

**Saint James**

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stiff," she said, noting that this was literally going to be a conversation with an artist. She said she wore her jellies and her T-shirt for her informal program.

She began by talking a little about herself, and then she accepted questions from the audience.

"I knew at 5 years old I wanted to be an artist. Now I'm 50," said Saint James, who lives in Los Angeles.

She said she started professionally by selling a few of her artworks in offices in New York. Then word spread within the offices and many other people wanted to buy her art.

In 1977 she had her first one-woman art show.

Disney once offered her an 8-5 job as an animator, but she declined after she asked several other animators whether they still painted. They said no.

She recently co-wrote with Bunny Hull a children's song about the principles of Kwanzaa titled "Happy, Happy Kwanzaa" after learning that there were no songs for children for Kwanzaa. (Bunny Hill won a Grammy for "New Attitude.") The Kwanzaa song features a multicultural choir of children. Saint James said the song shows "Kwanzaa can be celebrated by anyone."

Saint James then played the song for the audience. Several people in the audience moved their heads, arms and feet to the music and sang along.

The song was recorded by Synthia Saint James music publishing company, a new venture for her.

Saint James said that one local television station has referred to her as The Kwanzaa Queen.

One member of the audience asked how Saint James was chosen to do the postage stamp about Kwanzaa.

Saint James said government officials searched the Internet for Kwanzaa art and saw a book cover she had done. A government official called her. "The government can get your phone number," she laughed. She sent the government a package telling about all her art-

works, not just the ones dealing with Kwanzaa.

A government official called back and asked, "Do you have time to do a stamp for Kwanzaa?" she said.

Girl Scouts has also commissioned her to do art for the 85th anniversary of the organization.

A member of the audience asked Saint James who inspired her at the age of 5? Saint James said that at 5 she just knew that she loved art.

At 11, a film about French artist and lithographer Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec was her favorite, and in 1980 she visited Paris and saw some of the areas where he painted.

Saint James said she is a self-taught artist. "So it was very unusual for me 1 1/2 years ago to be the keynote speaker at an art educators conference," she said. "I felt (art) should never be a grade." She said that most people she knows who took art or majored in art in college did not become artists because it was a grade.

And "a lot of well-trained and wonderful artists have all these rules in their heads: 'You can't use this color with this color,'" Saint James said.

In addition to art, Saint James has long been interested in writing. About the same time she started painting a lot in New York, she started writing poetry, she said. "Art gave me a chance to do the writing." She has written and illustrated several books, including "The Gifts of Kwanzaa" and "Girlfriends."

One member of the audience asked who has inspired Saint James as an artist.

She responded, "I've got my champions."

She mentioned one of them - Alice Walker, who was one of the first people to use a Saint James painting on a book cover. It was a Book of the Month Club selection.

One member of the audience asked Saint James what was the first piece of art she ever sold.

Saint James responded that it was an oil abstract painting that she did in the 1960s for a lawyer she worked for.

"That's when the bandwagon started. Everybody had to have one," she said, noting that she received about \$75 for the first painting, which she said was a lot of money back then.

Saint James said that her largest painting is a 150-foot artwork for a baggage claim area for the airport in Ontario, Calif. She drew and color-coded the artwork, which was then fabricated into ceramic tile. Several million people will see the artwork every year, she said.

One member of the audience asked whether Saint James collaborates on paintings with other artists.

Only Charles Bibbs (of Moreno Valley, Calif.), she responded. She paints her portion first, then he accentuates. One of their original paintings was stolen from an exhibit in Atlanta. In 2001 they will do a calendar together.

Another asked if a tabletop book of all of Saint James' paintings is in the works.

Saint James said no but she would love for someone to do one. Saint James said that she has illustrated a book titled "Hallelujah!" about a black Jesus that is coming out for Christmas 2000.

"We'll have the first black Jesus that I know of," she said.

When the book publisher received her paintings for the book, "they loved them," Saint James said.

A member of the audience asked if Saint James thinks there will be any "political fallout" from a book about a black Jesus.

"It'll be interesting," she said. "I'm sure it's going to sell really well."

She said that the book publisher, a major company, considered the potential fallout and the potential market for such a book before doing such a project.

Saint James said she did a lot of research about Bethlehem for her paintings.

She showed the audience her illustrations for the book. One woman in the audience said she hopes Saint James keeps doing children's books. The illustrations are easy for children to understand and the "colors jump

out at them," the woman said.

Saint James noted that her books are usually multicultural, even if the main character is black.

One member of the audience asked why Saint James paints people with "a clean slate" for a face, rather than with features.

"As a self-taught artist I wanted to do all of it," Saint James responded, noting that her painting style has gone through phases. For a time, she painted her subjects from a realistic perspective, capturing details and features. But since the 1980s, she has painted her subjects featureless.

"I tell children, and it works well with adults, to imagine them-

selves on the pages or imagine their friends," Saint James said.

At first, one book publisher was reluctant to accept Saint James' paintings with featureless faces, but she showed the book publisher books the company had published previously by other artists who had featureless paintings.

Other the years, Saint James' style has come into vogue, and some other artists have imitated it.

Saint James said that for the past four or five years, some school teachers have used her artwork to teach their students, which pleases her.

