



By Mira Gandy  
Artist & Scribe

## NEW YORK ARTS

# Creative Spirit: The Art of David C. Driskell exhibit honors artist's eightieth birthday

*Creative Spirit: The Art of David C. Driskell* is on view at the DC Moore Gallery in New York until February 4, 2012. The exhibition is mounted in honor of the artist's eightieth birthday and encompasses paintings, drawings and collages from more than five decades. Driskell is an important figure in the art field whose work as an artist, scholar and curator have influenced the way African American art has been perceived.

In 1976, he curated and wrote the catalogue for the groundbreaking exhibition, *Two Centuries of Black American Art, 1750-1950*, which established the current field of African American art history. Driskell studied at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine, and received degrees from Howard University and Catholic University of America.

He joined the faculty of the Department of Art at the University of Maryland in 1977 and served as its chair from 1978-1983. His art is in the permanent collections of a number of major American museums, including the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; High Museum of Art, Atlanta; and the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut.

In 2000, he received the prestigious National Humanities Medal; and the annual David C. Driskell Prize was established in his honor, by the High Museum



David Driskell, *Zebra Chair, Moon*, 2011

of Art, Atlanta, in 2005 to recognize his major contributions to the field of African American art and art history.

Driskell's work has a mystical quality to it, rooted in his interest in African art, spirituality and the divine quality of nature. Colors and patterns inspired from African textiles, and Yoruba religion, are intertwined throughout his paintings. Many of his pieces incorporate African and African American iconography.

Driskell first encountered African art in 1953, when he worked at the Howard University art gallery, which held a major exhibition of African

art. This exposure made him see African art as a very potent artistry, which he incorporated into his work, simultaneously playing with forms of modernism.

*Creative Spirit: The Art of David C. Driskell* exhibition includes works informed by his experiences in Africa. The appearance of African themes in his early work was inspired by his first visits to Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana and Nigeria between 1969-1970.

Paintings such as *Our Ancestors*, *Festival* and *Memories from a Distance Past* are examples of the artist's connection with Africa. At that time, Driskell was



David Driskell, *Our Ancestors, Festival*

searching to find a connection between his roots as an American and his relationship to Africa; thus, his work embodies this personal journey. The exhibition also includes the artist's landscape paintings of trees and gardens.

Driskell is an avid gardener whose longtime studio in Maine enables him to be immersed in nature. Many of his landscapes are based on his surroundings in Maine, where he can look out of his studio window and see massive pines, slender birches, and other trees of the forest.

*Creative Spirit: The Art of*

*David C. Driskell* is a beautiful celebration of the legacy of the renowned artist. His spiritual and holistic approach to art makes his work engaging and inspirational.

Accompanying the exhibition is a 114 page catalogue with essays by Julie L. McGee, Adrienne L. Childs and Floyd Coleman, published by the David C. Driskell Center for the Study of the Visual Arts and Culture of African Americans and the African Diaspora. For more information visit: [www.dcmooregallery.com](http://www.dcmooregallery.com) (Photos Courtesy of DC Moore Gallery)



David Driskell, *Jazz Singer (Lady of Leisure)*, Fox



David Driskell, *Memories of a Distant Past*



David Driskell, *White Birches and Pines*