

**Clarence Washington: Giving the Inner Rainbow Outer Freedom**  
**By William Routhier**  
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Clarence Washington's artistic career has been noteworthy from the start. In 1955, his senior year of high school, the prestigious Museum of Fine Arts School in Boston chose Clarence for a scholarship as one of only eleven students out of 33,000 eligible students nationwide. The Museum School subsequently granted Clarence a traveling fellowship to study in Europe.

Studying with the Belgian surrealist painter Jan Cox led Clarence to develop his taste for what he calls the "spicy complexity of the mystical" in his work. He credits his study with another painter, Jason Berger, for bringing the influence of Matisse and Picasso as well as the romance and exaggerated palette of the Fauvists to his painting.

Clarence worked to combine and fuse the directions set down by these two mentors of his, often employing improvisational methods. The culmination of this effort came to him in his travels to Greece, where he felt that he reached a new level of maturity in his work.

Washington returned to America to continue painting and to teach. Over three decades many universities and galleries showed his work, including Boston's Museum of Fine Arts. Nevertheless, in 1991, with the end of a stint as the featured artist and consultant/organizer for the Black Cultural Exhibition in Boston, Clarence hit a period of emotional fatigue. The rigors of his schedule as well as personal troubles left him unable to work.

It was during this period of struggle, which went on for three years, that he remembered a woman he had worked with on the Black Cultural Exhibition whose vibrancy and confidence had moved and impressed him. He also remembered that she was a Buddhist of some sort, so he phoned her to ask about her Buddhism.

Clarence was soon chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, and his life began to improve immediately. "As I continued chanting, I witnessed my health and painting begin to recuperate simultaneously. I was able to land a position teaching again at a small art college in the evenings, and I was finally able to settle in and confront my task as a painter. I could decide what message I really aspired to tell. I was at a new beginning."

Clarence received the Gohonzon in March of 1995 and his continuing practice strongly influenced the direction of his art. He says of this fresh start: "As I was casting off the obstacles I faced, I felt a great desire to express the inner energy I was discovering. I knew whatever I did, it would involve strong color."

About his present work, a series of paintings of African dancers, Clarence says: "I wanted to show light coming from both within and without. I saw this reflecting my own discovery of my Buddha nature, what I'd call my internal prismatic light. I wanted to stimulate the internal prismatic light in others as well. With the figures I try to suggest the spiritual vibrancy as well as the monumental classicism of the African dancer."

Clarence based the series of large pastel paintings on pictures of African dancers from the mountain area of Northern Cameroon, who perform a harvest dance, symbolic of both ending and beginning.

"These figures reflect outer light as well as the kinetic energy of movement that brings the inner rainbow forth, displayed in a festive form."

Of his next projects, Clarence says: "I don't know exactly what my future work will

be like. I'll just keep chanting to keep an open avenue to my true self. I am confident that I'll be able to show more peace and harmony in my art. The art develops more easily these days. It has a brighter quality." □

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