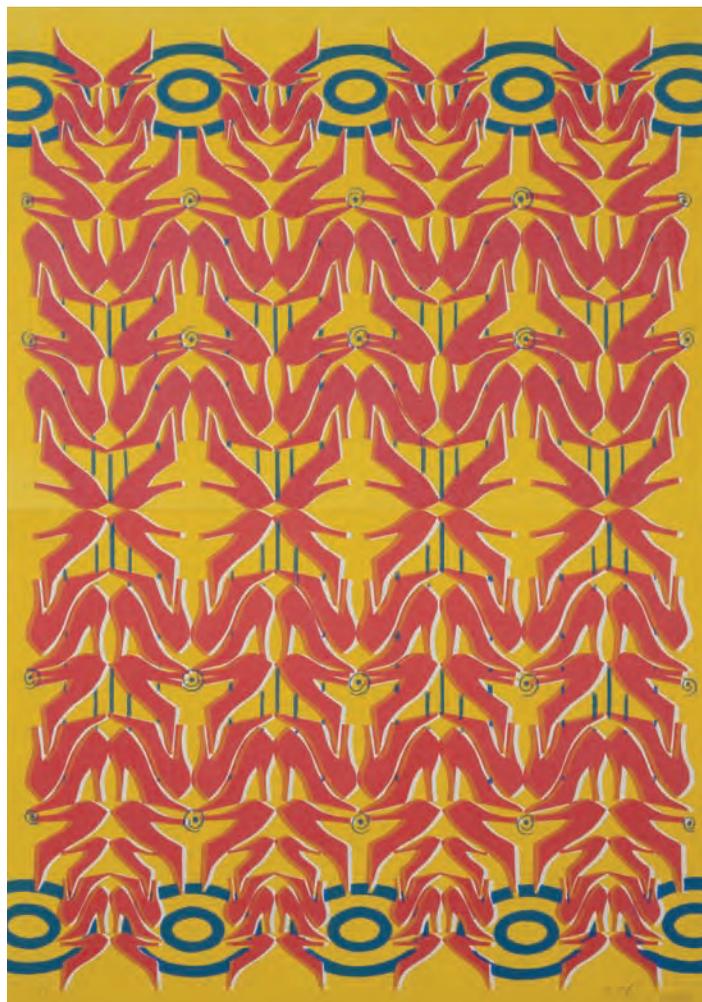
PRINTS



Rapture, 2008

Lithograph on two sheets of Arches
46 x 30.75 / 117 x 78 cm
Edition of 15
Publisher: Tamarind Institute

Cole's *Rapture* print represents the first time he depicted women's high-heeled shoes in a work on paper. It is a later manifestation of an ongoing series of abstract and figurative high-heeled-shoe sculptures that he began in 1990, instigated by the 1986 scandal over the huge collection of high heels accumulated by Philippine First Lady Imelda Marcos. Cole reveled in the shoes' malleability and learned that high heels could be purchased in bulk at a very reasonable price in secondhand stores. When Cole and other artists work with printmaking studios, they explore multiple trial and color proofs in contemplating different ideas, compositions, and color schemes. This color variant of *Rapture*, though liked and retained by the artist, was bypassed for the final, editioned version of this print.



Rapture, 2008

Lithograph on two sheets of Arches
Unique color trial proof on paper
46 x 31.75 in / 117 x 81 cm
Publisher: Tamarind Institute

The vertical green lines in this editioned *Rapture* composition convey Cole's notion that high-heeled shoes, like the Southwest's rich harvest of corn or maize, are a crop. He wanted his clusters of footwear to read like vegetation, totems of fertility and contented consumption. The title of the print also evokes the rapture of the dancers in the lengthy annual Southwest pueblo corn dances that honor this staple of their diet.

