

Show of major Afro-American artists opens today in la Rinconada museum

By Muriel Pilkington
For the Daily Journal

Starting today, Caracas art lovers will have a unique opportunity to get to know the work of four important artists — sculptors Tyrone Mitchell and Melvin Edwards and painters Jack Whitten and William T. Williams — who currently lead the Afro-American alternative expression movement in New York.

This “world-class exhibition of world-class work,” to quote its producer Hack Hoffenbourg, opens today at 11 a.m. at the Museo de Artes Visuales “Alejandro Otero” (MAVAO) at La Rinconada and will run through July 8.

It's the first time the four have shown their work together but they have several things in common: they were all born in the South of the United States and ended up

in New York because it's the capital of modern art, they are all art professors and Guggenheim fellows — and they all have impressive curriculums.

Mitchell, born in Savannah, Georgia, works with wood and teaches at Hunter College, City University of New York.

He's considered one of the most important contemporary sculptors in the Western tradition, although his work was deeply influenced by a ten-month visit to Africa in 1969.

Mitchell says the magical-religious spirit of African culture is present in his work and that this statement is necessary within North American contemporary aesthetics not only because of the culture's richness but because of its influence on our lifestyles as well.

MAVAO representatives

saw Mitchell's exhibition at the Newark Museum in New Jersey, where Whitten was also exhibiting, and were so impressed they invited them to show their work here.

Whitten teaches art at the School of Visual Arts, Cooper University, and has work currently showing at both the Museum of Modern Art and the American Academy of Art in New York.

Whitten's paintings have the texture of skin. Influenced by cubism, pop art and technology, the abstraction in his work is closely related to a sense of immediate reality with a strong cosmic vision.

He says his work falls between the scientific and the ancient, that is, “the history of humanity brought to people through the mass media.

Edwards, from Houston, Texas, teaches art at Rutgers

University and works in steel. Several of his massive works are on display at the Whitney Museum and the Museum of Modern Art as well as at the corner of 61st Street and 5th Avenue in New York.

For the show here, Edwards has brought smaller works such as African-style masks and fetishes.

Edwards says his mother taught him to sew and his uncle taught him to work iron. He brought together the two skills to produce what he describes as “symbolic, emotional, metaphorical, poetic and modern sculptures.”

William T. Williams, born in North Carolina, teaches art at Brooklyn College, City University of New York and was asked to join the show after the other three saw him on the front page of the April issue of “American Visions,” the magazine of Afro-American culture.

Williams started exhibiting professionally at age 25 and is currently preparing one-man shows for the Montclair Museum in New Jersey, the Greenhill Center for North Carolinian Art and the North Carolina Museum.

He is also the first African-American artist to be discussed in the “History of Art,” by H.W. Jansen which is the bible of many college art history courses in the U.S.

Of the show here, Williams says he and his fellow artists are bringing an extraordinary vision of the world to Venezuela, of mutual respect, humanity and total excellence.

The exhibition, entitled “Espíritu-materia, estética alternativa norteamericana,” opens at 11 a.m. today at the Museo de Artes Visuales “Alejandro Otero,” La Rinconada and continues through July 8.



VISITING ARTISTS (from left) sculptor Melvin Edwards, producer Hack Hoffenbourg, painter Jack Whitten (in front), sculptor Tyrone Mitchell and painter William T. Williams will be sharing their works with the public in a collective show of Afro-American alternative art which opens today at 11 a.m. at the Museo de Artes Visuales ‘Alejandro Otero,’ La Rinconada.