

# ALVIN CELEBRATES ALVIN



Portrait of A.C. Hollingsworth

by Joseph D. Harris PH.D

The ninth month of the year which heralded in the new decade of the 80's saw the magnificent coming together of two human traditions: the performing and fine arts. From September 14th to the 21st, the relatively small area of the Bronx county court house reserved for the Bronx Museum of the Arts exhibited 26 new works by Alvin Hollingsworth, Professor of Art at the Eugenio Maria de Hostos Community College, City University of New York, in celebration of Alvin Ailey and the American Dance Theatre. The works in size ranged from a quartet of small ink-lined drawings portraying dance movement sequences to a larger-than-life canvas of oil and acrylic, collaged amidst a towering poster image of Judith Jamison. Other canvases caught at once in moment and motion scenes from Ailey's Blues Suite, Cry and the nationally and internationally acclaimed Revelations. A majority of the drawing done in ink or ink and oil captured undressed movement and gesture, rehearsals of works choreographed by Alvin Ailey and performed throughout the world by the American Dance Theatre.

A handful of works sprinkled throughout the show suggests the dance theme in its universal application and expression: a beautifully rendered oil and acrylic canvas displaying a sextette of strong female dancers possessing large buxom bodies reminiscent of the East, perhaps Russia. The title of the exhibit "Dance Sequence", allowed for such universality, not to mention the artist's comment that "'Dance Sequence' was inspired by the many, great, contemporary dance companies....It represents a series I had to paint. From

my early days, I was fascinated by the poetry and artistry of the dancer....I have continued to attempt to capture the beauty of their bodies, motions and moods on canvas." To be sure, the exhibit succeeds in doing this. It is, nevertheless, unmistakably Alvin Hollingsworth celebrating Alvin Ailey and Company.

For me the most remarkable and deeply felt significance of the show is this fact of the fact that an accomplished Black artist pays tribute to his Black contemporary. Certainly, the coming together of performing and visual arts in and of itself is nothing new. The individual origin of the dance and painting alike must be, at least almost, as old as the human species, itself. But yet the exhibit, the coming together of these two human traditions, extends the current evolving of the dance and painting into a synthesis of Black experience, cultural attitudes, and world perspectives objectified and expressed in fixed indelible form, mood, color and movement. It catches the brilliance of the Black dance renaissance as a visual experience-an art of motion which brings to life the dynamic quality of drama and movement, lights and color and even music-so difficult, so near impossible to hold on to; to take with you, after the curtain, when the magic of performance had died.

Hollingsworth's vibrantly rich use of colors and lines and three-dimensional patterns of sculpture exudes and resonates with a long ago experienced Ailey spectacular - retrieves *les temps perdus*, the total experience, the rhythm, the bounce, swirl and jubilation of "Wade in the Water 'Chillun' ". Originally, the thought was that the exhibit would open with and hang for

the duration of the American Dance Theatre's spring season at City Center. Of course, this would have assured an audience more or less familiar with and receptive to the Ailey theme. Events would have it, that such a plan did not come to fruition. The September following Ailey's spring season, however, the new series was viewed and well received by a large number of persons from various and sundry walks of life.

The continuous rise in the number of enthusiastic Black participants in and supporters of the arts - especially so of dance and painting - is a wonderful and welcomed comment on the changing perspective and behavior of Blacks, in general. The shift from the traditional overwhelming socio-economic demands to sustain mere daily existence toward demands less total and stringent in depth and scope has permitted Blacks (as such shifts have with all peoples) expression and appreciation of universal life forces exposing and availing more widely the deep meanings underneath the various forms of pleasure that a people must create for themselves.

Of course everyone could not see this celebration of Black artist by Black artist, expressed in his medium in praise of another's as anything of particular note. For many, to be sure, the event could represent little more than a set of statements related to a preference for one canvas or another, or for the dance purist, the likeness - geometric preciseness - a rendering of a dancer or dance movement holds with reality or in his recollection of a specific performance. All of this is, of course, quite understandable, and, especially is it so, where there exists little historical perspective on the relationships among



Ink Sketch of Revelations  
"DANCE SEQUENCES"