

# THE SPRING LAKE NEWS

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## Internationally Known Artist Returned To Roots For New Direction

When artist William T. Williams began to back away from the commercialism of the New York art scene approximately 20 years ago, it was to Spring Lake he went back to in memory — the place where he was born on July 17, 1942. Here and in other places where he had grown up, including a public housing project in Queens, New York, the artist found inspiration.

Mr. Williams earned a M.F.A. degree in painting from Yale University in 1968 and made his mark in the mainstream art world before he had reached the age of 30. By 1970 his work was on exhibit at the Foundation Maeght in St. Paul, France alongside paintings by some of the most famous abstract expressionism artists: Willem De Kooning, Mark Rothko, Clyfford Still and Philip Guston. He had sold every painting at his first one-man show at New York's Reese Palley Gallery, and New York's Museum of Modern Art had acquired a 1969 creation.

"I decided that if I had anything to say, it was a time that I back away from all that and do what I wanted to do," Mr. Williams is quoted by art writer Valerie J. Mercer in *American Vision*, a magazine of Afro-American culture.

Thus Mr. Williams pursued his own artistic vision, broke away from the accepted definition of abstract work and integrated his personal life into his art — a life that had its beginnings on "The Hill," as the Vass Road area he lived in was known then. "Most of my adult ide-

als — at least the moral values — were formed in Spring Lake," Mr. Williams said earlier this year from his SoHo studio.

The transformation was, Mr. Williams said, "a difficult period — stepping into an untried area." Dur-

*Painter Williams on the Spring Lake he lived in as a child and still visits: "... the greatest people in the world—the strength and foundation of my art. They had so much to do with my formation as a person, my values."*

ing that time he drew from his periodical visits to Spring Lake. (He still has relatives here) He also went to Redfern, the Queens housing area where he once lived. The family had moved there after his father left the military service in 1952.

Mr. Williams continues to create his art in his studio while serving as a professor of art, City University of New York, Brooklyn College. Ms. Mercer wrote recently, "The following statement makes clear his unwavering faith in pursuing his own vision: 'I feel like I've come to that point as an artist where there's a vocabulary that I've established, and within that vocabulary I'm creating my own universe. A lot of references are specific to having grown up in a particular place and having experienced certain kinds of things.

They are not exclusionary references, but they are about where I come from and I want very much for my work to be all about that. It's not anonymous, and not about a second party. It's about me and my experiences gathered in a lifetime. I'm not willing to make art about anyone else's life but my own. That's what it's come down to."

Mr. Williams will have an exhibit at the Fayetteville Museum of Art this coming year. Although his work has been exhibited in European countries; Shanghai, China; Japan; Venezuela, and Nigeria and throughout the United States, there have been only two previous exhibits in this state from the North Carolina native: "Born in North Carolina" in Charlotte in 1986; and "William T. Williams" in Winston-Salem in 1985. His work, "Double Dare," which he executed in 1984, was bought by the North Carolina Mu-

*William T. Williams is the first African-American artist to be discussed in the book believed to be the bible of teaching college art, The History of Art, by H.W. Janson.*

seum of Art in 1991.

"Double Dare" reflects his transition period — "the period between the two periods in my work," he said. The "double dare" expression is one of the play of a child with an adven-

turesome and creative spirit, back to a time when he and his cousins played in the red clay found alongside an old railroad bank on "The Hill." "As kids, you make forms (and clay is) a very malleable medium to be used," he said.

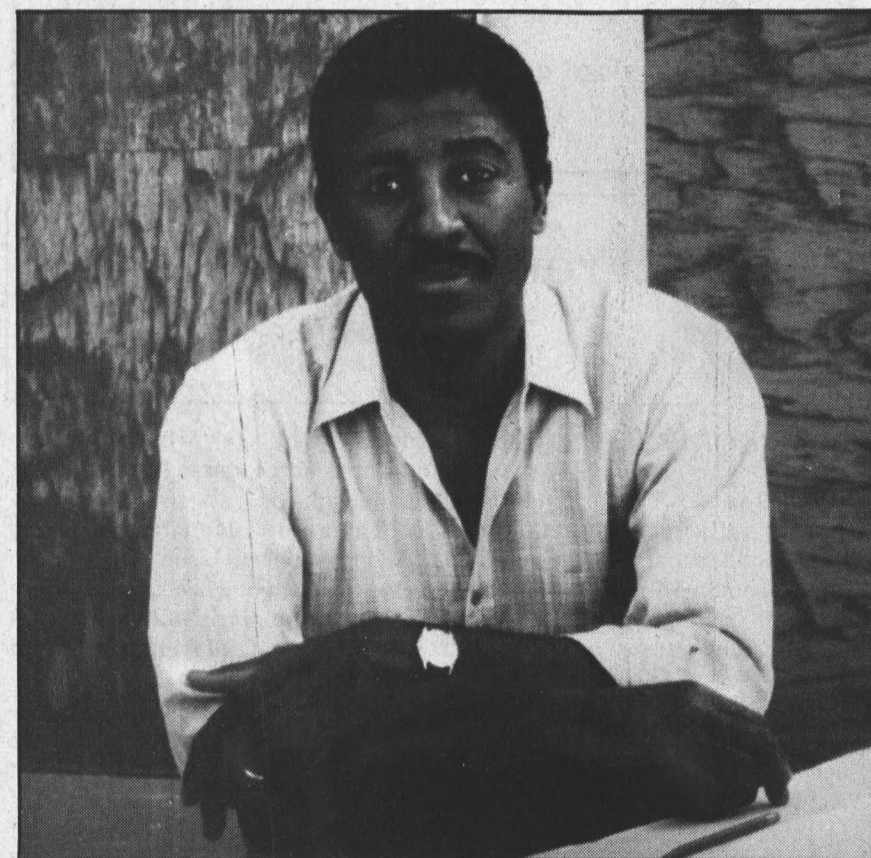
The Spring Lake of the forties was largely rural, Mr. Williams recalls. He remembers and integrates into his present day art the "real work of the farm and survival and the wonderment of nature." Folks made most of the things they needed then, he said. "The idea of making things was instilled at an early age."

Mr. Williams recalls "a close-knit community — especially when I grew up there." He described "the greatest people in the world — the strength and foundation of my art. They had so much to do with my formation as a person, my values."

Neighbors and teachers were an extended part of the family, Mr. Williams recalls. His parents instilled in him and his brother a respect for education, discipline and competition, and they supported his interest in art which developed when he was in his early teens.

The Fayetteville exhibit will be, in part, a payback to Spring Lake. Mr. Williams said he hopes the exhibit will be "a celebration of the community, the love and time that they took with me as a child and the love and humanity that still exists there."

He added, "If my life can be anything for the youth of this area, hopefully it will be an inspiration that they can do and be anything."



William T. Williams