

**W**ashington has the Capitol and the Congress, and therefore the privilege of being the capital of the United States of America. However, what makes Washington tick goes beyond the protracted debates between the Republicans and Democrats fighting for a hold on the nation's mind. Washington has a cultural life and a huge concentration of museums that probably would not be found elsewhere in the world. Thus, central to the Washingtonians apart from the politicians are also the scores of cultural workers who make art happen. Highly rated among which is Lou Stovall. Seeing Stovall or even his gallery is strictly by appointment. So when after a cold spring evening's children presentation of Hamlet by the pupils of Sydney Friendly's School

(Clinton's daughter attends here), Lou Stovall's wife (he never drives) drove myself, their son (who took part in the play) to a choice area of Washington for an inspection of his gallery and for a dinner. It was like some kind of privileged initiation. Lou Stovall, 58, is a complete artist in every sense of the word. So, his basement houses his wood workshop and a detached building in the lordly bungalow doubles as the printmaking workshop and gallery. Still in his unique shade, Stovall reads a poem to me before the follow-

Lou Stovall: *Heroes and Teachers*



ing interview began, the music in the background completes the environment for an artist who is spiritually in love with nature.

Under Stovall's direction, Workshop Inc. has grown from a small but active studio primarily concerned with community posters, into a professional printmaking outfit.

His craft is that of a master printmaker but he has passion for drawing as the numerous pieces in his gallery shows. Whilst his own

prints and drawings are part of numerous public and private collections throughout the world, Stovall's recognition as a master printmaker has gained him commissions to print the works of several other notable artists.

Among these are Josef Albers, Leon Berkowitz, Jacob Lawrence, Gene Davis, Peter Blume, Alexander Calder, Sam Gilliam, Sydney T. Guberman, Robert Mangold, Reuben Rubin, Franklin White, Selma Hurwitz, Jacob Kainen, Paul Reed, Jame L. Wells, Pat Buckley Mess, Breckie Stevenson and Di Bagley Stovall.

However, Stovall is well known to the White House and Washington. Thus among his special commissions he designed the Independence Day Invitation for the White House in 1982 at the request of Mr. Ronald Reagan. At the request of Mayor Marion Barry, in 1986, he made the print, *American Beauty Rose* for Washington, DC. Area Host Committee of 1988 Democratic National Convention.

Leading a community of respected artists in Washington, one cannot but be touched by Stovall's looming image of the artist as a community leader and servant.

## LOU STOVALL: 'I CREATE

**Q**uestion: Who's Lou Stovall? Can you give us a brief insight into your background, youth and development as a printmaker?

**Answer:** As far as I can remember, as a child

until I was four years old. I was born in 1937 and in 1941 my family moved north, like so many Black American families, to find work. My father found work in Springfield, Massachusetts and I went to school there. I received a grant and a scholarship to the Rhode Island

graduate from college. A German whom I had worked for part-time when I was a student offered me a job. I worked for him for two years and I became a foreman of his printmaking studio. There I learnt and taught myself more about printmaking.

## LANDSCAPES OUT OF

I was not interested in anything else but art. But I also like writing, so I wrote poetry, I did printing and made drawings. At the high school, I went to Rhode Island School of Designs, but while there my father became ill and he passed away, so I went home to take care of the family.

**Question:** Where was home?

**Answer:** Springfield Massachusetts. I was born in Athens, Georgia but I lived there only

School of Designs in Providence, Rhode Island. I was there for one semester and my father became ill and later he died. I had to return home to support the family, until maybe five or six years later when I was released from family responsibilities to pursue college education again. This time, I went to Howard University.

I had studied drawing and painting before and so I opted to specialise in printmaking. I decided I would try printmaking when I

In 1968, I received a grant from the Philip Stern Foundation and that grant allowed me to buy equipment for printmaking. But most of the tools and tables for the job I made for myself for a full scale printmaking, wood making and metal workshop. So, here I am at 58, having studied art all my life and having been well versed in art history and having realised that printmaking was a great medium with lots of potentials. That's what I have been doing for quite sometime now and not only have I made prints for myself but I

## MY IMAGINATION'

HAKEEM BELLO



Lou Stovall

have made prints for other artists.

