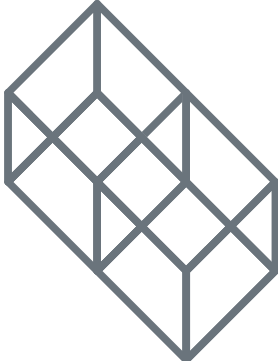




A CELEBRATION OF WORKS BY  
**JOAN AND  
REYNOLD RUFFINS**  
STUYVESANT FISH HOUSE  
FALL 2022 THROUGH SPRING 2023



THECOOPERUNION



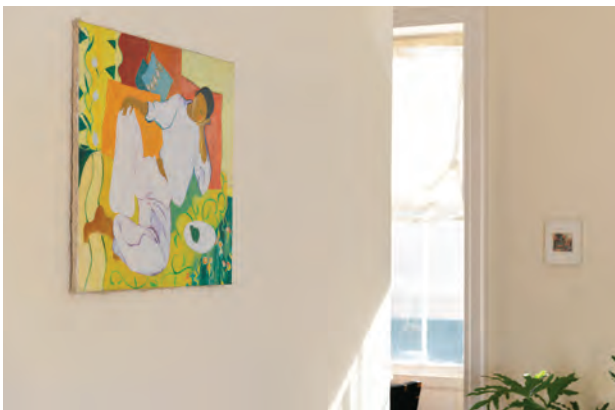
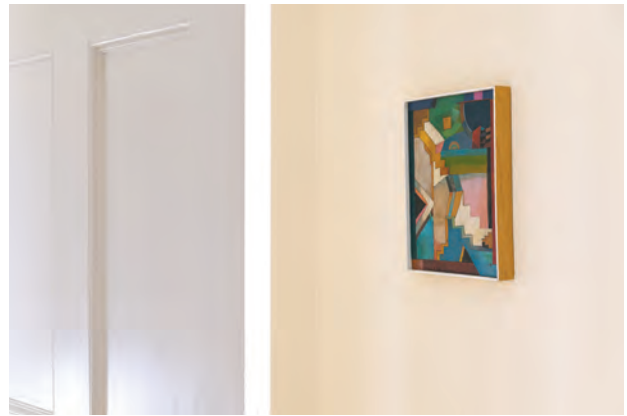
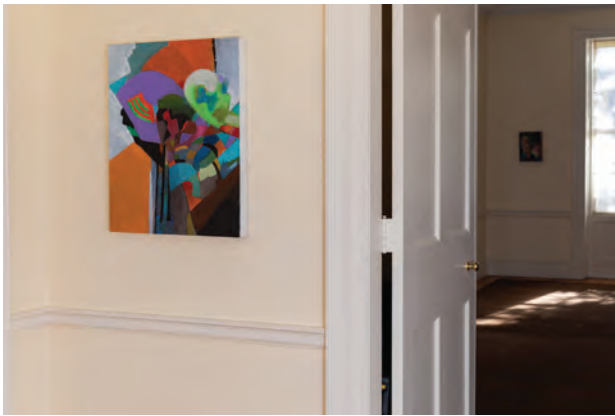
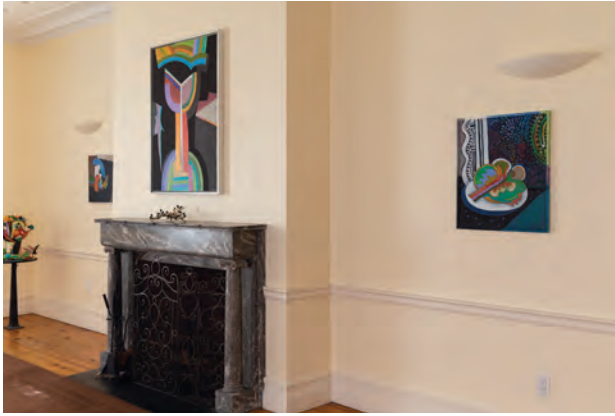


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# A LIFE IN ART ENTWINED

## REYNOLD RUFFINS

Today the idea of Reynold Ruffins is unsurprising, though still uncommon. When he was accepted to The Cooper Union, he was still only one of a handful of Black students matriculated into the prestigious art program. Where did he get the dream of becoming an artist? Why did he, a young Black man from Southeastern Queens, think he could be a professional working artist?

