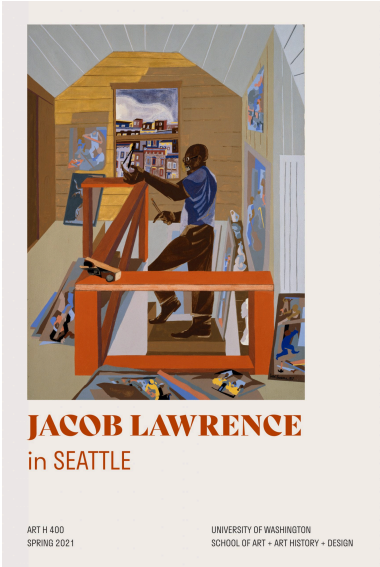
Jacob Lawrence in Seattle



Edited with an introduction by

Juliet Sperling

Essays by

Alexander Betz

Elizabeth Copland

Grace Fletcher

Maya Green

Ryan Hawkins

Monica Ionescu

Mingjie Ma

Samantha Seaver

Thomas Star

Nicolas Staley

Bailee Strong

Kira Sue

Ashley Tseng

Kate Whitney-Schubb

Elizabeth Xiong

Cover design by

Ashley Tseng

Cover Image: Jacob Lawrence, *The Studio*, 1977, Gouache on paper, 30 x 22 in. (76.2 x 55.88 cm) Overall h.: 37 3/8 in. Overall w.: 29 in. Seattle Art Museum, Partial gift of Gull Industries; John H. and Ann Hauberg; Links, Seattle; and gift by exchange from the Estate of Mark Tobey, 90.27 © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Contents

Part II. Bridging Seattle

Part III. Beyond Seattle

Acknowledgements

JULIET SPERLING

This book is the culminating project of an advanced art history seminar taught at the University of Washington in spring quarter 2021. Conceiving, writing, and publishing a digital book in the span of three months would be a heavy lift at any time, but especially so during the tail end of a pandemic. We want to express our deepest thanks to the community of collaborators that went above and beyond to support our project in the most difficult of years.

First and foremost, we are indebted to the Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, which graciously approved the free educational use of Lawrence's works for this publication. As students, researchers, and writers, we were beneficiaries of the Foundation's long record of robust and generous encouragement of art historical research and writing about Jacob Lawrence–our essays are built upon a sturdy foundation of existing scholarship, much of it by people who have dedicated decades to carefully preserving and disseminating knowledge about Lawrence's art. In particular, we wish to acknowledge Michelle DuBois and Peter T. Nesbett, the directors of the Jacob Lawrence Catalogue Raisonné project, which was an invaluable resource for our course. We also drew heavily on the work of Ellen Harkins Wheat, Patricia Hills, Elizabeth Hutton Turner, and dozens of other authors who structured our course syllabus. A full reading list is available at the end of this book, and we encourage you to continue studying Lawrence's history through their influential work.

Several people enriched our thinking about Jacob Lawrence and his surrounding contexts during the formative phases of the project. The class was scheduled to coincide with the west coast leg of the traveling exhibition Jacob Lawrence: The American Struggle, which was on view at the Seattle Art Museum from March 5 to May 23,

2021. Due to the continuing impact of Covid-19, our original plan of holding many class sessions in the galleries was of course not possible. Nevertheless, the staff of the Seattle Art Museum went out of their way to bring us into the show. Chelsea Werner-Jatzke, Nina Dubinsky, Natali Wiseman, and Philip Nadasdy ensured that every student had a chance to view the exhibition in person and share their responses with a broader public, and Theresa Papanikolas spent an afternoon with our seminar for a zoom study day that felt anything but virtual. Thank you so much to everyone at SAM for bringing us together around Lawrence's art, despite our physical distance.

A second seminar visitor, Professor Luther Adams of UW-Tacoma, deserves special mention. Dr. Adams generously lent his time and expertise as a scholar of Black history and culture to our class, first as a guest seminar leader, and later on in the spring as an eagerly welcomed seminar participant. It is difficult to overstate the impact the sessions with Dr. Adams had on our thinking in the course and in this book—he showed us new ways to look at Lawrence, rooted in his research on African American migration, histories of labor, and longstanding teaching interest in the artist. Many of the essays in this project directly stem from the hours that Professor Adams spent discussing Lawrence with us, and we owe him our most heartfelt thanks.

Without the support of collaborators in the University of Washington Libraries, especially Lauren Ray, Madison Sullivan, and Maryam Fakouri, this project would simply not have been possible. We are so grateful to you all, and everyone else who provided research and digital publishing support. We also want to thank many others in the University of Washington School of Art + Art History + Design: Morgan Bell, Julianna Jones, Jamie Walker, and the faculty in the division of Art History.

Finally, as editor of this project and professor of the course from which it emerged, I want to acknowledge my primary collaborators,

the outstanding students who participated in the seminar and contributed the thoughtful and frequently groundbreaking essays that comprise this book. Alexander Betz, Liz Copland, Maya Green, Ryan Hawkins, Monica Ionescu, Mingjie Ma, Sam Seaver, Thomas Star, Nic Staley, Bailee Strong, Ashley Tseng, Grace Fletcher, Kate Whitney-Schubb, and Elizabeth Xiong: thank you all for your unflagging energy, enthusiasm, and insight.

Introduction

Jacob Lawrence in Seattle, 1971 / 2021

JULIET SPERLING

1. Jacob Lawrence, *The Studio*, 1977, Gouache on paper, 30 x 22 in. (76.2 x 55.88 cm) Overall h.: 37 3/8 in. Overall w.: 29 in. Seattle Art Museum, Partial gift of Gull Industries; John H. and Ann Hauberg; Links, Seattle; and gift by exchange from the Estate of Mark Tobey, 90.27 © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Press play, and you'll hear the sounds of the University of Washington's Roethke auditorium on October 5th, 1978: applause, the muffled creaking of the stage as a speaker steps up to the podium, shuffling papers.

An audio element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can listen to it online here: https://uw.pressbooks.pub/arth400jacoblawrence/?p=380

"I'm trying to hold that first slide…yeah, this one," he says to the tech operating the projector, as the picture he wants appears on the screen. "I think we have it now."

"This slide is one of my latest works," Jacob Lawrence tells the audience. "[…] it's my studio here in Seattle." The 1977 painting, The Studio, shows the bespectacled artist in his workspace (fig. 1). He stands at the top of the stairs in profile, left knee pushing off the step as if mid-climb. A compass is balanced in his outstretched left hand, index finger pointing upwards; the right hand inverts the gesture, one finger pointing towards the floor as the others wrap around two paintbrushes.

2. Andreas Vesalius, *De humani corporis fabrica* (*Of the Structure of the Human Body*), 1555, Woodcut, Overall: 15 9/16 x 10 1/2 x 3 1/4 in. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Dr. Alfred E. Cohn, in honor of William M. Ivins Jr., 1953, 53.682.

Leaning against the wall to Lawrence's left is a figure study that mirrors the artist's pose—in fact, they're both mimicking a third body, a famous anatomical illustration from the Renaissance (fig. 2) that Lawrence drew repeatedly from 1968 to 1996 (fig. 3).[1] The triple reference poses a sly challenge to the viewer: where do you look for the artist's presence in his art? Where does his work fit into the broader arc of art history?

With the painting enlarged behind him, Lawrence, nearing the end of his first decade as Professor of Art in the School of Art + Art History + Design, began his address to the crowd. Hundreds of his fellow University of Washington students, faculty, staff, and community members had gathered in Kane Hall to hear the renowned artist deliver the third annual distinguished faculty lecture, a recognition reserved for an internationally acclaimed scholar whose work had demonstrably impacted their profession, the work of others in their field, and society at large. Lawrence certainly fit the bill. By 1978, he'd held a central position in the American art world for nearly 40 years, a long and prolific career that the Whitney Museum of American Art had just honored with a major retrospective exhibition (a mark of prestige that the evening's MC compared to winning an Oscar—he wasn't wrong).

3. Jacob Lawrence, "*Human Figure*" *after Vesalius*, 1968, graphite on paper. Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University; Gift of Dr. Herbert J. Kayden and Family in memory of Dr. Gabrielle H. Reem. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Lawrence could have easily started his lecture at his career's beginning, perhaps with a panel from his monumental Migration Series of 1940-1941, undoubtedly his most famous project. Instead, he started in medias res, in the middle of things. "I thought I would start with the latest slide so you can see where I am in this moment," he said, reminding the audience that his work was far from finished. Of course, he was right: he continued to make art for the next two decades until his death in 2000 at age 82, much of it just as complex

and incisive as The Studio. And yet for many scholars and critics, it's as if Lawrence's artistic trajectory came to a hard stop when he and his wife, the artist Gwendolyn Knight, left New York City permanently for Seattle in 1971. Nearly 30 years of his career wedge into a few lines in a closing paragraph, or a page in an epilogue. Art historian Patricia Hills captured the dominant attitude succinctly in the epilogue of her 2009 monograph *Painting Harlem Modern: the Art of Jacob Lawrence*. "Lawrence's works in Seattle, with the exception of the powerful Hiroshima series, lost some of their edge," writes Hills, chalking the dulling up to a "subduing of color" inspired by the constant Pacific Northwest drizzle.[1]

The essays in this volume, researched and written by the participants in the Spring 2021 art history seminar "Art and Seattle: Jacob Lawrence" at the University of Washington School of Art + Art History + Design, challenge the prevailing perspective that the "complete Jacob Lawrence" is a story that begins and ends in New York City. In so doing, we take our lead from the artist's own framing of the Seattle period as a critical stage in his artistic development, in which conceptual and formal concerns explored across his long career converged and became more of the sum of their parts. Some of these insights are drawn from the recording of Lawrence's previously unpublished 1978 distinguished faculty lecture, discovered by our colleague Morgan Bell midway through the term, and made available to the public for the first time as part of this project. In the lecture, The Studio is merely the first stop on a winding, non-linear, and cumulatively building account of Lawrence's artistic philosophy. Forking paths begin to come back together as the artist nears the talk's conclusion:

1. Patricia Hills, Painting Harlem Modern: The Art of Jacob Lawrence, 2009, 260.

An audio element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can listen to it online here: https://uw.pressbooks.pub/arth400jacoblawrence/?p=380

> I consider it a strand, all of these things running through my life. I don't separate them. I don't separate my series on Toussaint L'Ouverture where I become the rider, because I'm searching for an identity. I don't separate my life when I do a series of paintings on the Migration, because that is a part of my life although I did not participate in that. I do not separate these things when I do a work on Harriet Tubman. I cannot separate it because it's a part of me, a part of my life, a part of my experience. And this is what makes me. This is it, this is the experience, this is the search which continues on and on for that elusive thing. I go back to this because it is tied up with the picture plane. I deal with the picture plane for there's always the search involved in that. What am I looking for? I don't know. I have no idea. There's a certain magic there, I go back to Albers' words. A certain gestalt that I'm looking for. I don't know if I'll ever find that.

Here, Lawrence sets the record straight: his late work is not a dulling, but a sharpening. But seeing how the Seattle works contain and continue to hone the edge of his earlier years requires viewing the period from a fresh perspective. The Studio coaxes us to do precisely that. "You can see where I am in this moment," the artist said of this painting, a self portrait in two places—or times—at once. Out the window of his 1977 Seattle studio is a 1943 Harlem street.

About *Jacob Lawrence in Seattle*

Art history's job is to show how an artwork, or an artist, fits into a larger and more complex social, intellectual, or cultural frame. It's a lot like putting together a puzzle. Through research, we locate all of the puzzle pieces: individual artworks, people, life events. Through interpretation and analysis, we show how they all interlock to form a bigger picture. Scholars have been steadily assembling the Jacob Lawrence puzzle for more than half a century, but the pieces from the Seattle period are still loose and unintegrated, rendering the big picture incomplete. The goal of our Spring 2021 seminar was to begin filling in the missing pieces; to gain a deeper and more thorough understanding of Lawrence's art historical significance, both before *and* after 1971. Over ten weeks, we intensively studied his prolific and complex body of work, analyzing it both on its own terms and in relation to a variety of art historical contexts. We read hundreds of pages of critical and scholarly writing, tracing the patterns and shifts in interpretation from the beginning of his career in 1940 to the present. We pored over letters, contracts, news clippings, and interview transcripts in the archives to find the details left out of existing narratives. This book, *Jacob Lawrence in Seattle*, is the result. Each student in the seminar spent the quarter researching and developing an essay anchored in a single artwork that Lawrence created during his time in the Pacific Northwest. Their essays situate single paintings like 1977's *University* or contained series like the *Hiroshima* illustrations of 1983 within wider contexts or thematic frameworks, ultimately considering each anchor artwork as a loose piece in the still-unfinished Lawrence puzzle.

So where do the Seattle pieces fit in that picture? The essays in this volume concentrate on integrating Lawrence's post-1971 artistic production into existing art historical conversations: questions of modernism and abstraction, art and politics, materiality, self-

portraiture, and so forth. Of course, like the quarter-long class itself, this scope is necessarily and intentionally quite limited. However, as our discussions frequently explored, looking closely at Lawrence's time in Seattle from 1971 onwards can illuminate far more than art historical through-lines or expanded definitions of modern painting. In this foreword, we want to briefly address what the essays leave (for now) unwritten.

Art and Seattle: Jacob Lawrence is the first class at the UW to center on the work of the School of Art + Art History + Design's most distinguished former faculty member. It was motivated, in large part, by a desire to learn more about Lawrence's legacy at the institution where we work and study, in the region where we live, and within a community where his profound impact is visible in so many ways. Visible is the operative word: in 2021, exactly 50 years after accepting a permanent position at the UW, Jacob Lawrence is once again in the spotlight. A major exhibition, *Jacob Lawrence: the American Struggle*, toured museums across the U.S. from 2020-2021, with a wildly popular sold-out stop at the Seattle Art Museum. The *Struggle* show made headlines throughout its tour, including widely shared stories announcing the surprise discovery of two panels long thought to be lost ("lightning strikes twice," the New York Times proclaimed). While the *Struggle* panels were on view at SAM, the University of Washington made its own big announcement about the artist. The Jacob Lawrence Gallery, named in honor of Lawrence, will be completely remodeled and expanded in the next two years as part of a multi-million dollar initiative devoted to elevating the arts at the UW. Positioning the Gallery at the center of this transformative campaign is significant: it marks a growing recognition, beyond the immediate arts community, of the vital importance of programs like the Jacob Lawrence Legacy Residency, the Black Embodiments Studio, and its annual BIPOC graduate curatorial fellowship to the larger mission of the 21st-century University.

Given these exciting developments, Lawrence's name, art, and face

have recently appeared everywhere. Through social media posts, fundraising campaigns, and larger-than-life museum banners, more people than ever before are seeing and learning about Jacob Lawrence and his art. But with some exceptions, these formats can rarely deliver more than a few sentences of text or a minute or two of audio, and in turn can only scratch the surface of the artist's longer story—let alone the deeper art historical significance of his work. As participants in a seminar all about digging into that deeper historical material, we recognized the benefits of raising basic awareness about the artist, but were also acutely aware of how much more there was to say. In the necessary brevity of an instagram post, the core message risks shifting away from the artist and towards the institution's own image and desire to communicate its progressive values. On the other hand, a deeply-researched historical account doesn't do much good if it's only accessible to people with a university library affiliation and a fondness for academic jargon. We wondered: what would a middle ground between social media and scholarship look like?

Examining how, and in what level of detail, we tell Lawrence's story is more than just a rhetorical exercise. His arrival at the University of Washington coincided with a period of unprecedented reckoning with issues of structural racism and exclusion on this campus and in universities nationwide. Across the country, students and activists demanded change, including but not limited to the hiring of more faculty of color. And across the country, university administrations tried to communicate, loud and clear, that they were listening and changing. One common strategy involved putting individual faculty members like Lawrence in the spotlight as evidence of an institutional commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. In her exploration of diversity work in higher education, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*, feminist scholar Sara Ahmed explores what it means for institutions to deploy

"diversity as a form of public relations."[2] Citing the idea that "diversity" has become synonymous with "people who look different," she recounts an instance in which an organization wanted to photograph the diversity committee that she was serving on to share on behalf of the larger organization:

> When our team was their picture, it created the impression that the organization was diverse. Arguably this was a false impression: the other teams were predominantly white. On the other hand, when our team was pictured, it helped expose the whiteness of the other teams. Even if diversity can conceal whiteness by providing an organization with color, it can also expose whiteness by demonstrating the necessity of this act of provision.[3]

For Ahmed, diversity-as-PR is one of many ways that the bodies of people of color are literally used to "repicture" the institution that employs them. "People of color are asked to concede to the recession of racism: we are asked to 'give way' by letting it 'go back," she writes. "Not only that: more than that. We are asked to embody a commitment to diversity. We are asked to smile in their brochures."[4] The ultimate effect is at once an upholding of institutional whiteness as the norm through the devaluing of faculty, staff, and students of color. People are reduced to instruments, or as Ahmed writes, "bodies of color provide organizations with tools…we become the tools in their kit. We are ticks in the boxes."[5]

The photo request in Ahmed's example occurred in the 2000s, but it would not have been out of place in 1968, when the University of Washington began laying the groundwork for Jacob Lawrence's

2. Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2012), 34.
3. Ahmed, 33.
4. Ahmed, 163.
5. Ahmed, 153.

hire. In a Board of Deans meeting that spring, held amidst ongoing student unrest about the overwhelming whiteness of the university, participants discussed how Black professors could be made "visible without having them feel as if they are being used."[6] It's not for us to say whether Lawrence felt he was being used, or what he felt at all. But after permanently joining the University of Washington faculty in 1971, he was certainly made visible. The 1978 Distinguished Faculty Lecture cited throughout this volume was not the only time Lawrence was on stage: he actively participated in University-wide efforts to recruit and support Black students and faculty, and around diversity and recruitment issues in general (Fig. 4).

4. Jacob Lawrence on stage, photographer and date unknown. Box 9, Folder 9, Jacob Lawrence and Gwendolyn Knight papers, 1816, 1914-2008, bulk 1973-2001. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The parallels in diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts between 1971 and 2021, between Lawrence's time and ours, raises a question: what progress has actually been made? And what still hasn't changed? The makeup of our class is a glaring example of the ways in which diversity efforts often result in reproducing the existing structures of institutional whiteness. *Art and Seattle: Jacob Lawrence* was taught by me, a white professor. No Black students were enrolled in the course. To overlook this reality is to acquiesce to whiteness as the unnamed default–in art history, in academia, in higher education, and beyond. At the same time, attempting to hurriedly "conceal whiteness by providing [our] organization with color," as Ahmed put it, is damaging in a different way. We have opted, instead, to call attention to the subjectivities represented and not

6. "Board of Deans Meeting Minutes," April 3, 1968, University of Washington Office of the President Records, Box 28, University of Washington Special Collections.

represented in our seminar. To disrupt the ongoing reproduction of institutional whiteness, what must change now?[7]

Acknowledging that we, the authors of this volume, are implicated in replicating the structural whiteness of the institution is not enough on its own: it must also involve interrogating how those same power structures can enter into our work as art historians. Reflecting on our own subject positions as non-Black authors writing about work by a Black artist was a first critical step. Close reading of essays by art historians including James Smalls and Richard J. Powell, and artist Simone Leigh's 2019 explanation of how she defines the audience for her work, guided this conversation.[8] Reading their scholarship and statements pushed us to carefully consider the methodological frameworks we brought to this project, and to clarify the nuanced but significant differences between writing about the artist or art through a subjective framework, and writing about the art through an art historical lens. In an effort to practice the latter approach, our essays draw heavily on archival documents, particularly Lawrence's own statements, and are anchored whenever possible in the scholarship of Black authors, scholars, and writers. We are immensely grateful to Professor Luther Adams for the feedback and suggestions he provided on this topic, in addition to sharing his expertise on Lawrence and the historical context of migration.

Finally, we continue to grapple with the question of how to engage with Lawrence's legacy in a way that does not reduce his complex body of work and lived experience to public relations data. The public-facing aspect of *Jacob Lawrence in Seattle* is our attempt to counterbalance and complement decontextualized invocations

7. Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 34.
8. James Smalls, "A GHOST OF A CHANCE: Invisibility and Elision in African American Art Historical Practice," *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America* 13, no. 1 (1994): 3–8; Richard J. Powell, "Linguists, Poets, and 'Others' on African American Art," *American Art* 17, no. 1 (April 1, 2003): 16–19; "Simone Leigh on Instagram: 'I've Seen Some Preliminary Thoughts on the Biennial and Concerns about Radicality. I Need to Say That If You Haven't Read, Not a Single…,'" accessed June 22, 2021, https://www.instagram.com/p/BxiJI58gl4t/?hl=en.

of his name and art. This volume is grounded in our belief that renewed interest in Jacob Lawrence must go hand in hand with sustained and historically accurate attention to his artwork and its place within art history. In turn, that information must be as widely and freely available as a social media post. As students and scholars embedded within the institution, we hope to use our power and privilege to share what we have learned.

PART I

BUILDING SEATTLE

1. Bumbershoot '76

Public Art and Community Leisure

MAYA GREEN

Abstract

Jacob Lawrence (1917-2000) is widely known and rightfully appreciated for his early paintings depicting epic stories from American history, but the work from the last half of his career is woefully understudied. Having moved away from the global artistic center of New York City in 1971, Lawrence spent the rest of his life painting and teaching in Seattle, Washington. After this cross-continental relocation, how did Lawrence become involved in local art production and what impact did this have on his creative work? In this essay, I argue that starting with Bumbershoot '76 (1976), a painting-turned-print commissioned for a city-sponsored art and music festival, Lawrence became deeply engaged in Seattle's public art scene. Bumbershoot '76 conforms to Lawrence's canon through its social content and figurative style; its dissemination as a print also fits neatly as the 1970s were a period when many of his older paintings and new creations were being translated into prints. But Bumbershoot '76 stands out as a celebration of leisure in community and collective engagement with open public spaces, rather than of labor — a theme that was explored in his many Builders paintings created around the same time.

1. Jacob Lawrence, *Seattle Arts Festival: Bumbershoot* '76, poster, 24 x 37 in., Museum of History and Industry (MOHAI), © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Five years after relocating to Seattle, Jacob Lawrence was commissioned to create the promotional poster for Bumbershoot, a city-sponsored art and music festival held annually at the Seattle Center. First painted with gouache on paper and then translated into silkscreen prints, *Bumbershoot* '76 (1976) represents Lawrence's early integration into the public art scene in Seattle (fig. 1, fig. 3). There are a few other examples of this mode of working: in the 1970s and 1980s, Lawrence created at least four paintings intended to be used as posters and oversaw the process of translating many of his earlier works from paint to print. However, created amid his notable *Builders* paintings, and following commissions for the Washington state capitol building, *Bumbershoot* '76 stands out both formally and thematically from the rest of his oeuvre.[1] Rather than glorifying scenes of human labor or highlighting forgotten local history, as those previous commissions had done, *Bumbershoot* '76 features an idealized community and celebrates the pure leisure that the festival sought to create.[2] Not only was the poster commission the start of a long relationship with the City of Seattle's municipal arts institutions, but the design was also one of his first creations specifically for the Northwest. Despite these defining characteristics that make *Bumbershoot* '76 something of an anomaly among Lawrence's work, the painting has received only passing mention by scholars of the artist. This study is the first to place the poster in the context of Lawrence's engagement with public art in Seattle.

1. Peter T. Nesbett, "Jacob Lawrence: The Builders Paintings," in *Jacob Lawrence: the Builders, recent paintings*, 5-26, 1998.
2. Lawrence's five-panel series commissioned by the Washington State Arts Commission, George Washington Bush (1973), shows the largely-forgotten story of a local Black pioneer.

Analyzing *Bumbershoot* '76 in light of the festival's initial social goals supports an interpretation of the work as a celebration of civic life and the role of art in facilitating community development. Following the post-war boom in Seattle's industrial economy, the 1970s brought what is locally known as the "Boeing Bust."[3] Amid rising inflation and unemployment nationwide, the Mayor of Seattle, Wes Uhlman, proposed a city arts festival to "keep the human spirit going."[4] Around the same time, the recently-founded Seattle Arts Commission was considering organizing a festival, and the city went forward with sponsoring a summer event.[5] The sheer diversity of acts and entertainers led local commentators to label it a "populist grab-bag" of a lineup.[6] Bumbershoot was the definition of a "big tent" festival, sure to have something for everyone. The event's location at the Seattle Center furthered the Commission's goal of enhancing city life through the arts. As the former site of the 1962 Seattle World Fair, and featuring a diverse range of performance and gathering venues, the Seattle Center was well suited to accommodate the hundreds of thousands of festival-goers. [fig. 2] [7] At the time Lawrence would have been designing his poster, the Seattle Center also housed a pavilion of the Seattle Art Museum, making it the real geographic center for visual

2. Orit Sarfaty, *Seattle Center*, Project for Public Spaces, 2003. © Orit Sarfaty.

3. Sharon Boswell and Lorraine McConaghy, "Lights Out, Seattle," The Seattle Times, November. 3, 1996, https://special.seattletimes.com/o/special/centennial/november/lights_out.html.
4. Paul Dorpat, "Bumbershoot's Formative Years (1971-1979)," History Link, last modified September 1, 1999. https://www.historylink.org/File/10027.
5. Peter Blecha, "Bumbershoot: Seattle's Arts Festival," History Link, last modified September 3, 2019, https://www.historylink.org/File/20852.
6. Dorpat, "Bumbershoot's Formative Years (1971-1979)."
7. Blecha, "Bumbershoot: Seattle's Arts Festival."

and performing arts in the city.[8] Following the Bumbershoot poster, Lawrence participated in many projects organized by the Seattle Arts Commission, and a dozen of his paintings were purchased for the City of Seattle's public art collection. Archived correspondence with local officials shows that the City was eager to incorporate him into public projects and that Lawrence was often happy to oblige.

Visualizing Community

While the City already established its official position that public art enhances mutual understanding within communities and therefore the government has an obligation to financially support creative work, Jacob Lawrence's *Bumbershoot* '76 provides a visual example of those ideals.[9] Set against the Harlem tenements or crowded city streets of Lawrence's most well-known paintings, *Bumbershoot* '76 is comparatively open and green. Lawrence likely took inspiration from the Seattle Center's expansive lawns and grassy slopes ringed by community cultural centers, which were transformed into amphitheaters and outdoor stages during the festival. Despite filling the poster with twenty-one figures, Lawrence avoids a feeling of claustrophobia by employing undisturbed patches of green grass and a glimpse of the open sky. Two shades of green are used in the poster; the bottom half of the painting is a light green broken up by two darker green benches, and the top half is an inverse dark green patch with a single lighter-toned bench. The lighter shade of grass is formed in a large "U" shape, accentuated by the placement of the benches and positioning of the figures in the foreground. This composition creates a dynamic swooping effect, drawing the

8. "About SAM: Historical Timeline," Seattle Art Museum, https://www.seattleartmuseum.org/about-sam.
9. "Policies & Plans: Public Art Ordinance SMC 20.32.010 Purpose," Office of Arts and Culture, https://www.seattle.gov/arts/programs/public-art#publicartordinance.

viewer's eye cyclically around the scene. White birds flutter around the crowd and five of the figures stretch out their hands as if to feed them. Collectively, the birds and the U-shaped composition are a connection between otherwise disparate couples and families enjoying the public greenspace.

3. Jacob Lawrence, *Bumbershoot* '76, 1976, gouache on paper, 34 ¼ x 26 ½ in., Seattle Arts Commission, Seattle City Light 1% for Art Portable Works Collection. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Lawrence creates a sense of community through tolerant cohabitation to elevate the message of Bumbershoot as a free event for revitalizing the human spirit. He achieves this in part through his styling of the crowd, details that show pride of place. Men wear suits, ties, and hats, and women don dresses and visible jewelry. Something special must be happening here, because in Seattle in the 1970s (and today) these outfits would be far from casual daywear. The open public park provides neighbors a place to see each other at their best. This fashioning indicates that the work is not strictly illustrative of a scene Lawrence observed in his new city, but shows an idealized version of a community coming together to enjoy their shared environment.

However, not everyone is dressed to the nines. A figure in a burnt-yellow smock near the top of the frame wears a cap that takes an ambiguous form partway between a court jester and a wizard's hat. The pant legs on this figure are two colors, one yellow and one brown, contrasting with the rest of the crowd's mainly monochrome attire. This jester is mirrored by another small figure in yellow, also with two-toned pants. These two individuals could

be a reference to the eccentric costumes that many festival-goers wore (fig. 4) or to the popular vaudeville performances that took place in the early years of Bumbershoot.[10] Despite their slightly comical nature, neither of these jesters takes away from the overall unity of the community shown, implying a certain level of tolerance; although they wear less formal attire, they engage the birds and enjoy the park along with the rest of the crowd. The choice to depict the crowd in this way, combining the elegant with the comical, alludes to the wide variety of acts at Bumbershoot that supported the event's identity as a festival for the people in all their differences.

10. Blecha, "Bumbershoot: Seattle's Arts Festival."

Property of Museum of History & Industry, Seattle

4. Tom Brownell, *Contest participants posing at Bumbershoot, Seattle*, September 1, 1975. MOHAI, Seattle Post-Intelligencer Photograph Collection, 2000.107.168.05.03.

