



The Art and Life of Clarence Major

Keith Byerman

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Clarence Major is an award-winning painter, fiction writer, and poet--as well as an essayist, editor, anthologist, lexicographer, and memoirist. He has been part of twenty-eight group exhibitions, has had fifteen one-man shows, and has published fourteen collections of poetry and nine works of fiction. "The Art and Life of Clarence Major" is the first critical biography of this innovative African American writer and visual artist. Given the full cooperation of his subject, Keith E. Byerman traces Major's life and career from his complex family history in Georgia through his encounters with important literary and artistic figures in Chicago and New York to his present status as a respected writer, artist, teacher, and scholar living in California.

In his introduction, Byerman asks, "How does a black man who does not take race as his principal identity, an artist who deliberately defies mainstream rules, a social and cultural critic who wants to be admired by the world he attacks, and a creator who refuses to commit to one expressive form make his way in the world?" Tasking himself with opening up the multiple layers of problems and solutions in both the work and the life to consider the successes and the failures, Byerman reveals Major as one who has devoted himself to a life of experimental art that has challenged both literary and painterly practice and the conventional understanding of the nature of African American art. Major's refusal to follow the rules has challenged readers and critics, but through it all, he has continued to produce quality work as a painter, poet, and novelist. His is the life of someone totally devoted to his creative work, one who has put his artistic vision ahead of fame, wealth, and sometimes even family.

A Sarah Mills Hodge Fund Publication.

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