Burning Desire, 2010

Lithograph on Reeves BFK paper

30 x 22 in / 76.2 x 55.88 cm

Edition of 50

Publisher: Exit Art, New York

Alive with the flames of desire and seduction no less than the fires of hell, the composition of *Burning Desire* duplicates Cole's earlier "...it's a burning thing," drawing from his 2009–10 series of black ink on paper works. They manifested his return to drawing and more overtly figurative and personal narratives. The 2009-2010 ink drawings were titled after sorrowful country blues songs. Both the titles of his earlier "...it's a burning thing," and *Burning Desire* were drawn from the lyrics, written by June Cash and Merle Kilgore, for a 1963 hit song by Johnny Cash. Its opening chorus provides the best caption for this image:

Love is a Burning Thing

And It Makes A Fiery Ring

Bound By Wild Desires

I Fell into a Ring of Fire

The print's now vivid red coloration and larger size make its message even more emphatic.



Home and Hearth, 2011

Serigraph on paper

30 x 20 in / 76.2 x 50.8 cm

Edition of 75

Publisher: Printmaking Center of New Jersey

Using a day-glow palette that harks back to his paintings and works on paper of the early 1980s, *Home and Hearth* encases and forms three of Cole's emblematic steam iron plate impressions into the breasts, crotch, and hips of a female figure. He used his irons to personify the African Yoruba tradition of two orishas or goddesses. The key goddess here is Yemaya, the now global female deity of the ocean and their moon. Cole aggrandized the images' trio of big iron impressions resting on their pointed tops and overlaid their pneumatic forms with much smaller steam iron plate impressions in pink and white which scatter, boat-like, about his floating body on its watery support. One can make out sinuous, sperm-like motifs amid his armada of buoyant irons. At the top Cole's sunny, sexual, and domestically titled composition's breast-like forms are given a delicate scarification by his steam iron's tiny steam openings.

PRINTS



The Ogun Sisters, 2011

Serigraph with solar plates and glazing on paper

30 x 20 in / 76.2 x 50.8 cm

Edition of 75

Publisher: The Experimental Print Institute at Lafayette College in collaboration with Hummingbird Press Editions, Massachusetts

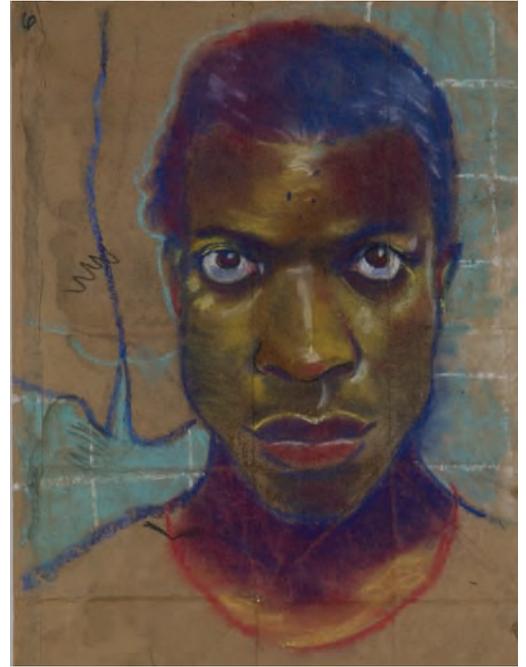
Cole describes this recent print, bordered by steam iron impressions, as “a collection of symbols.” The artist explains “the top symbol is the Haitian veve [sign] for OGUN, the Yoruba deity whose element is iron. The bottom symbol represents the chemical element iron as a mix of protons and neutrons.” Cole’s central pair of uniformed, ironing women each have a same circle above their hearts representing the proton and neutron mixture of iron shown enlarged below. The image of the ironing woman derives from an archival photo dating from the early 1950s of a single female student at Manual Training and Industrial School for Colored Youths in Bordentown, New Jersey, where Cole’s aunt was a student. This coed, state-funded boarding school, which closed in 1955, was a northern version of Alabama’s famed Tuskegee Institute. The heads of the ironing women are classic masks of the Dan people, based in the central west coast of Africa in what are now Liberia and the Ivory Coast. By duplicating and flipping the photo of the ironing woman, Cole creates a third figure in the middle, which he sees as “medical, like he’s laid out on the table, all dressed in white and being resuscitated by the heat from their irons.”

