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# Sticking To The Art

While the world hunts David Driskell for his opinions about the Cosby collection on exhibit at the Smithsonian, he drops a hint with us, in Maine.

## FROM STAFF & WIRE REPORTS

“We should remember that the real man behind this collection is David Driskell,” writes the *Washington Post* about the Smithsonian Institution’s exhibit that is sparking so much controversy: “Conversations: African and American Artworks in Dialogue.”

This is the very David C. Driskell, co-curator of the Smithsonian show and for dec-

ades the scholar and art consultant who has brought the Camille and William Cosby collection to an elite sphere, that so many Mainers revere as a likable Falmouth resident, world-class painter, and curatorial expert on world painting.

Driskell has been friends with Bill and Camille Cosby since Cosby called him in 1976 (see our interview, “The Prime of David Driskell,” Sept. 2001). No doubt uncomfortable with the controversy, Driskell has remained eloquently silent. Consider *Artnet News*: “We also reached out to David Driskell, the co-curator of the show who is also a longtime friend and advisor to Cosby, as well as to Cosby’s attorney Marty Singer for comment about whether the accusations have impacted the museum show. Neither responded.”

If you were in Driskell’s position, would you respond? As an index to the controversy about Bill Cosby as he relates to art, *Artnet* reports, “In a November 15 radio interview conducted at the Smithsonian that took the term ‘awkward silence’ to an entirely new level, NPR reporter Scott Simon talked with Bill and Camille Cosby in detail about the [62] artworks they loaned to the show. At the end of the four-minute segment, viewers were treated to roughly 30 seconds of dead air when Simon asked Cosby to comment on the allegations as Cosby shook his head no and wagged his finger at Simon...” This dead air time was, according to the *Washington Post*, “perhaps the most significant dead air in the history of National Public Radio.”

Then there’s “Public split over Cos-

by’s art at the Smithsonian,” by Brett Zonger of the Associated Press, which appeared in the *Post*. Here, once again, Driskell’s name comes up most respectfully, with a quote from him tantalizingly absent.

Kudos to our “Flash” editor, Diane Hudson, who had the moxie to ask Driskell what the situation was when she covered his art opening at a Portland gallery. Here is Driskell, thoughtful and, it must be assumed, hurt:

“As a curator hired by the Smithsonian in connection with this exhibit, I have been asked not to speak publicly about the controversy until my contract ends on January 16. You have not seen any comments from me about the exhibit as all the interviewers want to talk to me about Bill Cosby. I have no information about that and cannot speak to it. I can, however, speak about the art, and tell you that the art speaks for itself. This work by major American artists [including Beaufort Delaney, Jacob Lawrence, Elizabeth Catlett, Romare Berden, Faith Ringgold, Driskell himself, Alma Thomas, and Henry Ossawa Tanner] has never before been seen in public, and may never be provided that opportunity again. An extension of the American canon, the exhibit provides an invaluable educational opportunity that should not be lost... The Smithsonian reports attendance has more than doubled since the opening of this exhibit, and I do not think that is because of the controversy surrounding it.”

The show goes on. ■



*Still Life: Souvenir No. IV*, oil on canvas, 1916, by Eldzier Cortor, from the collection of Camille and William Cosby, is presently on exhibit at the Smithsonian Institution. At right, painter and curator David Driskell.