Since childhood, Reynold was known throughout the neighborhood as a gifted artist. Neighbors, friends, and family supported his budding artistry with gifts of tools to draw and create. In later years a local shopkeeper who knew Reynold growing up would regale younger and newer family members with stories of his ability to draw whatever you asked him to. If you wanted a picture of a bird or a car, he would scribble it off and it would look like a bird or a car.

His family, while by no means advantaged, was gifted in other ways. One ancestor was a Baptist minister and well-known social justice activist. Another published an abolitionist newspaper. Still others were renowned musicians in Newport, R.I. Perhaps this legacy inspired a will and belief that he could be anything he wanted.

Reynold Dash Ruffins was born on Aug. 5, 1930, to an appliance salesman for Consolidated Edison, and a homemaker. The world was between wars, in a depression, just 65 years from the



emancipation of enslaved Africans and deeply into the Jim Crow era. There were not many avenues open to Black boys. The advice from his dad was to take the civil servants' exam to be assured of a steady reliable income and stable retirement. Good advice to get into the middle class.

Instead, his journey took him out of Queens into the world of art and advertising and onto a different path.

He went to the High School of Music and Art in Manhattan (now the Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & the Arts), also attended by Ed Sorel, where he befriended Milton Glaser, with whom he would go on to make graphic design and illustration history.

Together they attended The Cooper Union, the highly selective and, at the time, tuition-free arts college in Lower Manhattan. He graduated in 1951. Years later he would receive the school's most prestigious honor, The Augustus St. Gaudens Award for outstanding professional achievement in arts. Later still he was also presented The Cooper Union Presidential Citation for his work and prominence in his profession.

While still at Cooper, Seymour Chwast, Milton Glaser, Edward Sorel, and Reynold formed Design Plus. They had two clients. One wanted to make a gross of cork placemats. Reynold designed the tropical scene they silk-screened onto them. The other was a monologist who needed a flier.

Next, Chwast, Sorel, and Ruffins had the idea to create a digest of type and illustration in a four-page booklet designed as a parody of the *Farmers' Almanac*. They called it the *Push Pin Almanack* and sent it to art directors to market their design work. Reynold designed the logo for the *Almanack*. Copies of the *Almanack* and its successor, *The*

*Push Pin Monthly Graphic*, are now collectibles for design enthusiasts.

These collaborations were the precursor to the legendary design firm, Reynold and the three friends would go on to establish. Push Pin Studios would fundamentally change the world of illustration and graphics.

While the studio was getting off the ground, Reynold broke the Madison Avenue color barrier by joining William Douglas McAdams, the pharmaceutical advertising agency. Reynold often commented that being Black made him a rarity in the advertising business — an industry that, before the Civil Rights era, was an all-white mecca. Since his work was his calling card, clients often did not know his race.

He told The Sag Harbor Express in 2013 “after finishing a job, I'd go meet an art director, and there would be some surprises. One-time, I finished a big job — both physically and financially — and had my portfolio under my arm. I was feeling so good. The receptionist looked up and said, ‘The mailroom's that way.’ The assumption was, if you were Black, you were delivering something.”

Reynold joined Push Pin Studios full time and stayed for about five years. There his work brought a whimsical voice that, according to Steven Heller, a former art director for *The New York Times Book Review* and the editor of *The Push Pin Graphic: A Quarter Century of Innovative Design and Illustration*, harkened back to turn-of-the-century European imagery, like the posters and illustrations of Emil Pretorius or Heinrich Christian Wilhelm Busch, a German cartoonist and illustrator, with a nod to Art Nouveau. His treatment of forms and shapes presaged his later illustrations and paintings.

He left the firm in 1960 to work as a freelance illustrator and three years later co-founded the design studio Ruffins/Taback with friend and colleague Simms Taback. The two collaborated for 28 years. They formed a greeting card company, too, called Cardtricks, featuring the two men's expressive, playful drawings.

