

Press Release

EMMA AMOS

10 July – 9 August 2025

Private view: Wednesday 9 July, 6-8pm



Emma Amos, *Dancing in the Streets*, 1986 © Emma Amos

Spanning a period of nearly five decades of work, this is the first UK exhibition show of pioneering African American artist Emma Amos (b.1937, Atlanta, Georgia; d.2020, Bedford, New Hampshire). In the 1950s, Amos lived in London, studying at the Central School of Art and Design.

Amos combines painting, textiles, and printmaking, often incorporating African fabrics, photo-transfers, and vibrant colours. Her work is politically charged and addresses themes of race, gender and identity.

Though under-recognised during much of her career, Amos has gained widespread attention in recent years. Her work was included in the landmark 2017 exhibition 'Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power' at Tate Modern, which travelled to Crystal Bridges, Brooklyn Museum, The Broad, LA, and MFA Houston. In 2021, Amos' major retrospective 'Color Odyssey' was exhibited at the Georgia Museum of Art and the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

An original member of the Guerrilla Girls, art and activism were inseparable for Amos. She was on the editorial board of the feminist publication *Heresies*, and was the youngest and only woman member of Spiral, the significant African-American collective, alongside artists and activists Romare Bearden, Norman Lewis and Hale Woodruff.

ALISON JACQUES

Before embarking on her career in New York, Amos studied at Central School of Art and Design in London, and completed a diploma in etching. Here, she experienced a cultural and artistic freedom that she was not afforded in the US. She honed her mastery in printmaking and weaving, two mediums that became essential tools in her artistic language, and discovered the pictorial possibilities of Abstract Expressionism and Action Painting. 'In London, as an art student', Amos stated, 'I had that wonderful feeling of release'.

Born to an established family in segregated Atlanta, Georgia, Amos' artistic talents were encouraged. She graduated with a degree in Fine Art from Antioch College, Ohio in 1958. Her development as an artist was predicated on her contention that, as a Black woman artist, putting brush to canvas was 'a political act'.

By layering pigment, print, textiles, African wax prints, photo-transfers and applying paint to unstretched fabric, Amos creates visually rich and conceptually experimental works which grapple with her nation's complex past, and her personal stake in it. Many of the exhibited works are from Amos' 'Falling' series – dynamic scenes which stage physical and social upheaval. Through such paintings, bell hooks observes, 'freedom of expression is made more inclusive... In this free world, identities are not static but always changing. Crisscrossing and crossbreeding become mutual practices, and the power to explore and journey is extended to all.'

Amos' work is held in prominent museum collections including: Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois; British Museum, London; Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York; Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Arkansas; The Getty, Los Angeles; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; MoMA, New York; National Gallery of Art, Washington DC; SFMOMA, California; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington DC; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

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