



Subjugation, 2008. Mixed media, 48 x 42 in.

COLOR IN FREEDOM

Journey along the Underground Railroad

Why should
I be a slave?

There was no
reason why I
should be
the thrall
of any man.

FREDERICK
DOUGLASS'

This exhibition will lead viewers along a historic path that marks the quest for freedom in America. Its works are divided into four distinct segments, these divisions analogous to the movements in a musical score. In it, Joseph Holston chronicles slavery in America through artistic interpretation, presenting a body of work that reads like an epic poem—one moving in a steady, continuing rhythm through this period in American history. He expresses his heartfelt feelings in successive rhythmic movements that flow through each exhibition segment. Within this harmonious theme, he remains sensitive to those courageous men and women who were subjected to bondage and to those who made a heroic escape. Here in this discussion of his work, their voices—some well known, others less familiar—are heard recounting personal reminiscences and individual experiences.

Throughout the visual journey this exhibition presents, Holston remains optimistic for the future of those whose lives it celebrates. Even when portraying the darkest hours, he illuminates each composition with light rendered in the subtlest shades of soft, warm tones or in the boldest, most vibrant colors, the effects suggesting hope and possibility. The luminosity of Holston's palette produces a radiance of color, with palpable rather than fluid brush strokes. The light appears radiant and painterly, leaving the viewer with an illusion of atmosphere and air circulating around the canvas. The minute tonal modulations mimic the effect of a glowing illumination penetrating the darkness.

The paintings are organized in a linear chronology that is at once musical and pictorial. Each of the four “movements” of the exhibition is faithful to a particular period of slavery in America: first, the arrival in an unknown world; second, the adjustment to living in bondage among