DRAWINGS AND UNIQUE WORKS ON PAPER

Self Portrait, ca. 1977

Pastel on brown paper bag
18.25 x 12 in / 46 x 30 cm

For several years in his late teens and early twenties, Cole lived pretty much on his own for the first time. Every year on his birthday he would make a self-portrait. This example, like others, was made using the reflection in his bathroom mirror in Newark's most famous modernist building, the iconic Colonnade apartment towers complex, designed by Mies van der Rohe, which opened in 1959. Cole was beginning to use pastel as his preferred medium. The portrait is drawn on a folded brown-paper shopping bag, an indication of his very limited resources.

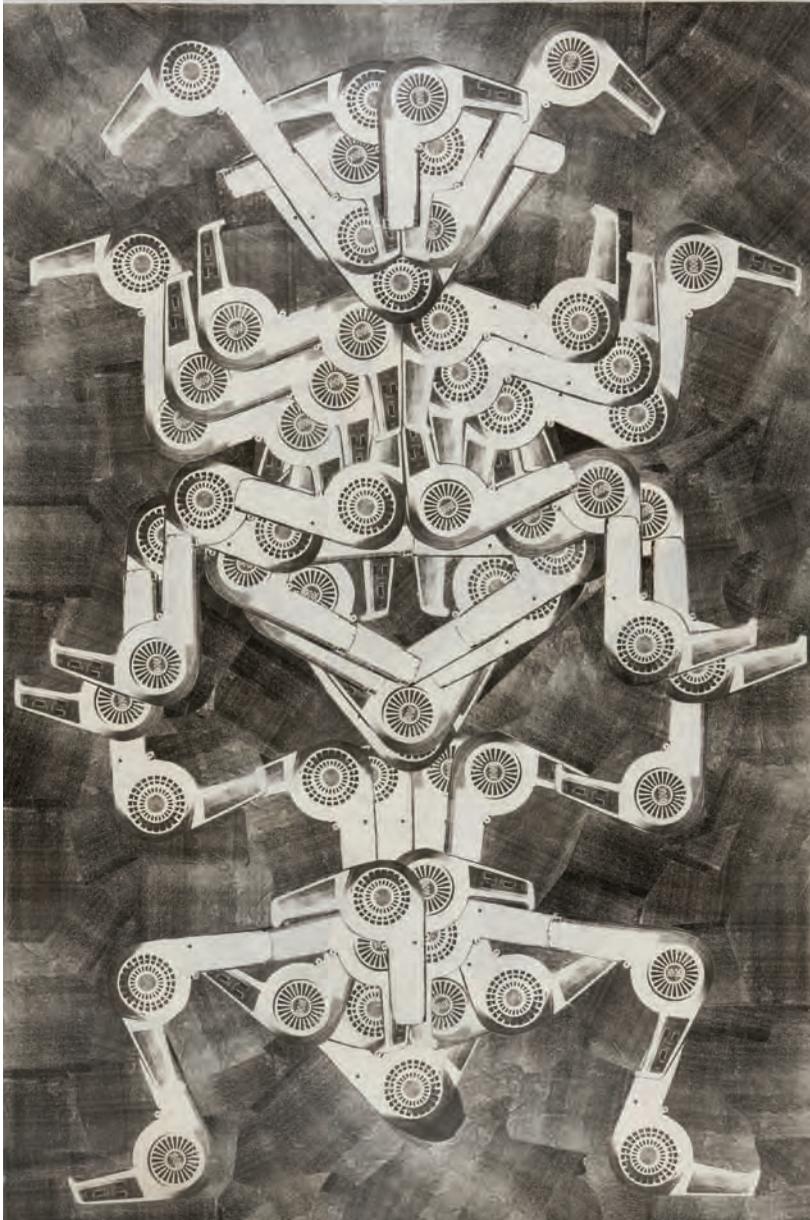


Yard Dog, 1985

Oil pastel on paper
Diptych: each 22 x 30 in / 56 x 76 cm

This elongated double-sheet drawing is one of the most carefully executed of the many pastels of dogs (along with male and female figures in interiors) created by Cole during much of the mid - to late 1980s. His snarling and aggressive pit bull, and his other dog drawings, derived from the angry urban canines he encountered in his Newark neighborhood. They earned him his first New York City gallery exhibitions.