Another way Lawrence shows an ideal of community in *Bumbershoot '76* is through the racial makeup of the crowd. Half the

figures are Black or people of color and half are painted White.[11] However, at the time of creation, this would not have been reflective of Seattle's demographics. At the 1970 census, the city of Seattle was an overwhelming ninety-three percent White. Ellen Harkins Wheat, commenting on Lawrence's *Pacific Northwest Arts and Crafts Fair* (1981) poster (fig. 5), argued that the commission featuring a mostly-White crowd allowed the artist to "indulge in wry social observation."[12] This is a contrast to the Builders in which, according to Wheat, it was "highly significant that in these works different ethnic groups are depicted working together toward mutual goals."[13] The crowd at Bumbershoot would not be much different than the crowd at the Arts and Crafts Fair, but for *Bumbershoot* '76 Lawrence depicted demographic parity. While the *Builders*' multi-ethnic construction crews emphasize that labor and collective creation can be a means for unity, these people in the park do not fit into this conception of achieving equity through shared work. Instead, in *Bumbershoot* '76, Lawrence offers an illustration of the fact that work is not the only way to unity and that mutual advancement also requires collective, integrated leisure, not just labor.

11. "Mapping Race in Seattle/King County," Civil Rights and Labor History Consortium, University of Washington, accessed June 2, 2021, http://depts.washington.edu/labhist/maps-seattle-segregation.shtml.
12. Ellen Harkins Wheat, "Jacob Lawrence" (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1987), 179.
13. Wheat, "Jacob Lawrence," 177.

Despite the unique theme, this mode of creation – a commissioned painting to be printed as a promotional poster – was a growing genre of work for Lawrence. More broadly, this took place in the context of Lawrence's increased interest in printmaking from the early 1970s through the end of his career. Peter T. Nesbett, author of *Jacob Lawrence: the Complete Prints, 1963-2000* and co-director of the Jacob Lawrence catalogue raisonné project, places the artist's period of printmaking within the broader "growing market for limited edition prints" from the 1960s onward. Prints not only allowed popular artists to offer lower-cost versions of their work, but artists also recognized its "aesthetic potential…and its ability to reach new audiences" — two factors that are present in the creation and dissemination of *Bumbershoot '76*.[14] The Seattle Arts Commission, the festival's primary sponsor, made 500 editions of the Bumbershoot poster to distribute freely around the city, making the design much more likely to be widely appreciated than if only the original painting was placed on view in a gallery, museum, or even a non-arts specific public building.[15]

5. Jacob Lawrence, *Pacific Northwest Arts and Crafts Fair*, 1981, tempera and gouache on paper, 23 x 18½ in., Collection of Seattle Sheraton Hotel and Towers, © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

14. Peter T. Nesbett, "Introduction, Jacob Lawrence: From Paintings to Prints," in *Jacob Lawrence: The Complete Prints, 1963-2000: A Catalogue Raisonné*, by Peter T. Nesbett and Patricia Hills (Seattle: Francine Seders Gallery, in association with University of Washington Press, 2001), 9.
15. John Blaine to Jacob Lawrence, 6 May 1976, Box 4, Folder 21: Seattle Arts Commission, Jacob Lawrence and Gwendolyn Knight Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/jacob-lawrence-and-gwendolyn-knight-papers-9121/series-2/box-4-folder-21.

Nesbett notes that *Bumbershoot* '76 was created in an era of "increased graphic activity" for Lawrence.[16] Building on his substantial production of prints, Wheat highlights the "influence of graphics" in Lawrence's paintings as a result. Wheat argues that this influence appears in his *Builders* paintings, finding that his "shapes are flatter, often solid and unmodulated, and details of facial features are almost eliminated."[17] These observations hold when examining *Bumbershoot* '76, and in particular when comparing the original painting to the printed poster version. Except for losing some texture on the darker patch of grass and dark green benches, the two versions are nearly identical. The color palette is just as limited in the painting as in the print: one tone each of red, yellow, blue, and gray; two tones of green; three skin tones; black and white. The clothing and figures are painted with no shading, almost as if they are paper cut-outs, placed on a green background. Even among Lawrence's many prints from the surrounding decades, *Bumbershoot* '76 shows a particularly keen sensibility for creating a bold, eye-catching graphic design that would read clearly across varying media.

16. Nesbett, "Introduction, Jacob Lawrence: From Paintings to Prints," 9.
17. Wheat, "Jacob Lawrence," 177.

6. Jacob Lawrence, *Munich Olympic Games*, 1972, Offset lithograph, 43 1/2 x 28 1/4 in., Seattle Art Museum, © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

While prints were becoming more common projects for Lawrence, open green space was still rare for the artist and just two other examples of his paintings-turned-posters employ a similarly grassy composition. The *Munich Olympic Games* (1971-72) poster which, as the title suggests, was prepared for the international sporting event, features five Black track runners, three simultaneously crossing the finish line with batons in hand (fig. 6). They are framed by patches of grass through which the track cuts in a tight arc. *Pacific Northwest Arts and Crafts Fair* (1981) is much more locally oriented. Taking place just outside of Seattle in Bellevue, Washington, this work would have been seen by regional artisans and arts supporters attending the event. The *Arts and Crafts Fair* uses a two-tone scheme for the grass similar to *Bumbershoot* '76, but rather than showing leisurely park-goers it depicts creators at work. Completed at the height of his *Builders* theme, Lawrence echoes those forms through tools and work tables but placed them among a crowd of visitors. Despite some formal similarities, the subjects shown in *Munich* and *Arts and Crafts Fair* have a different feel than *Bumbershoot* '76. *Munich* is a scene of competition, with the definition of the athletes' leg muscles emphasizing the intense physical labor they put in to reach the finish line of such a prestigious competition. *Arts and Crafts Fair* similarly highlights

physical as well as creative labor, and emphasizes an economic exchange; visitors approach artisans to examine their wares for possible purchase. But *Bumbershoot* '76 is significant in that it shows a scene of community leisure, of co-existing in public space, without the ulterior motives of profit or glory.

None of the other Bumbershoot posters from the decade surrounding Lawrence's commission feature the ideals of public art and community so directly as his contribution. He stands out for not engaging with some of the most obvious visual signifiers of the festival, most notably the rainbows and umbrellas visible in the posters from 1973, 1974, and 1975, which are absent from his design. Instead, Lawrence places the social nature of public art front and center in *Bumbershoot* '76. Other posters feature natural imagery typical of the Northwest — greenery, mountains, water (often in the form of rain) — but strip them of their relationship to the people who experience them. Even the 1972 poster designed by Claes Oldenberg, one of the most widely-known artists of the twentieth century, engages with nature in an abstracted sense by depicting an oversize faucet pouring water into Lake Union (fig. 7). Lawrence highlights the natural beauty of the region, but does so in the context of community and puts more "emphasis (sic) on the carnival

7. Claes Oldenburg, *Bumbershoot poster, Seattle*, July 21-23, 1972," 1972, 24.5 x 36.75 in., MOHAI 2011.49.2. © Claes Oldenburg, 1972.

atmosphere of the urban celebration."[18] Rather than symbolically referencing something visually recognizable as Seattle, Lawrence reconstructs the feeling of collective enjoyment in public space that is created each year through the Bumbershoot festival. This is especially notable considering that Lawrence himself sat on the selection committee for the 1977 poster — a design in which human presence in the state of Washington is only indicated through references to the built environment (fig. 8). Despite being a relative newcomer to Seattle, and with the festival still in its early years, Lawrence visually celebrates local community, civic space, and public engagement with the arts.

8. William T. Wiley, *Bumbershoot poster*, *Seattle*, September 2-5, 1977, poster: color; 30 x 23.75 in., MOHAI, 2011.49.7. © 1977, William Wiley.

18. Wheat, "Jacob Lawrence," 179.

Public Space, Public Art

Jacob Lawrence's celebration of public space and public support for the arts is expressed not only through the subject matter depicted in *Bumbershoot* '76, but also in statements made throughout his career. In a 1969 roundtable discussion on the place of Black artists in the U.S. art world, only two years before moving to Seattle, he asserted:

> "The greatest exposure for the greatest number of people came during this period [the 1930s] of government involvement in the arts… The government has made stabs at it – you've got various committees and they've given stipends, but nothing massive like the thing thirty years ago. I think *what we need is a massive government involvement in the arts* – by municipal groups or by the state…" [19]

Even Seattle's relatively ambitious and progressive support for local arts and culture may not have sufficed for Lawrence in this perspective. Regardless of any shortcomings, he made clear his support for these programs through his direct participation.

From 1976 onward Lawrence was engaged with various projects of the Seattle Arts Commission, a city department that sponsored and organized the Bumbershoot festival in its first decade. Among U.S. cities, Seattle was at the forefront of public arts support and funding in the 1970s. The Arts Commission was established in 1971 and in 1973 the City passed the "1% For Art" funding mechanism. Seattle has "one of the first" municipal programs in the country that devotes a percentage of funding for capital projects to the "commission, purchase, and installation of artworks throughout the

19. Romare Bearden, et al.,"The Black Artist in America: A Symposium." The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin 27, no. 5 (1969): 250. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3258415. (emphasis added)

city."[20] The City was eager to play a role in developing the local arts scene through this funding, with the Ordinance instituting the fund stating

> "The City of Seattle accepts a responsibility for expanding experiences with visual art. Such art has enabled people … to better understand their communities and individual lives. Artists capable of creating art for public places must be encouraged and Seattle's standing as a regional leader in public art enhanced." [21]

The text of the ordinance takes an instrumental stand on the role of art: it can and should play an active role in community development.

Even though the festival later transitioned to a more corporate model, partnering with major concert promoters and charging attendees hundreds of dollars for weekend tickets, from 1971 to 1980, Bumbershoot offered free admission and ran on a shoestring budget supplied by the City and outside grantmakers. The festival was by and for locals, with "nearly 100 percent" of the budget "spent on local talent," including musicians, comedians, and performers.[22] While it is unclear how much Lawrence knew about the festival itself, from his letter exchanges with John Blaine of the Seattle Arts Commission, he was surely aware that it was a free, city-sponsored event — showing Lawrence's support for, and recognizing the value of public investment in, local arts.[23]

After completing the Bumbershoot poster, Lawrence continued his engagement with the Seattle Arts Commission and other culturally-focused City departments. In May 1977, Lawrence received a letter from Pat Fuller, coordinator of the Art in Public Places program, confirming the details of an upcoming meeting for

20. Suzanne Beal, "Art for the Environment: Seattle's Public Art Embraces Nature in the City," Public Art Review 20, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2009): 66.
21. Corinne Murray, "Public Art, Public Funding," in Accessible Art: A Layman's Look at Seattle's Public Art, ed. Corinne Murray (Seattle, WA: At Your Fingertips, 1990), 3.
22. Dorpat, "Bumbershoot's Formative Years (1971-1979)."
23. John Blaine to Jacob Lawrence, 1976.

the selection of that year's Bumbershoot poster. From the letter, it appears Lawrence agreed to serve on the jury to select the artist who would create the next poster after having completed the 1976 commission himself. Fuller writes: "Enclosed is your contract and invoice, which allows for the Arts Commission to pay you a regrettably nominal fee for your participation."[24] Already employed by the University of Washington as a full professor, having had many major exhibitions, and considered one of the foremost American artists at the time, Lawrence would not have needed to participate in this process for financial gain.[25] Instead, this continued engagement with the City, and Bumbershoot in particular, shows he felt some alignment with the values and goals of these municipal art institutions.

Correspondence between Lawrence and various administrators of the Arts Commission continued for a decade following *Bumbershoot '76*, further showing a commitment to supporting local public art. In May 1980, Barbara Thomas of the Artists-in-the-City Program requested Lawrence's support for an Emancipation Celebration exhibition, stating that his "participation would ensure our City and its visitors are given the opportunity to share in the riches of our present-day ethnic cultural heritage" and that he was among "a select group of Black artists" invited to contribute artwork.[26] Barbara Thomas, more widely known as Barbara Earl Thomas, is a former student of Lawrence's and was a close friend of him and his wife, artist Gwendolyn Knight. Not only was his work continually requested for public showing in City programs, but Lawrence's mentees also became deeply involved in local arts

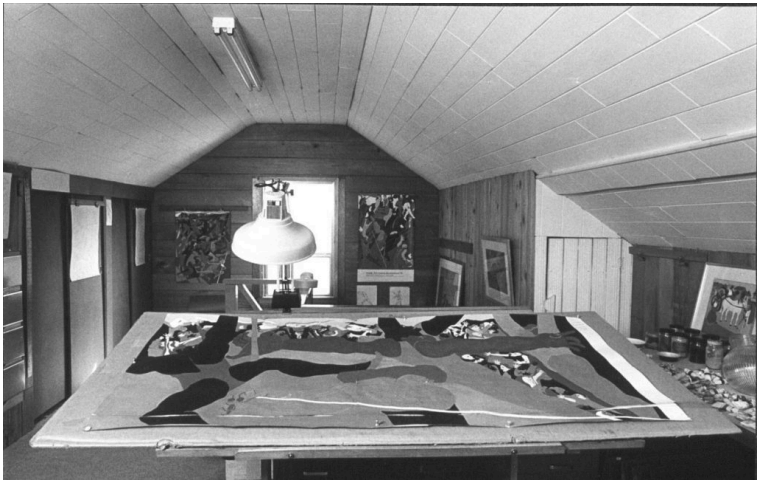
24. Pat Fuller to Jacob Lawrence, 9 May 1977, Box 4, Folder 21: Seattle Arts Commission, Jacob Lawrence and Gwendolyn Knight Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/jacob-lawrence-and-gwendolyn-knight-papers-9121/series-2/box-4-folder-21.
25. "Who was Jacob Lawrence?" Jacob Lawrence Gallery, School of Art + Art History + Design, University of Washington, https://art.washington.edu/jacob-lawrence-gallery.
26. Barbara Thomas to Jacob Lawrence, 9 May 1980, Box 4, Folder 21: Seattle Arts Commission, Jacob Lawrence and Gwendolyn Knight Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/jacob-lawrence-and-gwendolyn-knight-papers-9121/series-2/box-4-folder-21.

institutions.[27] In addition to regularly requesting his expertise and temporary loans for exhibitions, letters from between 1980 and 1982 show the City was actively collecting Lawrence's work for permanent municipal collections. Seattle City Light repeatedly asked to purchase paintings from Lawrence and, unsatisfied with only acquiring the "two small works" bought through Francine Seders Gallery, commissioned an original painting for City Light's Portable Works Collection.[28] These purchases, like the Bumbershoot poster commission, were financed through the 1% For Art fund.

Today, the City of Seattle's Portable Works Collection holds sixteen original works by Lawrence, a combination of paintings and prints, of which fourteen were purchased by City Light.[29] Although in the original agreement for the *Bumbershoot '76* commission Lawrence was set to retain the original painting, the City now owns that as well.[30] With each letter, request, purchase, and commission, Lawrence became more integrated into Seattle's municipally-supported arts scene.

27. Thomas's website confirms that she worked "in agencies such as the Seattle Arts Commission and Bumbershoot" and went on to work in public arts administration, along with being an active artist herself. "Barbara Earl Thomas," Barbara Earl Thomas, https://barbaraearlthomas.com/barbara-earl-thomas/ last modified 2021.
28. Richard Andrews to Jacob Lawrence, 17 July 1981, Box 4, Folder 21: Seattle Arts Commission, Jacob Lawrence and Gwendolyn Knight Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/jacob-lawrence-and-gwendolyn-knight-papers-9121/series-2/box-4-folder-21.
29. City of Seattle, "Arts E-Museum: Jacob Lawrence," Office of Arts and Culture. Accessed May 30, 2021. https://seattlearts.emuseum.com/advancedsearch/Objects/people%3A%22jacob%20lawrence%22/images?page=1
30. John Blaine to Jacob Lawrence, 1976.

Poster Puzzles



9. Mary Randlett, *Artwork by J. Lawrence and His Seattle Studio*, 1979, Photograph. Box 9, Folder 8, Jacob Lawrence and Gwendolyn Knight papers, 1816, 1914-2008, bulk 1973-2001. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

While it is clear that Lawrence's participation in the Bumbershoot commission and his subsequent collaboration with municipal art projects were of great value to the City, the importance of *Bumbershoot* '76 to Lawrence himself presents a puzzle. Photographs of Lawrence's home studio in Seattle show that a poster version of *Bumbershoot* '76 was tacked to the wall at the top of the stairs that led to his workspace. This position means every time Lawrence went up to work, he would be directly confronted with the design. A 1979 photograph (fig. 9) shows *Bumbershoot* '76 positioned to the right of a window, and *Builders (Red and Green Ball)* (fig. 10) hanging to the left. These two paintings share a key similarity. Both feature a man in a lower corner of the frame, with a long stick in hand, leaning so their feet seemingly bear none of

their body weight. The arrangement within the studio makes the poles point towards each other, coming to an implied point above the window frame. Paired with the painting on the worktable, which is likely *Games* (1978) that Lawrence completed as a study for his mural at Seattle's Kingdome Stadium, means that the photograph was probably taken in 1979. This timeline shows that Lawrence put up the *Bumbershoot* '76 poster shortly after he received a copy; not hanging it out of later nostalgia, but giving it an important visual placement soon after its creation.

It is interesting, too, that Lawrence decided to keep the poster version of *Bumbershoot* '76, rather than the original and hung it unframed when many framed paintings lean against the studio walls. One major difference between the painting and the poster is the presence of text. The poster clearly identifies the work as being for "Seattle Arts Festival: Bumbershoot '76," while the painting is unlabeled. Perhaps Lawrence enjoyed seeing this direct visual connection between his work and his new city. But while he gives the poster an important placement in his physical studio, it is notably absent from his self-portrait *The Studio* (fig. 11). *The Studio* shows Lawrence standing near the top of his staircase, but where *Bumbershoot* '76 should be, there is a blank stretch of wood-paneled wall. Lawrence shows his native Harlem out the window rather than the less artistically important North Seattle neighborhood of Laurelhurst, where the

10. Jacob Lawrence, *Builders (Red and Green Ball)*, 1979, gouache and tempera on paper, 30 x 22 in., New Jersey State Museum Collection. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

studio was located. But he does not replace the Bumbershoot poster with anything, and its absence in painted representations of the studio emphasizes its proud presence in photographic documentation. This leaves a shadow of ambiguity over understanding how important this early Seattle commission was to Lawrence, personally or artistically.

•••

Regardless of Lawrence's erasure of *Bumbershoot* '76 from later artistic portrayals of his studio, the impact the commission had on his engagement with public art in Seattle remains clear. From 1976 onward, Lawrence was in regular contact with city officials, fielding requests for his participation in exhibitions, commissioning original works, and accepting committee appointments. While the poster fits in with Lawrence's turn to printing in the 1970s, it stands out for its depiction of open green space found only in a handful of his paintings, out of the hundreds created over his career. *Bumbershoot* '76 is unique for showing community leisure during Lawrence's period of prolific interest in themes of labor and construction. While his *Builders* works are often read in terms of labor as a tool for integration, as workers build towards mutual goals, *Bumbershoot* '76 offers a counterpoint: shared space and collective enjoyment of public art are fundamental for building an equitable community. Lawrence's paintings throughout his working life embodied the goals set out by the City of Seattle's public arts institutions, but *Bumbershoot* '76 in particular proves that the visual arts can and do enhance mutual understanding between neighbors.

11. Jacob Lawrence, *The Studio*, 1977, Gouache on paper, 30 x 22 in. (76.2 x 55.88 cm) Overall h.: 37 3/8 in. Overall w.: 29 in. Seattle Art Museum, Partial gift of Gull Industries; John H. and Ann Hauberg; Links, Seattle; and gift by exchange from the Estate of Mark Tobey, 90.27 © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

2. The Fruit of Labor

Jacob Lawrence and Still-Life

RYAN HAWKINS

1. Jacob Lawrence, *Builders No. 1*, 1972, Watercolor, gouache, and graphite, 22 7/16 x 30 3/4 in. St. Louis Art Museum, Eliza McMillan Trust, 93:1972. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

In Jacob Lawrence's painting *Builders No. 1*, we find a carpenter seated at his work bench sharpening his tools and organizing his workspace (fig. 1). This piece from 1972 was painted shortly after Lawrence's move to Seattle to begin teaching at the University of

Washington's School of Art + Art History + Design[1] and rightly features the iconic image of Mt. Rainier in the window behind our subject. *Builders No. 1* utilizes the same motif of tools present in countless other paintings found in both his earlier work and the works to come after his move to Seattle. However, this painting remains distinct through a prominent use of Seattle imagery, and a unique depiction of tools that work in tandem to tell a story of labor that leads up to this very moment.

Over the course of Lawrence's long career, he utilized tools in a variety of different ways. In his *Migration Series* we see workers actively using their tools in a similar effect to genre painting, exemplified by the fourth panel.[2] The tools are highlighted by Lawrence's use of primary colors and stand out from the picture plane despite their simple depiction. This use of tools is quite literal, showing them being deployed in the process of labor. In contrast, other paintings implement tools in ways that are less direct and more conceptual. This is especially true in the *Eight Studies for the Book of Genesis* series,[3] where the creation of the world seems to be linked to the small tool box placed in the background of every panel. In *Builders No. 1*, both approaches to the tool motif come together to depict the lifetime of work that led to this landmark phase of Lawrence's career and the beginning of his Seattle residency.

In 1978, The University of Washington hosted its 3rd Annual Distinguished Faculty Lecture. The faculty member chosen to give this speech was said to have demonstrable impacts of their achievements on their profession and on society in general, and of all the esteemed faculty members nominated to give the speech, "no other fits this criteria like Jacob Lawrence." In his speech entitled, *I Wonder as I Wander*, Lawrence dives into his time spent in New

1. Cotter, Holland "Jacob Lawrence Is Dead at 82; Vivid Painter Who Chronicled Odyssey of Black Americans". New York Times. June 10, 2000. Archived from the original on August 26, 2020.
2. Lawrence, Jacob. All other sources of labor have been exhausted, the migrants were the last resource, 1940-41, Casein Tempera on hardboard, 18 in x 12 in. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Mrs. David M. Levy.
3. Lawrence Jacob. Eight Studies for the Book of Genesis, 1989, Gouache on paper, 75.6 x 55.9 cm. The Walter O. Evans Foundation for Art and Literature. Francine Seders Gallery, Seattle WA.

York city as a budding artist in the 1930s. He notes how the vibrant life and bustling streets of Manhattan that he wandered every day influenced the community-centric colorful depictions of life we observe in his paintings. His wanderings, from north to south to east to west covering every street corner of New York, opened his eyes to the community he found himself living in following his parents' migration from the rural southern United States. The people he meets, the buildings, the movement; life as he sees it lives on as he meanders:

> "And so I continue day after day week after week as I make these rounds…I do not stop at 110th street, I continue on moving south on 5th Avenue through the 90s through the 80s until I arrive at 82nd Street and 5th Avenue, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. A psychological barrier has now been broken. I enter the museum and I am amazed to see the artworks, sculptures, paintings, prints, and I focus on the paintings because by this time I had been painting and working very intuitively without guidance… and so I enter the Metropolitan and I am awed by what I see there."[4]

Lawrence regarded the Metropolitan Museum of Art as a place of inspiration in the early years of his artistic career. During the 1930s, the time of Lawrence's most frequent visits, The Met was going through substantial changes due to the financial turmoil of the great depression. Philanthropist John D. Rockefeller Jr. donated millions of dollars to support the museum's output of exhibitions to attract more visitors in times of record low attendance. The museum was trying desperately to pull people in to generate revenue, through enticing new collections and the establishment of the Cloisters.[5] The intriguing developments at the Met during the years Jacob

4. Lawrence, Jacob. "I Wonder as I Wander" (3rd Annual Distinguished Faculty Lecture, University of Washington, Seattle WA, October 5, 1978).
5. Rudnick, Allison. "Finding Inspiration in Dark Times: The Met During the Great Depression." metmuseum.org. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, December 24, 2020. https://www.metmuseum.org/blogs/now-at-the-met/2020/met-depression-years.

Lawrence was frequenting the streets of New York in his "wanderings" probes the question: what did Lawrence see during his visits?

Firstly, The Met Showcased a large amount of medieval works and artifacts due to the installment of The Cloisters.[6] In addition, according to the Met's record of past exhibitions and acquisitions, a number of ancient artifacts from Japan, Egypt, and China, collections of furniture and oriental rugs, and displays of ancient bronzes and armor were added to the museum's collection in the 1930s. Interestingly enough, there is a limited number of exhibits centered around painting, which Lawrence stated he was especially interested in during his visits. The majority of exhibitions feature ancient artifacts and décor, but include one exhibition that stands out, Paintings and Prints of the Italian Baroque Era.[7]

6. "Medieval Art and The Cloisters." metmuseum.org. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2020. https://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met/curatorial-departments/medieval-art-and-the-cloisters.
7. The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives. "The Metropolitan Museum of Art Special Exhibitions, 1870-2017." metmuseum.org. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2017. https://www.metmuseum.org/-/media/files/art/watson-library/museum_exhibitions_1870-2017.pdf?la=en.

2. Jacob Lawrence, *Cabinet Maker*, 1957, casein tempera on paper, 30.5 x 22.5 in. (77.4 x 57.0 cm). Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn, 1966. Image courtesy of Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

In the Distinguished Faculty Lecture, Lawrence recalls his impressions of the paintings he beheld at the Met: "I don't know how the artists achieved this, the grain in the wood, the grain running through a piece of marble, taking a shape and creating the illusion of weight".[8] He goes on to describe his awe at the hyper-realistic depiction of objects and the artist's technical capabilities to transform three-dimensional objects onto a two dimensional picture plane. Given these interests, it's likely that still-life, characterized by lavish and realistic depiction and a prominent genre in Baroque art, must have struck a chord with Lawrence. These depictions of glossy, delicious fruits and beautifully naturalistic renderings of flowers would seem far removed from his typical style, which was often described as 'cubist' and strays especially far from the illusionistic realism found in Baroque art.[9]

8. Lawrence, Jacob. "I Wonder as I Wander" (3rd Annual Distinguished Faculty Lecture, University of Washington, Seattle WA, October 5, 1978).
9. Stokes Sims, Lowery "The Structure of Narrative: Form and Content in Jacob Lawrence's Builders Paintings, 1946-1998," in Over the Line: the Art of Jacob Lawrence, 201-228

Despite the apparent stylistic mismatch between 20th-century cubism and 18th-century Baroque naturalism, Lawrence implemented signature characteristics of still-life imagery into his work on several occasions. An example is the 1957 painting *Cabinet Maker*, which shows us a carpenter hard at work with his various tools laid out in front of him (fig. 2). Above him lay an assortment of fruit–a pear, apple, banana, and bunch of grapes– rendered with a distinct sheen absent in the artist's other depictions of fruit. They are balanced at edge of the shelf which frames the composition, a placement of that seen in paintings like Caravaggio's iconic *Basket of Fruit* with their glimmering shine and appeal (fig 3). The fruits hovering above the hard-at-work carpenter seem seem removed from the scene altogether. Spatially, how could these objects exist without topping down onto the carpenter? Do they exist simply to look pretty, to decorate the picture plane? Why would Jacob Lawrence choose to couple a scene of a carpenter laboriously hunched over his work table with this arrangement of produce? To answer this question, it is important to understand the meanings that have traditionally been attached to the genre of still life throughout art history. In the tradition of Still-life across many regions of Europe, specific objects carry different meanings and significance. They exist partly as a coded language of sorts, conveying tone, emotion, or allegorical elements to a painting given each object's unique connotation. For example, in Italian Renaissance and Baroque eras, apples often represent the Biblical theme of original sin, anemones represent the themes of sorrow and death, and the rose often represents victory,

3. Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *Basket of Fruit*, c. 1597 – 1600, oil on canvas, 54.5 × 67.5 cm. Pinacoteca Ambrosiana, Milan.

pride, and passion just to name a few.[10] Lawrence is using a collection of objects unique to his own aesthetic eye, and assigning meaning to the presence of these objects to help craft a narrative around the subject matter he chooses to depict.

By juxtaposing tools and the idealized and art historically significant motif of fruits that rest atop the composition, Lawrence draws a connection between labor and beauty, exhaustion and celebration. The result is a shift in tone from one of somber overwork to a glorification of the intrinsic value of labor.

In a 1977 interview with Clarence Major regarding how Lawrence approaches a new painting, Lawrence states, "...when I am working I have a statement, I have something I want to say in my work. I say it according to my own ability as an artist, in my own style".[11] Considering the fact that Lawrence uses his work to make a statement, paintings like *Tools* —made the same year of this interview—likely have a deeper meaning despite the fact that the majority of the painting consists simply of tools scattered around a cluttered work room (fig. 4). *Tools* depicts a tired laborer slumped over his table presumably after a long day's work surrounded by an array of colorful tools displayed on the table before him and the shelves in the background. Lawrence has painted this man to be the exact same shade of brown as the background of his workshop, making the form of the man hard to decipher. The presence of the tools greatly overshadows the presence of the human figure, pulling our attention to the laborer's work over the state of the human being doing that labor. By highlighting the color of the tools and minimizing the presence of the man, Lawrence questions tendencies to value the products of labor over the laborer itself. These simple tools that are littered throughout many of Lawrence's paintings, especially those concerning laborers, are the catalyst for

10. Ferguson, George. Signs & Symbols in Christian Art. London: Oxford University Press, 1980.
11. Major, Clarence, and Jacob Lawrence. "Clarence Major Interviews: Jacob Lawrence, The Expressionist." The Black Scholar 9, no. 3 (1977): 14-27. Accessed June 8, 2021. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41067822.

