

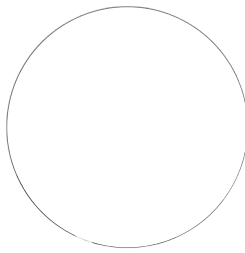
DISCIPLINES GALLERY



Features

Black Artist in Graphic Communication

In an introduction to a reprint of Dorothy Hayes's 1970 CA article, Dr. Miller unearths part of the buried history of Black graphic designers.



By Dr. Cheryl D. Miller

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination on April 4, 1968 was a pivotal marker for the closing of the 1954–1968 civil rights movement, organized by African Americans and their allies to eradicate legalized racial discrimination, disenfranchisement and racial segregation in America. King's murder finally moved the needle to change. Even in the visual communication industry, people started asking the question: "Where are the Black designers?"

**BLACK ARTIST
IN GRAPHIC
COMMUNICATION**



Prior to this, both *Communication Arts* and *PRINT* magazine had told the stories of renowned White male designers and a sprinkling of women designers, but courageously in 1968, they began to tackle the plight of the Black designer's missing presence in the industry.

CA's April 1968 cover asked, "How many Black Americans will graduate from art school this year?" "[We] have a very exclusive fraternity. The racial imbalance in advertising is second only to segregated social clubs," CA cofounder Richard Coyne contended unapologetically in his editorial.

In its November/December 1968 issue, *PRINT* published “The Black Experience in Graphic Design,” which queried five Black designers on their experiences in a field where “flesh colored means pink.” Dorothy E. Hayes, Alex Walker, Bill Howell, William Wacasey and Dorothy Akubuiro offered bittersweet replies of persistence and defiance against the odds. Their words offered a glimpse of the Black designer’s dilemma.

On January 2, 1969, designer Joyce Hopkins called Hayes to stop by for a visit, encouraged by Hayes as she had just received several copies of *PRINT*’s November/December 1968 issue and wanted to give Hopkins a copy. Reading the article together, they agreed: “Something needs to be done to let people know that we are doing our thing!”

For twelve years, Hayes had been thinking about how to inform “The Establishment” that Black design professionals indeed existed. Hopkins knew Sid Minson, president of The Composing Room, a New York City-based typesetting firm cofounded by Sol M. Cantor. By the end of February 1969, Minson introduced them to Sol’s son Eli Cantor, board chairman of The Composing Room and director of Gallery 303, the firm’s showcase gallery for young graphic designers seeking exposure to the industry.

After meeting Hayes formally on March 13, 1969, and empathetic to the challenges Black designers encountered, Cantor agreed to put on a show with Hayes. Together, they began to define the show’s purpose and created an exhaustive PR campaign to build awareness. As countless press releases quote Hayes: “One purpose of the exhibition is to show the advertising and publishing industries ... the vast reservoir of talent, which is being unused, misused or under used.” She and Cantor assembled the team that worked for over a year to bring forth the exhibit. Illustrator Mahler Ryder headed the exhibition committee. Illustrator Reynold Ruffins, inspired during an early morning walk, conceived the exhibition’s “black birds” theme, which was used on all the event materials.

A Call for Entries was originally mailed to 125 names, requesting five samples from each artist. The judging took place at Ruffins’s 61st Street studio from September 29th through October 1st, 1969. Ultimately, the work of 49 distinguished New York Black artists was selected for inclusion.

The *Black Artist In Graphic Communication* gala launched on January 8, 1970, at Gallery 303. In April 1970, the show began traveling around the United States and Canada universities, colleges, art museums and galleries, and completed its tour in April 1971.

In its January 1971 issue, Japanese magazine *IDEA* published the exhibit's story and major features in a 47-page article including 12 pages in full color, capturing a more complete mid-century-era visual history of Black graphic design with photos and biographies of the participants. But Cantor, who wrote the article's commentary, asserts he birthed the idea for the exhibit. Hayes's reporting of the event in CA's "An Exhibition by Black Artists" is most accurate: "The exhibit was the joint idea of co-chairmen Dorothy Hayes and Joyce Hopkins."

In the wake of George Floyd's and Breonna Taylor's murders, we find our industry in another season of reparation, once again asking: "Where are the Black designers?" But there is a rich history of Black graphic design. The answer is to acknowledge the cause, effect and affect of this history upon our industry. CA's original article is our primary history book, exhibiting 49 Black creatives who successfully overcame racially imbalanced odds.