DRAWINGS AND UNIQUE WORKS ON PAPER



Collage 4, 1990

Photocopies on paper
60 x 40 in / 152 x 102 cm

Around 1990, Cole came upon a cache of over one thousand unused hair dryers in one of the numerous abandoned manufacturing and commercial buildings in his Newark neighborhood. He soon began turning them into abstract sculptures. He also wanted to fashion them into figurative pieces, but he could not get them to stay upright. He addressed that issue with a series of four big collages using copies of his photographs of the hair dryers. The Mayan sculptural bas-reliefs he saw on his 1990 trip to the archaeological sites in Mexico's Yucatán peninsula served as the inspiration for the four collages and their closely related print edition *E²1000TM*.

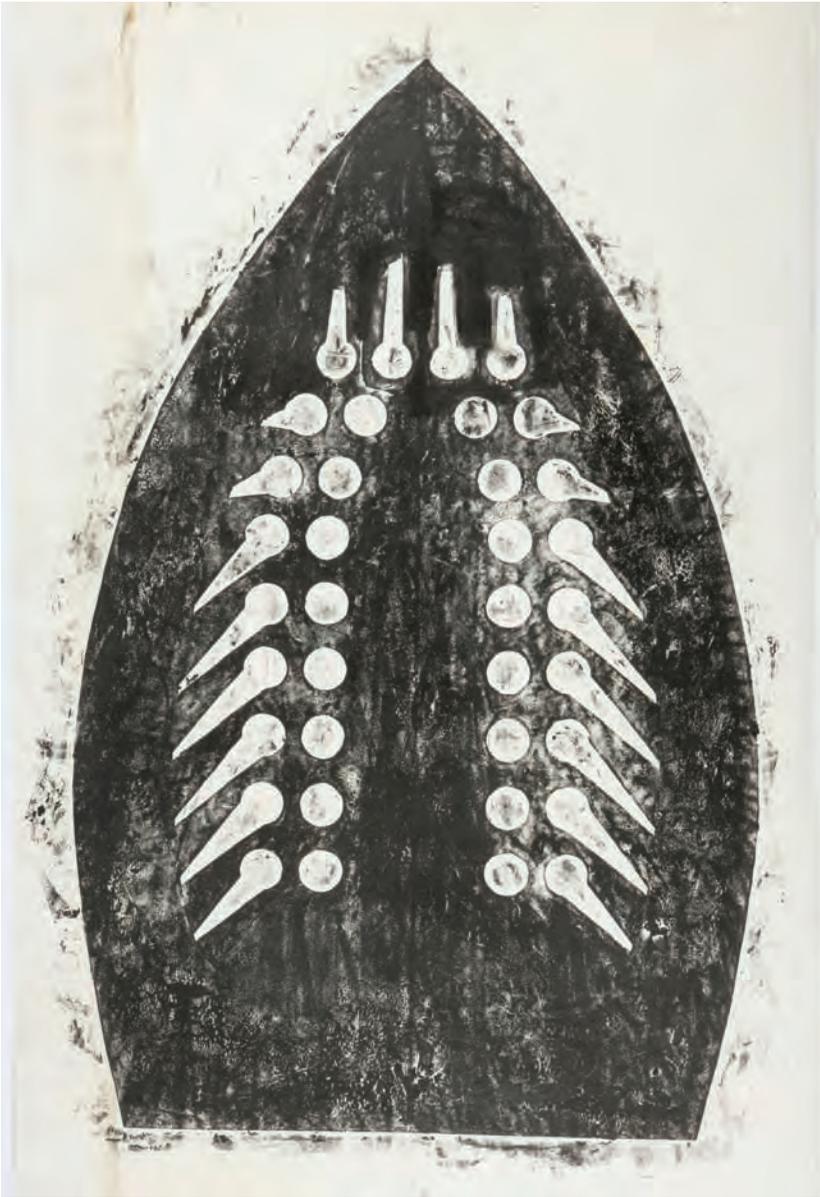
DRAWINGS AND UNIQUE WORKS ON PAPER

Proctor Silex, ca. 1992

Stencil on paper

82 x 44.5 in / 208 x 113 cm

After *Stowage*, this is Cole's largest work on paper. He connects it with a series of twelve *Domestic Shields* he made in 1992 using folded ironing boards. He wanted to see how big he could make one of his iron scorch impressions. Its size foretells the series of five monumental steam-iron sculptures he made in 1996 and 1997.



