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For more information or press images, contact:
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Exhibition Announcement

Complex Conversations: Willie Cole Sculptures and Wall Works
September 14 – December 15, 2013


Complex Conversations covers more than thirty years of the art of Willie Cole, from three-dimensional sculpture to drawing and printmaking. The exhibition establishes thematic consistencies and intense interactions of Cole’s art and its focus on key consumer objects like hairdryers, high heel shoes, and, above all, the steam iron. Inner-city African-American life and family have been the underpinnings of Cole’s work. He has lived most of his life in or near Newark, NJ, a city fraught with racial tensions and violence in the late 1960s.

In Cole’s deft hands and multileveled sensibility, his art connects the personal and the spiritual, everyday consumer objects and multi-layered metaphor, and African-American and US history and reality within a global perspective. Cole sees himself as an “urban archaeologist” whose style solidified during a prestigious eleven-month emerging artist residency at the Studio Museum in Harlem. At that time, he found a flattened steam iron near his loft and immediately
saw the formal similarity of its sole plate to slender wood facemasks made by the Dan people of northern Liberia.

Cole then turned to what became his signature work: assemblage-based works incorporating scrap materials and found objects that recall traditional African masks and headdresses. His art transforms everyday mass-produced objects into personal icons or symbolic representations that explore ideas of diversity, identity, and a consumer-based society. Best known for his sculptures, Cole also makes drawings, paintings, and prints.

*Complex Conversations: Willie Cole Sculptures and Wall Works* is organized by the James W. & Lois I. Richmond Center for Visual Arts (RCVA) at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo. Patterson Sims, Curator.

**Artist Biography**
Willie Cole (b. 1955, Somerville, NJ) attended the Boston University School of Fine Arts, and received his BFA degree from the School of the Visual Arts in New York in 1976. He continued his studies at the Art Students League of New York Art from 1976-79. Recent solo exhibitions include James Gallery of the City University of New York; Memphis Brooks Museum of Art; and Rowan University Art Gallery. A retrospective exhibition, *Anxious Objects: Willie Cole’s Favorite Brands*, was organized by the Montclair Art Museum in 2006 and traveled nationally. Cole is the recipient of many awards, including the David C. Driskell Prize in 2006, the first national award to honor and celebrate contributions to the field of African American art and art history established by the High Museum of Art in Atlanta. This is the fourth traveling survey of the art of Willie Cole in the last decade, two of them also organized by Patterson Sims. Cole’s work is represented by Alexander and Bonin, New York.


**Related Public Programs**

**Artist Talk & Reception**
Friday, September 27, 5:30 pm
A special artist’s talk with Willie Cole. Seating is limited. Up to two seats may be reserved beginning August 19 by emailing csrogers@uncg.edu, calling: (336) 256-1450, or reserving online at [http://weatherspoon.uncg.edu/eventcalendar](http://weatherspoon.uncg.edu/eventcalendar). Reception follows. Free.

**Educators Workshop**
Saturday, September 28, 10 am-4 pm
$50 WAM Members, $65 Non-Members
Educators will have the special opportunity to explore sculpture and drawing with the artist Willie Cole. Bring an object to transform that will become the basis for imaginative new works of two- and three-dimensional art (see website for details). Enjoy a bag lunch in the courtyard or visit one of Tate Street’s many restaurants during our mid-day break. Pre-registration is required. See website for details or contact Terri Dowell-Dennis at t_dowell@uncg.edu or 336-256-1449. A certificate of participation will be provided and can be used for CEU credit with prior approval of your school system.
Noon @ the 'Spoon  
Tuesday, October 8, 12 pm  
30 minute public tour. Free.

Fall Family Day  
Saturday, October 19, 1-4 pm  
Enjoy printmaking activities, live music, gallery games, and refreshments. Weatherspoon Family Days are free and fun for all ages! Free.

For a complete, updated list of related programs, visit http://weatherspoon.uncg.edu.

About the Weatherspoon Art Museum

Mission  
The Weatherspoon Art Museum at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro acquires, preserves, exhibits, and interprets modern and contemporary art for the benefit of its multiple audiences, including university, community, regional, and beyond. Through these activities, the museum recognizes its paramount role of public service, and enriches the lives of diverse individuals by fostering an informed appreciation and understanding of the visual arts and their relationship to the world in which we live.

History  
The Weatherspoon Art Museum at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro was founded by Gregory Ivy in 1941 and is the earliest of any art facilities within the UNC system. The museum was founded as a resource for the campus, community, and region and its early leadership developed an emphasis—maintained to this day—on presenting and acquiring modern and contemporary works of art. A 1950 bequest from the renowned collection of Claribel and Etta Cone, which included prints and bronzes by Henri Matisse and other works on paper by American and European modernists, helped to establish the Weatherspoon’s permanent collection. Other prescient acquisitions during Ivy’s tenure included a 1951 suspended mobile by Alexander Calder, Woman by Willem de Kooning, a pivotal work in the artist’s career that was purchased in 1954, and the first drawings by Eva Hesse and Robert Smithson to enter a museum collection. In 1989, the museum moved into its present location in The Anne and Benjamin Cone building designed by the architectural firm Mitchell Giurgola. The museum has six galleries and a sculpture courtyard with over 17,000 square feet of exhibition space. The American Association of Museums accredited the Weatherspoon in 1995 and renewed its accreditation in 2005.

Collections + Exhibitions  
The permanent collection of the Weatherspoon Art Museum is considered to be one of the foremost of its kind in the Southeast. It represents all major art movements from the beginning of the 20th century to the present. Of the nearly 6,000 works in the collection are pieces by such prominent figures as Sol LeWitt, Robert Mangold, Cindy Sherman, Al Held, Alex Katz, Henry Tanner, Louise Nevelson, Mark di Suvero, Deborah Butterfield, and Robert Rauschenberg. The museum regularly lends to major exhibitions nationally and internationally.

The Weatherspoon also is known for its adventurous and innovative exhibition program. Through a dynamic annual calendar of fifteen to eighteen exhibitions and a multi-disciplinary educational program for audiences of all ages, the museum provides an opportunity for
audiences to consider artistic, cultural, and social issues of our time and enriches the life of our university, community, and region.

Weatherspoon Art Museum
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