Lawrence making his statement on matters of labor and the working class.

Regarding his affinity for tools in his work, Lawrence has stated, "It's a beautiful instrument, the tool, especially the hand-tool. We pick it up and it's so perfect, it's so ideal, it's so utilitarian, so aesthetic, that we turn it, we look at it…I always think of the tool as an extension of the hand."[12] Lawrence sees a beauty in the personal nature between the worker and his tool, specifically rudimentary tools that don't rely on mechanized elements like drills or bandsaws. His affinity for hand tools is especially interesting when considering the development of electric power tools, which were invented around 1895.[13] Since power tools had decades to develop before Jacob Lawrence was even born and became the standard in terms of building and construction during the times Lawrence began depicting labor extensively in his paintings, why do electric power tools make no appearance in Lawrence's work, even in the paintings made late into the 20th century? The mechanization of tools used in construction is directly linked to the expanding industrialization of the west, as technology began to develop, the method of construction became advanced and streamlined. Rudimentary tools that required a significant amount of experience to be able to utilize effectively were replaced by power tools that could do the same job in a quicker amount of time. In short, industrialization dulls the beauty that people like Jacob Lawrence see in tools. Mechanization severs the intimate connection between the laborer and the tools of his craft. He spends less time drilling in each screw, his thoughts are drowned out by the heavy noise produced by a bandsaw, a nail gun negates the need for a hammer entirely. Instead of painting the tools that were used in the urban landscape surrounding Lawrence,

12. Messinger, Lisa Mintz, and Lisa Gail Collins. Essay. In African American Artists, 1929-1945: Prints, Drawings, and Paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 61. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2003.
13. "1895: The Year the Power Tool Was Born." Spark Energy. Spark Energy, March 14, 2019. https://www.sparkenergy.com/when-were-power-tools-invented/#:~:text=In%201895%2C%2016%20years%20after,world's%20very%20first%20power%20tool.

he chooses to paint these objects in a meaningful if less direct way. The tools that surrounded him in both Harlem and Seattle become idealized, much like Caravaggio's grapes. While *Tools* can be seen as a melancholy reality of the working class struggle, Lawrence's idealized depiction of tools is used to juxtapose the state of the worker with the methods of creating his work to make a statement about the commodification of labor. Additionally, the tools incorporated in *Cabinet Maker* further the narrative of highlighting the beauty of the laborer.

4. Jacob Lawrence, *Tools*, 1977, Gouache on paper, 26 in x 21.75 in. Detroit Institute of Arts, Founders Society Purchase with funds from the Friends of African and African American Art, Founders Junior Council, and the J. Lawrence Buell, Jr. Fund, Josephine and Ernest Kranzler Fund, Mr. and Mrs. Alvan Macauley, Jr, Fund, K. T. Keller Fund, Laura H. Murphy Fund. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

The tools featured in *Builders No. 1* are also a gateway to a deeper understanding of its themes and messages, but supply a distinctly different impact. In contrast to the demeanor of the man in *Tools*, the carpenter featured in *Builders No. 1* sports a thoughtful smile and focused brow as he works on sharpening and maintaining the tools in his work space. Before him, lay five neatly organized bins that hold sorted and color coded screws and nails. In the background above the window lay a large array of miscellaneous tools of varying shapes and sizes that all disobey the natural laws of gravity and seem to stand upright to showcase their details. There are three distinct groups of tools featured in this painting: what's behind him, what's being used, and what lies in front of him, granting this piece a reflective tone given the inclusion of

Mt. Rainer, an iconic symbol of the pacific northwest, and a symbol of the new home Lawrence has found in Seattle in the large window taking up the majority of the pictorial plane. The tools behind the carpenter sitting on the shelf are spread out chaotically and feature a more diverse collection of tools for a variety of uses. These tools are collected in one unorganized mass, barely holding on to the shelf that supports them. This depiction is typical of Lawrence's established tradition in painting tools that calls the reader to remember the legacy he has established with his aesthetic.

The carpenter in *Builders No. 1* is actively engaged, sharpening his tool kit–not unlike Lawrence when he painted this scene. Jacob Lawrence's career past the point of his relocation to Seattle has been routinely dismissed by scholars as a downward trend of loss of color, energy, and edge.[14] Lawrence's choice to depict a man in Seattle honing his craft, sharpening his chisel, and preparing for the labor set before him can be seen as a challenge to this very notion. Lawrence is not idly sitting by letting his career mellow into obscurity, he's using a new opportunity and a new setting to start on a brand new chapter.

The neatly organized bins of screws that lay before him are very unusual in comparison to Lawrence's tradition of depicting tools in his paintings. He often paints tools to be scattered around in a chaotic mess; teetering off the edges of shelves and tables, exemplified by his 1982 painting, *Eight Builders*.[15] Even though Lawrence doesn't make a habit of organized tool depictions, this change in his usual style of depicting tools reflects the major change in career path that is set before Lawrence, a time of reflection, mentorship, and stability. Made in 1972, this painting serves as a benchmark in his career given that it is the first of his known works to explicitly feature Seattle. This moment in Lawrence's life was a time of intense change given his drastic relocation across the

14. Hills, Patricia, and Jacob Lawrence. Painting Harlem Modern: the Art of Jacob Lawrence. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2019.
15. Lawrence, Jacob. Eight Builders, 1982, Gouache on paper, 33 x 44.75 in, Seattle City Light 1% for Art Portable Works Collection.

country, and a new career path. Even so, it cannot be called a self portrait: Lawrence was not a carpenter, and the works that do fit the genre show a different figure.[16] Rather, it might be seen as a portrait of a stage in life, a culmination of events experienced over the years. Even if this painting isn't meant to be a self portrait, there is a personal nature to the piece. What sets *Builders No. 1* apart from Jacob Lawrence's other paintings concerning labor, is the personal parallels present between the work depicted, the present state of the painter's life, and significant events in his career. The unique symbolic meanings hidden in the tools of this work aid in the viewer's reflection on the career of this magnificent painter. He has climbed the mountain, pondered on his accomplishments, and forged a path to further his artistic journey in a brand new city.

Looking back at the expression of the carpenter, we can see that he is content with his current state. Contrary to *Tools*, we see that Lawrence has used tools to tell an optimistic story of life, work and success. The view of Mt. Rainier mirrors the carpenter's strength, he has climbed the mountain and is ready to reflect on what he's achieved, yet still sharpens his chisel ready for the next task. Lawrence has worked his way to this milestone in his long artistic journey, and is able to pause, not to lay down his tools forever, but reflect on the fruit of his labor, and the opportunities that lay before him.

16. Lawrence, Jacob. Self-Portrait, 1977. Gouache and tempera on paper, 23 x 31 in. (58.4 x 78.7 cm). National Academy of Design, New York Artwork © Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence, courtesy of the Jacob and Gwendolyn Lawrence Foundation

3. Building Portraits of an Educator

Education, Labor, and Community in Jacob Lawrence's Builders Paintings

ELIZABETH XIONG

Abstract

After moving to Seattle in 1970, Jacob Lawrence dedicated the last three decades of his life to both teaching, and continuing his professional painting career. One recurring theme marked this period: the *Builders*. During this time, Lawrence's fascination with tools, the architectural process, and labor coincided with a deep passion for education that stretched into retirement.

More universalist and less intimate, the *Builders* paintings have generally been read as a broad commentary on labor, America's newest integrated workforce, and a symbol of Lawrence's optimism towards that future. However, this generalized universality unintentionally blurs Lawrence's personal stake in these paintings. Re-situating the *Builders* with Lawrence as an educator at its core, I place the builders theme in direct conversation with his personal teaching experiences in Seattle. With a representative selection of the *Builders* dating from his early years at the University to after retirement, and Lawrence's own words paired with visual evidence, the paintings unfurl into portraits of an artist-builder. Ultimately, I argue that the *Builders* paintings are explicitly grounded in his identification with the builder through experiences as an educator in Seattle. In turn, by seeing each painting as a deeply personal portrait of Lawrence, it sheds light on his vision, legacy, and optimism for the future.

Jacob Lawrence, *Artist with Tools*, 1994, gouache on paper, 25 3/4 x 19 5/8 in. Collection of Peter and Susan Tuteur, Saint Louis. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo credit: Art Resource, NY.

"My belief is that it is most important for an artist to develop an

approach and philosophy about life — if he has developed this philosophy, he does not put paint on canvas, he puts himself on canvas."

— Jacob Lawrence, 1986[1]

In 1977, six years after accepting a full professorship to the University of Washington, Jacob Lawrence painted *University* (fig. 1), where a bustling hallway full of students first fills the scene. These seven figures seamlessly flow past one another shoulder to shoulder. Two are making eye contact while the others appear to be deep in thought, perhaps pondering the class they just left or thinking ahead to the next. Looking slightly above these students in the foreground, and suddenly the brilliant white walls of the hallway guide our eyes deep into the three classrooms that line the painting's edges. This is a scene many of us have yet to experience after a year of remote learning, however, Lawrence still beckons us into the moment with his use of strong linear perspective. At the same time, boisterous sounds of footsteps, listening, and learning seem to emerge from the painting through the vibrant colors and bold figures that fill every conceivable nook.

1. Jacob Lawrence, quoted in Ellen Harkins Wheat, *Jacob Lawrence: American Painter* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986), 73.

1. Jacob Lawrence, *University*, 1977, gouache, tempera and graphite on paper, 32 x 24 in. Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University; Gift of Dr. Herbert J. Kayden and Family in memory of Dr. Gabrielle H. Reem, 2013.105. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

It's long been established that the works Lawrence created before his permanent move to Seattle in 1971, from the earliest genre

scenes depicting life in Harlem to his multiple historical series, are rooted in his lived experiences. Importantly, the artist himself once described all of his works as portraits of himself, his family, his peers, that they are a part of him.[2] But what of the works created from 1970 onwards? At first glance, that connection to an intimate portrait may seem to waver. Page after page of his catalogue raisonné are filled with paintings of builders, buildings, and construction scenes. The only explicitly education themed work from his time in Seattle was *University*. That then raises the question: if Lawrence himself was never a construction worker, but worked as a professor of art during this time, why did he choose to complete over forty paintings with the builders theme that spanned three decades? Taking Lawrence's own words as a starting point, this essay explores his dedication to the theme of builders within the context of life and work in Seattle, and argues that these works function as a collective portrait of the artist as an educator. A closer look at the *Builders* paintings sheds crucial light on how he "puts himself on canvas" through his pedagogy, the powerful relationship between labor as an educator, and community-building through art education.[3]

Despite limited scholarship on Lawrence's later career, prominent scholars who have turned their attention to the *Builders*, guide our initial approach to the series especially in regards to the paintings' formal elements and content. In one of the only sustained analyses of the series, art historian Lowery Stokes Sims analyzes the unconventional compositional design and color of the *Builders* through the lens of Lawrence's early education in Harlem, as well as Josef Albers' later influence following their time together at Black

2. Jacob Lawrence, interview with Elizabeth Hutton Turner, Seattle, Washington, October 3, 1992, quoted in Lonnie G. Bunch and Spencer R. Crew, "A Historian's Eye: Jacob Lawrence, Historical Reality, and the Migration Series." In *Jacob Lawrence: The Migration Series*, ed. Elizabeth Hutton Turner, 30.
3. Ellen Harkins Wheat, *Jacob Lawrence: American Painter* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986), 73.

Mountain College in 1946.[4] Importantly, Sims champions a universalist approach to the philosophical and social notions of construction which symbolize "American worker culture, especially in the African American community."[5] Her analysis of the individual formal elements on canvas, in light of a universalist interpretation is not incorrect, but I contend that without a personal interpretation grounded in Lawrence's own experiences, it is incomplete.

On the other hand, co-director of Lawrence's catalogue raisonné Peter Nesbett argued the *Builders* paintings' "content remained personal," but only to a certain extent of "renewed exploration of [his] self-identity."[6] This began to fill in what Sims' universalist reading left out, however Nesbett still found that the paintings lacked the personal experiences that Lawerence's earlier works were grounded in.[7] In turn, he identified only two paintings where Lawrence's identification with the builder was explicit enough to be considered as a portrait of expression.[8] Nesbett's emphasis on the personal content of the *Builders* is vital, however the oversimplification of the relationship is diluting, and takes Lawrence's teaching experiences at the time out of the conversation. His methods and experiences as an educator have, therefore, been generally understood from a biographical standpoint, and isolated from any discussion of his work.

Lawrence's own focus on the "formal means of picture making" characterize much of the *Builders*' style, and becomes a starting point to see his pedagogical identity at work in those scenes.[9] For instance, Lawrence skillfully camouflages the man in his workplace in *Man With Square* (fig. 2), and at first glance it is hard to

4. Lowery Stokes Sims, "The Structure of Narrative," in *Over the Line*, ed. Peter Nesbett and Michelle DuBois (Seattle and New York: University of Washington Press, 2000), 208-209.
5. Sims, 209-210
6. Peter T. Nesbett, "Jacob Lawrence: The Builders Paintings," in *Jacob Lawrence: Builders* (DC Moore Gallery, 1998), 5-22.
7. Nesbett, 17-18.
8. Nesbett, 18.
9. Julie Levin Caro, "The Legacy of Black Mountain College on Lawrence's Art Pedagogy," in *Between Form and Content: Perspectives on Jacob Lawrence and Black Mountain College*, ed. Julie Levin Caro and Jeff Arnal (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 78.

differentiate where the structures around him begin, and the outline of his body ends. This ambiguity in the picture plane is further accentuated through the protruding three-dimensional tools enveloping the man, juxtaposed with his two dimensionality. Defying the natural relationship between objects in space, Lawrence is not merely recording a builder at work, but floods it with experience. Lawrence was first exposed to cabinetmakers with their tools when he was fifteen, evidently it became a meaningful motif for him.[10] He therefore paints how he feels tools and builders interact in space according to his own experiences, all of which is a freedom that is core to his teaching philosophy. In his pedagogy statement, he stressed above all else for his students to not just record and look, but see and experience how subject matter makes them feel.[11] Hence, the teaching philosophy he imparts on his students goes hand in hand with his own philosophy on life — one "of seeing."[12] He once remarked that a philosophy is "most important for an artist to develop," because it "puts himself on canvas."[13] Therefore, through the *Man With Square*'s formal composition and content, we see his teaching philosophy on canvas. We begin to see him on canvas.

10. Jacob Lawrence 1993 interview excerpts, quoted in Peter T. Nesbett, *Jacob Lawrence: The Complete Prints*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 31.
11. Jacob Lawrence et al., "Faculty Notes," in *Drawing, at the Henry: An Exhibition of Contemporary Drawings by Eighteen West Coast Artists* (Seattle: University of Washington Press), 1980, 52-53.
12. Jacob Lawrence, interview by Mary Emma Harris, *Black Mountain College Project*, March 1, 1998, quoted in Julie Levin Caro "Jacob Lawrence at Black Mountain College Summer 1946" in *Lines of Influence*, ed. Storm Janse van Rensburg, (Zurich: Scheidegger and Spiess, 2020), 133.
13. Wheat, *Jacob Lawrence: American Painter*, 73.

2. Jacob Lawrence, *Man With Square*, 1978, gouache on paper, 24 5/8 x 16 1/4 in. Private Collection, North Carolina. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Given this powerful connection between built structures and the bodies building them, the prominent presence of architecture in the *Builder*s works cannot be overlooked. It is through architecture that we gain a deeper awareness of Lawrence's presence in these

images as both builder and educator. In his teaching statement, Lawrence posed the question: "you can have all the skill in the world, and turn out to be merely a renderer, but how can you build on that?"[14] Unsurprisingly, his answer was three words: experience, living, seeing.[15]

3. Jacob Lawrence, *Builders — 19 Men*, 1979, gouache and tempera on paper, 30 x 22 in., Private Collection © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

14. Lawrence, "Faculty Notes," 53.
15. Lawrence, 52-53.

In *Builders — 19 Men* (fig. 3) we see a familiar landscape — Harlem. Rows of colorfully crooked buildings stretch across the horizon, and if we stood on those streets perhaps we would be stepping into his iconic painting *This is Harlem* (fig. 4). In an interview with the Seattle Public Library, Lawrence remarked on the tight formal and conceptual coupling of human form and structures, which originated from his time in New York.[16] But when we concentrate on the distant east coast location as the sole place where Lawrence "put himself on canvas," we overlook the complex human-structure relationship he built on the west coast. That relationship is visible here: he paints the building *being built* as the main attraction, placing it right before our eyes. Therefore, incomplete structures equally serve as another portrait on canvas, evoking the ongoing experience establishing oneself in a new city, and creating new relationships, all of which drove Lawrence's life's philosophy. Once again it is in his philosophy, not only his face, that we see him on canvas, exactly as he portrayed it.

16. Jacob Lawrence, "Interview with Jacob Lawrence - #1," interview by Donald Schmechel, *The Seattle Public Library*, July 27, 1987, audio, 1:45:0, https://archive.org/details/spl_ds_jlawrence_01_01.

4. Jacob Lawrence, *This is Harlem*, 1943, gouache on paper, 15 3/8 x 22 11/16 in. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn, 1966. Image courtesy of Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Looking back at the amalgamation of men and tools in *Builders — 19 Men*, Lawrence's focus on the process leading up to a completed architectural endeavor (rather than on the finished building itself) is key in continuing to dissect pedagogy as portrait. Moving from the finished skyline downwards, working men carry individual horizontal planks to build the city, and the painting before our eyes. In the same way, Lawrence emphasized the basic elements of texture, value, line, and color collaborating to develop a work in his teaching.[17] He championed these small elements, where a line isn't just a line, but has "a certain beauty to it," and believed in their unified concentration.[18] Similarly, when describing what was a part

17. Lawrence, "Faculty Notes," 52.
18. Lawrence, 52.

of him, Lawrence emphasized the seemingly isolated experiences and paintings that ran through his life as one unified strand.[19] Accordingly, in *Builders — 19 Men* and other *Builders* paintings, he constantly showcased the individual pieces of wood, metal, tools, and workers that are vital to completing an intricate final product. Therefore, wood can be seen as texture, metal as value, tools as line, workers as color, and these essential elements on canvas equally portray who he was through his personal teaching methods.

In addition to the *Builders* reflecting Lawrence's self-conception through his philosophies, his dedicated depiction of the workforce points to an intersection between the builder's labor, and his own labor as an artist-educator. On the topic of carpentry and tools, Lawrence recalled, "I never thought I'd be using this content in my painting, but evidently it was having a great meaning for me," especially during his time at the University of Washington when the theme regularly occurred.[20] Similarly, after retiring, an interviewer asked if Black Mountain College conditioned him to teach. He replied "no... I never thought of teaching, and I've never applied to any places to teach. I've always been invited."[21] The convergence of these two strands in his life, experiences that he did not foresee, land directly on a target whose bullseye is the *Builders* paintings.

Depicting construction laborers of all types, Lawrence consistently made personal identifications with the builder's labor on canvas. Nesbett first tackled this relationship, but only attributed the connection to *Self Portrait* and *The Studio*.[22] However, paintings containing tools, and labeled as a self-portraits cannot be the singular determining factor of that relationship. So how can we continue to see Lawrence in the *Builders*, moving beyond philosophy, and into the explicitly figurative? Captions are powerful clues onto meaning, and through *Artist with Tools* (fig. 5) Lawrence

19. Jacob Lawrence, *Distinguished Faculty Lecture*, University of Washington, 1978.
20. Jacob Lawrence, quoted in *Jacob Lawrence: The Complete Prints*, 27.
21. Jacob Lawrence, "Interview with Jacob Lawrence - #1," by Donald Schmechel, audio, 1:11:06.
22. Nesbett, "Jacob Lawrence: The Builders Paintings," 18.

nudges us in the right direction.[23] He did not name this work 'Builder with Tools,' but intentionally chose the word 'artist.' Throughout his artistic career, Lawrence did prolonged archival research, laboriously planned and often painted panels color by color, all of which is labor.[24] The assembly line nature of his work had an end goal: to reveal accepted truths to those in his community while educating, and challenging others during pivotal moments in American history.[25] Sitting with carpentry tools and paint brushes as one unit, the artist's posture is reminiscent of a traditional portrait. His overalls indicate he is a builder, yet the delicately curled brushes indicate he is an artist. Lawrence pulls these two identities together, just like the items in the builder's hand, through his role as an educator building stories and paintings on canvas.

23. Leah Dickerman, "Fighting Blues," in *Jacob Lawrence: The Migration Series*, ed. Leah Dickerman and Elsa Smithgall, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2017), 20.
24. Milton W. Brown, *Jacob Lawrence*, (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1974), 11; Elizabeth Hutton Turner, "The Education of Jacob Lawrence" in *Over the Line*, ed. Peter T. Nesbett and Michelle DuBois, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), 104.
25. Lonnie G. Bunch, "Historian's Eye", 30.

5. Jacob Lawrence, *Artist with Tools*, 1994, gouache on paper, 25 3/4 x 19 5/8 in. Collection of Peter and Susan Tuteur, Saint Louis. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo credit: Art Resource, NY.

Furthermore, a comparison with *Self-Portrait* (fig. 6) paves the way to more concretely see Lawrence as the builder. The strikingly similar formal qualities between the two figures is key. Both heads

are tilted to the same degree, the artist in overalls looks down in contemplation while Lawrence rests his chin on his hands. His signature moustache also makes an appearance in *Artist with Tools*, along with a shared handful of brushes. These distinctive commonalities between a known portrait and a *Builders* painting help further ground Lawrence's identification with the builder. Here, he is that artist who sits reflecting on his labor, and what he has built.

6. Jacob Lawrence, *Self-Portrait*, 1977, gouache on tempera on off-white wove paper, 22 1/8 x 30 in. National Academy of Design, New York. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Completed eleven years after Lawrence retired, *Artist with Tools* not only paints Lawrence reflecting on his artistic career, but it also becomes a definitive portrait of how he saw his role as a professor of art in the builder's theme. For Lawrence, there was an "aesthetic beauty in how the tool emerges from the hand and how the hand

itself is a beautiful tool."[26] The ruler and hammer seamlessly flow out of the man's hand, but it is the paintbrush that looks like a true extension of the artist's fingers. Lawrence therefore draws this parallel between the tool accentuating the beauty of a builder's hand, and the brush accentuating the power of a painter's hand. As a professor, he ties that directly to teaching students "how beautiful a tool is — how it's a symbol of uplift, a symbol of building, a symbol of achievement."[27] Although the late 20th century marked fierce technological innovation, Lawrence exclusively placed these old fashioned tools that required the skill of humans in the hands of his builders. Likewise, he put brushes and ambition in the hands of his art students, guiding them to see their capacity to achieve.

This picture of Lawrence's labor as an educator is therefore not complete without the students he worked with. On the left side of the painting, seven other builders scale a tall building, and the ladder stretches out below the bottom of the frame, merging with the cropped feet of Lawrence as the artist. Here, he does not correct their lopsided ladder, but holds it in place, allowing them to climb, and build something for themselves (which can be seen in the windows that hang on the building like framed paintings). Likewise, Lawrence's presence in the classroom was never one of condescending critique, as he repeatedly stated that his job was to find a student's strong points, and *build* (emphasis mine) on them.[28] His MFA student and friend Barbara Earl Thomas concurred with this sentiment when she described Lawrence as "someone in the classroom guiding you without dominating you," which is present in

26. Jacob Lawrence, interview with Patricia Hills, January 11, 1994, quoted in Patricia Hills, "The Prints of Jacob Lawrence: Chronicles of Struggles and Hopes," in *Jacob Lawrence: The Complete Prints (1963-2000)*, ed. Peter T. Nesbett (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 16.
27. Jacob Lawrence, quoted in Los Angeles County Museum, "Jacob Lawrence | Artist Interviews," Youtube Video, April 28, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WdXz_D8t_qs&t=782s.
28. Jacob Lawrence, quoted in typescript of "Profile of an Educator" for Campus Report, 14, January 1975, Box 5, Folder 14, Image 37, Jacob Lawrence and Gwendolyn Knight papers correspondence, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.; Micheal Spafford, quoted in Julie Levin Caro, "The Legacy of Black Mountain College on Lawrence's Art Pedagogy," 80

this portrait of Lawrence as a builder-educator due to the balanced proximity between his climbing students and himself.[29]

The student and teacher's matching overalls additionally emphasize Lawrence's belief that "teaching is a two-way thing. It has enabled me to learn and expand in ways I may have not, both in my work and in my thinking."[30] The builder as a symbol of constructive growth for all parties illustrates that sentiment. Therefore, the full picture of Lawrence's labor as a professor is intricately rooted in his desire to give as a teacher, but also continually receive as a student. This developed from his time at Black Mountain College, where he was first invited to teach, but found what he learned about design and pedagogy from fellow colleague Josef Albers most valuable.[31] In turn, within this *Builders* painting and those beyond this one, the builder becomes a recurring motif that Lawrence uses to directly illustrate his labor and role as an educator to build upon the skills of his students, and his own.

In addition to the *Builders* paintings serving as a portrait of experience through Lawrence's philosophy and labor as an educator, the historical context surrounding his arrival to Seattle is key to repositioning his emphasis on an integrated workforce from purely universalist to personal. Jumping back in time once more, two years before Lawrence accepted his professorship, he participated in the groundbreaking The Black Artist in America Symposium as a roundtable panelist. In conversation with fellow artists including Romare Bearden and Tom Lloyd, Lawrence stressed that in order to continue solving the issues facing Black artists, it was "going to take education – educating the white community to respect and to recognize the intellectual capacity of Black artists."[32] He warned against an isolationist approach that the younger artist Lloyd proposed, and instead saw the most productive

29. Barbara Earl Thomas, quoted in Los Angeles County Museum, "Jacob Lawrence | Artist Interviews," Youtube Video
30. Jacob Lawrence, quoted in typescript of "Profile of an Educator."
31. Julie Levin Caro, "The Legacy of Black Mountain College," 80.
32. Romare Bearden et al., "The Black Artist in America: A Symposium," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 27, no. 5 (1969): 246.

potential for change in an integrationist one. However, despite his clear stance on using paint "instead of using words," Lawrence was often pressured to voice the value he saw in educating white students out loud.[33] After moving to Washington state, whose population in 1970 was roughly 95.4% white residents and only 2.1% African American, critics continued to "[grumble] about him living in a white neighborhood and teaching mostly white students."[34]

Nevertheless, even without many words, this optimism towards integration Lawrence painted in the *Builders*, where white and Black construction workers labor together in the same space, is directly rooted in his belief that time spent educating white Americans is a powerful, constructive tool against injustice. A prime example of this is in *Builders No. 3* (fig. 7), where a single white builder looks up with an expression of awe at two Black builders assembling the wooden structure's walls by hand. The two are educating the one on their craft as their bodies swirl left and right up towards a point that coincides with the mountainous peak behind them. Lawrence therefore utilizes the integration of their physical bodies to portray his labor charting a path to overcoming the mountain of struggles facing Black artists, through his experiences in overwhelmingly white classrooms. It is in these spaces, through his work of both painting and teaching, where Lawrence saw his commitment to fighting injustice.[35]

33. James Halpin, "My Neighbor Jacob Lawrence," Oct 7-13, The Weekly, 1987 Box 7, Folder 16, Page 15, Jacob Lawrence and Gwendolyn Knight papers correspondence, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.; Jacob Lawrence quoted in "Jacob Lawrence: An Intimate Portrait, 1993."
34. John Caldbick, "1970 Census: Women outnumber men in Washington State for the first time; Seattle and Spokane lose population as Tacoma and Everett gain; early baby boomers approach adulthood," HistoryLink.org, last modified May 18, 2010, https://historylink.org/File/9426; James Halpin, "My Neighbor Jacob Lawrence," Oct 7-13, The Weekly, 1987 Box 7, Folder 16, Page 15, Jacob Lawrence and Gwendolyn Knight papers correspondence, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.
35. Jacob Lawrence, "Clarence Major Interviews: Jacob Lawrence, the Expressionist," interview by Clarence Major, *The Black Scholar* 9, no.3 (1977): 19.

7. Jacob Lawrence, *Builders No.* 3, 1973, gouache, tempera, and graphite on paper. Collection of Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Furthermore, as Lawrence entered into retirement, harmonious integration in the *Builders* paintings shifted from specific scenes of builders and their craft, to their presence within the community. In these community scenes, namely *Images of Labor*, *Community*, and *Builders — Man on Scaffold* (fig. 8), Lawrence often painted laborers reinforcing the community's foundational structures, while members of their community flow past them as anchors of support. Notably in *Builders — Man on Scaffold*, an integrated crowd of men and women stroll past each other in the background, and others peer through the windows onto streets reminiscent of Seattle's. Accordingly, Lawrence explicitly painted each builder as permanently present in the community. The central figure supporting the scaffold becomes one with the pavement as his overalls coalesce into the ground he stands on, while the builder on the scaffold looks to be grabbing the red structure's window by its frame, pulling it into alignment. The builders' anchored presence among those he works for is therefore grounded in Lawrence's personal presence in Seattle's predominantly white population. It powerfully highlights his belief that the "only" way to "improve a society" is to live "totally within a society, not by being an outsider," and the ways in which he put that belief into action.[36]

36. Ellen Harkins Wheat, *Jacob Lawrence: American Painter*, 113.

8. Jacob Lawrence, *Man On Scaffold*, 1985, color lithograph, 29 7/8 x 22 1/8 in. Private Collection. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Community support for the arts was a major factor in Lawrence's development as an artist, and the *Builders* continue to show his

efforts to build that same community during his time in Seattle.[37] The builders in these community oriented paintings never work alone. Similarly, Lawrence cherished collaboration with local museums, children's programs, and public schools to reach those he was building for. A brief scroll through the Archives of American Art's digitized collection of Lawrence's correspondence papers shows twenty three folders from schools in Seattle all the way to Georgia. For example, from 1985 to 1994, Lawrence worked with the Bellevue Art Museum to develop educational art programs. Additionally, slide after slide of bright children's paintings, inspired by him, fill the folders (fig. 9). Letters from grateful public school teachers and alumni also beautifully illustrate that this integrated community-building vision through art education was an immensely personal one. Importantly, this ambitious vision continues, even after Lawrence's passing in 2000. For example in 2015, the Savannah College of Art and Design launched a K-12 curriculum guide based on the *Builders* paintings that were translated into prints.[38] Symbolizing this continuation, the builders in each painting have not stopped, but continue to stand, communicate and work together.