Domestic ID II, 1991

Iron scorches on paper in double-panel wood and glass window frame

Each window: 25 x 35.75 x 2 in

Overall: 50 x 35.75 x 2 in / 127 x 90.8 x 5.1 cm

Collection of Martin and Rebecca Eisenberg

Old window frames, many of which came from hothouse structures, were among the many collections of found objects that filled Cole's Newark loft. Their small windowpanes proved a perfect fit for single-steam-iron scorches on paper. They became for Cole spectral passport pictures or IDs that hauntingly peer out at the viewer. The unusual, mouth-like circles in the designs made by the steam-iron sole plates powerfully accentuate their unsettling aura.

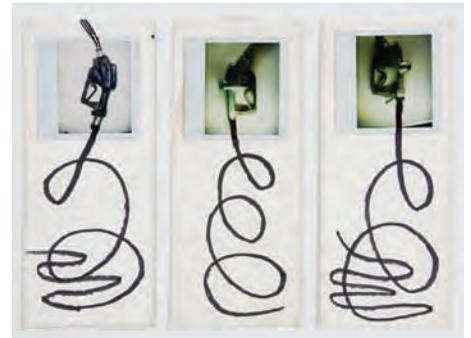


DRAWINGS AND UNIQUE WORKS ON PAPER

Gas Snake Studies, ca. 1995

Polaroid photographs with felt-tip magic marker on watercolor paper
12 x 16.375 in / 30 x 42 cm

Around 1990, believing his work was getting too personal, Cole began to consider ways to expand his imagery to take on more global issues. His first *Gas Snake* sculptures were initiated at the time of the 1990–91 Gulf War gas crisis. Finding a number of discarded gas pump nozzles near his studio loft, he saw their potential as rampant cobras. This singly framed trio of related studies was for a sculpture commission from Amoco. Created from Standard Oil Company, Amoco was merged in 1998 into British Petroleum (BP).



Raid, 1999

Collaged scorched paper, printer padding compound
37.5 x 50 in / 95.5 x 127 cm
Collection of
Studio Museum in Harlem, New York,
Gift of Sue Stoeffel

Using for its mass of scorches a single, very distinctive iron plate design with nail-like shaped openings, *Raid* is a pitched battle in which the warring factions cannot be differentiated. The original layer and single cut-out iron scorches have been adhered to a large sheet of patch-worked, burnt-edged paper with printer padding compound; it is nearly impossible to ascertain how the steam-iron forms are layered. In addition, the spatial ambiguity is intensified by the multiple gradations in tone. As with a raid, it is difficult to know what happened, although, as one steps back, despite the composition's confusing complexity, a pleasing tonal and formal balance prevails.

