

# ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

GALLERIES / Alice Thorson

## Snowden, an artist city should be proud of

Although the past year's critical debate has tended to focus on the revival of abstraction, nationally and internationally, expressionism is holding its own in the artistic landscape of the '80s.

As New Yorkers celebrate premier American neo-expressionist Julian Schnabel's newly opened retrospective at the Whitney — on the heels of Susan Rothenberg's re-emergence into the limelight with a one-person show at Sperone Westwater — Washingtonians can find similar cause for pride in the accomplishments of an expressionist painter whose background and experience fall considerably closer to home.

Born in Raleigh, N.C., educated at Howard University, a 20-year resident of the District and veteran of numerous area and national group exhibitions, **Sylvia Snowden** is Washington's pre-eminent expressionist painter. Awash with multicolored swirls of brilliant acrylic pigment, her current show at **Brody's Gallery (1706 21st St. NW)**, on view through Nov. 28, is

everything the artist has conditioned us to expect — and more.

The new works are on paper, a material the artist has found gives her greater mobility of execution and control of scale. Working on the floor, she hinges the pieces together with canvas strips to achieve the desired size. All of these paintings are large — 3 feet by 7 feet at least — and all are figurative. As with her work from the past 10 years, each is titled after an individual whom she paints to mirror the feelings within.

Ms. Snowden sees into our hearts. "Feelings are more important than anything else, in my opinion," says the artist. "I can see things in other people that are reflected in me."

Each piece commemorates an encounter, a friendship, an impression. Melancholy in froggy green, the reclining "Monica Johnson" holds up a hand as if to fend off the world's gaze. Her skull-like head attests to a world-weariness, even as her writhing, sinuous body seems to burst with life from the cramped space the artist allots her.

A determination to survive energizes all of these works. Reinforced by Ms. Snowden's ebullient brushwork and rambunctious palette, it pulsates through atrophied or extended limbs and woefully enlarged extremities, the toss of a head, the cast of a hip.

Head back, hips thrust out, the fiery red "Deborah Carrington" exudes a jaunty "here I come" attitude. In contrast, the pale, discombobulated "Suzanne Codi" sinks to her knees, momentarily daunted.



"Cheryl," above left; "Deborah Carrington," above, and "Frances and Monica Johnson," above right, by Washington artist Sylvia Snowden. All are acrylic on paper.