**Question:** Do you have some influence from your father or was his a different kind of painting?

**Answer:** It was a different kind of painting. But we used to laugh in my family that the lacquer for painting is in the blood of the Stovall people because the basic ingredient that I used for printmaking was made from lacquer.

**Question:** So would you say your art has evolved over the years or it is still evolving?

**Answer:** It is still evolving. When I first started, I was interested in being an abstract artist because basically that was the fashion. But after a while I realised that I really had no interest in abstract art but I was interested in nature, the way I perceived it in my head and not that I went out to copy a landscape. I was interested in creating a perfect world that would be nice to be in so I made landscapes from my own thoughts. Later, I evolved with flowers. So, I now do flowers and landscapes. I think probably if I would ever change my style again, I would do some figurative works expressing the beauty of Black people.

**Question:** Is the idea of imagining landscapes also responsible for your experimentation with the tandem (circular) art forms instead of the predominantly conventional rectangular art forms?

**Answer:** The use of the tandem form has always suggested a sense of spiritualism to me. I consider myself a spiritual person because I feel that the healthiness of the spirit is essential to mankind. So, I have a sense that

the round forms is representative of the cyclical state of nature, that life keeps moving in a cycle.

**Question:** Do you train artists?

**Answer:** I have two full time people who work as my studio assistants and these are people who are interested in printmaking. We

also do matting and printing and we undertake the installation of artworks in professional offices.

I also work sometimes as an arts consultant, buying art for offices and I also feature as one of the panel of discussants on an arts programme called **Around Town**. So, between making prints, drawings, furniture with my assistants and the arts programme, I lead a very busy life as an artist.

**Question:** How did the creative writing part come in?

**Answer:** The writing part comes in because I like to work with creative ideas. Sometimes a picture could be worth more than a thousand words and after creating the picture, the image that I want, I still have more to say. Sometimes, I will write a poem about its conception.

**Question:** So the work precedes the poem?

**Answer:** Sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes the portrait precedes the art but to me it doesn't matter.

**Question:** Is it true that the American art audience takes in a lot of colours that brighten the home rather than depict the grim realities of the day? I made that observation to an arts consultant earlier and he seemed to have agreed with me.

**Answer:** Well, it's not 100 per cent true. Certainly, the 35 to 50 artists whose works are on display in New York galleries and its surroundings do not all paint in bright colours. Some of these household names work with very bright colours but certainly not all of them. I think that in general, what you said about American collectors, not on the high level but on the medium level, that one must

have bright, colourful happy art to buy because you are hanging it in your home or office or anywhere and it's supposed to please people. Not many people would want to purchase an art work that's going to depress them. But a lot of works that come out in New York now deals with the grim realities of life, the cutting edge of life and that's what critics write about.

**Question:** To what extent does art and art education influence the American person? I discovered that every art outlet has very inspiring patronage. Does it reflect in the American life or it's all simply taken as part of tourism?

**Answer:** That's a very complex question that probably demands a complex answer. I'll put it this way, art and culture is as important to the American life as the constitution. In no other country would you find so many people who are so aware of their rights and the rights of man. Yet there are people who are still starving, who are hungry, who do not receive equal access to education and there are people who are still being discriminated against. However, we still have the sense of our rights as still being very important. However, as far as art and culture is concerned, in no other country would you find so many people going to so many places and spending so much on arts and culture. The country sends a lot of people or people initiate themselves to go to a lot of cultural events not only in this country, but also abroad. Predominantly people who visit the museum, the memorials and other historical sites are in search of arts, culture information and science. That's why the National Air and Space Museum is one of the most visited museums in the world because people are fascinated with science.

**Question:** Does this also include the young ones?

**Answer:** All the schools regularly take their pupils to the museums, to the galleries and the monuments. The families also during the weekend, take the children to all these places. So, the children grow up accepting the museum as a part of their recreation even though they make the usual complaints that they would rather be at in the fields playing. But they go to these places all the same and are usually proud to exchange their experiences in school with their mates.