DRAWINGS AND UNIQUE WORKS ON PAPER

| YES | NO | A | M | E | R | I | C | A | YES | NO |
|-----|----|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|---|--|--|-----|----|
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| ✓ | | A | MULT | ETHNIC | RULE | IS NOT | CONCEIVABLE | ANY MORE | | |
| ✓ | | ACTING AFTER | MUSCLES MORNING | EVOLVE ENTIRE | RAPIDLY REMAINING | INTO INVENTION | CRANIAL CIRCULATES | ARTHRITIS AGAIN | | |
| ✓ | ? | AMBUSHED annual ASPIRIN | MOTORIST MONTHLY MAY | EXITS EXPENDITURE EVEN | REPAIR BY REPORT RELIEVE | INFERTILE INDICATES INSOMNIA | EMERGING CURRENT CAREFULLY | ADOLESCENTS ACTIVITY ADMINISTERED | | |
| ✓ | ✓ | ANGERED AFRICAN | MAIL MOTORIST MOTHER'S | EXPRESS EXCITEDLY EMBRYOS | REMAINS RIPPED REMAINS | IMPORTANT INTO IM | CARLIER CROWD CUSTODY | ABROAD AREA AFTERWORDS | | |
| ✓ | ? | A | MELTING POT | EMPIRE | REJECTS | IMMIGRANTS | COMING | ASHORE | | |
| ✓ | ? | AGRIANS | MODEL | ENVIRONMENTAL | RECORD | IMPROVED | CANDIDATES | IMAGE | | |
| ✓ | ? | AVAILABLE AIDS AFTER | MARICA MONKEY MUCH | EVIDENCE ESCAPE EXPERIMENTAL | reveals RESEARCH RESEARCHER | INCREASING INSTITUTE INVESTIG | COCAINE CLINICAL CRITIC | addiction anxiety agenda | | |
| ✓ | ? | ACTIVIST AMERICAN | MINISTER MALAISE | EXPENSES EXPERIENCE | fighting RIGHT | INTO | CHRONIC | apathy | | |
| ✓ | ? | A | MORAL MEN | ETHIC EVERYWHERE | REVIEW RATES | INCRIMINATES IT | CHURCH CLASS | ATTORNEYS (A) | | |
| ✓ | ? | ABLE AFTER | MY MILITANTS | EVICTED | RAT | INFESTATION | CONDENSED | APARTMENT | | |
| ✓ | | A | MORE | ENTHUSIASTIC EXECUTE | RESPOND REALITY | IS IN | CONTAINING CITY | ACCOUNTABLE AREAS | | |
| ✓ | ? | ALARMED AFTER | MISTAKE MATH | ENDS EVERY | RECONSTRUCT RESIDENTIAL | INSURGENTS INSURANCE | COUP CLAIM | attempt ammended | | |
| ✓ | ? | A | MOBSTER MORAL MONEY MOTHERS | EVENTUALLY EXTREMIST ELECTRONICALLY EVERYWHERE | REGAINED RECOMMENDED RIGHT | INTERCULTURAL ITALIAN ISOLATING INTO INDIVIDUAL | COUPLES COMMUNITIES CRIMINAL CASH CHOICE | ASSETS AFFLICTED ACCOUNT AMMENDMENT | | |

America Papers IV, 2006

Framed inkjet print mounted on Dibond aluminum composite panel

43.5 x 56.5 x 1.75 in / 110.5 x 143.5 x 4.5 cm

This is a blown-up sketchpad study that Cole considered for a big wall installation he was contemplating for his Montclair Art Museum survey. As part of his desire to broaden the scope and subject matter of his art, Cole began to use acronyms in the early 1990s. In these works, individual letters of a word become the first letter of new words chosen to concoct a freely associated sentence, the content of which relates to the initiating word. Working with acronyms has been Cole's best means to inject topical political content and progressive messages, extracted mostly from TV, print news stories, and the internet into his art.

DRAWINGS AND UNIQUE WORKS ON PAPER



"Crossroad Blues," 2010

Ink on paper

23 x 17.5 in / 53.3 x 44.5 cm

Cross Road Blues was composed by Delta blues singer Robert Johnson (1911-1938). First released in 1937, it was inducted as a classic song into the Grammy Hall of Fame in 1998. The crossroads theme, a staple of blues songs, focuses on momentous, often unanticipated change and its emotional toll. For Cole, this theme also connects to the Elegba deity he directly evokes in his *P.O.V.* and *The Wayside* prints.



Dead Dog Blues, 2009

Marker and ink on paper

23 x 17.5 in / 58 x 44.5 cm

Dead Dog Blues is not an actual title for a song but rather a parody of the heartbreak, loss, and loneliness associated with the blues. This piece was among the first of a small series of noir outline drawings that Cole sees as single, text free pages of a graphic novel. As Cole returned to explicit figuration for the first time since the mid-1980s, music and the lyrics of sadness became a subject in such works as this and *Burning Desire*.

Air Mask, ca. 1989–90

Blow dryers

23 x 24 x 14 in./58.5 x 61 x 35.5 cm.

