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"Dr. Buzzard Meets Saddlehead"
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William T. Williams: Commonwealth Professor

"Patterned yet unpredictable, the calmly controlled chaos in Williams' recent work gives the measure of a man profoundly involved with questions of meaning and the role of the artist in today's society." These are words used to describe the art of William T. Williams by April Kingsley, a New York based critic in a magazine article devoted to his work following an exhibition at Manhattan's Touchstone Gallery. After a major solo exhibition in 1971 in the cavernous Reese Palley Gallery in Soho, Williams spent the next few years in relative isolation exhibiting mainly in group exhibitions until the show at Touchstone in 1980. Of the Palley exhibition Miss Kingsley writes: "When Williams burst upon the New York scene in 1968 with his radical, spangled, linoleum-covered 'pattern' paintings, and followed them with brilliantly colored, explosive, geometric illusionism, he was way ahead of his time. The earlier paintings predicted both the literal reliefs of Frank Stella a few years later and the patterning and decoration so pervasive now."

Born in Cross Creek, North Carolina in 1942, Williams, while in kindergarten, moved to New York with his family. He received his formal education at New York City Community College in Brooklyn, Pratt Institute, and Yale University where he received his MFA in 1968. In addition, Williams attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture where he currently serves on its board of governors, having also served as acting Director in 1979. He is married and the father of 2 young children. His wife is a successful graphic designer.

Williams has taken a leave of absence from the City University of New York, Brooklyn College, to come to the School of the Arts as Commonwealth Professor. He has

been a professor of art at Brooklyn College since 1971 and has also taught at the School of Visual Arts, Pratt Institute, and Skowhegan. His public exhibitions since 1969 include the *Whitney Biennial*, 1969, *The Structure of Color*, Whitney Museum, 1971, and *Painting and Sculpture Today* at the Indianapolis Museum of Art. Among the many public and private institutions where Williams has exhibited are: The Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Mead Art Museum, Amherst College; Sarah Lawrence College; University of Wisconsin, Madison; Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery; The Oakland Museum; The Everson Museum, Syracuse; and Bard College. His work is included in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney, the Wadsworth Atheneum, Yale University, Fisk University, Chase Manhattan Bank, and Phillip Morris.

Williams has received numerous grants and awards including an Individual Artists Award in painting from the National Endowment for the Arts, and a Creative Arts Public Service Grant in Painting from the city of New York. He has received commissions for major works from the Jewish Museum in New York and the Menil Foundation in Houston, Texas.

Since 1968 Williams has given public lectures and participated in panel discussions in universities and museums throughout the country. He has been a visiting artist at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, Morgan State University, Fisk University, Minneapolis College of Art and Design, and the University of Delaware.

As a painter he has pursued a personal vision and has come to accept the alienation and loneliness that often result from intensely introspective activity. His evolution as an artist has kept pace with his personal development. In recent paintings there seems to be a synthesis of expressive and formal properties which reflect Williams' attitudes about life and the role of his art. Williams comments, "Too often artists graft themselves to the immediate atmosphere of the art world, forgetting that art is a singular activity. As a result, their work doesn't resonate, it hasn't lived and breathed. Clearly, only one person must make the aesthetic decisions about the role and function of the art." He goes on to say, "art is a vehicle for communication and anything that impedes that communication should be removed, including style, political content and the limits of language. Art has to exist in a larger human context."

In his role as Commonwealth Visiting Professor, he will be on campus for the academic year teaching painting to advanced undergraduate PAP majors and graduate students. He occupies a studio in the Graduate building and is in the process of preparing for a major exhibition of his paintings, scheduled to take place next fall, at SECCA in Winston Salem, North Carolina.

by Victor Kord