**Question:** So what would be the effect on all these if the politicians who are advocating for budget cuts at all levels carry the day and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) is slashed or abolished?

**Answer:** My response to that will be that arts have never been wholly dependent on the sustenance or subsidies of the politicians or even of the arts community or the collectors. Art would go no matter what. A very good example of this is that in the darkest hours of Germany, much as the state strove to ensure that nobody was making arts, there were people who still make art poking fun at the state. In every culture that we can think of, most of the arts are usually focused on the ways that we make wars against each other. The artists have always managed to set themselves apart and make comments on the society. I don't mean art just in terms of the visual artists but also the plays, the musical performances and even films in which you have responses to the political climate.

**Question:** Does your being an African-American influence your work? In other words do you have the sensibility of an African-American?

**Answer:** No. That's why I said earlier that if I changed styles again I would want to do something in that direction. Of course, an artist can't say when I change my subject matter, this is what I am going to do because once you are in front of the canvas you are not always the one in control of the communication between you and the canvas. Sometimes you want yourself to do one thing and something else comes out. So at times when I hope that maybe I'll have the opportunity to make some images of Black people it may not work out and I'll turn them to flowers.

**Question:** Could that be attributed to the fact that you probably left your family roots too early because your father went to work elsewhere and you didn't have enough time to take in the environment?

**Answer:** Not exactly. I was born in the South and at that particular time, I don't think any Black person of my age at four would be thinking about that or even ten years after that. I think that I found my roots by the time I was seven years old and I began to realise what I was interested in. I started making drawings and I expressed the desire for music and so on. I felt very much a part of the New England culture because I found information and education more accessible and I think that, that way lots and lots of scholars have come from the South. But I also think that the South have lost lots of potential great scholars by not educating them properly. So, I feel very fortunate that I was not left in the South.

**Question:** : Can you tell us how far you've

travelled with your art?

**Answer:** I've had exhibitions in many cities of this country (United States) and I have taken my work to London. I've had an exhibition in former Soviet Union now Russia, and in some of the Caribbean Islands.

**Question:** Do you still hope to visit Africa either to exhibit or teach?

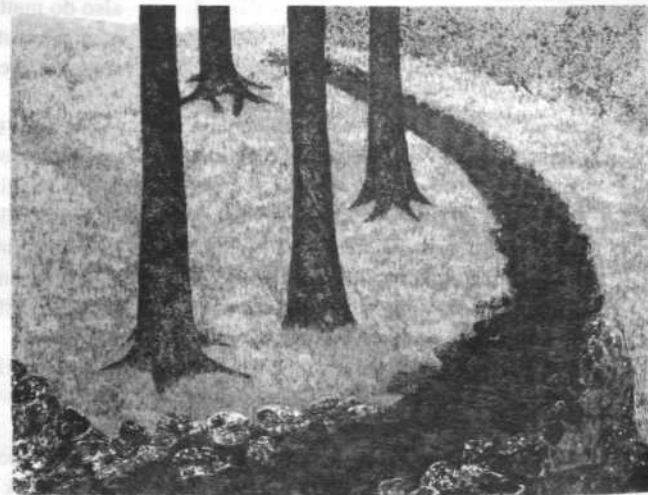
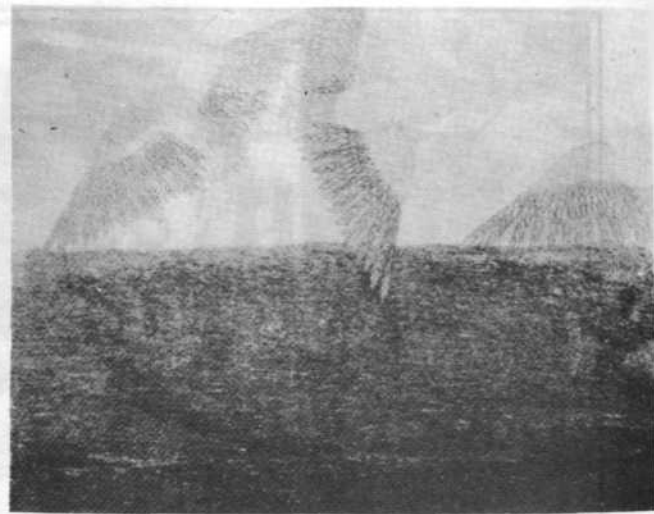
**Answer:** I'm very interested in talking to Africans and listening to people from Africa. I feel that I see a great deal of the arts from my Africa. I mean about the way Africa feels and I would like to take my works there and share some with other people. I think that we have taken some of the best of arts from Africa they are placed in the museums here and in London. So, I think that is not being fair to Africa. They won't be able to show the best of their arts to their children unless they go to foreign countries. So, I am interested in going to Africa to share my ideas with its people.