37. Jacob Lawrence, "Clarence Major Interviews: Jacob Lawrence, the Expressionist," 19.
38. "History, Labor, Life: The Prints of Jacob Lawrence," *SCAD Museum of Art Curriculum Guide K-12*, SCAD Museum of Art, 2015.

9. Photograph of Hawthorne Elementary students holding paintings, Box #2, Folder #32, Jacob Lawrence and Gwendolyn Knight papers, 1816, 1914-2008, bulk 1973-2001. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Bringing the universalist interpretations of the *Builders* paintings back down to Lawrence's own personal experiences in Seattle, and seeing each work function as a unique portrait of himself as an educator has not only clarified his identification with the builder, but also clarifies ours. Overall the builders theme is a coherent

whole, conveying notions of teaching, labor, and community. However, each painting equally speaks volumes for itself, unable to be generalized. In the same way, as we look at each painting individually, and see the ways in which Lawrence has put himself on canvas, what does he motion for us to see? I believe he assures us that his ambitions are not unreachable universalist notions, but instead that they are reachable, personal teachings derived from experience. Take one more look at *University*, the painting we started with, and Lawrence shows us how.

The paper thin walls, and textured floorboards all draw attention to the materiality of the space, the same materials evident in the *Builders* paintings. The purple figure in particular, dressed in overalls, but clutching two books rather than tools, furthers this physical connection between building as a verb and the places where education happens. Likewise, Lawrence continually emphasized throughout the *Builders* paintings that the potential to ignite change, and build something meaningful, lies within the individual. From the tools of a builder to an individual's ongoing education, it is just a matter of getting on the scaffold, and out into the community in order to build upon the legacy he left, in our own uniquely personal ways.

4. The Materials of Change

Jacob Lawrence on Migration

ALEXANDER BETZ

1. *Jacob Lawrence, The hardest part of the journey is yet to come – the Continental Divide, stunned by the magnitude of the roaring rivers*, 1973, gouache on board, 40.25×48 in., Washington State Capitol Museum, Olympia, W.A. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

The Great Divide

Early in 1973, just two years after his move to Seattle, Washington,

Jacob Lawrence painted *The hardest part of the journey is yet to come – the Continental Divide, stunned by the magnitude of the roaring rivers* (fig. 1), a scene from his series on Pacific Northwest pioneer George Washington Bush. The painting centers upon Bush who, rifle in hand, braves the Rocky Mountains at the helm of a covered wagon. Grasping tendrils of snow creep up to Bush's mount, while the horse drawn carriage is engulfed in a flurry. The horse's hooves still trod upon the green grass of the east, each step pulling the party deeper into the wild. Bush himself rides stalwart at the front in parallel with another man, each of them enduring the brunt of the high alpine exposure as they lead their diverse band of peoples over a mountain pass. Nature itself watches on, as elk high upon the mountain slopes bear witness to the courage of the settlers. In Lawrence's work to migrate is to endure, and to learn from such endurance. One can only hope that the promises of the destination are worth the trials.

Jacob Lawrence was no stranger to migration, and his depiction of George Washington Bush in *The Great Divide* is one of many in a long lineage of his works capturing Americans in transition. Indeed, Lawrence's own life was punctuated by moments of movement, from his birth in Atlantic City to parents who had traveled north as part of the Great Migration, to a journey south as an instructor at the Black Mountain College in North Carolina, to an eventual move westward to assume a professorship at the University of Washington in Seattle. Using this theme of migration as a foundation, this essay will explore the intersection of three main elements of Lawrence's work: First, this essay will inspect the relationship of materiality within Lawrence's work. Of interest will be physical attributes that link pieces together within a series, such as paint types and pigments. From here, this essay will seek to understand how Lawrence uses the serial format to develop a narrative. The serial format appears in Lawrence's work as the cooperation of a multitude of individual panels all presented in unison to speak towards different aspects of an installation's greater message. For example, *The Great Divide* comes as panel three in

a series of five paintings chronicling the migration of George Washington Bush from east to west. This essay will then arrive upon a closing question: how does this development of migration in Lawrence's work impact his view as an educator? In this essay, I intend to explore Jacob Lawrence's construction of migration through materials and serial narrative as an expression of community development and education.

Jacob Lawrence's construction of narrative in series and expression of materiality can be found in the pigmentation of the paints he selected. Opting to create paints without changing the mixture or intensity of pigmentation between panels, Jacob Lawrence would use such mediums "...so that the colors would not vary from one panel to the next" (Steele 2000, 250). Through allowing his paints to stay unmixed, and painting in a manner in which he worked on multiple pieces at the same time, a whole series of pieces became tightly knit together. For example, this commonality in hue can be seen in the comparison of panels within the George Washington Bush series.

2. Jacob Lawrence, *On a fair May morning in 1844, George Washington Bush left Clark County, Missouri, in six Conestoga wagons*, 1973, gouache on board, 40.25×48 in., Washington State Capitol Museum, Olympia, W.A. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

The beginning of the series is introduced through the piece *On a fair May morning in 1844, George Washington Bush left Clark County, Missouri, in six Conestoga wagons* (fig. 2), depicting the beginning of the journey west for Bush and his fellow pioneers. As the sun shines resplendent through the clouds, rays of fire-gold thrust themselves through the picture plane. Evocative of a gold-lit roadway, these dazzling sunrays bring the ephemeral promise of westward hope. It is a hope not yet tested, and one still of unfettered promise. In contrast, bookending this series is the panel *Thank God All Mighty, home at last – the settlers erect shelter at Bush Prairie near what is now Olympia, Washington, November 1845* (fig. 3).

Within this piece the same fluorescent yellow can be found, its pigmentation unbroken across the span of the series. However, now the sparkling motes of light take the shape of kicked-up saw dust as they obscure figures toiling to erect their new homestead. Where the sunrays of the first panel speak of a naïve promise west, the haze of debris in the closing piece speaks to a more realistic, tangible future in Bush's new home. By using an unbroken linkage of color between these two panels Lawrence has produced a developing narrative of progress for his subject. What was once the airy desire for a better life has become a cloud of hard work and promise, where heavenly light at the outset of the journey has transformed into the debris of labor. Jacob Lawrence maintained a consistency in the pigmentation of this color between these two panels, and in doing so laid their connection. Indeed, the physical relationship of panels in a series through their pigmentation was something that Jacob Lawrence established throughout the development of the work. Art Historian Elizabeth Steele remarks that Jacob Lawrence, "with all of the prepared panels laid out, [would] systematically apply color to each one" (Steele 2000, 250). In this way, it is likely that the application of the yellow hue in the Bush Series was one that happened simultaneously

3. Jacob Lawrence, *Thank God All Mighty, home at last – the settlers erect shelter at Bush Prairie near what is now Olympia, Washington, November 1845*, 1973, gouache on board, 40.25×48 in., Washington State Capitol Museum, Olympia, W.A. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

between panels. This linkage between Lawrence's paint pigmentation and content is present in more than the only his George Washington Bush series, where similar themes of American movement are also present in his *The Migration Series*.

The Migration Series

Painted between the years of 1940 and 1941, Lawrence's *Migration Series* chronicled the passage of black Americans north from the bitter truths of a Jim Crow south. On display within Lawrence's depiction of the Great Migration is what scholars Lonnie Bunch and Spencer Crew identify as a "…complex narrative [that did] not romanticize the massive transition from rural South to urban North" (Bunch and Crew 1993, 26). One of these complexities on display within *The Migration Series* is the transition from agrarian labor to one of a different kind: education.

4. Jacob Lawrence, *The migrant, whose life had been rural and nurtured by the earth, was now moving to urban life dependent on industrial machinery*, 1940-41, casein tempera on hardboard, 18×12 in., The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

In panel 7 of Lawrence's *Migration Series*, entitled *The Migrant, whose life had been rural and nurtured by the earth, was now moving to urban life dependent on industrial machinery* (fig. 4), rows of tilled farmland stretch across the canvas. In sweeping vertical strokes, the burnt hues of orange and red breath dimension into the fertile soil. One can picture running their fingers through this dirt, leaving crimson clay trapped under their nails. Lawrence seeds this ground with parallel rows of plant life, where sea-green leaves of teal and cyan rise and fall like the spines on a dragon's crest. The viewer is given no sky, no background, only a solid singular picture plane bearing bands of unbroken color to illustrate the agrarian landscape of the south. Filled with verdant life, this panel implies hard labor. As scholars including Leah Dickerman have observed, all of these crops needed to be planted, and overwhelmingly the labor force of the southern economy relied upon black Americans (Dickerman 2015, 20). However, Lawrence captures the expanding scope of labor available to the migrants as these communities moved north in exodus. In panel 58 of *The Migration Series*, entitled *In the North the African American had more educational opportunities* (fig. 5), Jacob Lawrence constructs a classroom scene of three black female students.

Reaching up with chalk in hand, they create a line of ascending numbers on the blackboard. And yet, notice the colors of the three students' dresses: one is a burnt red, another orange, and the last a sea-tinged cyan. These are the same pigments used for the southern farmland in panel X, unchanged and now intimately involved with an institution of education. Through the use of a fast-drying tempera paint, Lawrence was able to jump between panels quickly and with instant visual feedback to construct these threads of connection (Dickerman 2015, 20). More than a mere formal device, the shared color between the fields and crops of the south and the school dresses of the north established a conceptual narrative of development. Through migration, the individuals involved with this journey north had the promise of a future rich with academic potential. What were once the terracotta earth tones and resplendent greens of Carolina fields have become the very drapery of educational achievement. The materiality of Lawrence's work allowed for him to make this visual connection, where the unbroken color between panels established a narrative from southern farming to northern education. The hues Jacob Lawrence has selected to depict these two images never change, instead they merely travel across the frame as they rearrange and take on their new scene – not unlike the migrants themselves.

5. Jacob Lawrence, *In the North the African American had more educational opportunities*, 1940-41, casein tempera on hardboard, 12×18 in., The Museum of Modern Art, New York City, N.Y. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

On Education

Jacob Lawrence's own life was influenced by migration, which helped to build his outlook on education. Remarking on his understanding of such travel, Lawrence stated: "To me, migration means movement…Uprooting yourself from one way of life to make your way in another involves conflict and struggle. But out of the struggle comes a kind of power, and even beauty" (Rodgers 1992, xxi). Throughout the scenes of the George Washington Bush series and *The Migration Series*, conflict and struggle play a key role. However, this kind of power and beauty Lawrence speaks to can be found in how migration causes a development of education. Lessons that Jacob Lawrence gathered from his role as an educator at North Carolina's Black Mountain College in the summer of 1946 would come play a preeminent role in his pedagogy. After completing his move to the city of Seattle to teach at the University of Washington in 1971, Lawrence was asked to reflect upon his past experience as a teacher, to which he replied: "Teaching is a two-way thing. It has enabled me to learn and expand in ways I may not have, both in my work and in my thinking" (Lawrence 1975, 3). These words are emblematic of the academic environment found in North Carolina. Under the direction of Josef Albers, a notable artist of the abstract expressionist movement and educator at the Bauhaus school in Germany, educators and students alike came together without a clear hierarchical division between either group (Caro 2020, 133). However, this impactful experience in Lawrence's life did not come without the struggle of movement across the United States. Jacob Lawrence described his experience returning back home to New York from North Carolina with his wife Gwendolyn Knight as "…something we'll always remember. We were put into a Jim Crow car, Jim Crow section, the two of us" (Caro 1998, 135). This experience came just five years after Lawrence's completion of the *Migration Series*, and the racism he experienced as a part of this journey northwards was similar to the very discrimination on display within that work. However, in response to this discrimination, Lawrence remembers that "…many of the students from Black Mountain came back to join us, which was some

gesture…What they were saying of course was 'We're supporting you'" (Caro 2020, 135). If Lawrence's teaching was characterized by his empathetic method of a "two-way street," then it was moments like this that would have built the deep respect between teacher and student inherent within that method. The solidarity of the students while on this journey with Lawrence showed how communities can pull themselves through the trials of migration. George Washington Bush faced the biting winds of cold during his party's crossing of the Rockies in *The Great Divide*, and in this moment on the train north it was the wickedness of the Racist policies of the Jim Crow south that plagued the Lawrence's. However, just as George Washington Bush would go on to use the strength he found in his journey west to found a home for himself and his community, it was the solidarity shown to the Lawrence's by the students that Jacob Lawrence would return to as an educator at the University of Washington twenty-five years later. The materiality of Jacob Lawrence is something that will not leave him as he undertakes movement across the United States as well. Migration in Lawrence's work does not only capture a journey to that which is new, but also a strengthening of the core principles that have come along for the ride. This appears in Lawrence's own relationship with the materiality of paint in his work. In an interview in 1977, Jacob Lawrence recalls that he "…started working in poster color because it was so inexpensive back then in the late thirties…it's fast to work with, and really suited for [his] working in series form" (Lawrence 1977, 1). While his usage of water based paint began because it's what was accessible for a young artist, this preference for the fast drying paint would remain throughout all of Jacob Lawrence's career. As Barbara Earl Thomas would explain about Jacob Lawrence's teaching style, "Jake was always looking at what his students were doing and trying to get them to do it better, as opposed to trying to get them to look like [his] work" (Caro 2016, 80). Sticking to what comes genuinely from one's self was at the core of Lawrence's pedagogy. This intersects with the materiality of Lawrence's work, where his water-based mediums would be tested through his entire life's migrations and yet

continue to remain at the center of his process alongside the serial format.

•••

Jacob Lawrence used migration as a recurring theme in his work just as it was a recurring experience in his own life. In his series on George Washington Bush, the movement of settlers to the southern shores of Washington State's Puget Sound was imbued with a narrative progression of migration. Jacob Lawrence used unchanging colors of yellow-gold to characterize the transition of Bush's party from one of untested hope to real and rewarding hard work found in the construction of a new community. The journey west was educational for the settlers, where nature itself was an obstacle that must be overcome to ensure that they will have the resolve required at their destination. Educational development is also on display in Jacob Lawrence's series *The Great Migration*, where simultaneously applied hues are used between panels to construct a narrative of northward promise. As Jacob Lawrence's colors shift in form from scenes of the agrarian south to a northern classroom, the unbroken pigment of his work sings the promise of migration. These developments of education through migration would come full-circle back into Lawrence's own life, where his experience journeying south to teach at the Black Mountain College in North Carolina would remain pivotal to his role as an educator. While that journey was fraught with social challenge, Jacob Lawrence's legacy as an empathetic educator who valued equality with his students was forever strengthened. Lawrence would continue to use the same paints and materials to paint in a serial format as he did as a young artist in New York City all the way through to the end of his career in Seattle. For, on Jacob Lawrence's canvas, migration and education are one and the same. Education is a journey, and the goal of migration isn't only to find something new.

Instead, it is to find what is so powerful and true to one's soul that it may endure the challenge of any change.

Bunch, Lonnie G., Elizabeth Hutton Turner, and Spencer R. Crew. "A Historian's Eye: Jacob Lawrence, Historical Reality, and the Migration Series." Essay. In *Jacob Lawrence – the Migration Series*, 23–31. Urbanna, Virginia: Rappahannock Press, 1993.

Caro, Julie Levin, and Jeff Arnal. *Between Form and Content: Perspectives on Jacob Lawrence + Black Mountain College*. Asheville (C.): Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center, 2019.

Major, Clarence, and Jacob Lawrence. Clarence Major Interviews: Jacob Lawrence, the Expressionist. Other. *The Black Scholar* 9 3, 1977.

Miller, Barbara to Lawrence, Jacob, 1975, Box 5, Folder 14, Jacob Lawrence and Gwendolyn Knight papers, 1816, 1914-2008, bulk 1973-2001. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Rodgers, Lawrence R., and Jacob Lawrence. Essay. In *Canaan Bound: the African-American Great Migration Novel*, xii. Chicago, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1997.

Steele, Elizabeth. "The Materials and Techniques of Jacob Lawrence." Essay. In *Over the Line: The Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence*, edited by Peter T. Nesbett and Michelle W DuBois, 247–65. Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press in association with Jacob and Gwendolyn Lawrence Foundation, 2001.

Turner, Elizabeth Hutton, and Leah Dickerman. "Fighting Blues." Essay. In *Jacob Lawrence – the Migration Series*, 10–31. Urbanna, Virginia: Rappahannock Press, 1993.

Van Rensburg, Janse, Levin Julie Caro, and Carroll Greene. "Jacob Lawrence at Black Mountain College, Summer 1946." Essay. In *Jacob Lawrence: Lines of Influence*, 131–44. Zurich, Switzerland: Verlag Scheidegger & Spiess, 2020.

PART II

BRIDGING SEATTLE

5. A Builder Himself

The Pedagogy and Practice of Jacob Lawrence

ELIZABETH COPLAND

1. Jacob Lawrence, *Builders Three*, 1991, color lithograph, 30 x 21 3/4 in. (76.2 x 55.245 cm. Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Gift of Meyer P. and Vivian O. Potamkin. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Builders Three (1991) draws us into an intimate scene of two black

figures, surrounded by and entwined in a supply of tools, fasteners and wooden planks (fig. 1). The powerful arms of the figures extend beyond a rational reach, emphasizing the potential and strength of these individuals as they collaborate. Six years into his retirement from the University of Washington, Jacob Lawrence made *Builders Three* during an honorary residency at the Brandywine Workshop's Offset Institute in Philadelphia, PA. The printmaking residency was one element of his James Van Der Zee Achievement Award, acknowledging a black artist with profound impact.[1] As the award suggested, Lawrence's impact extended beyond his gifted abilities and important artistic contributions– he was also a notoriously generous teacher who devoted much of his time and energy towards building community and creating arts access for students of all ages. Much like the Utopia Neighborhood Club where Lawrence's exposure to art began, the Brandywine Workshop aimed to create arts opportunities for predominantly low- and moderate-income Black and Hispanic youth. Selecting 'builders' as a theme for this piece was perhaps a symbolic celebration of the team of artists collaborating and teaching at the Brandywine's Offset Institute, as well as a reflection of Lawrence's established teaching philosophy and the building of his artistic legacy at this stage of his career.

This paper examines Jacob Lawrence's *Builders Three* within the context of the artist's own educational development, his teaching pedagogy, and his philanthropic investment in supporting the next generation of artists, cultural innovators, and arts supporters. Through an analysis of the formal elements of the print, this paper will argue that *Builders Three* is a physical representation of Jacob Lawrence's own educational pedagogy as a builder of progress across many facets including the arts, culture, race relations, and society in general. Let's consider, when thinking about this depicted scene of two collaborators and the title of the work, *Builders Three*, that Lawrence was metaphorically making space for the third

1. "Our History." Brandywine Workshop and Archives, 2019

builder in the conversation of his composition; calling for them to join him in working diligently towards progress.

Prior to his and wife Gwendolyn's move westward, Lawrence sat on a panel in New York to discuss the state of Black artists in America where he shared, "I don't know any other ethnic group that has been given so much attention but ultimately forgotten ... It's going to take education— educating the white community to respect and to recognize the intellectual capacity of Black artists.[2] With this in mind, and knowing that Lawrence wanted his work to speak for him, *Builders Three* begs political, cultural, and metaphorical analysis. While he created many works featuring builders, this work stands out as a depiction of intergenerational learning, specifically Black intergenerational learning and collaboration. In the print, the larger figure on the right stretches across the composition, their arm raised and supporting a board and their legs powerfully active. The second figure, much smaller, appears to be a child, and both figures concentrate on the task at hand. In 1991, when this work was made, Lawrence was balancing his active studio practice and a deep commitment to service. The print therefore can be seen as a microcosm of his own life's work, since his art was his mode of reaching and educating others on a large scale, and he gave the gift of his time and artistry, generously, to students of all ages.

The theme of builders was a constant subject of interest while Lawrence resided in Seattle. In his analysis of the loosely connected group of works, art historian Peter Nesbett suggests that "Lawrence felt akin to builders, and included himself with carpentry tools in both of his self-portraits of 1977."[3] Tools decorated his home studio and were a reminder of hope and progress. They may have also been a visual reminder of his roots, as Lawrence's rigorous studio practice was not his only exposure to physical labor. As a teenager in Harlem,

2. Bearden, Romare, et al. "The Black Artist in America: A Symposium."
3. Nesbett, Peter T. "Jacob Lawrence: The Builders Paintings," Jacob Lawrence : the Builders, recent paintings (1998). PG.18

he worked to support his family delivering papers and assisting in a printing shop, and also served in the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), under President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal jobs program.[4] Lawrence painted what he knew, and his builders were symbolic representations of what he had lived and seen, as well as his desires for the future. Lawrence saw builders, as Nesbett states, as "symbols of hope and persistence, addressing the role and responsibility of all people to the improvement of society."[5] Lawrence was fortunate to have made artistic connections before and after his service in the CCC that shaped his future, and the figures in *Builders Three* likely represented the relationships and collaborative spirit involved throughout his artistic development.

The Workbench and Lawrence's Early Influences

In considering the symbolic elements of *Builders Three*, the red and brown workbench is littered with tools that are entwined with the arms of the figures and materials in use. Lawrence found tools to be "aesthetically beautiful like sculpture," as well as representative of man's potential and symbols of progress and craftsmanship.[6] Tools enable us to build beyond what we can and will do with our own two hands- they extend our capacity and promote our progress. Considering the symbolism that Lawrence appreciated and found

4. Yoes, Sean. "Jacob Lawrence: Eyes of the Harlem Renaissance." Afro News: Black Media Authority. February 18th, 2021. https://afro.com/jacob-lawrence-eyes-of-the-harlem-renaissance/ (accessed June 7, 2021).
5. Nesbett, Peter T. "Jacob Lawrence: The Builders Paintings," Jacob Lawrence : the Builders, recent paintings (1998). PG.6
6. Sims, Lowery Stokes, "The Structure of the Narrative: Form and Content in Jacob Lawrence's Builder's Paintings, 1946-1998." In Over the Line: The Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence, edited by Peter T. Nesbett and Michelle DuBois 97-109. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2000. PG.206

in tools, and looking at his development and progression as an artist and educator, there were some key 'tools', or powerful forces within his toolkit that shaped the young artist and future educator. These forces included his creative mentors, his environment, and the government supported arts funding that enabled him the time to dedicate to his studio practice. Reflecting on his childhood during an interview, Lawrence shared, "There were three important areas in my life that I can think of. One was coming in contact with the Utopia Center as a child and being exposed to art. The other was Augusta Savage's seeing that I became a member of the WPA art project."[7] His formative exposure to Art at the Utopia Center began with experimentation in a wide-range of media including painting, drawing, rug designs, soap carvings and papier mache masks. This experimentation began under the watchful eye of his first artistic mentor, Charles Alston who saw something unusual in young Lawrence. Alston would intentionally offer him the tools he needed, but largely let Lawrence guide himself. This philosophy of learning through doing that Alston encouraged was part of his training at the Columbia Teachers College, where Alston studied under Alfred Wesley Dow.[8] Lawrence was greatly impacted by Dow's approach to form in his compositions, emphasizing line and harmony, and from the forming of Alston's caring mentorship. The formative experiences at Utopia Center remained important elements in Lawerence's artistic and pedagogical tool kit that he continued to draw on throughout his career.

7. Stewart, Marta Reid. "Women in the Works: A Psychobiographical Interpretation of Jacob Lawrence's Portrayal of Women as Icons of Black Modernism" Source: Notes in the History of Art 24, no. 4 (2005): 56-66. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23207950. PG. 57
8. Hills, Patricia., Lawrence, Jacob, and Getty Foundation. Painting Harlem Modern : The Art of Jacob Lawrence. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009. PG.13

2. Harlem Art Workshop, 1935. Photograph. © Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York

Two additional forces in Lawrence's development were the government funding that was available for artists and the mentorship that enabled access to that support. In 1933 President Roosevelt was elected and began to develop community support programs to combat the massive impact of the Great Depression. Under this new administration, registered artists could sign up and earn $32 a week for their work under the new Works Progress Administration, which afforded them the ability to continue creative research and affirmed the importance of creative contributions to society."[9] Lawrence attended the workshop funded by the WPA at 306 West 141st St. where he continued to study with Charles Alston and a whole host of other creatives, including Augusta Savage.[10] Lawrence's contact with Augusta Savage at the Harlem Community Arts Center (HCAC) was crucial to his success. Savage was an artist-builder herself; she ran her art spaces with an open-door policy stating that any individual that wished to learn about or experience art was welcome and was dedicated to providing arts opportunities for others, in addition to maintaining her own artistic practice.[11] She played a major role in Lawrence's development and financial security as an artist by her commitment to register him for the Federal Art Project. Lawrence shared, "Thanks to her, I was on the project for 18 months, and it was my first professional work as an artist."[12] While it only lasted for a short time, the support afforded

9. Wheat, Ellen Harkins., Lawrence, Jacob, Hills, Patricia, and Seattle Art Museum, Issuing Body. "At Home in the West". Jacob Lawrence, American Painter. Seattle: University of Washington Press in Association with the Seattle Art Museum, 1986. 29
10. Turner, Elizabeth Hutton "The Education of Jacob Lawrence." In Over the Line: The Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence, edited by Peter T. Nesbett and Michelle DuBois 97-109. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2000.PG.97
11. "Jacob Lawrence." St. James Guide to Black Artists, 1997, St. James Guide to Black Artists, 1997-01-01, PG 471.
12. OLIVER, STEPHANIE STOKES. "JACOB LAWRENCEA MASTER IN OUR MIDST." *THE SEATTLE TIMES*,

Lawrence the ability to focus on his craft and broaden his artistic community. In his 1968 interview with Carroll Greene, Lawrence shared on the subject of the FAP, "It was a very informal kind of schooling. You were able to ask questions of people who had more experience than yourself about technical things in painting. They had lectures. They put out books on painting, technical pamphlets and things."[13] These resources remained in Lawrence's toolkit throughout his life, and the powerful model of mentorship that he received from Augusta Savage and Charles Alston instilled in Lawrence an inherent value in building up the next generation of artists.

In addition to impactful artistic mentors, another influence in young Lawrence's development were the public spaces where he came into contact with artwork and resources that documented Black contributions towards American progress. At the Schomburg Library, Lawrence found contextual evidence that supplemented the scenes he wanted to depict, and he also took in free lectures by different members of the Harlem community. It was at the Schomburg library where young Lawrence came into contact and began to learn from "a carpenter-turned-lecturer who made frequent speeches about Black history."[14] The self-taught historian Charles Seifert —known as 'Professor Seifert'—played a key role in Jacob Lawrence's awakening to the importance of African history. Seifert built a successful career in Harlem as a carpenter and contractor, and as he prospered, he amassed a collection of books, manuscripts, maps, and artifacts related to Africa's cultures and diaspora."[15] Seifert made history come alive through public lectures and Lawrence in turn took that information and felt inspired to

October 27, 1985: 14. *NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current*. https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=news/0EB53183DE103022..

13. "Oral History Interview with Jacob Lawrence" by Carroll Green, October 26, 1968. Lines of Influence, SCAD Museum of Art. 2020.
14. Gasman, Marybeth., and Sedgwick, Katherine V. "A Gift of Art; Jacob Lawrence as a Philanthropist". Uplifting a People : African American Philanthropy and Education. New York: Peter Lang, 2005. 175-188
15. https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2015/onewayticket/key-figures/charles-seifert/

consider his medium to contribute to social change.
Lawrence's community was filled with artists and teachers of all levels of prestige that welcomed him and made space for his own development and exploration. Considered retrospectively, the impact of all these combined experiences in Lawrence's life and artistic development, his focus on builders and building in his works that came later carry great metaphorical weight both personally and professionally.

