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SELECTIONS FROM THE BARNETT-ADEN COLLECTION:

A Homecoming Celebration, January 31 - March 7, 2009

Jeffrey Stewart, Curator



WASHINGTON, DC -- Bob Johnson, Chairman and Founder of The RLJ Companies will debut select works from his privately owned Barnett-Aden Collection (“the Collection”). Since the early 1980s, Johnson has assembled a private collection of more than 250 pieces of artwork by 19th- and 20th-Century African Americans, Africans and artists of other ethnicities. This exhibition, “Selections from the Barnett-Aden Collection: *A Homecoming Celebration*” is a preview of a variety of works featured in the Barnett-Aden Collection acquired by Johnson in 1998, and will be shown at Hemphill Fine Arts from January 31 through March 7, 2009.

The Barnett-Aden Collection is important because of its artistic range and how it reflects both the early social and cultural conditions of the African American experience. The Barnett-Aden Collection celebrates the diverse aspects of African American history and is a tribute to African American art and culture. The Barnett-Aden Collection is reported to be one of the country’s oldest collections of African American art. Portraiture, urban genre themes and the depiction of the African American experience

dominate the pieces featured in the exhibit.

“Many of the paintings represent pride and dignity,” says Johnson. “I identify personally with several pieces from the Collection and think it is important that the works from talents of our early American history are preserved and enjoyed as much today as they were many years ago.”

A rich history embodies the Barnett-Aden Collection. In 1943, James Herring, a Howard University professor of art and founder of its Department of Art, and Alonzo Aden, his student and curator of the University’s Gallery of Art, founded a private gallery in their Northwest Washington, DC home. These men collected art at a time when most African American artists could not exhibit in mainstream museums and galleries and when up and coming white artists lacked local patronage and encouragement.

The Barnett-Aden Gallery became an oasis of beauty and culture in a segregated America and provided a haven for artists like Romare Bearden, Elizabeth Catlett, Jacob Lawrence, Archibald Motley, and John Robinson to advance art through their interpretations of the American experience.

This year marks the first time art from the Barnett-Aden Collection will be on display in Washington, DC since 1975 when the Collection was dispersed following the death of its original founders. The Barnett-Aden Collection, which in many ways documents the struggles, achievements and celebrations of black people in America, was acquired by Johnson in 1998 from the National Museum of African American Art (NMAAA) based in Florida.

H E M P H I L L



“Over the last 10 years, Bob Johnson has restored and preserved one of the nation’s oldest and extraordinary collections of African American art,” said Jeffrey Stewart, curator for the Barnett-Aden Collection and professor and chair of the Department of Black Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. “Exhibiting these works during Black History Month and unveiling important works from the Collection in the community that fostered its inception truly reflects the title of the exhibit -- *A Homecoming Celebration*.”

“Exhibiting these works in an art gallery reminds us that this art was first introduced to the public as contemporary art primarily by African American artists,” said George Hemphill, owner of Hemphill Fine Arts. “This collection reveals the deeper humanity in all of us and serves as a foundation for educating the public through the use of African American art and imagery.”

An opening reception will be held on Saturday, January 31, 2009 from 6:30 – 8:30 p.m. (EST)

Note to Editors: Press Preview on January 29, 2009 from 10:30 – 11:30 a.m. (EST)

GALLERY HOURS

Tuesday - Saturday, 10 AM to 5 PM and by appointment.

IMAGE CREDIT, PAGE ONE: JOHN N. ROBINSON (1912-1994), MYSELF, OIL ON CANVAS MOUNTED TO PAPERBOARD, 17" X 13"

IMAGE CREDIT, PAGE TWO: ELLIS WILSON (1899-1977), FLOWER VENDOR, OIL ON FIBERBOARD, 23 7/8" X 20"

IMAGES ARE AVAILABLE FOR REPRODUCTION.

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About the Barnett-Aden Collection -- *The Barnett-Aden Collection was originally assembled by the founders of the Barnett-Aden Gallery, James Herring and Alonzo Aden, from the 1940s through the 1960s and was built by the purchase of works shown in the Gallery throughout the years. Works by prominent African American artists such as James Porter, Romare Bearden, Archibald Motley, Henry O. Tanner, Dox Thrash, Elizabeth Catlett, and Raymond Barthé were exhibited by the Gallery and are now part of the permanent Barnett-Aden Collection, which currently includes: fifty-four pieces of African art, 107 paintings, eleven sculptures, and nine drawings, along with fifteen pieces of ephemera, photos, and the original desk used at the Barnett-Aden Gallery.*

For media inquiries or interview requests, please contact Traci Otey Blunt, The RLJ Companies at 240.744.7858 or press@rljcompanies.com