Reynold contributed designs for *The Urbanite*, a short-lived culture magazine for what it called "the New Negro." Published in 1961, it was put together by Byron Lewis, an advertising executive, and others; James Baldwin, Lorraine Hansberry, Langston Hughes, and LeRoi Jones were contributors.

"We couldn't attract any paid advertising," said Mr. Lewis, who went on to start his own advertising agency, Uniworld, to focus on the Black market. "No mainstream advertiser wanted to advertise in a Negro publication. That's what we were called then. We were a start-up trying to be different from *Ebony* and *Jet*, which focused on Black celebrities. Reynold was a pioneer because he was working in the white mainstream advertising world. That was unheard-of for a Black man then. He was a role model."

In the late 60s Reynold was engaged to create the graphics for *Harlem on My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900-1968*. The exhibit generated controversy and protests resulting from the Metropolitan Museum of Art's decision to exclude Black artists and the Harlem community from an exhibit about Harlem.

In 1969 Reynold teamed up with Joyce Hopkins, Dorothy Hayes, and Eli Cantor to put on a show to bring attention to Black artists, illustrators, and designers. Reynold, inspired during an early morning walk, conceived the exhibition's "black birds" theme,

which was used on all the event materials. The *Black Artists in Graphic Communication* gala launched on January 8, 1970, at Gallery 303. In April 1970, the show began traveling around the United States and Canada to universities, colleges, art museums, and galleries, and completed its tour in April 1971.

Over his long career Reynold created designs and illustrations for publications like *The New York Times Magazine*, *Time*, *Life*, *Fortune*, *Gourmet* and *Essence* magazines. Commissions for an array of clients including Amtrak, AT&T, Coca-Cola, CBS, IBM, Pfizer, Scribners, Random House, and the U.S. Post Office have garnered many awards, from the New York Art Directors Club and The Society of Illustrators.

He co-illustrated his first children's book, *The Amazing Maze*, with Mr. Taback in 1969, and went on to illustrate nearly 20 more, the most recent of which, "A Friend for King Amadou," was published in 2006. With writer Jane Sarnoff, he collaborated on 14 children's books, which were offbeat and comedic expositions on whatever topic interested them in any given year, from superstitions to chess to riddles.

Reynold was the illustrator on "Koi and the Kola Nuts," a highly praised video for children based on an African folktale, with narration by Whoopi Goldberg and music by Herbie Hancock. Ruffins' brilliant illustrations produced a highly praised video for children.

His illustrations for *Running the Road to ABC*, by Denize Lauture, a Haitian poet, earned Mr. Ruffins honors for illustration in 1997 from the Coretta Scott King Book Awards. "Illustrator Reynold Ruffins' gorgeous single- and double-page gouache pictures capture the cadence of Lauture's rhythmic text and the vibrant colors of the children's world," *The Los Angeles Times* wrote in 1996.

His work has been acclaimed in trade and design publications, among them: *200 Years of American Illustration*, *A History of Graphic Design*, *The Push Pin Graphic*, *African American Art*, *Graphis* and *How Magazine*. His work is internationally recognized in group show exhibitions at The Louvre in Paris, Milan, Bologna and Tokyo. In 2022 he was inducted into the Society of Illustrators Hall of Fame.

His influence was felt as a teacher as well as an artist. He retired as professor emeritus at Queens College CUNY where he taught for over a decade. He also taught at the School of Visual Arts, the Parsons School of Design at the New School, and was a Visiting Adjunct Professor at Syracuse University.

After a career as an illustrator, designer and teacher, Reynold began painting full time, creating joyous, jazzy and often abstract work that he exhibited in Sag Harbor and elsewhere. "I've had the good fortune of almost always enjoying my work, some less, of course, than others," he told *The Sag Harbor Express*. "I probably work harder at easel painting than I did as an illustrator, because I had the constraints and the need to satisfy the client, although it can be helpful to know what you can't do."

His illustrations covered many themes. Lively street scenes, fanciful travel locales, heartwarming hearth and home, vivid black-and-white food renderings, and whimsical animals and creatures. His bold use of color, abstract form, and uninhibited composition are distinctive. These characteristics are carried over into his paintings.

