

For Immediate Release  
January 19, 2006

Regional Enterprise Tower  
425 Sixth Avenue, Suite 1750  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

p 412 258 2700  
f 412 258 2701  
www.africanaculture.org

**THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CULTURAL CENTER'S UNIQUE NEW EXHIBITION, "EXTREME CANVAS," SPOTLIGHTS POPULAR CULTURE AS SEEN THROUGH THE EYES OF AFRICAN ARTISTS**

**Hand-painted movie posters from Ghana from the collection of Ernie Wolfe III on view January 27 through April 1, 2006 at the AACC's 209/9<sup>th</sup> Street Gallery**

**PITTSBURGH, PA** – EXTREME CANVAS, an exhibition of over 20 wildly imaginative hand-painted movie posters from Ghana, opens January 27 at the African American Cultural Center of Greater Pittsburgh's 209/9<sup>th</sup> Street Gallery. The exhibition of stunning fabric canvases can be viewed through April 1.

EXTREME CANVAS showcases the unexpected art form that developed in the mid-1980s to the late 1990s, when a group of entrepreneurs in Ghana created small-scale, mobile film distribution empires. Moving from community to community, they would set up makeshift movie parlors to screen the latest videos from around the world using television monitors and VCRs powered by portable generators. Without the aid of printers, computers and graphic design software to use in order to create marketing for the film screenings, the entrepreneurs sought out the talent of local, often self-taught artists to make movie posters. Flour sacks were sewn together to create large canvases upon which the artists would paint colorful scenes and trailer-esque representations of the films. The more striking the poster, the more likely a film screening would be "sold-out."

The resulting posters became instant works of art that offer an unusual twist on form and function and an intriguing combination of traditional African art and modernity.

The African American Cultural Center presents this exhibition as a celebration of the link between African and African American culture because of the collective memory shaped by shared film experiences, as well as the common urban aesthetic of displaying art in public spaces. These posters represent a community of remarkable artists that have sustained the creative legacy of contemporary African art.

These works of art came to the attention of Ernie Wolfe III while he was visiting Ghana in the early 1990s. Wolfe, an avid collector of traditional African art and owner of Ernie Wolfe Gallery in Los Angeles, found the visual narrative and composition of the canvases stunning. He spent over a decade traveling back and forth to Ghana collecting these posters. He first shared his collection in the book, "Extreme Canvas," published in 2000, which featured over 400 prints from the first generation of artists who started the hand-painted movie poster tradition.

While the hand-painted posters have slowly disappeared in Ghana, replaced by mass-produced paper posters, the commemoration of this unique artwork and the innovation and skill of the artists continues in the AACC's EXTREME CANVAS

exhibition, which features canvases ranging in size from 34" x 44" to 46" x 73". Most of the canvases in the exhibition will be featured in Wolfe's second book, "Extreme Canvas II."

EXTREME CANVAS marks the third exhibition at the African American Cultural Center's 209/9<sup>th</sup> Street Gallery. The African American Cultural Center will present a number of visual arts and public programs at this space prior to the anticipated opening of its new multi-disciplinary venue in 2007.

**The Opening Reception for Extreme Canvas will be held on January 27 from 5:30 to 9 p.m., and coincides with The Cultural District Gallery Crawl. Regular gallery hours are: Wednesday, Friday and Saturday: Noon to 5 p.m.; Thursday: Noon to 7 p.m.** Phone: 412.281.5484 (during gallery hours only) or 412.258.2700. Admission: Free & Open to the public.

#### **About Ernie Wolfe III**

Ernie Wolfe III has spent over 30 years immersed in African art and culture. He has authored two books on African art – "Introduction to the Arts of Kenya" (Smithsonian Institution, 1979) and "Vigango: Commemorative Sculpture of The Miiikenda of Kenya" (Williams College, 1984). He founded the Ernie Wolfe Gallery in West Los Angeles in 1981. Selected gallery exhibitions have included: "Dino Danger: Fantastic Afterlife Vehicles from Ghana," "American Foreign Policy: Barber Board Signs from West Africa" and "Rendille, the Barons of Bovinity: Zoomorphic Neckrests from Northern Kenya." He lives with his wife and two sons above his gallery in West Los Angeles.

#### **About The African American Cultural Center**

The African American Cultural Center of Greater Pittsburgh presents, interprets and preserves the art, culture, and history of African Americans in Pittsburgh and of people of African descent throughout the world. The Center realizes its mission with an engaging schedule of visual and performing arts programs as well as educational and public programs.

The programs of the African American Cultural Center's 2005-2006 season are supported by lead gifts from The Heinz Endowments, The Pittsburgh Foundation and The PNC Financial Services Group. Additional programmatic support provided by The Pennsylvania Council on the Arts and The Mary Hillman Jennings Foundation. Operating support has been provided by the Allegheny Regional Asset District. More information is available at the African American Cultural Center's Web site, [www.africanaculture.org](http://www.africanaculture.org).

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Media Contact: Heather D. Clark  
Phone: 412.258.2700  
E-mail: [hclark@africanaculture.org](mailto:hclark@africanaculture.org)

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