Collection of Vincent and Pilar M. Pita, New Jersey

Among the first and most ingenious of the series of assemblages of domestic consumer items Cole has made were his hair dryer pieces. They were crafted from a large cache of hair dryers he found in a deserted warehouse near where he was living in Newark, New Jersey. Of the many sculptures using these hairdryers, the most vivid are the vivacious, big-cheeked, many-browed, and long-eared wind mask visages such as this piece. He made many of these hair dryer masks; probably two full sets with north, east, west, and south wind direction designations and others with color or animal descriptions. These masks derived from Cole's many visits to the strong, multi-cultural holdings of the Newark Museum, which he knew well starting with his childhood when he went to the museum for its Saturday art classes. An East Asian influence underlies these exotically transformed household appliances deities of air and heat.



Pacific tji wara, 2002

Bicycle parts

42 3/4 x 14 x 9 in /108.5 x 23 cm

Collection of Joshua L. Mack, New York, NY

This is one of a series, started in 2002, of over twenty "tji wara" type bicycle part sculptures that Cole has crafted. They are made in homage and artful, modernist replication of the esteemed African eastern Bamana people's distinctive tji-wara (also referred to as Coward Kun or Sogoni Kun) head-dress masks. These carvings were attached on woven caps atop the heads of coupled male dancers (enacting male and female spirits) who annually honored and renewed the powers of the antelope/man deity who had taught them to farm and to ensure good harvests and fecundity. Sometimes seen with another smaller, child antelope form perched on a female back, these mask dance sculptures are now among the most sought-after by collectors of African woodcarving. Pacific in the title comes from the brand of colorful bicycle used for this example.



SCULPTURE



The Worrier, 2011

Bronze, 21 3/4 x 8 3/4 x 10 3/4 in / 56 x 22 x 27 cm

Edition of 7, each with a unique patina

Publisher: beta pictoris gallery/Maus Contemporary Art

Birmingham, Alabama

Though he has long worked with other metals, *The Worrier* is only Cole's second cast bronze sculpture; his first, made in 2009 in an edition of one, was a bust of the American rapper and television personality Flavor Flav (b. 1959). *The Worrier's* seven casts are colored with shades of grayish white, bronze, black, and red. Using its stack of eight pairs of shoes, this black cast takes the sentimental notion of bronzing a child's first pair of shoes to a new height. Cole's careful mounding of high heels with two thick shoe sole lips drolly and symmetrically approximates and melds African tribal figurative wood carving and the French sculptor Auguste Rodin's *The Thinker*. With Cole's typical wordplay, *The Worrier* rhymes with its probable cause of worry: war and warriors.



MBF, 2011

Shoes, screws and wire

17 3/4 x 9 x 11 in / 45 x 23 x 28 cm

Cole's acronym initial *MBF* title refers to Man's Best Friend. His obediently sitting all-black canine consists of 13 pairs of shoes and a single folded shoe for the mouth. Its details, e.g., the hearts on the soles of the shoes used for the dog's back, the stitched-together shoes at the top, the array of gold studs, and, unusual for Cole, flat shoes with their long straps, add startling and witty nuance and verisimilitude to his depiction. *MBF* contrasts the complexity of its material and fabrication with the compacted simplicity of its final form.

Acknowledgments

The generous assistance and loans of the artist, his longtime gallery, Alexander and Bonin, New York, and the key private and public collections made this show possible and are gratefully acknowledged. At Alexander and Bonin particular thanks go to Carolyn Alexander for her wise counsel and deep commitment to the artist and his exhibitions and to gallery staff members Alex Schneider and Kathryn Gile for their dedicated help with myriad details.

Mary Salvante, Curator and Gallery and Exhibitions Program Director at the Rowan University Art Gallery is responsible for bringing this first museum show of Willie Cole to southern New Jersey and worked with the author and the designer Jenn Thwing, Assistant Professor, Department of Art, Rowan University to produce this publication.

The basis of this exhibition and publication is *Deep Impressions: Willie Cole Works on Paper*, initiated and produced by the Graduate Center, the City University of New York, 365 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10016, for the James Gallery exhibition at the Graduate Center, September 21, 2010 – January 8, 2011.

