

RYAN LEE

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RYAN LEE at Frieze, New York
May 3–6, 2018

“I want to do the human figure, and I want to invent the human figure.”
—Emma Amos, 2011

Amos, through her depictions of the heroic black body, explores her position as a black woman artist not as the Other but as an integral voice in collective art history. As the youngest and only female member of Spiral, the historic African American artist collective founded by Romare Bearden and Hale Woodruff in 1965, Amos always questioned the purpose of the group: “I don’t believe there is such a thing as a Negro artist.” However, she was conscious of the art world and its mechanisms; in 1982, her satirical article for the feminist publication *Heresies*, “Some Do’s and Don’ts for Black Women Artists,” addressed the limits that she and her contemporaries faced in a white, male-dominated art world. The article’s text accompanied a reproduction of Amos’s print, made to resemble a plastic surgeon’s notes on a face-lift patient.

RYAN LEE’s booth at Frieze will feature works focusing on the black female body, contrasting Amos’s 60s work with her 80s works on paper and woven paintings. Like her early figurative works from the 60s, Amos’s 80s works explore skin tone and its nuances from her particular position as a black woman artist. In *Seated Figure and Nude* (1966), Amos depicts two women with skin tones that vary across their arms, legs and face, considering the meaning and perception of “black” skin. In her 80s works, Amos continues to deconstruct gender, race, materiality and art history into seamless compositions that frame herself and the black body within a larger context.

Emma Amos (b. 1938 Atlanta, GA) is a distinguished painter, printmaker, and weaver. She was the youngest and only woman member of Spiral, the historic African American collective founded in 1963, as well as a member of the important feminist collective, *Heresies*, established in the 1980s. Influenced by modern Western European art, Abstract Expressionism, the Civil Rights movement and feminism, Amos explores the politics of culture and issues of racism, sexism and ethnocentrism through her paintings and works on paper. Over six decades, she has employed color theory, innovative printmaking and weaving techniques, photo-transfer and collage. Amos graduated from Antioch College in Ohio in 1958 and the Central School of Art in London in 1960. She subsequently moved to New York and became active in the downtown arts scene, working alongside prominent Spiral artists such as Romare, Bearden, Hale Woodruff, Norman Lewis, Alvin Hollingsworth and Charles Alston. In 1965, she earned her Masters in Arts from New York University and taught art at the Dalton School in New York. She is a former Professor and Chair in Visual Arts at the Mason Gross School of Art at Rutgers University where she taught for 28 years. Her work is held in the collections of the Bass Museum of Art, Miami; Birmingham Museum of Art; British Museum, London; Bronx Museum of Art, New York; Fowler Museum of Art, Los Angeles; James F. Byrnes Institute, Stuttgart, DE; Museo de las Artes, Guadalajara, MX; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Newark Museum; Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, and Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, among others. Amos’s prints were recently included in the British Museum’s 2017 *American Dream* exhibition, and her paintings were included in Tate Modern’s *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power* and the Brooklyn

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Museum's *We Wanted A Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965-85*. In 2016, Amos received Georgia Museum of Art's Larry D. and Brenda A. Thompson award and was honored by the Studio Museum in Harlem as an Icon and Trailblazer, along with Faith Ringgold and Lorraine O'Grady. In 2018, Amos will be included in the upcoming National Portrait Gallery, London exhibition *Michael Jackson: On the Wall*. In 2020, Amos will be the subject of a retrospective exhibition at Georgia Museum of Art at Georgia University in Athens. Amos still lives and works in downtown Manhattan.