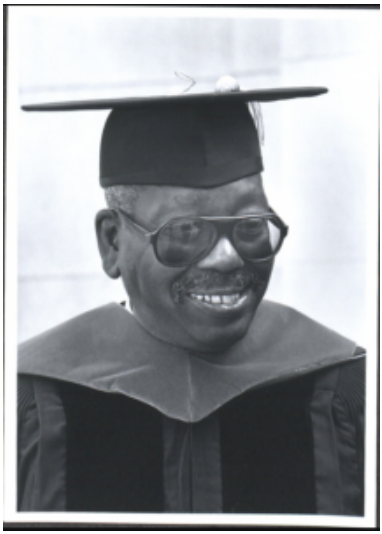
Lawrence's Compass and Teaching Pedagogy

Situated off the edge of the workbench in *Builders Three* is the compass tool which is utilized in drawing to create a perfect sphere or arc. In self-portraits, Lawrence often holds a compass himself, confirming its importance in the artist's mind and a way of conceptualizing his identity. In *Builders Three*, the use of white for this tool creates a visual that pops out in stark contrast to the dark red surface of the workbench. Its shape creates an arrow pointing from the large figure to the smaller figure. The compass is a tool that both balances the big picture and a focused point, a balance that echoes Lawrence's arc and legacy as an artist and his focused in the moment mentorship. The informal kind of mentorship that he received growing up in New York offered him powerful models of supportive educators and professional artists. However, Lawrence's confidence in his own teaching practice was solidified in 1946 during his summer at Black Mountain College. He considered this experience as his initiation into the ranks of becoming a teacher.[16]

16. Lawrence, Jacob, Rensburg, Storm Janse Van, Levin Caro, Julie, Greene, Carroll, Verlag Scheidegger & Spiess, Publisher, and SCAD Museum of Art, Issuing Body, Publisher, Organizer, Host Institution.

The invitation from Joseph Albers alone was an acknowledgement for Lawrence that he had tools to share. From his colleagues at Black Mountain College, Lawrence retained "a philosophy of seeing, of having a wonderful appreciation of form and texture and color and value, the abstract elements irregardless of what your style is."[17] The supportive Dewey-inspired teaching philosophy of learning through doing at Black Mountain College extended the arc of Charles Alston that defined Lawrence's early years, and the sharing of knowledge across students and faculty was unilateral and of mutual interest and respect.

Jacob Lawrence brought this teaching philosophy with him to the University of Washington in 1971. As many former students and colleagues later reflected, he stood out as a teacher who brought something refreshing and unique to the classroom: a belief in his student's capacity to dive into complex experimentation within their fundamental courses. He wanted students to feel their way into making art, trusting their intuition. A former student, Laura, "remember[ed] spending the first week in his class with [her] eyes closed, feeling [her] chalk in her fingers



3. David Ottenstein, Photograph of Jacob Lawrence in graduation regalia, date unknown. Box #9, Folder #9, Jacob Lawrence and Gwendolyn Knight papers, 1816, 1914-2008, bulk 1973-2001. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Jacob Lawrence : Lines of Influence. Zurich, Switzerland : Savannah, Georgia: Scheidegger & Spiess ; SCAD Museum of Art, 2020.

17. Lawrence, Jacob, Rensburg, Storm Janse Van, Levin Caro, Julie, Greene, Carroll, Verlag Scheidegger & Spiess, Publisher, and SCAD Museum of Art, Issuing Body, Publisher, Organizer, Host Institution. Jacob Lawrence : Lines of Influence. Zurich, Switzerland : Savannah, Georgia: Scheidegger & Spiess ; SCAD Museum of Art, 2020.PG.133

and hearing the scratch of the stick on the paper. The exercise taught [her] that art is not something you effect on the outside but find within. It was liberating, washing away the mimicry taught in high-school art classes."[18] While other colleagues often met their first-year students with the mission of removing bad habits, Lawrence's approach was additive: he helped students follow their own voices and encouraged them to use their whole selves, what they brought and lived with, to their work. As Lawrence's student Barbara Earl Thomas shared, "He believed that skill served faith, persistence and vision. If you undertake a work and if you don't do it with skill, honesty and vision, everyone will know. And it's just an exercise."[19] An established artist in her own right, Thomas was shaped greatly by Lawrence's support and mentorship but maintained her own artistic voice. The stark differences between Lawrence and Thomas's work, despite their close relationship, is a testament to Lawrence's ability to develop and support each student's individual voice.

Lawrence was known for his unique critiquing abilities by students and fellow faculty alike. Artist and UW Colleague Michael Spafford once said that Lawrence "was the only teacher I've ever met who could be critical without being negative."[20] Lawrence's pedagogy came from a place of curiosity and he found that his conversations with students crystalized his own artistic theories.[21] Lawrence gave his students a conceptual framework to strengthen their practice, and was supportive of their individual interests and

18. Cronin, Mary Elizabeth. "Finding Common Thread in an Uncommon Canvas; Jacob Lawrence's Moving Images Open Windows to Heritage." The Seattle Times, December 22, 1993: E1. NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current. https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=WORLDNEWS&docref=news/0EB536E7A6FBDEB3.
19. Tu, Janet I.. "Mourners say farewell to artist who `was gifted and a gift to us'." Seattle Times, The (WA), July 13, 2000: B1. NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current. https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=WORLDNEWS&docref=news/0EB53A68BAD4FD8F.
20. Tu, Janet I.. "Mourners say farewell to artist who `was gifted and a gift to us'." Seattle Times, The (WA), July 13, 2000: B1. NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current. https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=WORLDNEWS&docref=news/0EB53A68BAD4FD8F.
21. Caro, Julie Levin, "Jacob Lawrence at Black Mountain College, Summer 1946". In Jacob Lawrence, Lines of Influence. Exh. Cat. Savannah, GA: SCAD Museum of Art. PG. 142

subject matter. Judy Night, a former undergraduate student who studied under Lawrence wrote to him "I thought you might enjoy knowing that although I learned a great deal from all of the Professors at the University of Washington, you were by far the most influential, understanding and encouraging teacher that I have ever had the privilege of working with".[22] Lawrence's generous and supportive pedagogical approach was undoubtedly shaped by the important mentorship that he found early on from Charles Alston, Augusta Savage and Josef Albers, who cemented the idea in Lawrence that Art was for everyone.

Service and Community Building

Just as Augusta Savage was a pillar in her community, dedicated to providing art programming for all, Lawrence was similarly committed to service, particularly in his later years. Ellen Harkins Wheat, herself a former student of Lawrence as well as one of his first biographers, noted of his contributions: "His active participation in the academic community has helped to build arts programs (he served six-year terms on both the Washington State Arts Council and the National Council of the Arts), efforts that might be seen as his desire to propagate the kinds of opportunities that served him so well early in his career."[23]

Lawrence was aware that government opportunities that helped launch his career were still necessary decades later, particularly for students in lower income areas. The state of arts education in Washington State shifted significantly during the 90's towards

22. Judy Knight to Jacob Lawrence, Box #5, Folder #15, Jacob Lawrence and Gwendolyn Knight papers, 1816, 1914-2008, bulk 1973-2001. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution
23. Wheat, Ellen Harkins., Lawrence, Jacob, Hills, Patricia, and Seattle Art Museum, Issuing Body. "At Home in the West". Jacob Lawrence, American Painter. Seattle: University of Washington Press in Association with the Seattle Art Museum, 1986. PG. 191

an emphasis on standardization, which forced administrators to reallocate funding towards other subjects and push the arts to the back-burner. A report entitled, "The Support Infrastructure for Youth Arts Learning", examines the shift of Arts education in the US between 1984 and 2000. Pressures for accountability in non-arts subject areas and decreases in districts' discretionary budgets created hostile conditions for sustained arts education. It is largely left up to school districts to raise funds and establish programs to provide their students with quality arts opportunities. As many schools rely on arts grants, state-funded public art collections have become a powerful means of early arts exposure for children. The Art in Public Places Program in Washington state has a

process for K-12 Schools to apply for an artwork from the state collection to be placed in their care, on display for students and teachers to utilize and enjoy. There is an emphasis on selecting works that provide curricular connections, and for School communities to use the artwork as a jumping off point to explore other disciplines.[24] Jacob Lawrence has 39 pieces of art in the Washington State Public Art Collection, 38 of which are housed in public schools. This collection includes several works on his 'builders' theme including, *The Builders* (1974), *Tools* (1977) and *Carpenters* (1977) [Fig.4], and *Builders Three* (1991) [Fig.1]. Through his consistent use of a bold color palette, scenes of progress, and his celebration of the artistry of simple hand tools, these works offer something for

4. Jacob Lawrence, *Carpenters*, 1977, color lithograph, 30 × 22 in. Washington State Public Art Collection. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

24. https://www.arts.wa.gov/public-art/

every viewer; a potent reminder that anyone of any age can be a contributor.

5. Photograph of Jacob Lawrence and a young student, Box 9, Folder 9, Jacob Lawrence and Gwendolyn Knight papers, 1816, 1914-2008, bulk 1973-2001. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The dissemination of Jacob Lawrence's work, particularly in K-12 schools, had an enormous impact on the next generation. He received hundreds of personal letters, drawings and photographs from students of all ages, wanting to know more about him as an artist and person, or just wanting Lawrence to know how much his work meant to them. For instance, 6th grader Markia Williams shared:, "I am writing because I think you are a splendid artist and I just thought you should know it... I just wanted you to know that there is someone who admires you and your work. Please write back."[25] Lawrence visited schools and offered phone interviews to respond to student questions.[26] Another young fan, Dawniah Eddy, from Silver Lake Elementary in Washington State wrote "In my class at school we have been studying your work. I really love your work. You use beautiful colors that catch your eye real quick. I especially like your picture of the runners with torches. I like the way you brought out the muscles in their legs. We wanted to know if you could stop off at our school sometime. We think it would be great."[27]

Shortly after his retirement from the University, Lawrence was

25. Markia Williams to Jacob Lawrence, Box #4, Folder #40, Jacob Lawrence and Gwendolyn Knight papers
26. Cathy Bean to Jacob Lawrence, Box #4, Folder #39, Jacob Lawrence and Gwendolyn Knight papers. Cathy Bean, an Art docent volunteer at Frank Love Elementary, sent a note, "Thank you for taking the time to talk to our 6th graders over the telephone... The students and I were very impressed that a person of such great accomplishments would take time to answer our questions. It was one of the highlights of my 11 years of being a PTA art docent.
27. Dawniah Eddy to Jacob Lawrence, Box #4, Folder #25, Jacob Lawrence and Gwendolyn Knight papers

commissioned to create a massive 41ft mural in Meany Hall. He quoted a fee of only $25,000, an amount that would barely cover materials and overhead. "It wasn't quite a gift, but I took into consideration that it was for the university," he explained at the dedication ceremony.[28] In Lawrence's mind, the initial output of such a gift came back to him, much as he saw his teaching practice. He and his wife, the artist Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence, supported numerous projects at the UW beyond the gift of their works, including undergraduate and graduate student scholarships, financial support for the development of a printed MFA Thesis Exhibition Catalog, and an endowment that provided student scholarships. In 1993, the UW School of Art officially named the gallery after Jacob Lawrence. Director of the School at the time, Jerome Silbergeld, shared, "Your art, your humane values, and your years of service to the School of Art have been a great inspiration for all of those who know you and your work, and we are lucky to count you as one of us."[29] This space remains a catalyst for creative conversation and a platform for sharing work today.[30]

Builders Three celebrates the importance of sharing one's own craft, and the idea that legacy cannot be built alone. Lawrence's own work as a builder of progress, honed over the course of a 60-year career, provided the foundations to recognize the power of collective labor in any field and the capacity for human potential towards progress. Of the many works that he created on the builders theme, Builders Three uniquely showcases an educational exchange and scene of collaboration that ties into Lawrence's own

28. Oliver, Stephanie Stokes. "Jacob Lawrence, A Master in our Midst." The Seattle Times, October 27, 1985: 14. NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current. https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=WORLDNEWS&docref=news/0EB53183DE103022.
29. Jerome Silbergeld to Jacob Lawrence, Box #5, Folder #15
30. The Jacob Lawrence Gallery presents 12 exhibitions each year, eight of which feature student work. In addition to these exhibition opportunities, the gallery hosts an internship program where students learn curatorial methodologies, exhibition design and production, and act as docents for the exhibitions on view. There is an annual Jacob Lawrence Residency in the Gallery, which invites Black artists at all stages of their careers to have a residency during the month of January to develop new work and an exhibition during the month of February, Black History Month. Additionally, the Jacob Lawrence Gallery is the site of the The Black Embodiments Studio (BES), an arts writing residency and a public lecture series dedicated to developing complex, creative, and rigorous discourse around contemporary black art and artists.

philosophy on reciprocal knowledge. He stated on numerous occasions how vital his teaching practice was to him in solidifying his own studio practice. As his former student and friend, Barbara Earl Thomas, shared about her time with Lawrence as an instructor. "He really looked at your work and tried to figure out what it was you were trying to do," Thomas says, "then he tried to help you do that."[31] Lawrence's pedagogy was centered on meeting students where they were at in their development, and helping them find their own way ahead, just as Augusta Savage and Charles Alston had encouraged him to do.

Lawrence's builders act as important visual reminders of this work, our collective potential and an invitation to explore art, in addition to being symbols of how Lawrence lived his life. He once said, "For me a painting should have three things: universality, clarity, and strength. Universality so that it may be understood by all men. Clarity and strength so that it may be aesthetically good. It is necessary in creating a painting to find out as much as possible about one's subject, thereby freeing oneself from having to strive for a superficial depth."[32] Like the central figure depicted in *Builders Three*, Lawrence was powerful in his purpose, firmly following his own artistic voice, while also contributing towards the growth of others. The fruits of Lawrence's labor in Washington state continue to unfold even twenty years after his passing- gifts for future generations who can look to his legacy for inspiration to move us forward, the way Lawrence would have wanted; laboring, creating, and standing strong in togetherness.

31. Barbara Earl Thomas is an established artist in her own right. Her exhibition, The Geography of Innocence, was recently on display in the Seattle Art Museum. https://thomas.site.seattleartmuseum.org/?gclid=Cj0KCQjw2tCGBhCLARIsABJGmZ4Bv3hUgJvSHll0Y9yIQNmDBVrp1bA0iQnr9GtXDBGi1v-bpqE3HXAaAuaFEALw_wcB
32. Wheat, Ellen Harkins., Lawrence, Jacob, Hills, Patricia, and Seattle Art Museum, Issuing Body. "At Home in the West". Jacob Lawrence, American Painter. Seattle: University of Washington Press in Association with the Seattle Art Museum, 1986. 29

6. Jacob Lawrence and the Magic of Sight

GRACE FLETCHER

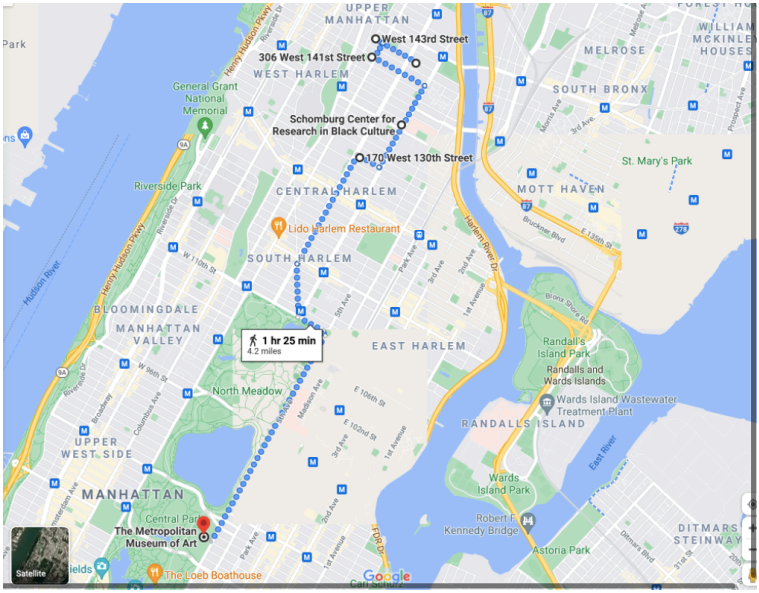
1. Jacob Lawrence, *University*, 1977, gouache, tempera and graphite on paper, 32 x 24 in. Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University; Gift of Dr. Herbert J. Kayden and Family in memory of Dr. Gabrielle H. Reem, 2013.105. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Jacob Lawrence delivered a lecture on his artistic journey at the University of Washington in 1978 with the fitting title "I Wonder as

I Wander." The name was taken from the title of Langston Hughes' autobiography, and resonated with Lawrence whose development as an artist consisted of "meandering, seeing and observing."[1] This act of meandering on foot was integral to Lawrence's life as he never acquired a driver's license–when offered a teaching position at the University of Washington he requested lodging close enough to walk to campus.[2] Walking was more than just a mode of getting from one place to another–it was important to his artistic development. Through personal interactions within his neighborhood and public spaces, Lawrence was able to see the patterns present in his life more fully, which he incorporated into his art. By combining and pulling inspiration from sights, observations, and locations, Lawrence created art larger than the sum of its parts, with a deep investment in the human experience. This essay will follow Lawrence's life, art, and teaching on foot to thread together the images of spaces of dialogue, interaction, and work which he frequently returned to and complicated throughout his career. When considered together, his scenes of libraries, classrooms, and labor collectively envision a world of collaboration and creativity built on the substance of experiences. As Lawrence's work, for instance *University* (fig. 1) shows us, the daily rhythms and paths of our lives can provide tangible (physical and literal) and intangible (conceptual) tools that inform our education. In *University*, Lawrence imagines a radical space of learning: one inspired by a life and career engaged in community, experience, and interaction, that explores the intimate and magic relationship between sight and art making. This painting was the destination of Lawrence's 1978 lecture, and in a similar vein it will be the final destination of this paper.

1. Jacob Lawrence,"I Wonder as I Wander" (3rd Annual Distinguished Faculty Lecture, University of Washington, Seattle WA, October 5, 1978). Timestamp, ten minutes.
2. Archival letter to Spencer Mosely from box 5 folder 14, page 7.

Stop I: New York, New York



2. Map of Lawrence's frequented locations in New York. Google Maps.

In interviews, Lawrence was often asked about his education (because many believed him to be an untrained genius). Milton Brown's 1974 introduction to Lawrence's Whitney retrospective separated Lawrence from his contemporaries by describing him as a singular and untrained genius with no true teachers.[3] This line of thinking posits that Lawrence was conjured out of nowhere and removes him from an artistic lineage. It ultimately undermined the threads of learning through community and experience that Lawrence spoke of in interviews, roundtables and most crucially within his paintings and captions. He spoke of his early learning

3. Milton W. Brown, "Jacob Lawrence," 1974, 9.

as beginning in his neighborhood of Harlem, where he drew inspiration from the lives and public spaces he encountered within the community. He emphasized the lessons he learned from talking with and listening to street preachers, communists, librarians and Garveyites (Black Nationalists).[4] In a 1968 interview with art historian Carroll Greene, Lawrence recalled the places he worked in through their location and where he walked to access them. Across the street from where he lived on 143rd street in New York City was a public center where Lawrence first encountered the sculptor, activist, and teacher Augusta Savage, at around the age of fifteen (fig. 2).[5] She would eventually help Lawrence find a position within the easel division of the Federal Arts Projects, a governmental program in support of the arts and the teacher of Lawrence's future wife the artist Gwendolyn Knight. Prior to meeting Savage, Lawrence attended the Utopia Children's house on 130th street in 1931, for around three years. It was an after-school arts and crafts program where the classroom was transformed into a studio and the children were encouraged to experiment with the materials available. His early teacher was Charles Alston, a young painter and recent Columbia graduate, who believed that teaching should follow students' interests and personal affinities.[6]

This freedom to explore materials was furthered when he attended Alston's Work Progress Administration workshop at Studio 306 on 141st street from 1934 – 1937. The process for Lawrence was one of tangible learning, of "seeing and doing, doing and undergoing."[7] As Lawrence developed and gravitated toward tempera paints, Alston turned his teaching toward the picture plane (a painting on a two-dimensional surface). He introduced Lawrence to designing based on rugs, an activity created and influenced by the thinking of Arthur Wesley Dow and John Dewey which stressed

4. Elizabeth Turner, "The Education of Jacob Lawrence," in Over the Line: the Art of Jacob Lawrence, 97.
5. Carroll Greene, "Oral History Interview with Jacob Lawrence, 1968 October 26." Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
6. Elizabeth Turner, "The Education of Jacob Lawrence," 98.
7. Turner, 98.

finding inspiration in everyday experiences and patterns. Dewey saw no separation between fine arts and applied arts and focused on the education of doing.[8] Through copying rugs, Lawrence was learning how to map space. In a 1983 archival interview Lawrence described his work with the picture plane as directly influenced by this mapping of space, as he liked "to put things against things and see them work… and seeing the entire picture plane as a whole and seeing one thing, how it reacts against something else, and the push, the pull of things." By concerning himself with the entirety of the picture surface, Lawrence began to see each stroke as necessary to the composition. He saw his formal choices of line, shape and color as continuously reacting against one another, and for him to be a successful painter one had to take these reactions into account. Within the picture plane he tweaked patterns to see how forms related to one another, a mode of looking that he carried into the world around him, drawing inspiration from doors, fire escapes, carpets and windows.[9] By equating art with experience, Lawrence began to foster the idea that art clarified meaning contained in the scattered fragments and materials of our lives.

8. Margret Halsey Brown, "THE AESTHETIC AND EDUCATIONAL THEORIES OF JOSEF ALBERS." New York University, 1968, 65.
9. Turner, 99.

3. Jacob Lawrence, *Cabinet Maker*, 1957, casein tempera on paper, 30.5 x 22.5 in. (77.4 x 57.0 cm). Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn, 1966. Image courtesy of Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Part of Lawrence's walk and routine was visiting the New York

Public library on 135th street where he conducted research for his series on the life of Harriet Tubman and Toussaint L'Ouverture. Throughout his career he would return to depict libraries as spaces of knowledge by enlarging the books as the tools within those spaces. Lawrence often placed emphasis on tools in relation to specific crafts like in *Cabinet Maker*, 1957 where a huge hammer lies propped against the worker's forearm and a massive carpenter square rests within the worker's hands while nails fall out of his pocket (fig. 3). By using tangible tools to perform his work the carpenter reveals the power of embodied and physical knowledge.

Similarly, the library books are the tools that conceptually inform our knowledge of the world around us, and actively informed Lawrence's own historical research and subsequent series. This particular library, now the Schomburg Library for Research in Black Culture, held archival material of Black history collected by Arturo Alfonso Schomburg, a supporter of the arts and an activist who emphasized the importance of histories and heritage.[10] In 1937, Lawrence paid homage to Schomburg in his painting *Library (The Curator)*, which was done on brown paper with tempera and reveals Lawrence's limited material as a restriction that dictated his expression (fig. 4).[11] By limiting himself, Lawrence believed the restrictions gave "an experience you wouldn't get otherwise."[12] This quote is remarkably similar to a comment he made during his lecture at the UW, where his choice to not drive allowed him to "see things he wouldn't have seen otherwise."[13] The repeated use of material and paint was perhaps due to economic necessity, but also reflects a desire to use the same medium in order to further develop his form.

10. Ellen Harkins Wheat, Jacob Lawrence (University of Washington, 1987): 13, 198..
11. Turner, "The Education of Jacob Lawrence," 102.
12. Ibid.
13. Jacob Lawrence,"I Wonder as I Wander," twelve minutes in.

4. Jacob Lawrence, *Library (The Curator)*, 1937, tempera on paper, 11.5 x 8.5 in. Schomburg Center for research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox & Tildon Foundations. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Library plays with the geometric windows, chairs and tables within

the space of the reading room, abstracting them into their essential colors and shapes. The arched windows mirror the forms of the circular table and chair, their color only slightly darker than that of the table, making the eye strain to differentiate between the two shades. The subdued palette of dark greens, tans, and charcoals provides a soothing atmosphere of contemplation, yet the chair blocks the viewer's entry into the scene. Schomburg is turned away from the viewer's gaze, legs crossed and absorbed in the brightly lit book in his hands that is open and facing us, an available tool of learning. In 1930 the national literacy rate for the Black population was eighty-three percent compared to the white population who had a literacy rate of ninety-eight percent.[14] This disparity between the two populations reveals books as tools that could not be accessed by all. Here literacy becomes the intangible tool that opens the space of the library, like a key. Lawrence returned to the library repeatedly throughout his life, layered visits that informed his paintings. Fifty years after 1937's *Library*, he returned to the space (fig. 5). In this iteration there are multiple figures back-to-back, almost touching and stacked on top of each other. In contrast to the subdued and low-contrast palette of the 1937 composition, mostly primary colors brighten and expand our view of the library's physical space. In this piece, there is a greater sense of community and interaction. Libraries are not only spaces for gathering information but also for gathering communities. Their history and public communal space is as much a tool as the books they contain. In this painting learning through books and through community become equally important in the accumulation of knowledge. What do we miss when we only look at text, or in this case, when we only view libraries as individual spaces of learning where people conduct their learning independently, sealed off from the people around them? There is a certain "push and pull," between his works

14. National Center of Statistics, "National Assessment of Adult Literacy," 2003.

as he looks back on this space with a new focus on the activities rather than focusing on one individual's interaction with books.[15]

15. Turner, "The Education of Jacob Lawrence," 99.

5. Jacob Lawrence, *Library Series*: *The Schomburg*, 1986, gouache with graphite underdrawing on paper, 40 1/4 x 34 1/4 in. (102.2 x 87.0 cm). SCAD Museum of Art, Gift of Dr. Walter O. Evans and Mrs. Linda J. Evans. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Stop II: Black Mountain College

6. Harold Raymond Collection, Project Papers, Black Mountain College Collection, Western Regional Archives, Asheville, NC.

In the summer of 1946, Jacob Lawrence was offered and accepted a summer teaching position at Black Mountain College, located in the Blue Ridge Mountains of then-racially segregated North Carolina. The school was led by the German Bauhaus teacher Josef Albers, who would come to hold a significant place in Lawrence's vision of education. The Lawrences traveled by train and remained on campus for the entirety of their eight week stay – Albers suggested that the teaching position would be like a holiday, with only two days a week of required instruction.[16]

16. Julie Lavine Caro, "Jacob Lawrence at Black Mountain College, Summer 1946," 2020 in Lines of Influence, 137.

Photographs from that summer show Lawrence and his wife, the artist Gwendolyn Knight, posing with the other faculty under a tree in front of the picturesque Lake Eden (fig. 7), or lounging on a deck in the sun (fig. 8).

7. Faculty of the 1946 Black Mountain College Summer Art Institute, including Jacob Lawrence and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence, Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center collection

8. Beaumont Newhall, *Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence*, 1946, photograph. North Carolina State Archives.

The relaxed location was directly related to the educational models the college followed, with informal conversations about art and form taking place. The informality blurred the hierarchies between student and teacher, and Lawrence realized that the advantage of Black Mountain College was that they "were all students in a way."[17]

The school was founded in 1933 with a central aim of teaching the art of living, where art and learning should be synonymous with life.[18] One can imagine why this form of education would appeal to Lawrence with his inclination to integrate his life and his art. The teaching did not stop in the classrooms but was continued over meals in the dining hall. This mingling of teachers and students

17. Ibid., 139.
18. Margret Halsey Brown, "THE AESTHETIC AND EDUCATIONAL THEORIES OF JOSEF ALBERS," 56.

reflected Lawrence's early education of mingling with artists and thinkers within the Harlem community. Lawrence found the classes and visual examples provided by Albers fascinating, like when he used a twisted coat hanger to illustrate the importance of line in space.[19] Albers insisted on students beginning with material rather than theory, and he believed that students learned best through experimenting, again echoing Lawrence's early education. In this regard, he was like Dow and Dewey in his belief that free play develops courage and that through experimentation one can be skillful in constructive thinking.[20]

Participation at the college was intimately tied to sight, and the ability for students to see in the widest sense, to take in the world around them and most importantly to bring awareness to their own "living, being, and doing," especially for the purpose of art.[21] For instance, Albers's lessons on color theory involved placing blocks of color in front of each other to illustrate the importance of color and its placement on the picture plane. Lawrence said Albers was so brilliant in his demonstrations he did not need to communicate in clear English, but had a few specific concepts he would use, like 'push and pull,' and an emphasis on 'the picture plane."[22] These concepts were ones Lawrence frequently referenced in the many interviews he gave throughout his life, and reflected the teaching he received in Harlem, indicating that they reinforced his own philosophy on art making. In Lawrence's 1978 lecture he spoke repeatedly of Albers, musing appreciatively: "this man was like magic in what he could make you see, how he could open the vision – we look but do we see? The painter is like a magician. You make things appear."[23] Here, vision refers to the ability to see the plastic (or shapeable) elements within a composition and be able to visually identify only those necessary for the piece to function.

19. Ibid., 56.
20. Ibid., 50.
21. Ibid., 60.
22. Jacob Lawrence,"I Wonder as I Wander," 1 hour 11 minutes.
23. Jacob Lawrence,"I Wonder as I Wander," 1 hour 12 minutes.

In Albers'–and Lawrence's–philosophy, when one sees the shapes, textures, and colors rather than the objects of representation themselves, one can escape merely copying and being "illustrative."[24] For Lawrence, every formal choice was an essential part of weaving a composition together, and the forms dictated the content produced.