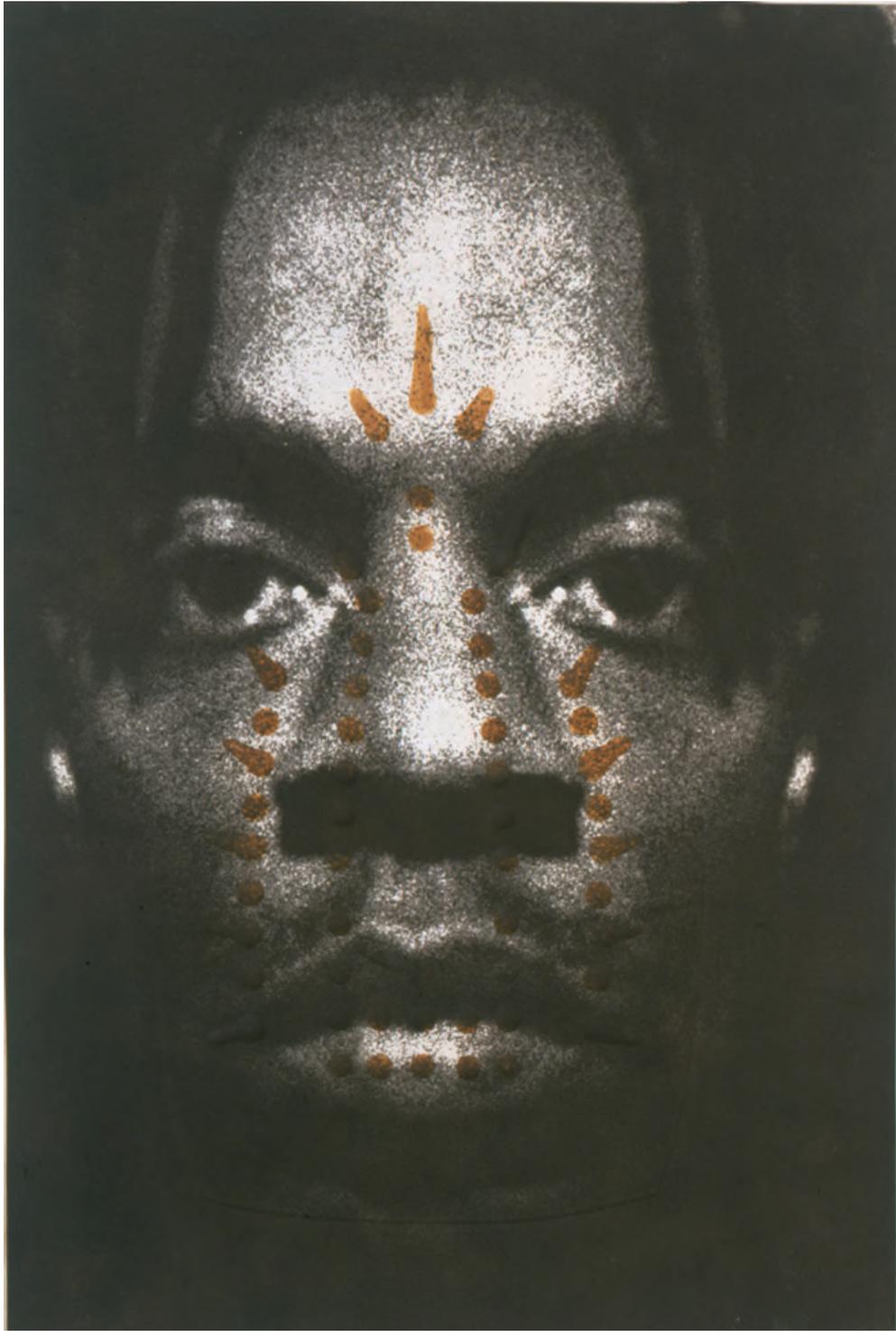
Other venues participating in the tour of the previous version of this exhibition, the Memphis Brooks Museum, Memphis, Tennessee and the Sarah Moody Gallery, University of Alabama, are acknowledged with thanks for also significantly broadening the reach and audience of this exploration of Willie Cole's works on paper.

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Man from *Man Spirit Mask*, 1999