

THADDEUS MOSLEY

March 11 – April 17, 2004

”... his pieces partake of tilt, bend, lean, asymmetric poise, flirting with totter, flirting with collapse, miracles of recondite balance.”

-- Nathaniel Mackey, Exhibition Curator

Writer and poet Nathaniel Mackey was first introduced to Thaddeus Mosley's work by fellow poet Ed Roberson in the late nineties. What particularly resonated for Mackey was the symbiotic relationship forged between the sculptor and his chosen material of stone and wood. Mackey believes Mosley's deftly carved and beautifully composed sculptures require greater exposure beyond the Pittsburgh arts community, in which he has played a prominent role for more than 40 years.

In Mosley's sculptures, the individual characteristic of each piece of wood remains intact. The sensuous and anthropomorphic qualities of his work and his ability to capture the essence of the material echo the sculptural language of Brancusi, Moore, and Noguchi. According to writer David Lewis, “[Mosley's] sculpture also never ceases to be a tree; its energy to soar is tempered by shakes and splits in the wood and the scars of its surface, as though youth and age... aspiration and struggle are combined in one expression.” One of Mosley's greatest sources of inspiration came from a photograph of grave markers in Georgia, which he found in Marshall Stearns' book, *The Story of Jazz*. It reminded him of Brancusi's “Bird in Space” sculptures. Each work had, according to the sculptor, “a similar spirit, a similar approach to clean, fluid shapes coming from people working close to the earth and trying to fuse the earth and human spirituality into a single form.”



Rhythmic Rhythms, 2002
Walnut & Cherry, 7' x 3' x 2'6"



Equivalence, 2002
Walnut, 4'7" x 2' x 1'4"

The earthbound nature and totemic quality of many of Mosley's pieces build on many African tribal art traditions. His approach and relationship to his materials further relates to ancient African belief systems in which every object has its own life force. Without the aide of preparatory drawings, he draws instead with hammer and chisel, creating what he describes as a “sculptural improvisation, a journey,” while focusing on “materials, form, rhythm, surface, relation to the earth, and capacity to soar.” Yet, there is no mistaking his sculptural discipline, for the patterning caused by his chisel marks is as important to him as is the articulation of form and mass. In his most recent works, found elements such as metal and bone are included, some of which he has kept with him for more than 20 years. Incorporation enlivens these elements for, according to Mosley, “you have to listen to the sculpture while you are working on it. It will tell you what it needs.”


(Over, please)

Mosley's passion for literature and culture has played an instrumental role throughout his life and career. References found in art books, while as a student at the University of Pittsburgh in the late 1940's, introduced him to the sophistication and vitality of African art and sculptures by Brancusi. Equally important in his education as an artist were his frequent visits to the Carnegie Museum. The Carnegie's Permanent Collection and the Pittsburgh Internationals of the 50's and 60's exposed him to contemporary art from all over the world, including the works of influential sculptors such as Arp, Calder, Moore, Soulages, among others.

Yet, it was a modest exhibition of Scandinavian furniture, which included wood carvings of birds and fish that finally prompted him to begin carving in wood. By then, Mosley, approaching thirty and the father of two children, decided to devote himself to sculpting, working two jobs in order to do so, and initially creating pieces that were quite naturalistic. Unable to attend art school, he opted instead to gain practical knowledge through his own curricula with Chaim Gross's book, *The Technique of Wood Sculpture* serving as his principal means of instruction. He also became friendly with fellow African-American sculptors, William Palmer and Carl Smith, and would frequent local museums together and meet at local jazz bars in which the great pioneers including Coltrane, Mingus, and Gillespie would perform. In 1961, Mosley along with fellow artists, Charles Anderson and Lee Cowan, formed the Watt Lane Art Club, a grass-roots arts collective for African American artists working in Pittsburgh. The club would later change its name to Group One, expand its membership, open a gallery, and stage poetry readings and jazz performances. Yet, after four years, the group disbanded prompting Mosley to find his own studio.

Using one of his sculptures as a down payment, Mosley bought a new house with an adjoining structure that would become his working studio. The move also served to integrate what was previously an all-white working class neighborhood. Undaunted by the surrounding racial tension that marked this period, Mosley continued to sculpt in the studio, work at the post office, and raise three children. The routine allowed him to devote four hours a day at the studio and to develop, for the first time, a mature and recognizable style that garnered him exhibitions. In 1968, he had his first solo exhibition at the Carnegie Museum of Art. Several exhibitions and awards have followed including the purchase of *Georgia Gate #1* by the Carnegie Museum in 1976, and the Governor's Distinguished Arts Award in 1999.

Thaddeus Mosley was born in New Castle, Pennsylvania, in 1926. Following high school and a stint in the Navy, he enrolled at the University of Pittsburgh, where he graduated in 1950 with a double major in English and Journalism. Mosley then went to work for the postal service, from which he retired in 1992. During the 1950's, he additionally did freelance journalism for *The Courier* and for several national magazines; he also began making sculpture. Since that time, his work has been shown in numerous exhibitions throughout Pennsylvania, including a recent exhibition at the Carnegie Museum of Art in 1997. Mosley lives and works in Pittsburgh, PA.

This exhibition was made possible with the generous support of 

Upcoming exhibitions:

April 22 – May 29, 2004

Richard Allen Morris: Curated by Siri Hustvedt

Robert Sussman: Curated by Thomas Nozkowski

For additional information, please contact Jeremy Adams, Gallery Director / Sandhini Poddar, Gallery Assistant, CUE Art Foundation, (212) 206-3583.