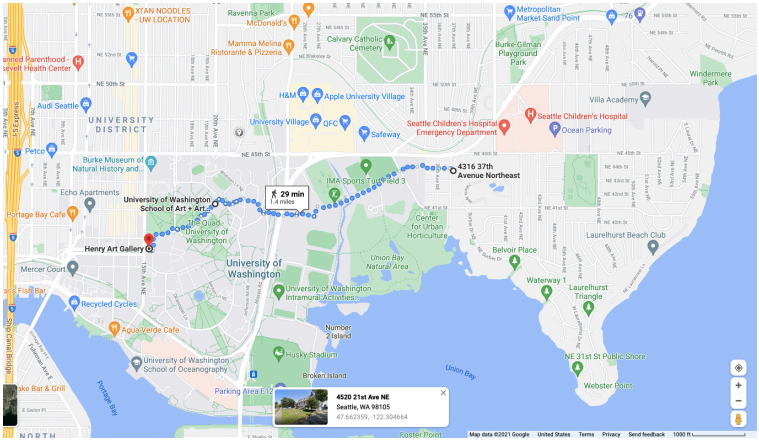
9. Jacob Lawrence, *Magic Man*, 1958, egg tempera and pencil on fiberboard, 20 X 24 in. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Folkerson, 1981. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

These methods appear in Lawrence's 1958 painting *Magic Man*, which plays with colors and inversion in its depiction of a Black

24. Carroll Greene, Oral History Interview with Jacob Lawrence, 1968 October 26.

magician, making the viewer's eyes work to understand what is happening in the picture plane (fig. 9). Every element, especially the shadows, lights and colors work to confuse and distract us, as magicians do when they perform their magic tricks. Lawrence has reduced the flowers from the right side down to dots of color, abstracting their forms down to their essential qualities. Lawrence, as the artist, asserts his control over the entirety of the picture plane, and the image is punctuated with areas of pure abstraction, like the dots of color emitting from the wand that encircle the edge of the painting and the planes of red and purple behind the magic man. The dots of color escaping the magician's wand are the same colors he uses throughout the composition, with the purple fishbowl and yellow flowers. By placing the gloved hand against a black background and making it the size of the head of the magician, Lawrence emphasizes it as the tool by which the magician does his work. Considering Lawrence's statements about Albers and the magic of the picture plane, the painting can be understood as a meditation on artists and the magic they perform within their work.

Stop III: Seattle, Washington



10. The route from Lawrence's residence to the University of Washington School of Art, Art History + Design and Henry Art Gallery.

In 1970 Lawrence traveled west to accept a full-time teaching position in Seattle at the University of Washington, at a time where his life, teaching and career had sharpened his artistic practice and beliefs about experience's inexorable connection with artistic vision. The University's offer of a tenured full professorship was a motivating factor, but the move itself to a new location and environment was also attractive and influenced the art Lawrence produced. In 1975 Barbara Miller wrote a "Profile of an Educator" where she discussed Seattle's characteristic gray atmosphere, and how Lawrence incorporated the graying of color into many of his works like *University*.[25] Again we see sight implicated with location

25. Barbara Miller, "Profile of an Educator," 1975. Box 5, Folder 14, Jacob Lawrence and Gwendolyn Knight papers, 1816, 1914-2008, bulk 1973-2001. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

and experience, and it results in a shifting of artistic practice similar to the complex and abstracted planes of color and forms in his piece *Magic Man* from after his time at Black Mountain College. In a short essay in the Henry Art Gallery's 1980 *Drawings* exhibition catalogue, Lawrence spelled out his belief that experience, sight and living were vital to one's ability to draw:

> Experience, and this largely comes with age, is vital to this kind of response, so I emphasize that – living, seeing. You may walk across campus day in and day out, and then all at once you begin to notice a certain tree that you have been passing all the time: that is the nature of experience. In drawing there is more than just the skill itself, there is also the experience behind it, the feeling, the interpretation: how you see a figure, how you see a tree, how you see anything.[26]

Here Lawrence emphasizes the ways that living, and experience inform an artist's ability to see directly, which shapes their ability to experience the repetitive processes of their own artistic creation. The skill is not as important as the feeling, the practice, and the repetition of continual experience of life and art are what Lawrence sees as integral to the art making process. Though almost forty years had passed, the influence of Black Mountain College's sharp focus on sight and living are felt in this passage. In the 1977 interview with Clarence Major, Lawrence discusses "the x factor" that cannot be taught, and I believe he is speaking to a student's ability to see.[27]

Though "Profile of an Educator" is brief, it offers rich insight into Lawrence's belief in non-hierarchical learning. It explains how Lawrence saw learning as a two-way street, which is reflective of the oral history between Lawrence and Greene in 1966, where he speaks to teaching as a clarifying force, one that does not end

26. Jacob Lawrence et. al., "Faculty Notes," in Drawing, at the Henry: an Exhibition of Contemporary Drawings by Eighteen West Coast Artists, April 5-May 25, 1980, Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington. Seattle: The Gallery. 1980.
27. Clarence Major, "Clarence Major Interviews: Jacob Lawrence, The Expressionist." The Black Scholar 9, no. 3 (1977), 17.

in the classroom, and one that he felt gave his work a "broader dimension."[28] The impact of Lawrence's teaching style is evident from his end of term reviews, where he received the highest marks of any professor in the studio section.[29] His colleague Michael Spafford recounted how Lawrence would teach intro level drawing classes in a more advanced, and trusting fashion. He took his introductory level drawing class to the dance department so that students had to think quickly about how to jot down the movements they were seeing. Other professors often waited to introduce movement for more advanced classes.[30] The activity emphasized vision over copying, an important distinction for Lawrence, and revealed his confidence and trust in his students. As Allan Kollar, an MFA student of Lawrence's put beautifully, "Lawrence always treated you like the person you were going to become rather than the person you were in the present."[31] The same vision and foresight is apparent in the constructed vision of education within the thin walls of *University*.

The tangible and intangible tools of education are prominent within the open halls and classrooms of *University*, wherestudents carry books in the crook of their arms, teachers gesture while speaking and one student carries a compass ruler (fig. 1). The space actively structures and informs the tools of knowledge, from the presence and co-mingling of classes and ideas as well as the active engagement with applied and learned knowledge.[32] The openness of the space dictates the kind of learning that is able to form and take shape, one that is inclusive and in a constant state of change. The *University* is also site specific, in not only its title but also in the purple and gold school colors and the grays of the chairs and clothes. Location once again influences the vision created. In *University* a completely purple figure in the foreground walks

28. Miller, "Profile of an Educator," 7.
29. Greene, "Oral History."
30. Julie Levin Caro, "The Legacy of Black Mountain College on Lawrence's Art Pedagogy," in Between Form and Content: Perspectives on Jacob Lawrence Black Mountain College, 2019, 80.
31. Ibid., 80.
32. Henry J. Elam Jr., "Images of Higher Education: Jacob Lawrence's University," 37.

towards the edge of the painting; they hold books and a curious circle of colorful dots hover between their forefinger and thumb and above their hand. At first when I saw the dots, I thought they were planets, but upon further inspection, and in conversation with *Magic Man*, I believe they are a painter's palette hovering in the air. They are the colors that bring the scene to light, the figure once again representing magicians and implicitly the magic work of painters. Lawrence was not necessarily a religious person, but did "believe in something beyond our understanding."[33] In his 1978 lecture he detailed that painting for him had a great deal to do with what he described as a "search," but one in which "I don't know what I am looking for – there's a certain magic there to go back to Albers words, a certain gestalt that I am looking for. I don't know if I'll ever find that."[34] He strived to create work larger than the sum of its parts and make more out of less – like magic. This purple-clad figure embodies the continuous search; the x factor that cannot be taught. The picture plane contains the magic and mystery that this figure reflects.

33. Clarence Major Interview, "Clarence Major Interviews: Jacob Lawrence, the Expressionist," 19.
34. Jacob Lawrence,"I wonder as I wander," 1 hour and 14 minutes.

11. Jacob Lawrence, *The Studio*, 1977, Gouache on paper, 30 x 22 in. (76.2 x 55.88 cm) Overall h.: 37 3/8 in. Overall w.: 29 in. Seattle Art Museum, Partial gift of Gull Industries; John H. and Ann Hauberg; Links, Seattle; and gift by exchange from the Estate of Mark Tobey, 90.27 © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

A final detail in *University* is worth noting: in the central background, a teacher leans down to listen to a bespectacled student, who is pointing at himself. This figure looks remarkably similar to the self-portrait in Lawrence's painting *Studio* (1978), where he paints a himself bespectacled and turned in profile (fig. 11). The position and glasses are quoted in the figure in the back of *University*. This intentional quotation reveals that this student is in fact Lawrence, who has placed himself into the role of student, rather than teacher. Throughout his life, Lawrence was a student first and foremost, and was continuously winnowing and focusing on the forms he used. By placing himself in the position of the learner, Lawrence finalizes his image of education: one where ideas flow freely, and there is no hierarchy between mentor and menteé.

I would like to end our journey in the place where we began: Lawrence's distinguished faculty lecture where he said of his painting *University*: "I see this every day, how could I not paint it?"[35] Though his tone was light, this paper has stressed the importance of vision and everyday experiences and their relationship to Lawrence's work. His radical vision of education as an equal exchange between teachers and students, in which learning is a lifelong pursuit, is one we should consider within the broader educational system the United States subscribes to, one of competition, individualism and hierarchies. Lawrence's philosophy of living and experiencing as a model for art making suggests that art historians, critics and writers should take art classes because doing and participating changes one's vision. It is also worth noting that at times art historians become so wrapped up in different art movements that they forget to closely look at an artist's words and visual patterns, at patterns that only become apparent with age. In a broader sense, Lawrence's philosophy of taking one's time, of living as art, is one that should be considered within our own lives. Lawrence's life, work and teaching suggests that magic occurs

35. Jacob Lawrence, "I Wonder as I Wander," 1 hour 15.

because of our wandering, seeing, and doing, because we took the time to notice.

7. Making Art "Work"

Government-Funded Depictions of Labor

KATE WHITNEY-SCHUBB

Jacob Lawrence, *Eight Builders*, 1982, gouache on paper, 33 x 44 3/4 in. (83.8 x 113.7 cm) 40 x 52 x 2 in. (101.6 x 132.1 x 5.1 cm). Seattle City Light 1% for Art Portable Works Collection. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Defending the practice of art-making is an unspoken, universal skill all artists must possess. Whether it's in response to criticism or jest, artists uniquely understand that their craft will always remain poorly interpreted by outsiders. And yet, some artists still aspire to make art for the masses—the populous. These artists have seen art

that communicates zip to the American layman, and believe they have a new way to communicate. And some of these artists, like Jacob Lawrence, truly do. Lawrence's art speaks to all and it tells a story. But what makes it legible? What makes his work universal to all Americans? While many critics validly assert that Lawrence's humanist inspirations heavily originated from African art and his contemporary cubists, his series of paintings surrounding labor and builders speak to a unique influence that only Mexican-muralists and the tropes of 1930s government-funded art could provide—tropes that are political, social, and intended for everyone.

Starting his career in the midst of the Great Depression led Jacob Lawrence to inevitably be influenced by the ways of the art-making trade at the time. In the early 20th century, art was a career of labor. It required skill, craftmanship, complicated tools, and time. These virtues were celebrated and applauded—and they had monetary value. Under FDR's New Deal, art-making could actually become a way out of economic despair. Though Lawrence began with menial jobs, like construction and newspaper delivery, in 1938 he finally joined the WPA's easel division in Harlem, New York. From there, his art-working career continued to build, as he transitioned from an employed artist to a self-employed one.

In 1969, Lawrence was offered a faculty position at the University of Washington, and while he could financially rely on this position, Lawrence still continued to produce art of his own and remain heavily engaged with the "working" art world. In 1979, Lawrence finally made his debut into the world of murals, after having been surrounded and inspired by many from his time in Harlem. From there, Lawrence continued to take on government commissions. In July of 1981, Richard Andrews, Coordinator of the Art in Public Places Committee within the Seattle Arts Commission, wrote Lawrence to inquire about adding one of his paintings to the City's collection. The Work was intended to be featured in the Seattle City Light's "1% for Art Portable Works Collection" by the end of 1982 and to be displayed in locations with "a great deal of public access" and "excellent exhibition" space. Accessible through the Jacob Lawrence

and Gwendolyn Knight papers, the five-page long contract later sent to Lawrence lists twenty terms that Lawrence must agree to comply to. In line with most government documents, the terms cover anything and everything— "Compliance with Law", "Non-Destruction/Alteration", "Excuse and Suspension of Contractual Obligations", etc. The form is dense, wordy, and frankly, not much of an artistic inspiration. It's contractual. Among the terms, Lawrence was instructed "to accomplish the following": to prepare a proposal for the board's approval by March 12th, 1982, and to complete the work by that October. Payment for the commission was stated as follows:

3. Price and Payment Schedule. As payment for the services of the Artist and for the completed Work, and subject to the conditions herein, the City shall pay the Artist the total sum of TWENTY THOUSAND AND NO/100 DOLLARS ($20,000.00) upon invoice from the Artist as follows:
4. a) 40 percent upon approval by the Seattle Arts Commission of the artwork proposal;
5. b) 40 percent upon one-half completion of the Work;
6. c) 20 percent upon completion and acceptance of the Work by the Arts Commission.[1]

Within the seven months Lawrence was allotted to complete the Work, he had to additionally handle the transactional side of the Work and meet the strict deadlines and checkpoints—the work was to be expedited and monitored in every way.

Lawrence completed *Eight Builders* in October of 1982 and the piece now lives within its intended collection. The painting, gouache and tempera on paper, sits at approximately three by four feet. Unsurprisingly featuring eight builders, the composition is full—2x4s flank the top of the frame, while loose work tools are

1. Pat Fuller to Jacob Lawrence, May 9, 1977. Box 4, Folder 21, Jacob Lawrence and Gwendolyn Knight papers, 1816, 1914-2008, bulk 1973-2001. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution

scattered around each builders' worktop. Abstractly placed in a two-dimensional world, the walls are a creamy blue while the floor is a deep yellow. Red lumber jags into the scene from out of the frame and each worker is caught in an action-filled pose. Their faces are slightly illegible, some have their backs turned to us, others are concentrating on their craft. Their skin tones range from deep brown to a reddish-brown—nothing lighter or whiter. They are clad in blue overalls and dark purple jumpsuits while their limbs remain exposed and toned.

While the legal contract implied the work was made under a rigid, systematic timeline, Lawrence, in theory, had complete artistic freedom. The Arts Commission had been in correspondence with him for years as he had served on boards, had donated works before, and had even completed posters and murals for the City. He was respected and admired for his work holistically and it cannot be doubted that the City of Seattle understood they would be commissioning a piece with deep layers of social, racial, and economic commentary. These themes are undeniably seen in depictions of labor, and *Eight Builders* doesn't stray from this. Yet depictions of labor additionally come with their own realm of conversation—a realm that unpacks egalitarianism, industrialism, and capitalism.

Depictions of labor and laborers have long been studied for their political and social messages. Labor is a defining aspect of every American's quality of life and those that *labor* to depict it are included. Lawrence's background working for the Works Progress Administration began his career with the foundation of art as a way to survive. As Julia Bryan-Wilson would call it, he was an "Art Worker". Bryan-Wilson, an art historian and author of *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era*, writes about the common themes of art makers post-depression and the ways in which their work, at the time, was seen as a job just like any other.

Attempts to link art and labor have been central to American modernism. In the 1930s artists of the Works Progress

Administration, seeking solidarity with the laborers they depicted, organized the Artists' Union. Thirty years later, artists tried to rekindle the progressive identity by naming themselves art workers: however, they mainly manifestly refused the aesthetic dimensions of the WPA's social realism. Art Workers tracks the unprecedented formation in the United States of an advanced, leftist art not committed to populism—that is, not primarily concerned with making its images accessible to the very people with whom these artists asserted a fragile solidarity. At the same time, the book attends to these artists' commitment to political change and their belief that art matters—that it works.[2]

Bryan-Wilson mainly speaks of white artists, making this generalization a poor fit for Lawrence. While perhaps this assessment is fair for *Art Workers*, a book published thirty years after the WPA era, a true Art Worker like Lawrence was in fact committed to this social realism. His style is readable, accessible, and emotive. These values clearly were influenced by the aesthetic of the 1930s "art-worker" as his life story was echoed in survival through craft. Though many critics cover the ways in which Lawrence's initial influences ranged from this social realism to African cubism, Bryan-Wilson's assertion that art-workers made art *work for them* rings true in Lawrence's *Eight Builders*. Lawrence finds himself reentering the art-working world with this commissioned piece, just as he did under the WPA. Can we extrapolate that Lawrence was inspired to make *Eight Builders* for the City of Seattle in response to this commissioned "job" and therefore depicted laborers as a self-representation? Or was it the legal contract that reminded him of the labor that carried his career? Regardless, Lawrence's builder series was legible and for the people—the working people. The series channeled the WPA's social realism and reignited the unity of labor he got his career started in. From 1946 to 1998, Lawrence spent a lot of time adding

2. Bryan-Wilson, Julia. Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era. University of California Press, 2010.

to his collection of builder paintings. Labor, construction, and composition were engrained in Lawrence's mind: "'repetitive form' was 'a part of…building the composition, the design, creating a certain tension…. It's part of the structure, part of the building of the painting, part of the composition," Lawrence explained to a fellow artist in 1968.[3] While perhaps Lawrence also thought like a builder, he was paid to work like one too.

An easily observed theme of Lawrence's life work is his genius in story-telling, epics, and modernist form, yet all of these virtues were heavily influenced by Lawrence's upbringing in Harlem. Growing up amidst the Harlem Renaissance exposed a young Lawrence to a creative, cultured, and artistic community. One creative, in particular, was Aaron Douglas, a prolific Black artist and activist. Douglas was the first president of the Harlem Artist Guild which was founded in 1929, which advocated for Black artists struggling to find work despite WPA efforts. While the WPA successfully employed thousands, thousands were still struggling. In his own art practice, Douglas was best known for modernist work that told the story of Black Americans through an authentic Black eye—not a white-washed version. Douglas's signature works channeled both cubist and African influences, notably seen in his *Aspects of Negro Life: From Slavery to Reconstruction* murals which hang in the 135th Street Library. Predictably, this was one of the libraries Lawrence grew up visiting.[4]

An additional Harlem influence was Charles Aston, who was the director of the WPA's Harlem Mural Project at the time. Lawrence was Aston's pupil and learned from him while he was working on murals for the Harlem Hospital. Surrounded by muralists, it's no surprise Lawrence channeled their influence in his later work. It's important to note, however, Alston and Douglas had to find their

3. Sims, Lowery Stokes. "The Structure of Narrative: Form and Content in Jacob Lawrence's Builders Paintings, 1946-1998" in Over the Line: The Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence, edited by Peter T. Nesbett and Michelle DuBois, 201-228. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press in association with Jacob Lawrence Catalogue Raisonné Project, 2000. Pg. 203
4. Shaw, Gwendolyn DuBois. "Migration and muralism: new negro artists and socialist art" from Vida Americana: Mexican muralists remake American Art 1925-1945.

inspiration somewhere too. Gwendolyn Shaw, author of "Migration and Muralism: New Negro Artists and Socialist Art" writes, "One of the most significant attractions of Mexican muralism to African American artists was the movement's emphasis on calling out economic inequality and migration-related racial violence, in both the history and contemporary reality of both nations."[5] Muralled epics became a fortified genre in the 1920s and 30s, most famously pioneered by greats such as Diego Rivera and José Orozco. Muralled epics had been the decoration of Lawrence's childhood—depictions of survival, history, and unity. "Learning to draw and color under the tutelage of Charles Alston at the Works Progress Administration (WPA) Harlem Art Workshop Lawrence again drew on this environment: 'the…brightly colored 'Oriental' rugs covering the floors at home…their configurations and their repetitions, in their geometry, and the diversity of their colors.'"[6] His influencers surrounded him with a deep history of craft and culture. Though as stated earlier, critics often reference his modern, cubist contemporaries, such as Stuart Davis and Josef Albers—this comparison innately ties to their style, not their content, and Lawrence himself said one can't exist without the other. While we can say simple forms, primary colors, and geometric compositions grace all of Lawrence's work, these stylistic choices, epitomized in his builder series, seem to coalesce in an even more interesting way—they transcend his individual style and speak more to a common trope in public, government-commissioned art.

Commissioned, public art is a fragile medium—there are many stakeholders involved. And while *Eight Builders* sits nicely within Lawrence's larger body of work surrounding labor, this painting was a commissioned piece which makes it unique and susceptible to further analysis: did Lawrence subconsciously fulfill the trope of depicting labor for government-funded art? Were digestible,

5. Ibid.
6. Sims, "The Structure of Narrative: Form and Content in Jacob Lawrence's Builders Paintings, 1946-1998" Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press in association with Jacob Lawrence Catalogue Raisonné Project, 2000.

modernist art forms employed out of government influence? What *is* this fascination with public, government-funded art focusing on labor?

After the economic crash of 1929, Roosevelt's New Deal finally allowed the nation to rebuild. And while Americans needed work, American artists were working to capture it. Over the following ten years, the Works Progress Administration and Farm Security Administration created a complete archive of photographs, paintings, murals, and other art forms that documented America's newfound love of labor and laborers that rebuilt America. But this fascination continued to arise. David Ward, author of "The Face of Labor: Portraying the American Worker" writes:

Character traits of the ideal artisan included his completeness and self-sufficiency, the harmony among head, hands, and heart that was expressed by his dexterity in wielding the tools of his trade. Dependent on his own skill, the artisan was self-reliant. His labor was indicative of his honesty: his character was written in the objects he made, and those objects rebounded to create the open countenance with which he greeted the world.[7]

The fascination was more than just how our nation operated—it was about how *we* operated. Ward speaks of strong character and world-outlook—depictions of labor spoke to all mankind and reassured an engaged community (an often minority-filled community) that through hard work we would survive and be seen. Jonathan Weinberg, an art historian and author of "I Want Muscle: Male Desire and the Image of the Worker in American Art of the 1930s," adds to this notion in claiming the worker to be "not so much a hero as an object of compassion… a model of American action and integrity."[8] Through the WPA, public declarations (government-funded declarations) reinforced that America runs on your labor.

The WPA, and even Seattle City Light in 1982, understood that

7. Ward, David. "The Face of Labor: Portraying the American," in The Sweat of Their Face: Portraying the American Worker. Smithsonian Institution Press, October 31, 2017.
8. Weinberg, Jonathan. "I Want Muscle: Male Desire and the Image of the Worker in American Art of the 1930s" from Male Desire: The Homoerotic in American Art, May 1, 2005.

public art made a statement—it was a message to the people. And these ideals seeped into other aspects of depictions of labor as government bodies identified the possibilities of public art. The New Deal "encouraged imagery that suggested that the American male was already hard at work in traditionally masculine occupations. At the same time…the increasing organization of workers into industrial unions in the 1930s legitimized images of labor that emphasized both the individual and the collective."[9] It was clear that government-funded programs had discovered the best way to communicate with the working class and keep moral high. And while many of Lawrence's series pertained to much darker epics of African American history, *Eight Builders* seems to echo a more unionized, universal message for all of working-class America: "despite the representation of vigorous activity in these scenes, there is a calm purposeful determination, which emphasizes the commitment of the participants not only to complete the task at hand but, as has been noted, to build a sense of pride and a spirit of racial harmony in the process."[10] Labor carried Jacob Lawrence throughout his lifetime, and Lawrence understood this was a message the City of Seattle, and fellow Seattle-ites, would want to hear.

9. Ibid.
10. Sims, "The Structure of Narrative: Form and Content in Jacob Lawrence's Builders Paintings, 1946-1998" Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press in association with Jacob Lawrence Catalogue Raisonné Project, 2000.

8. The Subtle Politics of Jacob Lawrence

THOMAS STAR

1. Jacob Lawrence, *New York in Transit*, 2001, glass mosaic. Source: MTA Arts & Design. Times Square-42nd Street. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Jacob Lawrence spent his career depicting the working class Americans that surrounded him. In a shift away from the long serial projects like the Migration series that shaped his early career, he made a number of murals later in his life that are on display in public institutions across the United States. These larger works exhibit a clearer statement from the artist about his worldview. Where later in life some artists' themes may deviate from their earlier work, Lawrence's themes became clarified. Absent from his murals are the

senses of pain and struggle seen in his earlier paintings, evident of a younger man still evolving as an artist and a person.

This essay looks closely at Lawrence's large-scale murals, considering both why they were created and how they were publicly received (including potential criticisms). At the center of my analysis are statements from Lawrence himself, which provide insight into the artist's inclination to take on these projects. Whether he consciously or subconsciously chose to, it is my belief that these later works, culminating with New York in Transit (hereafter, NYIT) serve as a fitting bookend to a long and remarkably consistent career of painting subjects he knew intimately and saw pieces of himself in (fig. 1). Though at times during his career Lawrence was accused of political agnosticism, he would maintain that his political statements could be found clearly in the content of his work. I find these to be weak criticisms. The politics in NYIT, not only seen in its content but in its medium, scale, and location, are not the type that you debate, but are subtler, gentler, and only wish to draw appreciation to the people and institutions that mattered to Lawrence.

2. Jacob Lawrence, *Library Series: The Schomburg*, 1986, gouache with graphite underdrawing on paper, 40 1/4 x 34 1/4 in. (102.2 x 87.0 cm). SCAD Museum of Art, Gift of Dr. Walter O. Evans and Mrs. Linda J. Evans. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

In speaking about his early life and education, Lawrence never glossed over the immense impact that public institutions like libraries, theaters, schools, community centers, and train stations had on his development as a painter. His work brought those institutions to life. A vital force in Lawrence's early life was the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, where he spent countless hours in his youth, and which he honored in a painting years later in 1986 (fig. 2). It was in these spaces that Lawrence received some of his first forms of validation as an artist. As he commented in a 1993 interview, "the teachers who purchased some of my works, the librarians, for very, very little, you'd think in terms of almost giving it away. But that five or ten dollars that they would pay for a small work meant more than the five or ten dollars. It was the idea of you're doing something of worth, that somebody else wants."[1] In spaces like the Schomburg, Lawrence was introduced to a wide diversity of ideas, people, and cultures, and found that his own ideas and potential could be recognized and nurtured. With this in mind, Lawrence's penchant for depicting these places, as well as his

1. Jacob Lawrence and the Making of the Migration Series. YouTube. United States: The Phillips Collection, 1993. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=62dlyfIRg5E.

decision to teach at a public university for several decades later in his life, begins to make sense.

3. Jacob Lawrence, *Events in the Life of Harold Washington*, 1991, ceramic tile mosaic, 10.5 x 15.25ft, City of Chicago Public Art Collection. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society.

Knowing the importance public institutions held for Lawrence changes the way NYIT and other projects like it should be viewed. The mural is not an objective portrait, and it's certainly not an example of a city commissioning a big name artist with no relationship to the subject matter. Lawrence understood the unlimited possibilities that libraries, schools, and trains could provide a citizenry, and that feeling of potential comes through in works like NYIT and Events in the Life of Harold Washington, a 1991 mosaic mural by Lawrence for the Harold Washington Library in Chicago (fig. 3). The murals feel like related parts of an unofficial series, both bursting with similar bright reds and blues, and both working in a two dimensional plane that flattens and unites the actions of every individual subject. Books feature heavily in Chicago's *Events*, unsurprising since it was commissioned for a library, yet they're also seen in the hands of many subway riders in NYIT. Additionally, in Events, subjects participate in various aspects of higher education, and out of a pseudo-window in NYIT, tucked away in the lower panel a dark shape resembles a distorted graduation cap, speaking to the connectedness of all aspects of public life. While Events celebrates one man's life, NYIT celebrates life itself, pointedly honoring an aspect of life few would think to.

4. Jacob Lawrence, *Fulton and Nostrand*, 1958, tempera on masonite, 24 x 30in. Cleveland Museum of Art, Mr. and Mrs. William H. Marlatt Fund, 2007.158. © The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

NYIT inspires a different response than Lawrence's other works – especially earlier paintings like Tombstones from 1942 and Fulton and Nostrand from 1958 (fig. 4, fig. 5). To me, those evoke a feeling of dread, of sadness, of struggle, but NYIT has less visual nuance. Literally, the colors are solid, with no visible hurried brushstrokes – because it's not a painting, yet despite being a glass-mosaic mural, its lack of brushstrokes and shading make it feel even more two dimensional than a traditional painting. Its visual, physical elements make it immediately understandable. Lawrence said of his work, "I want the idea to strike right away," a goal which he achieved partially through never abandoning the human form in his work, and also through simplifying his process of depicting the human

form.[2] Lawrence would often credit German artist Josef Albers for influencing him to think about economizing color and lines, posing to Lawrence when he spent the summer as a guest professor at Black Mountain College in 1946, " 'Why use three colors when you can use two?' or 'Why use five lines when you can use four?', an idea Lawrence used extensively as he developed his own artistic identity.[3] By the time he created NYIT, Lawrence was a true master of making more out of less. The spareness in his style allowed him to create a chaotic scene that feels totally relaxed.

2. Nesbett, Peter T., Michelle DuBois, and Elizabeth Hutton Turner. "The Education of Jacob Lawrence." Essay. In Over the Line: The Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence, 97–120. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press in association with Jacob and Gwendolyn Lawrence Foundation, 2001.
3. Caro, Julie Levin. Jacob Lawrence: Lines of Influence. Zurich, Switzerland: Verlag Scheidegger & Spiess, 2020.