Local artist Anne Bonner -

whose own colorful paintings grace the walls of Whistling Women - said she admires Saint James for "being true" and standing by her artistic convictions. Bonner said she sees rhythm, unity and sisterhood in Saint James' paintings. "(They don't) just say black people; it's about all people," Bonner said.

When Bonner was complimented about the vibrant colors in her own paintings, she said they are not as vibrant as Saint James' paintings.

Works by Saint James are now on exhibit at the Diggs Gallery at Winston-Salem State University.

**Briefs**

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ference, hailed the NAACP initiative against the exclusion of black artists in new television programming.

His association is currently campaigning to bring an end to the embargo against black promoters and other businesses within the concert industry.

"The promoters have been picketing, petitioning, and have filed a lawsuit against talent agencies such as William Morris and Creative Artists for excluding black promoters from handling concerts featuring white artists and stellar black artists," Rev. Lowery said. "Now that the NAACP has opened a second front in the struggle against economic injustice in the entertainment industry, both talent agencies and major TV networks must face up to their responsibilities to put an end to the exclusion of black promoters, other black-owned businesses and artists."

**Census Bureau to hire noncitizens**

The U.S. Census Monitoring Board has been granted a waiver by the Department of Commerce allowing it to hire qualified noncitizens for the 2000 decennial census.

"Allowing the bureau to hire noncitizens who are legally residing in United States gives the agency an important tool to find and count those people living in hard-to-enumerate areas," said the board. "Our nation is home to people representing many cultures and languages. But, they are part of the American family, and every effort should be expended to find and count them in Census 2000."

**HUD awards \$3.1 million in grants to 26 states**

Housing and Urban Development Secretary Andrew Cuomo recently awarded \$3.1 million in grants to 26 states to help low-income elderly and disabled citizens get health care, meals and other supportive services they need while living in HUD-subsidized housing.

**Murder**

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remains were discovered June 2. A 16-year-old suspect was arrested the next day and remained in custody today.

NAACP officials believe the teen had ties to an area hate group called the Day Walkers. Activist Lee

"These grants will help older Americans and people with disabilities stay out of nursing homes and institutions and continue living in their homes," Cuomo said. "They will help families stay together and improve the lives of some of our most vulnerable citizens."

Among the states targeted for the funds are: California, Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Illinois, North Carolina, Virginia, New York and Maryland.

**INTERNATIONAL**

**Millions missing from Benin**

**COTONOU, Benin (IPS)** - Over \$100 million has disappeared from the west central African country of Benin in the past three years, according to a report by a presidential commission.

The commission, which concluded its investigation on July 1, delivered a report to President Mathieu Kerekou bearing the names of those ministries suspected of being involved with the missing funds.

Local newspapers say suspected legislators and government officials will soon be investigated. However, no names have been released.

"My government is ready to get down to the task of checking and finalizing all investigated cases of misappropriated funds between April 9, 1996, and April 19, 1999, with a view to instituting legal proceedings against the perpetrators in the appropriate courts," Kerekou said. - *Ali Idrissou-Toure*

**Businessmen In St. Maarten want to use the Internet to boost tourism**

**PHILIPSBURG, St. Maarten (IPS)** - As Caribbean officials try to devise innovative ways to boost tourism in the region and market their products more aggressively, some business people are arguing that they need to turn their attention to the Internet.

"The Caribbean is missing a paradigm shift," said Judy Nisbeth, head of the Education Committee of the St. Maarten Hospi-

tal and Trade Commission. "(The Internet) is a major marketing tool, the least expensive we have, but still it's not up to date and used to its full extent."

"Take the U.S. for instance," said Roy Richardson, an entrepreneur in the island's virtual technology market. "Some years ago, that country was the third or fourth in economic marketing. Then the current administration took far-reaching decisions, among which was one to deregulate the telecommunications industry and the Internet. The country's surplus today is much more than was anticipated."

The Internet, Richardson added, offers the most lucrative form of advertising, as well as interactive capabilities. - *Marvin Hokstam*

**Housing crisis In Gabon deepens**

**LIBREVILLE, Gabon (IPS)** - Crowds of desperate homeless people scanning government bulletin boards in search of a place to live have become a common sight in the Gabonese capital of Libreville, where there is an acute shortage of housing.

A recent Ministry of Housing study indicates that Libreville is short 100,000 units of housing for its 550,000 residents. Real estate agents are making a fortune charging the highest rates the market will bear. Short on funds, the government of Gabon, on the west coast of Africa, is unable to finance any new low-cost homes.

"The price of a house or apartment is too high and agents require a three-month deposit for rent, and their fees are exorbitant," complained a college graduate who is looking for a place to live.

The accelerating exodus from rural to urban areas, in search of a better life and job, has compounded the housing crisis in Libreville.

Under pressure from labor unions and nongovernmental organizations, the government has agreed to build houses for the homeless. However, given a lack of city planning policy and the financial means to build more units, the housing crisis is likely to worsen. - *Antoine Lawson*

Alcorn said witnesses interviewed by his group reported that the boy was known to be affiliated with the group.

But two other possible murder motives have been postulated.

A spokeswoman for the Department of Public Safety, which has Texas Rangers investigating the case, said killing might have been the