

also their environments. The figures are typically fully clothed, their outfits providing a natural and abundant source of patterns for the artist to work with, so it is interesting to see how Gangloff reorganizes her compositions when the subject is naked. Rather than fitting neatly within an overall arrangement of forms, the full-figured nudes in *Afternoon Shower* (2012) and *Lydia (The Tattooed Lady)*, 2013, appear to be superimposed upon their environments like cutouts. This is especially the case with *Afternoon Shower*, in which a man scrubbing his back looks as if he is in front of the running water rather than actually standing in it.

There is no erotic element in Gangloff's nudes, and they are no more exposed for being undressed. A sense of privacy, or at least separation, is established by means of their gazes; distant and nonconfrontational, they convey a sense of aloofness. Here, as in many of Gangloff's portraits, her subjects seem to be only physically present. What holds their attention the viewer can only imagine.

—Charles Marshall Schultz

PHILADELPHIA BARBARA BULLOCK Seraphin

From intense violet to black, Barbara Bullock has spent a career balancing vibrant colors with darker hues. She uses black liberally to make her painted collage constructions. Beyond



its reference to mourning and death, black is understood as the confluence of all colors, and in many African cultures and within Japanese philosophy it is identified with power, mystery and transcendence—the portal into the spirit world.

Bullock's recent exhibition at Seraphin, "Chasing after Spirits," could be considered the ultimate exploration of the color black. Her cultivated love for the hue resonates in each of the 10 pieces on view. Working with heavy watercolor paper, Bullock cuts and paints a diverse array of shapes that she then collages into interwoven, sculptural compositions, reaching over 6 feet tall or wide in some instances. Among the twirling and tumbling shapes are hints of cadmium orange, golden yellow and blues that range from turquoise to azure; aerial forays of linear elements cascade and overlap these larger forms. Close scrutiny of the wall-dependent relief works is required to appreciate their nuances. For example, the artist's blacks are not uniform but created from overlays of yellow and purple that gradually become darkened surfaces. Pattern and underpainting peek through from one layer to the next. The overall effect is that of a theatrical orchestration of movement and form.

As an Africanist, Bullock attempts to invoke ancestral spirits. According to the artist, her work is informed by myths, literature and symbols from Africa and the African diaspora; she has traveled to many countries throughout the continent, from Morocco to South Africa. In *Ethiopia Revisited* (2011), the suggestion of the Coptic cross emerges, however loosely. Bullock visited a Coptic church in the mountains of Lalibela, Ethiopia; these edifices are usually cut directly into the rocky hills and are often underground. Through abstract means—languid gestural forms—Bullock narrates such journeys.

Bullock has been working for more than four decades, and she arrived at her current constructions by nearly eliminating representational elements, although sometimes silhouettes of hands, feet, heads, figures, fish, snakes and foliage can be found tucked within the cacophony of shapes. In years past, her work relied heavily upon figurative traditions but always with a nod to mythology and the fantastical. *Jasmine Garden*, a classic work from the '80s, features detailed indigo figures with cords of dreadlocks gracing their heads, caught midair in a sensuous embrace. Statuesque figures gliding in space are particular to her early works: she focused on painting during the 1970s and '80s, transitioning to mixed-medium sculpture and collage in 1990.

As a spiritualist, she imbues the emblems and shapes she creates with narrative; however, secrets and mystery abound. Influenced by the literary works of such writers as Ben Okri (author of the 1991 novel *The Famished Road*, a winding tale replete with spirits that guide a young Nigerian boy's journey through life) and Isabel Wilkerson (whose 2010 historical study, *The Warmth of Other Suns*, traces the migration of blacks from the South to the North between 1915 and 1970), Bullock with fervor internalizes their themes, articulating references to the spirit world and transcendence in her own way. For Bullock there is no separation between life, spirituality, dance, music and poetry. Her works convey the connection between the empirical and the metaphysical, the known and the unknown.

—A.M. Weaver

Barbara Bullock
*Chasing after
Spirits 2*, 2012
acrylic paint on
matte medium
watercolor paper
45 by 34 by 19
inches; at Sera