



Mystery of the Masks, 2005. Collage and acrylic on paper, 29 1/2 x 21 5/8 inches

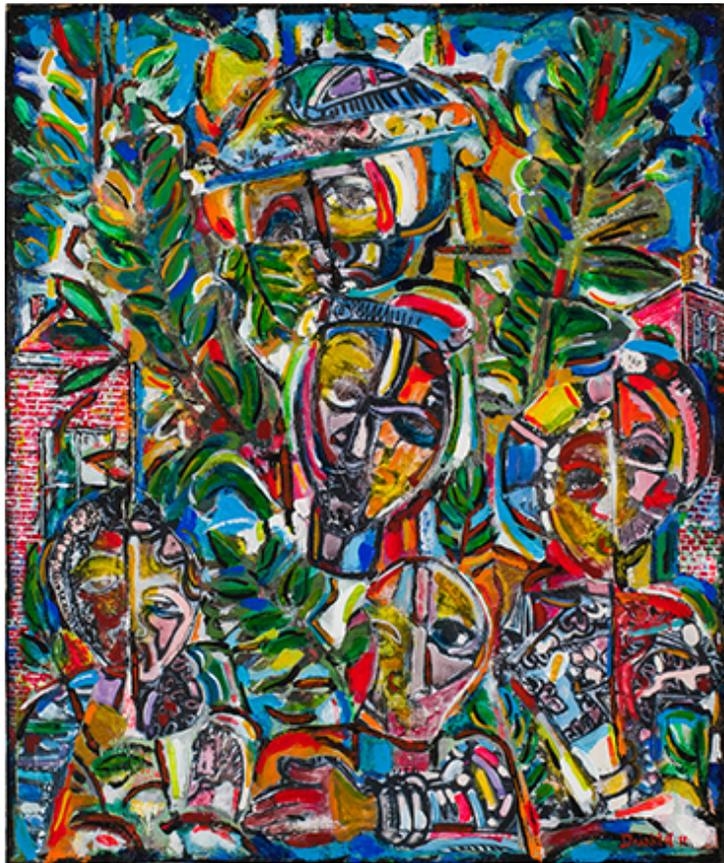
Interpreted holistically, across his oeuvre, Driskell gives us compositions in which the human and the divine coexist. African masks, ancestors, and nature in its earthly and celestial forms, take residence in Driskell's creative realm.

-Julie L. McGee

DC Moore Gallery is pleased to present *David Driskell: Mystery of the Masks*, on view from February 17th through March 26th.

David Driskell (1931 - 2020) created a body of work that unites a strong modernist impulse with his personal vision and memory. The works highlighted in this exhibition were heavily influenced by early trips taken to the African continent taken between 1969 and 1972. He returned with a deep appreciation and respect for African artistic traditions and iconography which he brought into his artwork. As explained by art critic John Yau, "Driskell never tried to fit in or accommodate his work to prevailing, white, avant-garde styles...Rather, he absorbed aspects of various styles and, in the cauldron of his art practice, welded them to his personal and cultural history." Driskell transformed iconic African art forms into honorific personal visions - flattened, decorated, and resurfaced in his signature style, color, and calligraphy - and melded these forms with Modernist aesthetics and the tradition of Western art.

For Driskell, the African mask became a central, fundamental theme revisited throughout his work. As explained by art historian Adrienne L. Childs, in Driskell's art, "the mask is not only an intriguing formal model, but represents his own ancestors, both African and American, ever present in his memory." In *Ancient Watch* (1975), a central cluster of six masks peers through the white top layer of paint, as if they are ancestors peering through the veil dividing their world from ours and keeping watch over our world. In *Palm Sunday* (2011), painted as a tribute to Romare Bearden, Driskell depicts the figures in the church processional with mask-like faces split into two. The splitting of the masks represents the connection between those in the present and their ancestors. Embedding himself directly into this history and narrative, Driskell renders the lower left figure as a self-portrait.



Palm Sunday, 2011. Collage and acrylic on fiberboard, 24 x 20 inches

The exhibition also highlights Driskell's exploration of the self-portrait throughout his career, which began in the 1950s when he was a student at Howard University. These self-portraits were expressive depictions that served as a means of self-examination and reflection for Driskell. Art historian Julie L. McGee explains that "many self-portraits are intimate studies of his mood, changing physiognomy and hairstyles, others intertwine his face with an African mask," perhaps as a means to directly connect his sense of self with his ancestors.