**Question:** What future do you see for printmaking, especially with the advancement of technology and computerisation of even the arts? Do you see the personal touch to printmaking gradually disappearing?

**Answer:** No. Not for me. I think that now because we have the computer graphics, laser colours and all that there will be a bit of difference but it's still not producing the great art that the print is. There is a very unique sense of what a print is, what it feels like and it looks like. I think that there would always be a place for fine arts prints that's separate. There is a different market for such prints, that's special and very expensive.

**Question:** How about the business side of arts generally? I learnt in the course of my

Top: Lou Stovall, *Right*, 1989  
Centre: Lou Stovall, *Morning Stream*, 9/11/81  
Bottom: Lloyd McNeill, *Feed Kids*, '69





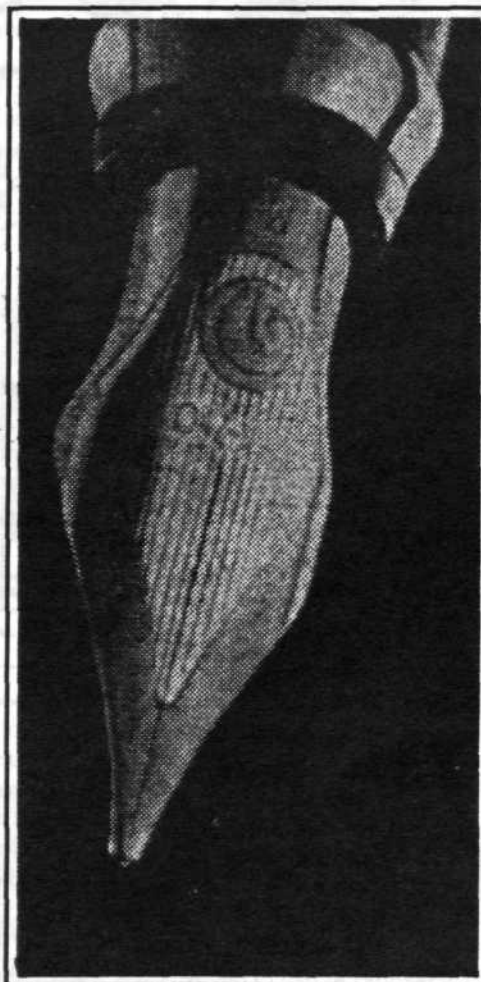
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trip that it costs a lot to move art works around especially in form of insurance charges. Won't this affect the quality and quantity of international exhibitions especially for the famous artists?

**Answer:** It's been affected already. Ten, fifteen years ago, it was very easy to borrow a work of art to show in any exhibition, no matter how small or insignificant. But now it has to be something very, very important before the works can be given out. I think it's the National Gallery of Art that doesn't have a great deal of trouble getting the works but most other museums have a great deal of trouble doing that. And insurance are the problem really, because insurance covers are so expensive to get. You pay for the full coverage of the work and most shippers and freighting concerns also carry their own insurance.**GR**

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57, Western Avenue Surulere.

Shop No, 43, 1st Floor

Kingsway Building, 51, Marina, Lagos.

**Tel: 2666919**

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