Eleta J. Caldwell and Rodney M. Gilbert Memorial Gallery

Presented by Gallery Aferro, with the support of Newark Arts

Gallery Aferro and Newark Arts are honoring the lives of two powerful and much-beloved Newark culture workers: Rodney Gilbert (July 27, 1967 - November 8, 2017) and Eleta J. Caldwell (June 13, 1945 – December 13, 2017). Ms. Caldwell was Mr. Gilbert’s teacher; and both were working artists passionately committed to cultural leadership in Newark, and to mentorship of the artistically inclined youth of the community. The new Memorial Gallery, located within Gallery Aferro’s downtown location at 73 Market Street, is an intimate space appropriate for visual arts exhibits, poetry readings, screenings, and other sorts of gatherings where people connect with ideas and each other. The gallery is a place to linger, and a place for remembering.

www.aferro.org
Born in Chapel Hill, NC, Eleta J. Caldwell moved to Newark in the late 1940’s and graduated from Arts High School. She began drawing at age 3 and went on to earn a Bachelor’s and a Masters of Fine Arts from Montclair State University. She began her teaching career at Weequaic High School and then went on to Arts High School, where she was first a teacher, then a Department Chair, and then the principal. She began exhibiting her work in the 1970’s with Gladys Barker Grauer’s AARD Gallery, and exhibited extensively including at the Newark Museum, the Studio Museum in Harlem, City Without Walls, Clocktower Gallery, Art in the Atrium, and others. She dedicated most of her work, time, and life to the city of Newark, NJ, and is remembered as a tireless and powerful mentor, advocate, and culture worker by countless former students as well as by her colleagues.

Eleta wrote: “My parents raised six children with love and respect. My father was a Pullman Porter, while my mother worked occasionally her primary obligation was the home. It was a major sin to be “idle” in my household. My father would give you a boring domestic chore if he caught you doing nothing. Therefore we all had interests: reading, art, sewing or music. We had a great deal of freedom, and that freedom was based on trust and respect. Art has always been my first love. During junior year my college class visited West Kinney Jr. High to observe a class and I was assigned an art class (of course), and I fell in love! I loved the teaching, the atmosphere, and especially the aura emanated by the students and their teacher. I felt a strong connection to my hometown, the city of Newark, where I received a great education. How better to give back to the city than to teach- I’m so glad I did it! I created my art while I pursued my teaching- it was an excellent marriage. I believe education is synonymous with experience. For me, exhibiting and teaching go hand in hand. I wanted to give my students a broader experience. Art was my tool to emphasize a holistic approach that combined creativity and critical thinking. I began painting in a representational genre; I loved the African and American face and figure. My family members were often the subject for my figurative works and portraits. I drew and painted Black faces incessantly. My work started to lean towards a more abstract representational style. I painted women and our contributions, historically, spiritually and physically. I still focus on women’s unrecognized contributions but now employ mixed media to broaden my statements.” Image courtesy of Onnie Strothers.