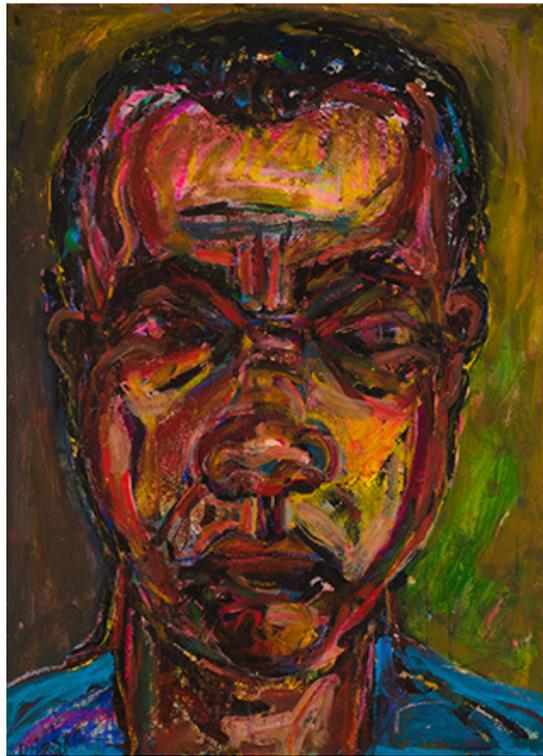
A catalogue with an essay, *An Inward Poet's Vision*, by Julie L. McGee accompanies the exhibition.

David Driskell was born in Eatonville, GA in 1931 to a father who was a Baptist minister and a mother who was a quilter. He received his BA in Fine Art from Howard University (1955) and MFA from Catholic University (1962), both in Washington, D.C. He attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Madison, Maine, in 1953, with which he has retained a lifelong relationship, serving as visiting faculty, lecturer, and board member.

Driskell's pioneering scholarship underpins the current field of African American art history. Among his most influential curatorial contributions is the exhibition and catalogue for the groundbreaking *Two Centuries of Black American Art*, which opened in 1976 at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) and traveled to museums across the country. In 1977, after having taught at Talladega College, Howard University, and Fisk University, Driskell joined the Department of Art at the University of Maryland where he remained until his retirement in 1998. The University of Maryland opened The David C. Driskell Center for the Study of the Visual Arts and Culture of African Americans and the African Diaspora in 2001 to celebrate his legacy as an artist and art historian.

Driskell's works have been featured in numerous solo and group exhibitions in galleries and museums throughout the United States, most recently as the subject of the career survey *David Driskell: Icons of Nature and History* (2021 - 2022) at the High Museum of Art, GA, which traveled to the Portland Museum of Art, ME, the Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C., and the Cincinnati Art Museum, OH. Other solo exhibitions include *David Driskell: Renewal and Reform* (2017) at the Center for Maine Contemporary Art, ME, and *Creative Spirit: The Art of David C. Driskell* (2011) at the David C. Driskell Center at the University of Maryland, College Park, MD. Group exhibitions include *Black American Portraits* (2021 - 2022) at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; *Afro-Atlantic Stories* (2018), which originated at the Sao Paulo Museum of Art and traveled (2021 - 2024) to the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA, and the Dallas Museum of Art, TX; *Tell Me Your Story* (2020) at Kunsthal KAdE in Amersfoort, the Netherlands; and *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power* (2018-2019) at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, NY.

His works can be found in collections throughout the country, including the Baltimore Museum of Art, MD; Birmingham Museum of Art, AL; Bowdoin College Museum, ME; Colby College Museum, ME; Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, AR; High Museum of Art, GA; Hood Museum of Art, NH; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; National Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington, D.C. Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, PA; Portland Museum of Art, ME; The Studio Museum in Harlem, NY; and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, VA, among others.



Self Portrait, 2003-2004. Acrylic on paper, 29 3/4 x 22 1/4 inches

DC Moore Gallery specializes in contemporary and twentieth-century art. The gallery is open by appointment Tuesday through Saturday from 10am-6pm. For more information, photographs, or to arrange a viewing please call 212-247-2111 or email Sabeena Khosla at skhosla@dcmooregallery.com.