

# Goodnight at the Gallery



The Oohh Baby Experience, painting by Paul Goodnight.



Boston artist Paul Goodnight at work in his South End studio.

He rubs a small stick of flaming tangerine color back and forth across a ground of midnight blue, pauses, stares at the canvas, then lays a thin streak of bright pink-orange over a row of dark and light shapes. Suddenly one part of the image relates to another, and another. A rhythm is set up.

Paul Goodnight then turns from the canvas to his visitors from BHCC, says something self-effacing, and laughs. A deep seriousness that alternates with an equally intense *joie de vivre* make up not only the man but his work, as seen in pieces such as “The Oohh Baby Experience” that he agreed to contribute to the BHCC Art Gallery’s “Common Ground” exhibit this spring.

Working in his cluttered studio at the Piano Factory in Boston’s South End, Goodnight confesses that he doesn’t always know what he’s doing. “You’re out of control sometimes,” he says. “But you trust the process, and you work through the problem.”

Faith in “the process” came to Paul Goodnight from the extraordinary effect of art on his life. A soldier in Vietnam, he came home from the war so traumatized that he lost his ability to speak. It was through practicing the art he had learned in childhood that he was able to communicate with people once again and eventually to win back his voice.

It’s a voice that speaks, many years later, to students looking at his pastels in the Gallery at Bunker Hill Community College. “It reminds me so much of home,” said Ahmed Lawal, who grew up in Africa. He identified a familiar feeling of family in Goodnight’s image of three generations working together. Called “Links and Lineage,” the work emerged from Goodnight’s travels in Africa and his interest in African themes. An international flavor infuses many of Goodnight’s paintings, the result of extensive travels worldwide.

A major figure in African-American art in Boston for many years, Goodnight has enjoyed a national reputation since the early 1980s, when a set designer picked up a print of his for a segment of “The Cosby Show.” After that, Goodnight’s prints began appearing in other TV programs and in movies as well, most recently in “Gone, Baby, Gone.”

Goodnight’s work, part of the private collections of such notables as Maya Angelou, Desmond Tutu, Lionel Richie, Samuel L. Jackson, Wesley Snipes, and Isaiah Thomas, has been exhibited in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Museum of the National Center of African American Artists and the Smithsonian Institution. ■

## Giving Young Artists Their Moment

The Art Gallery reaches out to the young as well as the well known. Early this summer, BHCC invited a group of middle-school students from Citizen Schools to exhibit their work in the Gallery. Citizen Schools is a national nonprofit organization that connects adult volunteers with young people in experiential learning projects after school.

Works in a variety of media were on display in the Gallery. Photos taken by students working with volunteers at Ritterbin Photography in Dorchester showed unusual glimpses of neighborhood life. Mentors from the Hip Hop Shop helped other students produce their own music CD, which played continuously in the Gallery. Two videos also ran on small monitors. One by a group of students working with volunteers from Reunion Christian Church featured interviews of students who had dealt with violence in their lives.

“We are grateful to BHCC for the opportunity to share this work with your College and community,” said John Werner, Executive Director of Citizen Schools in Boston, at the exhibit opening. Citizen Schools has been active in Boston for 12 years and has helped more than 8,000 students. “Our students develop academic and leadership skills they need to do well in school, get into college and become leaders in their careers and communities,” Werner said. The organization’s research shows that students who attend Citizen Schools for two years go on to four-year colleges at twice the rate of their peers.



BHCC student Darko Blazic at the Citizen Schools exhibit.