5. Jacob Lawrence, *Tombstones*, 1942, opaque watercolor on paper, 30⅞ x 22 13/16in. Whitney Museum of American Art. © The Jacob and Gwendolyn Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

How often have you gone into a subway station not in a hurry? Public transit does not give us time to look through every inch of the artwork in its stations. We look at it as we rush to get to our

trains. Maybe if you pass it for a few seconds every day you'll piece together different bits over time, but I'd guess most people see it only once and for only a moment. And because Lawrence made it the way that he did, they can understand it too. In Lawrence's teaching philosophy statement, he expands upon this idea of how experience can change one's perception of an object or work of art. "I emphasize that–living, seeing," he wrote. "You may walk across campus day in and day out, and then all at once you begin to notice a certain tree that you have been passing all the time; that is the nature of experience. In drawing there is more than just the skill itself, there is also the experience behind it, the feeling, the interpretation."[4] Here, he's speaking to his students about the value of building a relationship with their subjects, but I think he's speaking to viewers of his work as well. Because it lives in a place where people can see it everyday – whether that place is a lecture hall on a Seattle campus or a subway station in New York City's Times Square – it has the potential to be viewed more deeply than a work held in a museum, something that most viewers will only see once.

Public murals shouldn't need 500 word artist statements, nor should they require viewers to know even so much as the name of the artist. It might add context, but they don't need to. Deeper context may serve the art fans, but the viewing experience of everyday passersby shouldn't be weakened by a lack of it. Lawrence took on a project that I assume the MTA wanted to be an inch deep and a mile wide, both in message and form. Literally, the mural is very wide and since it lacks shading, lacks the feeling of three dimensionality, yet he created something dimensional without dimension, and deep without visual depth.

A glass-mosaic mural, New York in Transit runs 6 feet tall and 36 feet wide and is displayed permanently in New York's Times

4. Jacob Lawrence et. al., "Faculty Notes," in Drawing, at the Henry : an Exhibition of Contemporary Drawings by Eighteen West Coast Artists, April 5-May 25, 1980, Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington. Seattle: The Gallery. 1980.

Square/42nd Street subway station. NYIT is the realized version of the second of two maquettes Lawrence painted in the late 1990s as proposals for the large project. This was Lawrence's last commissioned work. He died in 2000, a year before the piece was finished and installed. As Lawrence was unable to supervise the installation himself, his widow, the artist Gwendolyn Knight, oversaw the creation of the mosaic to ensure it stayed true to Lawrence's vision.

6. Terry Furchgott, *Seattle Center Mural I*, 1999. Approx. 25′ x 116′. The Seattle Center. ©Terry Furchgott, 2021.

The non-Lawrence artwork that NYIT reminds me of most is a magnificent, gigantic mural by Seattle artist Terry Furchgott that used to be displayed in the Seattle Center House (now known as The Armory) (figs. 6-7). Simply titled Seattle Center Mural 1, it featured a smorgasbord of people, activities, and events happening all at once. It highlighted the beauty of what the Seattle Center had to offer, but it wasn't an ad – it was a celebration. It was imposing in its size and its indulgence of color and action, yet completely

humble, presenting its subjects as they were. I began noticing it as a child in the early 2000s when my Dad would take my sister and me to the Seattle Center on his days off to have lunch and visit the Children's Museum. In 2012 the mural came down. Its subjects and style looked too dated to fit into the Seattle Center's plan to revamp the campus for its 50th anniversary. I never looked at the mural for more than a few seconds at a time, but when I think of it I feel a deep sense of nostalgia and familiarity. What the Seattle Center Mural has in common with NYIT, aside from their similar visual qualities – brightness and overlapping subjects – is that both depict regular people, and more importantly, both are displayed publicly, with regular people in mind.

7. Terry Furchgott, Seattle Center Mural I, 1999. Approx. 25′ x 116′. The Seattle Center. ©Terry Furchgott, 2021.

At its worst, NYIT could be viewed as sterile of political meaning, a mere advertisement for the MTA that the city coaxed out of him. I, however, am fairly certain Lawrence didn't phone this in. Why, at age 80, after a 60 year career devoted to painting American working

people, when given the opportunity to create a mural for one of the most iconic subway stops in the entire NYC transit system, would Lawrence suddenly make an artwork without deeper political meaning? Especially when depicting a quintessential American institution, subject matter he knew intimately and returned to over and over again in his career? Of course, Lawrence's political statements, if you can even classify them as such, are not the fiery kind. At their most overt they feel somber and haunting, like in The Ordeal of Alice from 1963, where Lawrence paints a Black child struck by arrows, surrounded by distorted human figures, depicting the first wave of children to desegregate schools in the South (fig. 8). Though Lawrence took flak from others in the Black community throughout his career for his reticence to make overt political statements, he never accepted this criticism as legitimate, claiming " 'Everything I have to say is in my paintings" , succinctly referring to the fact that one need look no further than his art to get a glimpse of his worldview.[5] Being a fan of Lawrence's work doesn't make me qualified to describe his political ideologies, but having combed through a number of his interviews with and articles about him I feel strongly that these words serve as an invitation to look at the form and content of his work as reflections of who he was as a person.

5. Turner, Elizabeth Hutton, Austen Barron Bailly, and Barbara Earl Thomas. "Tender Beauty, Wounded Hope." Preface. In Jacob Lawrence: the American Struggle, 13. Salem, MA: Peabody Essex Museum, 2020.

8. Jacob Lawrence, *The Ordeal of Alice*, 1963, egg tempera on hardboard, 24 x 20in. Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University; Gift of Dr. Herbert J. Kayden and Family in memory of Dr. Gabrielle H. Reem, 2013.105. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

As Lawrence rose to prominence during the 1930s and '40s he became acutely aware of the way critics pigeonholed Black artists into the realm of "Black art". This marginalization, this "othering", effectively worked to limit who would see the work and how they

might view it. With this in mind as well as an awareness of the economic consequences of being an outspoken Black artist, Lawrence's approach to embedding his politics into his work softened. However, as his assertion that "'Everything I have to say is in my paintings" reminds us, Lawrence would never concede that his work lacked political meaning. His politics, however, are subtle and expansive rather than militant and targeted. Scholar Paul J. Karlstrom compared the painter to fellow Rosenwald fellowship recipient and writer Zora Neale Hurston, observing that both "chose to celebrate the spirit rather than the politics of Black America as the battle for civil rights and dignity was joined in the public arena. The question for these and other black artists is to what extent they were engaged in the struggle through their work."[6] Lawrence was essentially engaged in two struggles, first, in finding sustained success as a Black artist in a white-centric art world, and second, in finding a balance between prioritizing individual goals with serving his community. His solution to this second struggle was to continue to paint working class people of color his entire career, serving them by representing them.

Lawrence's mural was commissioned during the 1990s, when former District Attorney Rudy Giuliani was elected mayor of NYC. During his administration, Giuliani unleashed a wave of exorbitantly harsh policing, with 'tough on crime' tactics like stop-and-frisk terrorizing Black and Brown communities. Given the racist impact of these policies, it's fair to wonder about the rationale for the Giuliani administration's choice to commission a prominent Black artist like Lawrence for such a publicly visible piece. Did the selection of Lawrence betray the city's cluelessness about the underlying political commentary of much of his work? Or was choosing Lawrence a disingenuous attempt to win approval from New York's BIPOC community? It's almost ironic that the city would

6. Nesbett, Peter T., Michelle DuBois, and Paul J. Karlstrom. "Jacob Lawrence: Modernism, Race, and Community." Essay. In Over the Line: The Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence, 229–46. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press in association with Jacob and Gwendolyn Lawrence Foundation, 2001.

commission an artist like Lawrence to do such a publicly visible piece. Perhaps his old age made him seem harmless to the Giuliani regime, but I believe this mural can be seen as a wolf in sheep's clothing – a quiet protest against an authoritarian political movement in the city Lawrence spent most of his life in. Writer Sewell Chan wrote "public art is populist by definition," and NYIT is as populist as can be.[7] Just to make art publicly viewable is a form of protest against the elitism of art as something reserved for rarified, white spaces, as is the choice to paint regular, everyday Black and Brown people. Simply by creating populist art in New York during a time when illiberal politics ran rampant is a form of protest.

9. Faith Ringgold, *Flying Home Harlem Heroes and Heroines*, 1996, glass mosaic mural, MTA 125th Street Station.

In 1996, the MTA commissioned murals by another Harlem native, Faith Ringgold. Ringgold's work, *Flying Home Harlem Heroes and Heroines*, lives in Harlem's 125th Street station and depicts notable Black figures such as Hurston and Malcolm X flying above the neighborhood (fig. 9). Though aesthetically different, these public

7. Chan, Sewell. "Access to Art With a MetroCard Swipe." The New York Times. The New York Times, June 30, 2005. https://www.nytimes.com/2005/06/30/arts/design/access-to-art-with-a-metrocard-swipe.html.

works by Ringgold and Lawrence share a similar spirit and vision of politics. In both, the feeling of potential, of the possibilities that come from strong community and freedom of movement, come through clearly. Yellow and black tiles bordering one section of Flying Home resemble the pattern seen on classic taxicabs, alluding to the theme of transportation even in a piece where subjects soar from point A to point B unassisted by machines.

10. Jacob Lawrence, *The Migration of the Negro, No. 12: The railroad stations were at times so crowded with people leaving that special guards had to be called to keep order.*, 1940-41, casein tempera on hardboard, 12 x 18in., The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Mrs. David M. Levy. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Transit was a common theme throughout Lawrence's career, most notably in his iconic Migration series of 1940-41, in which the theme was literally the transit of Black people from the rural South to Northern cities in the early 20th century. In panels portraying movement, you see migrants traveling North due to economic and social factors largely out of their control. In Panel 12 of the series, white guards holding batons corral the travelers onto their trains (fig. 10). In panel 18, migrants are shown in crowds simply walking to their Northern destinations. In these, color and line are used sparingly, bringing the focus onto the content and ideas behind the panels (fig. 11).

Movement and transit as amorphous themes can be seen in both Ringgold and Lawrence's work – bodies move, and their ideas, cultures, and histories are brought along and left behind. Even though his immediate family was based in New York because of the Great Migration, Lawrence felt a deep connection to his family's Southern roots, saying of the South in an interview "I was far removed from the culture I knew, but yet I was very close to it through my mother, through her friends. So there's a paradox here; being close, and yet far away… urban Northern is Southern, because my background, my family's background, the friends of my family, were all Southern in culture."[8] To Lawrence, people could in essence occupy two places at once, and transit is what allowed them to do so.

11. Jacob Lawrence, *The Migration of the Negro, No. 18: The migration gained in momentum*, 1940-41, casein tempera on hardboard, 18 x 12in., The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Mrs. David M. Levy. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

8. Jacob Lawrence and the Making of the Migration Series. YouTube. United States: The Phillips Collection, 1993. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=62dlyfIRg5E.

12. Jacob Lawrence, *Subway Acrobats*, 1959, tempera on board, 20 x 24in., Private Collection, New York. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

In 1959, Lawrence returned to the transit motif with Subway Acrobats (fig. 12). This time, everyday life is the setting, but unlike in Migration, the subjects have no destination. The dark blue background and faceless characters give it a brooding atmosphere, almost resembling a scene out of a noir film. In the center of the composition, two small figures engage in an elaborate performance and are paid little mind by the other riders.

Nearly 40 years later comes NYIT. In the last era of Lawrence's life and career the artist returned to this familiar subject, yet this time the message is gentler. In Subway Acrobats, the mundanity of everyday life weighs on the train riders – in NYIT that mundanity is honored, the daily routine of taking the subway to work or school is to be relished, not commiserated over. In one of the few analyses of this mural, scholar Michele Elam describes Lawrence as an artist who "captured the rhythms and poignancy of the everyday"- and that he was.[9]

9. Elam, Michele. "Moving Forward Together: New York in Transit." Essay. In Promised Land: the Art of Jacob Lawrence: a Gift of the Kayden Family, 50–55. Stanford, CA: Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts, Stanford University, 2015.

12. Jacob Lawrence, *New York in Transit I*, 1998, silkscreen, 12 x 36 in. Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University; Gift of Dr. Herbert J. Kayden and Family in memory of Dr. Gabrielle H. Reem, 2013.105. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

"The people in the cars who are hurtling through space have not yet arrived; they are forever journeying in the perpetual presence of this image, hurtling from unknown origin to unknown destination."[10] By the time he created NYIT Lawrence had arrived at his destination. He was an accomplished illustrator of everyday life, a subtle social critic, a chronicler of the dignity of unsung working people, and a master of creating more using less. His subject and unmistakable iconography make him one of the great American artists of the 20th century.

10. Ibid.

9. Experience in the *University*

MINGJIE MA

1. Jacob Lawrence, *University*, 1977, Gouache, tempera and graphite on paper, 32 x 24 in. Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University; Gift of Dr. Herbert J. Kayden and Family in memory of Dr. Gabrielle H. Reem, 2013.105. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Introduction

A hallway with vivid white walls, a diverse group of people walking towards you with books and tools in their hands, rushing to get somewhere. You can peek into the classrooms on both sides of the hallway through the open doors: instructors teaching vigorously with their hands gesturing, students listening attentively, and some engaged in heated discussions. The sound from several classrooms and the busy crowd around you blend in, forming a chaotic yet harmonic noise: that was my first impression of Jacob Lawrence's painting *University* (fig. 1).

"This is called *University*, I don't think I need to comment on that. I see this day in day out, so how could I not paint it?" Jacob Lawrence introduced the painting like this during his 1978 Distinguished Faculty Lecture at the University of Washington (UW).[1] Dated in 1977, the painting was produced during his years as a faculty member at UW, and drew inspiration from his experiences at the Seattle campus as well as other institutions in which he had previously studied and taught.[2] It is a constructed reality that combined his experience and philosophy related to the subject matter, as he once wrote in "My Ideas on Art (Painting) and the Artist": "My belief is that it is important for an artist to develop an approach and philosophy about life – if he has developed this philosophy he does not put paint on canvas, he puts himself on canvas."[3] In order to provide a more holistic and historically-specific understanding of this painting, Jacob Lawrence, and his philosophy in teaching, the socio-historical context of African American educators, and the

1. Jacob Lawrence, "I Wonder as I Wander". (Third Annual Distinguished Faculty Lecture, University of Washington, Seattle WA, October 5, 1978).
2. Nesbett, Peter T., and DuBois, Michelle. *Over the Line : The Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence*. Complete Jacob Lawrence (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press in Association with Jacob Lawrence Catalogue Raisonné Project, 2000), p. 25-65.
3. Black Mountain College Records, Faculty Files, Microfilm Roll 199, Archives of American Art, 1946. Also cited in Wheat, Ellen Harkins, *Jacob Lawrence, American Painter* (Seattle: University of Washington Press in Association with the Seattle Art Museum, 1986), p. 73.

value of African American struggles; this paper situates *University* within the specific contexts of African Americans' access to higher education in the US, Lawrence's own position within academia, and his experiences as both student and educator.

Jacob Lawrence and Education

Jacob Lawrence's first formal encounter with art education was in 1930 at age thirteen when he attended a day-care program after school at Utopia Children's House (UCH).[4] The arts and crafts program at UCH was established by James Wells, who learned avant garde pedagogical theories from his Columbia University Teachers College education and implemented it in the program.[5] Wells set up the classroom like a workshop – without settings that indicate the instructor's authority – and encouraged experimentation with different mediums and the idea of art.[6] Under this educational environment that Wells built, Lawrence met his mentor Charles Alston, who supervised the program at the time.[7]

Lawrence continued to study with Alston throughout the 1930s and eventually entered the WPA Harlem Art Workshop, where he stayed until 1940.[8] Alston's pedagogy aligned with Wells, and in addition, he was also influenced by other pedagogical theories from his time in Columbia, mainly John Dewey and Arthur Wesley Dow, that he employed when teaching Lawrence.[9] Dewey's philosophy focuses on "learning by doing" and advocates that the teacher's role is to assist students on the technical side of studying rather than

4. Nesbett, and DuBois. *Over the Line*, p. 25.
5. Elizabeth Hutton Turner, "The Education of Jacob Lawrence," in *Over the Line*, ed. Nesbett, and DuBois. (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press in Association with Jacob Lawrence Catalogue Raisonné Project, 2000), p. 98.
6. Turner, "The Education of Jacob Lawrence," p. 98.
7. Turner, "The Education of Jacob Lawrence," p. 98.
8. Nesbett, and DuBois. *Over the Line*, p. 26.
9. Turner, "The Education of Jacob Lawrence," p. 98-99.

assign them what subject to learn and what works to do.[10] Dow, chairman of the Fine Arts program at Columbia, championed the idea that fine art and decoration share the same principles of design and emphasized art can be found in everyday life, such as an object's pattern and shape and the visual relationship it may have with its environment.[11] Lawrence recalled Alston's teaching as not defining right or wrong but as "a support that was very, very important – that what I was doing, the way I was seeing had validity, it was very valid."[12] All of the above suggests that Lawrence's art education was unlike any formal art education and complex in nature. He once said, "During my apprentice days I wasn't grounded so much in the technical side of painting as I was in the philosophy and subject I was attempting to approach", a philosophy of art that calls for experimentation, experience, and exploration in real life.[13] Informed and influenced by many novel pedagogical theories of his time, Lawrence's education in turn also lay the groundwork for his later pedagogical development.

Lawrence's approach to painting was shaped not only by his teachers but also by his learning environments. The WPA workshop was relocated to Alston's studio in 1934, known as the Studio 306.[14] It was not just a workshop but a gathering space for artists and established Harlem intelligentsia.[15] In an interview, Lawrence recalled hearing discussion on topics other than art: "during the '30s there was much interest in black history and the social and political issues of the day – this was especially true at 306."[16] The emphasis

10. Turner, "The Education of Jacob Lawrence," p. 98.
11. Turner, "The Education of Jacob Lawrence," p. 99.
12. Jacob Lawrence, "Jacob Lawrence on his mentor Charles Alston," interview by The Philips Collection, video, 0:59, https://youtu.be/rhNRlxeO6ds.
13. Black Mountain College Records, Faculty Files, Microfilm Roll 199, Archives of American Art, 1946. Also cited in Wheat, Ellen Harkins, *Jacob Lawrence, American Painter* (Seattle: University of Washington Press in Association with the Seattle Art Museum, 1986), p. 73, and Elizabeth Hutton Turner, "The Education of Jacob Lawrence," in *Over the Line*, ed. Nesbett, and DuBois. (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press in Association with Jacob Lawrence Catalogue Raisonné Project, 2000), p. 100.
14. Turner, "The Education of Jacob Lawrence," p. 100.
15. Lawrence, in an interview with Jeff Donaldson, January 8, 1972, in Donaldson, "Generation '306,'" PhD diss, Northwestern University, 1974. Also quoted in Leah Dickerman, "Fighting Blues," in *Jacob Lawrence*: *The Migration Series*, p. 16.
16. Dickerman, "Fighting Blues," p.16.

on learning about black history and doing research work concerns the community's interest reflected in Lawrence's early works. He painted series on Toussaint L'Ouverture, Frederick Douglass, and Harriet Tubman with a historical approach based on extensive research in the library.[17] What stuck with the young Lawrence in time of 306 is the awareness of concurrent theoretical debate and social consciousness that fueled his creation in the years following.

By the time Lawrence left studio 306, he already won a few prizes and fellowships, had solo exhibitions, and became a rising figure of the New York City art scene.[18] But what brought him nation-wide recognition was his Migration series painted during 1940 and 1941. The Great Migration was a movement of hundreds and thousands of African Americans relocated from the Southern United States to the North, fled from strict segregation laws and sought better livelihood.[19] Depicting the movement which his family was a part of, the series includes not only scenes of the migration process but also the cause and effect of such migration, integrating history with Lawrence's personal reflection.[20][21] The whole series was published in color in a 1941 issue of Fortune Magazine, bringing attention, fame, and credibility to the young artists. His newfound fame kick-started his teaching career. In 1942, Lawrence worked as a summer art instructor at Workers Children's Camp (Wo-Chi-Ca), it was his first of many educational roles he took throughout his career.[22] Before he became a faculty member of UW in 1971, Lawrence taught in institutions including Black Mountain College (1955), Five Towns Music and Art Foundation (1955-62, 1966-68), Pratt institution (1956-70), Brandeis University (1965), New School for Social Research (1966-68), Art Students Leagues (1967-69), Skowhegan

17. Dickerman, "Fighting Blues," p.17.
18. Nesbett, and DuBois. *Over the Line*, p. 27-31.
19. Devoy, Maeve, and Allen Raichelle. "Great Migration." In *The American Mosaic: The African American Experience*, ABC-CLIO, 2021. Accessed June 25, 2021. https://africanamerican2-abc-clio-com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/Search/Display/1407061.
20. Dickerman, "Fighting Blues," p.17.
21. Wheat, *Jacob Lawrence, American Painter*, p.62.
22. Nesbett, and DuBois. *Over the Line*, p. 32.

School of Painting and Sculpture (1968-69), and California State College (1970).[23] Out of the ten institutions at which he once taught, seven of them were private institutions that were progressive in ways such as being diverse and inclusive of all races and genders, founded by female scholars, and working on progressive models of education etc. These institutions informed Lawrence's understanding of what an educational environment should be like and who is included.

Among these institutions, Black Mountain College stands out as Lawrence's first official teaching position, one that he considered a "milestone" and that initiated him "into the ranks of teacher".[24] The college was established with a vision to implement John Dewey's "learning by doing" philosophy.[25][26] It reminded Lawrence of studio 306: teaching was informal, faculty and students were close, everyone was learning something from each other, and an individual approach was encouraged. Josef Albers, a former educator at the famous Bauhaus school, was hired as the first art teacher.[27] Despite Lawrence's lack of teaching experience, Albers invited him to join the summer faculty and showed Lawrence how to convey ideas analytically. Albers's ideas about teaching design, color, and the picture plane became foundational to Lawrence's pedagogy.[28]

Lawrence's longest and last teaching experience was at UW, a much different one than Black Mountain College. UW is a public state university on the West Coast, and according to Lawrence, it was less competitive compared to private schools in the East.[29]

23. Nesbett, and DuBois. *Over the Line*, p. 25-65.
24. Jacob Lawrence quoted in E. Honing Fine. *The Afro-American Artist: A Search for Identity*. (New York: Holt Reinhart and Winston, 1973), p. 150. Also cited in Julie Levin Caro, "Jacob Lawrence at Black Mountain College, Summer 1946," in *Lines of Influence*, p.131.
25. "History," Black Mountain College Museum and Arts Center, accessed June 1, 2021, https://www.blackmountaincollege.org/history/
26. Caro, "Jacob Lawrence at Black Mountain College, Summer 1946", p. 133.
27. Black Mountain College Museum and Arts Center, "History."
28. Jacob Lawrence quoted in A. Berman, "Jacob Lawrence and the Making of Americans." *ARTnews*, Vol. 83, No.2 (Feburary 1984): p.85. Also cited in Caro, "Jacob Lawrence at Black Mountain College, Summer 1946", p. 141.
29. Jacob Lawrence, "Interview with Jacob Lawrence," interview by Donald Schmechel on July 27, 1987, video, 1:17:29-1:21:00. https://archive.org/details/spl_ds_jlawrence_01_01.

He described his experience at the UW as “pleasant”.[30] Lawrence liked the environment, especially the fact that it supported artists’ individual research, so that his painting did not have to “suffer from teaching”.[31] From 1971 until he retired in 1983, Lawrence was a beloved member of the UW community, and he continued to teach part-time as professor emeritus until 1985.[32]

The particularity of the *University*

The *University* depicts a scene of a busy hallway that might seem familiar to many, a chaotic yet energetic environment of learning and doing things. This painting stands out as the only painting titled *University*, a particular type of institution, and the only education-related painting created in this period that was not commissioned. There is no direct reference to UW, but the symbolic composition and color, books and tools depicted, and the implied pedagogy seen through interaction between students and educators tell us more about his experience in a state university, his education, and his philosophy. Just like he once said: “my work was mainly autobiographical.”[33]

30. Lawrence, "Interview with Jacob Lawrence," 1:13:47.
31. Lawrence, "Interview with Jacob Lawrence," 1:17:59.
32. Nesbett, and DuBois. *Over the Line*, 25-65.
33. Jacob Lawrence, "I Wonder as I Wander" (Third Annual Distinguished Faculty Lecture, University of Washington, Seattle WA, October 5, 1978).

2. Raphael, *The School of Athens*, 1509-1511, fresco, 200 × 300 in. Stanza della Segnatura, Palazzi Pontifici, Vatican City.

At first glance, the white walls and ceiling not only take up substantial portions of the picture plane but also stand out as the structure of the space that defines the composition. The use of white was no coincidence: it refers to the notion of an ivory tower, a place of privilege.[34] Moreover, the column-like walls on the side, together with the use of linear perspective that form a vanishing point at the center of the painting, also closely resembles the iconic scene of education *The School of Athens*, painted by Raphael during the height of the Italian Renaissance (fig. 2).[35] *School of Athens* pictures a gathering of renowned scholars from different times and of different disciplines. Not only does the two works' composition

34. Harry J. Elam. Jr., "Images of Higher Learning: Jacob Lawrence's University," in *Promised Land: The Art of Jacob Lawrence*, (Cantor Arts Center, 2015), p. 35.
35. Monica Ionescu, class discussion with the author, May 27, 2021.

look alike, the palette used was strikingly similar, and the appearance of books and tools resembles one another.[36] Well aware of Renaissance art, Lawrence drew this parallel to this elite hall of thinkers to suggest that higher education is not accessible to all.[37] During the 1970s, the pursuit of higher education for black people in America was challenging. Until the 1950s, higher education in America was still segregated and upheld the "separate but equal" doctrine that grants legality to the dual system.[38] Black students went to historically black colleges and universities, and white students went to designated schools that only serve them. 1954 marked the turning point of desegregation in higher education, the Supreme Court's ruling of the *Brown v. Board of Education* case declared segregated educational facilities unconstitutional.[39] After this decision, the admission rate of black students in white colleges increased slightly. However, the effect was limited because the desegregation requirements on students and faculty were not applied to institutions of higher education.[40] Only until the passage of the Higher Education Act (1965) against the backdrop of the Civil Rights Act (1964), black students were finally legally provided equal opportunity in higher education.[41] Lawrence was aware that his presence in many institutions that he taught in was something quite exceptional. In 1945, there were only 15 African American faculty in predominantly white universities and three decades later the statistics were 4.2%.[42] UW was no exception, there were only 7 black faculty members before 1969.[43][44] If it wasn't for Lawrence's success

36. Nic Staley, peer evaluation with the author, June 3, 2021. Specifically the tool's resemblance.
37. Wheat, *Jacob Lawrence, American Painter*, p.132.
38. Clifton F. Conrad, and David J. Weerts. "Desegregation in Higher Education." In *The American Mosaic: The African American Experience*, ABC-CLIO, 2021. Accessed May 12, 2021. https://africanamerican2.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/1757993.
39. Conrad and Weerts, "Desegregation in Higher Education."
40. Maria Bennett and Stafford Hood. "African Americans in Higher Education." In *The American Mosaic: The African American Experience*, ABC-CLIO, 2021. Accessed May 12, 2021. https://africanamerican2.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/1757992.
41. Bennett and Hood, "African Americans in Higher Education."
42. Bennett and Hood, "African Americans in Higher Education."
43. Taylor, Quintard. The Forging of a Black Community: Seattle's Central District from 18710 through the Civil Rights Era. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994, p. 223.
44. Walker, Dianne Louise. The University of Washington Establishment And the Black Student Union Sit-in of 1968. Thesis (M.A.), University of Washington: 1980, p.47.

as an artist, he may have had little chance in becoming an educator. It was his privilege, too, to be invited and became a faculty member in higher education.

Beyond the notion of privilege, the white walls and ceiling arrangement can also suggest his philosophy on life – the value of struggle. The arrangement creates a cage-like impression but is an incomplete one. The "cage" does not have a ground and is open on the right, with part of it being confronted by the black and purple figure in the foreground. Classrooms seem closed but there is no door to them. Restrictions and possibilities coexist in this painting, echoing Lawrence's belief in the value of struggle: "man's struggle is a very beautiful thing… The struggle that we go through as human beings enables us to develop, to take on further dimensions."[45] Lawrence's teaching career was not without struggle. His invitation to the Black Mountain College, located in the Jim Crow south, was partially motivated by the integration effort, and Lawrence did not leave campus during his stay.[46][47] Lawrence was invited mostly by private institutions that were devoted to minorities and championed diversity, accepting a predominantly white state university's invitation can also be a struggle, but as Lawrence showed in the painting, "when you don't feel struggle, there is no passion."[48]

There are other intriguing details in *University* that reveal part of Lawrence to the viewer. Most of the figures in the painting are holding books, but the purple man on the lower-left corner is holding something like a few floating glass marbles, the black figure on the lower right has a folding ruler, and the gold figure in the

45. Jacob Lawrence, lecture, November 15, 1982, quoted in Wheat, *Jacob Lawrence, American Painter*, p. 105. Also quoted in Patricia Hills, "Epilogue," in *Painting Harlem Modern*, p. 270.
46. Bryan Barcena, "Texture of the South: Roland Hayes and Integration at Black Mountain College in H. Molesworth, et, al., *Leap Before You Look*. Also cited in Caro, "Jacob Lawrence at Black Mountain College, Summer 1946."
47. M. Wilkins. Social Justice at Black Mountain College "Before the Civil Rights Age: Desegregation, Racial Inclusion, and Racial Equality at Black Mountain College," The Journal of Black Mountain College Studies, Vol. 6 (Summer 2014). Also cited in Caro, "Jacob Lawrence at Black Mountain College, Summer 1946."
48. Robin Updike, "Modern Master," *Pacific Northwest* (Seattle: Seattle Times Magazine), June 28, 1998, p. 18. Also quoted in Hills, "Epilogue," p. 270.

second classroom to the right is playing with a compass. Tools are repeated motifs that occur in many of Lawrence's paintings, but the presence of both books and tools in an educational setting has symbolic meaning. Tools are usually associated with hands-on experience and Lawrence's own education was centered on that. He has been exposed to John Dewey's philosophy of "learn by doing" through his mentor Charles Alston and at Black Mountain College.[49][50][51] The idea of education to him was not merely theoretical but of experience that is represented through tools. The juxtaposition with the *School of Athens* that was introduced earlier also provides another possible interpretation. Tools can be seen as representations of different academic disciplines: the floating marbles resemble atomic models in quantum physics, the compass references mathematics, and the folding ruler evokes architecture – just a few disciplines that Lawrence was exposed to during his teaching at different institutions.

