Charles Searles

American, b. 1937, Philadelphia, PA, d. 2004, New York, NY

*“My work as a sculptor grew out of my early work as painter. The medium I use most often is painted word. Although abstract, my work still often has a reference to the figure, in particular, dancers.” 1*

 Charles Searles, 2005

Initially a painter, Searles was drawn to the artifacts in the collection of Museum of Archeology and Anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania. He participated in the exhibition New Black Artists at the Brooklyn Museum in 1969 and Contemporary Black Artists in America at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1971. The following year he received a diploma from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts at the University of Philadelphia. A fellowship from the Academy in 1979 allowed him to travel to Ghana, Nigeria, and Morocco which solidified his interest in African sculptural forms, masks and design patterns. Searles’ polychrome works not only united his immersion in painting and sculpture, they fused his interest in traditional African forms and his involvement in Afro-Cuban music.

Searles was commissioned throughout the eighties and nineties to create public sculptures. A notable work of the period is the monumental bronze piece, Freedoms Gate, 1993, installed at the Fulton Street Traffic Triangle, Brooklyn, New York, which was commissioned by the Department of Transportation.

*“My sculptures are wall hung and free standing, which challenges me to think frontally as well as in the round. I combine my curvilinear and flat forms which gives the work a lot of movement. Negative spaces in and around the piece become part of the sculpture and charge them with energy. It has been said that my work has a positive and multi-cultural feel. This is exactly what I want to convey.” 2*

 Artist’s Statement

1 Charles Searles. Artist’s Statement. “Charles Searles, Standing Tall.” New York: G.R. N’Namdi Gallery, 2005 (8).



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