His work as a painter is less representational than his illustration and graphic design, often consisting of areas of bold color that sometimes hint at still-life arrangements such as flowers in a vase, but at other times appear more purely abstract. Often

his paintings reflect his quick wit, enjoyment of play and color, appreciation for the play of light on objects, adventurous spirit, and love for the outdoors, especially the sea.

Retiring from commercial work returned Reynold to his life as a painter. He started life as an inspiration to others, created a place for himself where previously there wasn't one for people like him and in doing so, became a role model. With his paintings and sculpture displayed at institutions like Cooper Union and his commercial work archived at Stanford University as well as in The Cooper Union's Herb Lubalin Study Center of Design & Typography; it will remain available to inspire and educate future generations.

## JOAN YOUNG RUFFINS

It is often true that the stories of women are lost to the winds of time. Joan's path to and as artist is less well documented and less well known than her husband Reynold. And yet Reynold would say she was arguably the more talented painter.

Born May 30, 1932, in Chicago, Illinois, to a strong, well-educated Black woman who raised she and her sister. As a teenager Joan heeded the advice of an aunt from her father's family to move to New York City and pursue her dream to be an artist. A gifted painter, Joan graduated from New York City's High School of Music and Art and attended The Cooper Union from 1952 to 1954. In a sign of the times, Joan was asked to leave Cooper Union when she was pregnant. The dean at the time told her that she was wasting a spot that could be given to a man. Decades later, the school awarded her a certificate of completion.



By choice and by circumstance family was most important to Joan. Upon being asked to leave Cooper she raised her four children teaching them and the neighborhood kids art in the basement of their Queens home. A home purchased in the same neighborhood she landed in when she arrived in NYC.

She loved to read and cook and garden and entertain. She and Reynold welcomed everyone into their home with great conviviality and esprit. Many learned about cooking, baking and wine drinking from Joan. She enjoyed travelling and loved the rugged landscapes of New Zealand, the big sky of Montana, the gentle mountains of Vermont, the countryside of Michigan, and the shores of Eastern Long Island. Her creative spirit was evident in how she lived her life.

Her drawings and paintings, often evocative of time and place, have been characterized as primitive at times, and yet there is a veracity of emotion to her work that speaks to her lived experience largely in the more domestic realms. There are scenes from throughout that home. A view of the foyer coming down the stairs. The art wall behind the kitchen table. A still life including a pewter pitcher that is still in the family home. The house itself, seen on a dark winter night.

Other pieces depict life and landscapes from nature and Sag Harbor. A chair from the living room. A field with the big sky of Montana. A lighthouse at the end of a rocky point. Places that perhaps held special meaning or were frequently visited leaving a distinct impression.

*—Text by: Deborah Ruffins wife of Ben Ruffins  
on behalf of Todd Ruffins, Lynn Ruffins Cave,  
Seth Ruffins, Joan and Reynold Ruffins' children*

This exhibition was organized by Associate Dean and Adjunct Professor Adriana Farmiga (A '96) and Adjunct Professor Yuri Masnyj (A '98), in coordination with the Office of the President Laura Sparks.



