

Driskell Center Grand Opening
Monday, Oct. 15, 2007 4:45- 9:30 PM
Cole Activities Building

Welcome guests, Dr. David Driskell, the Driskell Center leadership, and Dr. Camille Cosby, who has graciously agreed to be our keynote speaker this evening. Thank you for joining us for the dedication of this beautiful new art gallery and educational center. This is now the official home of the David C. Driskell Center for the Study of Visual Arts and Culture of African Americans and the African Diaspora. Tonight is the culmination of nine years worth of combined efforts by many to found an interdisciplinary center for the study of African American arts. The Center will fill several critical needs: it will provide an intellectual home for artists, scholars, museum professionals, and art administrators. It will broaden the field of African diasporic studies and African American Art and it will preserve, document, and present African diasporic artwork. The marvel of this Center is that all of these elements will now be available to a cohort of energetic young people. It is in these youth that a new generation of leadership will be cultivated.

Speaking of leadership, the birth of this Center is a model for leadership in many ways. The project has been a fantastic partnership between the University and Dr. David Driskell and many of his supporters. Let me first describe how this Driskell Center benefits the University even beyond the expansion of the field of African diasporic studies. Interdisciplinary Centers such as the Driskell Center help encourage collaboration across departments and Colleges, they attract high level faculty, and they offer enriching programming for our students. They increase our academic strength and our national profile. These dynamics ultimately help us provide first-class training for the next generation of scholars. The Driskell Center is also a fantastic example of productive University and private philanthropic partnerships.

The University has collaborated with David Driskell at several different levels. The College of Arts and Humanities, under Dean Jim Harris' leadership, provided substantial support for the Center's growth and programming. Dean Harris was convinced that the Driskell Center would be a critical resource for our students and that it would deliver a resounding impact throughout the region and the national artistic community. Because the University believes in the Center's mission it has dedicated time, energy and resources to renovating this historic space expressly for the Center. These efforts, combined with the outstanding talent and dedication that David and his supporters have put into the project, have created this historic Center.

This kind of partnership in the context of the University's *Great Expectations Campaign*, is really a model for the building blocks of a great University. These types of collaborations benefit all of the partners. They pull the University up in stature and they attract faculty, staff and other partners who enrich programs like this with innovation and creativity.

The University has done the groundwork to launch the Center, but there is much more work yet to do. I know that many of you are ardent supporters of the Center's mission to truly transform our national perspective on African American—and American— art. To this end we look forward to working with you to cultivate the resources that the Driskell Center deserves.

The transformative vision of the Center is really the genius of the Center's namesake, Dr. David Driskell. Without Dr. Driskell's remarkable talent and dedication this Center would not have been possible. David has been among the most vocal advocates for the field of African American art and for its next generation of artists and scholars. Dr. Driskell has been a member of the University of Maryland's Department of Art for 22 years and spent half a decade as its Chair. He is a renowned painter, art historian, curator and collector. Over the years he has received numerous fellowships, awards and prizes, including three Rockefeller Foundation Fellowships and a Harmon Foundation Fellowship. Dr. Driskell has also received nine honorary doctoral degrees in art. A recipient of the prestigious National Humanities Medal, awarded by President Clinton, Dr. Driskell is considered one of the world's foremost experts on African American artwork. One of the world's leading authorities on the subject of African American Art, Professor David C. Driskell has made invaluable contributions to scholarship in the history of art and the role of the African American artist in American society. He is also a vital member of our UM community, serving on our Board or Trustees and as one of the co-chairs of the *Great Expectations Campaign*. His vision is really the lifeblood of the Center. His name and his reputation have attracted art enthusiasts from around the country. His substantial gifts of art work have become the basis of the Center's permanent art collection. This Center stands as a tribute to a man who continues to make a tremendous impact on the University of Maryland. I am honored to welcome Dr. David Driskell.