Artist shares taste of Jamaican culture, experience in exhibit

BY ELIZABETH ELLIOTT

Spiritual and cultural roots permeate the paintings of Jamaican artist and educator Cecil Cooper, who opened the latest exhibit at the Creighton University Art Gallery, titled “Journeying/Transcendence” last week.

The exhibit features 14 examples of Cooper’s life struggles, passions, cultural roots and experiences. Cooper is the director of the Edna Manley College of the Visual & Performing Arts and head of the Painting Department in Kingston, Jamaica.

The centerpiece of the exhibit, “Friends at a Gathering”, is one example of how personal experiences influence his work. Cooper said the background of the painting was at the gravesite of a close friend.

“It’s a piece that has history to it,” Cooper said. “It’s the most important piece of the show in my opinion.”

While in Omaha, Cooper will give gallery talks and lectures about Jamaican art and travel to Lincoln with fellow Jamaican artist-in-residence at Bemis Art Gallery, Dawn Scott. Scott, a textile artist, and Cooper will lecture on Jamaican art, which will soon be displayed at Joslyn Art Museum.

Cooper is also a classically-trained singer and he will perform in a concert Feb. 4 for Black History Month and sing in a major gospel concert at the Lied Performing Arts Center in Lincoln.

Cooper’s exhibit was made possible by a grant from the Nebraska Arts Council and the Department of Fine and Performing Arts at Creighton University.

The gallery director, the Rev. Ted Bohr, S.J., said Creighton is working toward showing multicultural exhibits this semester.

“It’s a part of the commitment to cultural diversity,” Bohr said.

Bohr said much of Cooper’s work can be categorized as “figurative expressionism.”

“In each image you discern there are human faces, fish, birds,” Bohr said. “He uses that kind of imagery to elicit and emotional response.”

The exhibit will be open daily until March 5.

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