*Reynold Ruffins*  
*Untitled, undated*  
*Acrylic on canvas*



*Reynold Ruffins  
Untitled, undated  
Acrylic on canvas*





*Installation view*



*Joan Ruffins  
Untitled, undated  
Pastel on paper*



*Joan Ruffins  
Untitled, 1980  
Acrylic on paper*



*Reynold Ruffins*  
*Untitled, undated*  
*Acrylic on panel*





*Reynold Ruffins*  
*Untitled, undated*  
*Acrylic on panel*



*Joan Ruffins  
Untitled, undated  
Pastel on paper*



*Joan Ruffins*  
*Untitled, undated*  
*Pastel on paper*



Reynold Ruffins  
Mc 9 Creek, undated  
Oil on canvas



*Reynold Ruffins  
Untitled, undated  
Acrylic on canvas*



*Reynold Ruffins  
Untitled, 2006  
Acrylic on canvas*



*Reynold Ruffins  
Untitled, undated  
Acrylic on canvas*



*Reynold Ruffins*

*Top*

*Untitled, undated; mixed media, acrylic, wood*

*Bottom*

*Untitled, undated; mixed media, acrylic*





*Reynold Ruffins  
Untitled, undated  
Acrylic on wood*

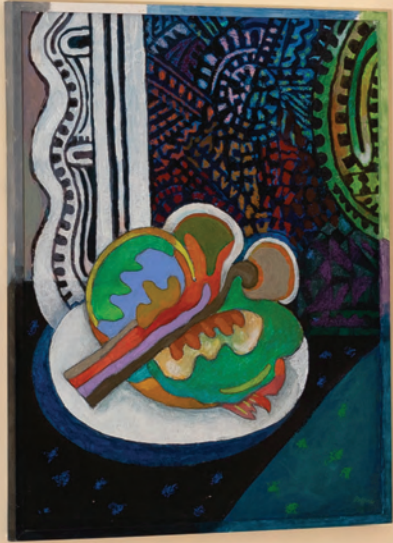




*Reynold Ruffins  
Untitled, undated  
Decoupage paper and acrylic*



*Reynold Ruffins  
Untitled, undated  
Decoupage paper with acrylic*





*Left*  
*Reynold Ruffins*  
*Vernal Equinox, 2009*  
*Acrylic on canvas*

*Right*  
*Joan Ruffins*  
*Untitled, undated*  
*Acrylic on canvas*





*Reynold Ruffins  
Vernal Equinox, 2009  
Acrylic on canvas*

*Reynold Ruffins  
Untitled, undated  
Decoupage paper with acrylic*



*Reynold Ruffins  
Untitled, undated  
Acrylic on canvas*





*Reynold Ruffins  
Untitled, undated  
Oil on canvas*



*Reynold Ruffins  
Untitled, undated  
Ink on paper*



*Reynold Ruffins  
Untitled, undated  
Acrylic on paper*



*Reynold Ruffins  
Untitled, undated  
Acrylic and pastel on paper*



*Reynold Ruffins  
Untitled, undated  
Acrylic on canvas*



*Reynold Ruffins*  
*Jessup's Neck #2, undated*  
*Acrylic on paper*



*Reynold Ruffins  
Untitled, undated  
Acrylic on paper*



*Reynold Ruffins*

*Left*

*Untitled, undated*

*Acrylic on paper*

*Right*

*Woman (Orange), undated*

*Acrylic on paper with paper collage*





*Reynold Ruffins*  
*Renewal 2, undated*  
*Mixed media on paper*



*Reynold Ruffins  
Untitled, undated  
Acrylic on paper*



*Reynold Ruffins*  
*Tumblers, undated*  
*Acrylic on paper*



*Reynold Ruffins*

*Left*

*Untitled, undated  
Acrylic on paper*

*Right*

*Spring Rush, undated  
Acrylic on paper*



*Reynold Ruffins*  
*Still Life II, 2012*  
*Pigment print*



*Reynold Ruffins  
Untitled, undated  
Acrylic on canvas*



*Reynold Ruffins  
Untitled, undated  
Acrylic on paper*



*Joan Ruffins*  
*Untitled, undated*  
*Acrylic on canvas*





*Joan Ruffins  
Untitled, undated  
Pastel on paper*



*Joan Ruffins  
Untitled, undated  
Acrylic on canvas*



*Joan Ruffins*  
*Queen's House, 1991*  
*Oil on canvas*



*Joan Ruffins*  
*Untitled, undated*  
*Acrylic on canvas panel*



*Joan Ruffins*  
*Untitled, 1979*  
*Oil on board*



*Joan Ruffins  
Untitled, undated  
Oil on canvas*



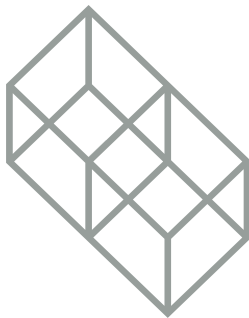
*Reynold Ruffins*  
*Paroxysm, undated*  
*Acrylic on canvas*



*Reynold Ruffins  
Untitled, undated  
Acrylic on canvas*



*Joan Ruffins*  
*Untitled, undated*  
*Acrylic on paper*



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