In a recent reflection, Andrea Marquez remembers her participation as a selected artist: "*Black Artist in Graphic Communication* was years before its time and an important contribution to our American history. I was fortunate enough to have been a part of the exhibit. CA magazine, in recognizing this historical contribution by reprinting this article, is reinforcing our achievements to today's audience." **ca**

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An Exhibition of Black Artists

By Dorothy Hayes

wide-ranging exhibition of graphic communication—including design, illustration, advertising, television commercials and film—is currently on a two-year tour of art schools and colleges. Originated, planned, selected and produced by Black artists, it presents the work of 49 Black men and women from the New York metropolitan area. Except for collections of fine arts assembled under museum auspices, it is believed to be the first



A exhibition in this country to present a representative showing of graphics by Black professional artists.



The selection committee (from left): Seldon Dix, Carl Overr, Reynold Ruffins, Mahler Ryder, Roy LaGrone, Dorothy E. Hayes, Alex Oliver, Joyce Hopkins. Photograph courtesy of Dorothy Hayes papers (M2740). Dept. of Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford Libraries, Stanford, CA; Jim Collier, photographer.

The exhibition was the joint idea of co-chairmen Dorothy Hayes and Joyce Hopkins. Miss Hayes teaches advertising concept at the New York City

Community College as well as operating her own design studio in New York. Joyce Hopkins is a designer with Harper & Row, book publishers.

The selection committee was made up of Black artists and designers. In addition to Miss Hayes and Miss Hopkins, it included Seldon Dix, Jr., graphic designer; Alex Oliver, Carl Overr and Roy LaGrone, art directors; Reynold Ruffins, illustrator; and Mahler Ryder, illustrator and instructor in drawing at the Rhode Island School of Design.

Georg Olden served as a consultant to the committee, as did Leo Fassler, vice president and associate creative director at Benton & Bowles.

Lubalin, Smith, Carnase & Ferriter volunteered their resources to design and mount the exhibition which appeared first, early this year, at the Composing Room's Gallery 303 in New York.



At the gala opening (from left): Herb Lubalin, principal, Lubalin, Smith, Carnase & Ferriter; Dorothy E. Hayes, committee cochairman; George Olden, vice president, McCann Erickson; Eli Cantor, board chairman, the Composing Room/director of Gallery 303. Photograph courtesy of Dorothy Hayes papers (M2740). Dept. of Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford Libraries, Stanford, CA; Jim Collier, photographer.

Several films were shown as part of the exhibition. Poet, composer, painter, photographer and filmmaker Gordon Parks was represented with a 25-minute autobiographical film. Seventeen television commercials by Georg Olden were shown, as were commercials by producers Ted Shearer, Bill Mason, Alex Oliver, Dorothy Hayes and Tee Collins. An IBM sales recruiting film designed for use in recruiting sessions in Black schools was also presented. It was produced, directed and shot by Roy Inman.

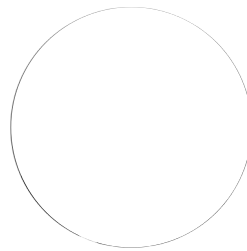
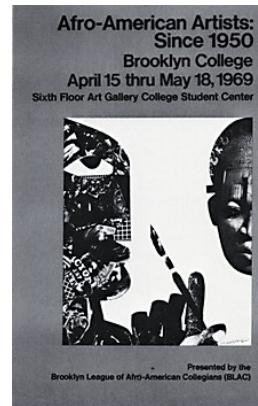
A special music score to accompany the exhibition was written by Gene Casey.

The 49 artists represented in the *Black Artist in Graphic Communication* exhibition are:

Dorothy Akubuiro, Roosevelt Allison, Romare Bearden, Charles Boyd, Cecil Elombe Brath, Ronnie Brathwaite, Oraston Brooks-El, Wallace E. Caldwell, Elmore Theodore Collins, Donald Crews, Leo and Diane Dillon, Seldon Dix, Philip Draggan, Loring Eutemey, Tom Feelings, George Ford, Veronal Grant, Robert A. Gumbs, Donald Harper, Dorothy E. Hayes, Joyce Hopkins, Bill Howell, Roy Inman, Louise E. Jefferson, Jo Jones, Roy E. LaGrone, Vincent Lewis, Alexander Mapp, Andrea Marquez, Bill Mason, Don Miller, John Morning, Georg Olden, Alex Oliver, Carl Overr, Gordon Parks, Jerry Pinkney, George Robert Pruden, Samuel Reed, Reynold Ruffins, Mahler B. Ryder, Ahmand Sadig, Ted Shearer, John Steptoe, Otis D. Sullivan, Mozelle Wilmont Thompson, Jr., Alex Walker, Bernadine Watson and Verona Witcher.

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