49. Turner, "The Education of Jacob Lawrence," p. 98.
50. Black Mountain College Museum and Arts Center, "History."
51. Caro, "Jacob Lawrence at Black Mountain College, Summer 1946", p. 133.

3. Jacob Lawrence, *Library Series*: *The Schomburg*, 1986, gouache with graphite underdrawing on paper, 40 1/4 x 34 1/4 in. (102.2 x 87.0 cm). SCAD Museum of Art, Gift of Dr. Walter O. Evans and Mrs. Linda J. Evans. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Just like tools, books in Lawrence's works carry symbolic meaning as well. In the *Schomburg Library* from around the same period, books are depicted, as seen in many other Lawrence's paintings, open and in the hands of active readers, engaging in intellectual labor (fig. 3).[52] However, in *University*, none of the books are being read but held in hands as symbols. Interpreting books and tools as related symbols raises the question of Lawrence's own beliefs about African American access to education as a path to equality.[53] Lawrence's stance on this subject is clear as both symbols appear in this environment showing that he saw value in both types of education, an opinion that was probably informed and influenced by his former education which similarly combined the two.[54] He stated as much in a caption to 1947's A *Class in Shoemaking*: "knowing the value of an industrial skill as well as an academic education the

52. Hills, "Epilogue," p. 270.
53. There are two camps of this subject. On one hand, Booker T. Washington, who started the Tuskegee Institution, championed the idea that equality can be earned through work and practical skill development. While his opponent and leader of the Niagara Movement, W.E.B. Du Bois, calls for liberal arts education and civil rights as means of emancipation. Further reading: Bobby R. Holt, "Booker T. Washington." In *The American Mosaic: The African American Experience*, ABC-CLIO, 2021. Accessed June 8, 2021. https://africanamerican2.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/1477536. William McGuire, and Leslie Wheeler. "W. E. B. Du Bois." In *The American Mosaic: The African American Experience*, ABC-CLIO, 2021. Accessed June 8, 2021. https://africanamerican2.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/1404462.
54. Hills, "Epilogue," p. 267.

Negro, for many years, has worked hard to obtain both."[55] In this brief caption, Lawrence provides the viewer with insight into his own political philosophy on issues related to racial equality.

Lastly, comes the pedagogy visualized in this painting. In the three classrooms on the side of the hallway, students listen attentively to their instructors, who stand in close proximity to them. Other than standing out from the seated crowd, there are no signs of authority. The composition also brings viewers' attention to the center classroom, where the instructor seems to be listening humbly to the brown figure who is pointing towards himself. Hand gestures, a form of nonverbal communication, are depicted among students and educators to suggest the vocal aspect of communication that cannot be drawn. The lack of hierarchy and free exchange between students and teachers resembles the classroom set up at Utopia Children's House, the Studio 306, Black Mountain College, and other progressive institutions that Lawrence once taught in. The experience largely influenced his pedagogy and is also evident in the painting where students and teachers blend in visually. When asked about teaching, Lawrence said he always enjoyed the interaction with students, and saw his role as "inspirational encouragement" to them.[56] He did not enforce a certain approach on students, rather, he taught them to explore different mediums, stress the importance of design, and create art that's about one's unique "experience" and "feeling" towards an object.[57] In this pedagogical approach, Lawrence built upon what he had been taught by his own mentors, from Harlem to Black Mountain College.

55. Quoted in Hills, "Epilogue," p. 267.
56. Lawrence, "Interview with Jacob Lawrence," 1:18:32 and 1:20:27.
57. Jacob Lawrence, in *Drawing, at the Henry : An Exhibition of Contemporary Drawings by Eighteen West Coast Artists*, April 5-May 25, 1980, Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington. Seattle: Gallery, 1980, p. 52-53.

Concluding thoughts

Lawrence's experience in the university, both literally and figuratively unfolds before the viewer's eyes. As he said often, he speaks through his work. The composition and color of the painting signal the elite nature of this educational institution and an awareness of his own position of relative privilege, while also finding and grasping opportunities in an environment that might appear restricting at first. The tools and books in the work are symbols of his own education and his stand on concurrent debates. And the interaction between students and educators in the work as an embodiment of his experience and philosophy in the education field.

The topics that Lawrence discussed in this painting, who has access to education, means of education, and pedagogy are still relevant today. Taking access to education as an example, although there is an unquestionable increase in African Americans earning higher education degrees, the number is still not representative of the U.S. demographic.[58][59] Desegregation of education can be traced back to Lawrence's time, but the progress our society made was still limited. Research of 2018 by the National Center for Education Statistics shows that only 3% of U.S. full-time faculty members are Black and Hispanic.[60] And speaking of UW specifically, only 1.5% of the professorial faculty at UW were Black in 2018.[61] In the summer of 2020, the UW Black Student Union posted their seven final demands, which closely resemble the demands made by the

58. Bennett and Hood, "African Americans in Higher Education."
59. The Condition of Education 2020, National Center for Educational Statistics. Reference URL: https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/pdf/coe_cpb.pdf.
60. "Race/ethnicity of College Faculty," Fast Facts, National Center for Educational Statistics, accessed May 12, 2021, https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=61. A complete table of statistics can be found here: https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d18/tables/dt18_315.20.asp.
61. Board of Regents Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Advisory Committee Diversity Metrics Data Book (2018), University of Washington, p. 109. This report can be found here: https://depts.washington.edu/dvrsty/BOR/DEI-Data-Book-2018.pdf?_ga=2.70405264.1223729846.1623113253-169521470.1463477398.

organization in 1968, just before Lawrence's arrival on campus. Both include hiring more black faculty.[62] It is daunting to see the same issue persist as of the time that the painting was produced, but it is also the power of art to keep its audience alert and inspired from decade to decade. As Lawrence once said: "I always want to keep my work alive and moving. Maybe the new reality is the result."[63] If the 1977 *University* is still not yet the reality, as the contemporary audiences viewing this painting, it is our responsibility to reach for the tools and books to keep the discussion "alive and moving" until the walls are dismantled.

62. Andre Lawes Menchavez, "A History of BSU's Demands: Repeating Our University's Oppressive Past," *The Daily*, Nov 29, 2020. Read the report here: https://www.dailyuw.com/opinion/bsu/article_637a4448-32bc-11eb-b69a-9779a08acebf.html.
63. "Clarence Major Interviews: Jacob Lawrence, the Expressionist." *The Black Scholar* 9, no. 3 (1977): 14-27.

PART III

BEYOND SEATTLE

10. Intellectual Labor

Jacob Lawrence and the Library

BAILEE STRONG

Abstract

This article follows the development of representations of libraries in Jacob Lawrence's work throughout the twentieth century. Images of libraries persist over the expanse of his career through social unrest, popular art movements, geographical location, and artistic evolution, therefore cementing the significance of this iconography beyond a singular image. *Schomburg Library* (1987), a painting commissioned for the library of the same name in Harlem, makes an important departure from Lawrence's other depictions of these spaces of education. When compared to works such as *Builders- Man on a Scaffold* (1985), *Schomburg Library* modifies the definition of labor to expand beyond the physical. While many of the paintings in the *Builders* series are of traditional carpentry and woodworking, images such as *The Builders Family* (1993) show parental duties as its own kind of industry.

Early in Lawrence's career, he painted *The Libraries Are Appreciated* (1943) with the bustling energy of those who are eager to learn; the focus on people actively in charge of their education is carried throughout each iteration of the theme. The artist would continue to expand upon this theme over the decades, eventually creating *Schomburg Library* and directly addressing his history with the collection housed there. In preparation for various series throughout the mid-twentieth century, Lawrence delved into the archives of Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. This research took months to complete and is itself a form of intellectual

energy; *Builders- Man on Scaffold* parallels the physical labor of construction to the intellectual development symbolized by *Schomburg Library*.

1. Jacob Lawrence, *Library Series: The Schomburg*, 1986, gouache with graphite underdrawing on paper, 40 1/4 x 34 1/4 in. (102.2 x 87.0 cm). SCAD Museum of Art, Gift of Dr. Walter O. Evans and Mrs. Linda J. Evans. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

As a history painter himself, Lawrence understood, better than most, the importance of the library as a powerful source of inspiration. Lawrence was a young teenager during the Great Depression in Harlem, New York, and was encouraged to take advantage of public resources in the community- many of which were within walking distance of one another.[1] Being within close proximity to the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture made his subjects for paintings in the 30s, 40s, and 50s all the more accessible.[2] The stories of heroes and heroines of history that had been told to him through street orators, teachers, and librarians were available to research and bring to life.[3] In order to create historically informed paintings, he translated documents to tell the story of the primary and secondary sources he researched extensively.[4] The amount of work required to produce these images is immense, and this is acknowledged through a mirroring of the formal qualities of *Schomburg Library* and *Builders- Man on Scaffold* (fig. 1, fig. x). A common depiction of labor in Lawrence's work manifests in images of construction workers under the *Builders*' theme, such as *Builders- Man on Scaffold*, however, this representation begins to unravel in depictions of builders who do not perform this version of physical labor like *The Builders Family*. An exploration into Lawrence's depictions of labor expands the definition beyond the physical industry. Using the same visual conventions, *Schomburg Library* is treated as if it is part of the *Builders* theme in parallel intellectual labor required in Lawrence's practice to physical labor in scenes of construction.

1. "Harlem Walking Tour: Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture," One Way Ticket: Jacob Lawrence's Migration Series (MoMA, 2015), https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2015/onewayticket/walking-tour/3a/.
2. Peter Nesbett and Patricia Hills, Jacob Lawrence: Thirty Years of Prints (1963-1993) (Bellevue, Wa: Bellevue Art Museum, 1994), 45.
3. Jacob Lawrence and Xavier Nicholas, "Interview with Jacob Lawrence," Callaloo 36, no. 2 (2013): pp. 260-267, https://doi.org/24264907, 262.
4. Jacob Lawrence and Xavier Nicholas, "Interview with Jacob Lawrence," 262.

2. Jacob Lawrence, *The Library*, 1978, screenprint, 10 7/8 x 15 1/8 in (image). © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Jacob Lawrence depicted the library in varying conditions and styles throughout his career from *The Library* (fig. 2, 1960) to *Schomburg Library* (1986), all of which maintain a high level of respect for the information and community these spaces provide. The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture was the main archival source for Lawrence's historical paintings, such as the *Migration* series. In an interview with Carroll Greene, Lawrence stated, "Yes, I did quite a bit of research. I was fortunate in that we had the Schomburg Library, which had become one of my favorite places to go... work and do research. And this is where I think I read many books, Du Bois and many books like this."[5] He used these public documents to translate into a visual story that exemplified the wealth of knowledge and inspiration of primary sources.[6] This library serves the community of Harlem with a wealth of resources in its

5. Oral history interview with Jacob Lawrence, 1968 October 26. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
6. Jacob Lawrence and Xavier Nicholas, "Interview with Jacob Lawrence," 262.

collection. The community was so involved after the opening of the "Division of Negro History, Literature, and Prints" in 1925, in fact, that the institution could not replenish books at the same pace they were consumed by the public.[7] The opening of the Arthur A. Schomburg Collection would become a priceless resource for Lawrence's career as he spent months of time researching for paintings such as the *Migration* series.[8] Lawrence said about his research process, "I would go to the Schomburg Library and read books on these various personalities. I would take plenty of notes. Then I would go back to my studio and peruse the notes and edit them. I would select notes that describe an action that I could visualize as a painting."[9] In order to identify the key moments for a composition, Lawrence would read through his sources, take extensive notes, and revise them repeatedly to eliminate any extraneous details.[10] This ensures his images will distill the crucial moments in history that he has discovered in the archive. As a result of this work, his paintings serve to encourage others to delve into the wealth of knowledge available as well as become an even more accessible piece of history.

7. Deborah Willis, "The Schomburg Collection: A Rich Resource for Jacob Lawrence," in Jacob Lawrence: The Migration Series, 1st ed. (Washington, D.C.: Rappahannock Press, in association with the Phillips Collection , 1993): 34.
8. Willis, "The Schomburg Collection," 35.
9. Lawrence, Nicholas, "Interview with Jacob Lawrence," 262.
10. Ibid.

3. Jacob Lawrence, *The Libraries Are Appreciated*, 1943, gouache on paper, 37.3 x 54.9 cm., Philadelphia Museum of Art. The Louis E. Stern Collection. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

In contrast to previous iterations of the library theme, such as *The Libraries Are Appreciated* (fig. 3), the composition of *Schomburg Library* stacks the figures within a vertical frame. Warm tones of brown and grey serve as a public invitation into the room while simultaneously forming a narrow aisle full of energetically formed human figures. Brown and grey dominate the color palette to ground the composition and provide a clearer sense of direction. Additions of red, blue, and yellow not only invigorate the palette but provide movement with the oscillation of cool and warm tones. The planes of the composition are flattened as if they all exist on the same surface; the red and blue elements contribute to this flatness by creating a visual illusion of receding and protruding throughout the composition. Even with this perception of flatness, there is still a feeling of activity.[11] The central figure, a man walking toward the viewer, is carrying an inordinate number of books in his arms that he struggles to carry. Another figure in the foreground excitedly turns the pages of a magazine that he hunches over with a smile. The composition is lined on one side with figures actively reading while the opposite displays the sheer number of novels yet to be studied. The line quality contributes to the contained chaos as the shapes resist hard edges or geometric shapes; bodies are pliable, books are warped, and shelves are interrupted by curved sculptures. Excess at every turn, this scene embodies the wealth of knowledge there is to gain from the library. The color of the floor blends the

11. Clarence Major, and Jacob Lawrence. "Clarence Major Interviews: Jacob Lawrence, the Expressionist." The Black Scholar 9, no. 3 (1977): 22.

figures into the architecture of the ground, and the color of the book covers mimic the figures' clothes; the figures become a part of the fabric of the library itself through Lawrence's use of form and color. In conversation with Clarence Major, Lawrence said that "As you move up you have form and content. You can't separate them. For a work to be successful they must merge. The ideal is for them to merge so you can't separate them."[12] The forms created by blocks of color merge to become the fabric of the library which cannot be disconnected. The public is what keeps the library alive and invigorated; it is a communal and reciprocal relationship.

Always observant, Lawrence used similar visual constructions and took inspiration from his community when he began to paint scenes of carpenters and various laborers amid energetic construction for his Builders series.[13] Lawrence addresses his subjects in an interview with Xavier Nicholas when he says:

4. Jacob Lawrence, *The Builders Family*, 1993, gouache on paper, 66 x 56.5 cm., Francie Bishop Good and David Horwitz, Fort Lauderdale. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

> "I've always dealt with my experiences, either directly or indirectly. My work in that way is autobiographical… The *Builders* paintings come out of my experience being around cabinetmakers when I was a youngster. I paint my impressions of the things I know about and the things I have experienced… I just try to put down my emotions and

12. Clarence Major, and Jacob Lawrence, "Clarence Major Interviews," 18.
13. Patricia Hills, "Epilogue," in Painting Harlem Modern, 266.

> feelings about how I respond to my surroundings. That's what I'm trying to do in my paintings."[14]

This emotional interpretation of labor contributes to distinct features recognizable in the paintings under the *Builders* theme. The perspective of later Builders images, such as *Builders- Man on Scaffold*, is severely tilted and elevated above the horizon while the imagery is formatted in a narrow vertical composition, giving the audience an expansive view of the scene.[15] The painted tools, construction material, and bodies assist the transition between planes and contribute to the pyramidal figure that places the focus at the apex; the energy nearly pushes the figures from the edge of the painting as they are collected in the foreground.[16] While Lawrence's *Builders* series primarily concerns images of carpenters and construction workers, these are not the only figures depicted hard at work. *The Builders Family*, for example, shows the exhausted man at the head of the table with his tools spread throughout the room, while a mother figure steps in to care for their family (fig. 4). The vertical aspect ratio prioritizes detail for the tools, places the laboring figure at the apex of a pyramidal arrangement, and tilts the perspective to view the subjects from a higher angle. These qualities parallel the labor required to care for a house and family to the construction performed by manual workers in the series. This unorthodox vision of *Builders* broadens the definition of labor beyond carpentry and into a humanistic exploration. These paintings were hopeful assertions that are crucial to Lawrence's humanistic underpinnings; they demonstrate communal work and effort to create change.[17]

14. Jacob Lawrence and Xavier Nicholas, "Interview with Jacob Lawrence," 264.
15. Ellen Harkins Wheat, Jacob Lawrence (University of Washington, 1987): 176.
16. Ibid., 176-177
17. Peter Nesbett, "Jacob Lawrence: The Builders Paintings," (1998), 14.

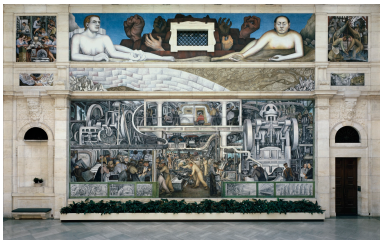
5. Jacob Lawrence, *Man On Scaffold*, 1985, color lithograph, 29 7/8 x 22 1/8 in. Private Collection. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Builders- Man on Scaffold exemplifies the formal elements demonstrated in *The Builders Family* and is visually similar to *Schomburg Library*; this implies they have more in common in

content than at first glance (fig. 5). The two paintings share a simple palette of brown, grey, and primary colors that fill the vertical composition. The main figure of either image stands in the center apex of the composition with the tools of their labor in hand; the man on the scaffold holds a clamp while the figure in the library carries several books. Bookshelves serve as the platform to elevate the figure in *Schomburg Library* while the builder is lifted by the scaffolding. Other figures within the compositions recede into the background and populate each with a diverse selection of experiences. In an interesting parallel, the woman in *Builders- Man on Scaffold* cradles an object in a similar pose as a figure; this illuminates how closely related the images are in compositional arrangement. The woman cranes her neck to the side to look down gleefully at what she is holding, possibly books, and the construction of a building carries on next to her. Holding the same pose, the figure in *Schomburg Library* positions their left arm underneath the novel and bends at the neck to get a closer look as the active consumption and building of knowledge takes place next to them. The open windows in *Builders- Man on Scaffold* serve as a telescope into the lives of the community as they carry out everyday tasks indicative of a genre scene. This intimate sight into surrounding buildings is mimicked in the *Schomburg Library* by images that reference the content of the novel on its cover. Harriet Tubman's silhouette is reflected on the dust cover of one of the novels to serve as the audience's window into the contents.[18] These visual similarities highlight the treatment of both subjects as laborious; paralleling the physical labor of construction with the intellectual labor required by Lawrence to carry out the research to inform his art.

18. Nesbett and Hills, Jacob Lawrence: Thirty Years of Prints (1963-1993), 45.

Diego Rivera, a Mexican muralist working throughout the early twentieth century, contributed public art that spoke to Harlem during the Depression, and Lawrence took notice of the socially-minded art being produced.[19] Rivera's commissioned mural, titled *Detroit Industry*, for Henry Ford's River Rouge factory is helpful for understanding Lawrence's unconventional depictions of labor because it provides a point of comparison between his human-centered compositions and Rivera's hybrid focus of the worker as a machine (fig. 6, fig. 7).[20] Made in 1932, *Detroit Industry* immortalizes Ford, a large production factory with a sizable workforce, while having a critical outlook on the intense capitalist property that perpetuates commodity fetishism.[21] In contrast to Lawrence's *Builders- Man on Scaffold*, *Detroit Industry* is heavily focused on the machinery that comprises the factory. Meticulous attention is paid to the intricacies of the machinery required to build Ford's automobiles, and Rivera relegates that product to a barely visible location in the background.[22] *Detroit Industry*, *North Wall* centralizes the apex of movement within the machine where technicians are dwarfed on



6. Diego M. Rivera, *Detroit Industry*, South Wall, 1932-33, Gift of Edsel B. Ford. Photo © 1989 The Detroit Institute of Arts.

19. Elizabeth Hutton Turner, "The Education of Jacob Lawrence," in Over the Line: The Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence, ed. Frobia W Simpson and Peter T Nesbett (Seattle, Wa: University of Washington Press, 2000), 102.
20. Anthony Lee, "Workers and painters: social realism and race in Diego Rivera's Detroit murals" in The social and the real: political art of the 1930s in the western hemisphere, 2006, 202.
21. Lee, "Workers and Painters," 202-206.
22. Ibid., 204.

7. Diego M. Rivera, *Detroit Industry*, North Wall, 1932-33, Gift of Edsel B. Ford. Photo © 1989 The Detroit Institute of Arts.

all sides by the towering equipment. Like Lawrence, Rivera believed the laboring process itself is important to depict, however, *Detroit Industry* portrays the human workers as an efficient workforce that becomes as rhythmic as the machinery itself. The individuality of labor and experience is stripped away.[23] The volume of bodies works as one entity that appears to have no other desires outside of labor.[24] The subjective human experience is centered in paintings such as *Builders- Man on Scaffold*; analog tools are the supporting element to the laborer themselves. To Lawrence, the human subject is essential to a painting to communicate with the viewer.[25] In comparison with Rivera's mural, the focus on individuals and communities shine with optimism throughout Lawrence's depictions of labor. This is exemplified by Lawrence when he says "...Man's struggle is a very beautiful thing... The struggle that we go through as human beings enable us to develop, to take on further dimensions."[26] The focus on struggle and development is seen in both the depictions of physical labor in scenes of builders as well as libraries; the material for this development is different, but the goal is the same.

The library represented a place for Lawrence to learn from his community in the present by attending the lectures and community meetings held there.[27] He listened to historians in his community, and eventually, he would follow in their footsteps to become a

23. Ibid., 208.
24. Ibid., 209.
25. Wheat, Jacob Lawrence, 4.
26. Hills, "Epilogue," 270.
27. Jacob Lawrence and Henry Louis Gates, "An Interview with Jacob," An Interview with Jacob Lawrence by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., no. No. 19 (1995): pp. 14-17, https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/4381286, 14-15.

historian in his own right. Not only were his paintings documenting stories of black heroes and heroines told to him by his teachers and librarians, but he was actively recording events and people on the streets in the present to continue his own historical education.[28] Both the historical figures within the pages of novels and the actual people Lawrence observed in the library provided a variety of subjects of Lawrence's paintings. Lawrence's depictions of libraries demonstrate the vast evolution of style over decades while remaining consistent in composing reading figures as the focal point of the image. *The Libraries are Appreciated* silhouettes the patrons by the shelf teeming with books, their figures are contrasted in red and white draws the eye to their activity. The horizontal composition, simple color palette, and still figures create a calm environment; this convention is invigorated with movement and color in later depictions of the same location such as the *Schomburg Library*.

While the main figures in these compositions are typically construction workers, Lawrence's observations about labor under the *Builders* theme expand beyond that definition.[29] The universality of labor transforms these images into near genre scenes.[30] Lawrence views labor in *Builders- Man on Scaffold* within the framework of human skill and production that happens within a small community; *Schomburg Library* demonstrates a similar production and cycle of knowledge that happens within a select group. In order to portray historical figures and events in an informed way, he had to accept the responsibility of developing a historical sense which, as Arthur A. Schomburg stated, was a slow and difficult process.[31] Learning about, researching, and creating the archive is in itself a form of labor, different from construction or building a family, but an immense responsibility. Visually paralleling *Schomburg Library* to

28. Willis, "The Schomburg Collection," 35; Lawrence, Nicholas, "Interview with Jacob Lawrence," 261.
29. Lowery Stokes Sims, "The Structure of Narrative: Form and Content in Jacob Lawrence's Builders Paintings, 1946-1998," in Over the Line: The Art of Jacob Lawrence, 209.
30. Wheat, Jacob Lawrence, 157.
31. Arthur Schomburg, "The Negro Digs Up His Past," 1925: 670.

Builders-Man on Scaffold broadened the perception of labor beyond physical work to include intellectual labor that is required to interpret historical documents.

11. Hiroshima

Jacob Lawrence, War, and Activism

KIRA SUE

Abstract

In order to attempt a serious understanding of Jacob Lawrence's *Hiroshima* series of 1983, the characterization of Lawrence as an apolitical artist must first be questioned through a discussion of the ways in which Lawrence's work has been praised for this quality and the artist's increasing connections to activism from the 1960s on, such as in his depictions of the civil rights movement. To contextualize the *Hiroshima* series in Lawrence's oeuvre, this essay will discuss the artist's previous work on the topic of World War II in his *Coast Guard* and *War* series of 1943-1945 and 1947 respectively, as well as the existing scholarly treatment of these series. An exploration of his commitment to activism, combined with the historical context of relevant events such as the Three Mile Island disaster of 1979, provide possible motivations for Lawrence to return to the topic of World War II 36 years later.

1. Jacob Lawrence, *Hiroshima series*, 1983, tempera and gouache on paper, 23 x 17 1/2 in. each. Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Alexander Harrison Fund. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Jacob Lawrence's Hiroshima series of 1983 is one of the many understudied works of Lawrence's later career, perhaps because of its untidy fit within the accepted narrative surrounding Lawrence, his career, and his politics (fig. 1). Despite an unfortunate scholarly habit of discussing his long career myopically through the lens of his Harlem youth, Lawrence's practice and approach to his topics were anything but static. In order to approach this series seriously, a complete reevaluation of the overdetermined reading of Lawrence as an apolitical artist is necessary. The *Hiroshima* panels are by far the most graphic depictions of violence in his oeuvre: they are shockingly visceral, the figures' exposed skulls clearly visible. Nevertheless, at the time of their publication in the reprint of John Hersey's *Hiroshima*, they were an unequivocal success. The book completely sold out and generated great acclaim. When placed into the context of Lawrence's work on the subject of World War II and

his increasing interaction with activist movements since the 1960s, it becomes clear that the *Hiroshima* series is not without precedent, but is rather the culmination of Lawrence's lifelong commitment to contributing to justice through his artistic practice.

Early Career

"There is little or no hint of social propaganda in his pictures, and no slighting of the artistic problems involved, such as one finds in many of the contemporary social-theme painters."[1] This is how Alain Locke, one the most distinguished representatives of the Harlem art and intellectual scene, described Jacob Lawrence's work in 1940. Locke was instrumental in launching the young artist's career. He wrote letters for funding, corresponded with gallerists, and produced some of the first serious writing on Lawrence's work, positioned within an essay entitled 'Naïve and Popular Painting and Sculpture. Art historian Lizetta Lefalle-Collins has argued that this early criticism "sealed the context for Lawrence's work" within Harlem and discourses of primitivism and the "naive,"" for instance in favorable critical reviews that praised his "poster-like bright colored scenes" and "the cut-out kindergarten gaiety of his protest." These ostensibly positive impressions may raise alarm bells for contemporary readers or those already familiar with Lawrence, and for good reason. As Lefalle-Collins has shown, these back-handed compliments from white and black critics alike would come to dog Lawrence's entire artistic production, a framework for understanding his work that would remain "the most overarching and enormously complicated issue of his career."[2]

1. Lowery Stokes Sims, "The Structure of Narrative: Form and Content in Jacob Lawrence's Builders Paintings, 1946-1998," in Over the Line: the Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence, ed. Peter T. Nesbett (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press in association with Jacob Lawrence Catalogue Raisonné Project, 2000), 214.
2. Lizzetta Lefalle-Collins, "The Critical Context of Jacob Lawrence's Early Works, 1938-1952," in Over

Though Lefalle-Collins focuses on the problem of Lawrence's ascribed primitivism, taken in conjunction with Locke's focus on 'propaganda', it becomes apparent that the two ideas are linked. Indeed, this is visible in the above comment where the "kindergarten gaiety" is explicitly linked to and undermines Lawrence's "protest." These characterizations of Lawrence were anything but accidental. Contemporary scholarship acknowledges that critics often preferred to ignore the realities of Lawrence's artistic training and intellectual connections in favor of a narrative of unspoiled artistic inspiration. Though it may be surprising given their mutual goal of elevating Black artistic production, Locke's treatment of Lawrence, such as his use of the word naïve, was more intentional yet. Black artists, critics, and intellectuals were aware of white interest in the 'primitive,' and often cannily exploited this ignorance.[3]

Context is everything. For example, the first of Locke's above quotes was taken from a letter written on behalf of Lawrence to the Julius Rosenwald Fund with the intention of attaining a substantial scholarship for the young artist. This context and monetary incentive casts Locke's words in a completely different light. The comment on "propaganda" can be read as reassuring a conservative potential benefactor that Lawrence creates 'appropriate' art, while the emphasis on "artistic problems" center's Lawrence's identity as a Modern artist. This assertion of Modernism is important as in the 1940s and '50s artistic discourse was almost singularly focused on formal experimentation, and works not fitting within the ascetic Modernism framework were at risk of critical dismissal.[4]

Early writing about Lawrence by Locke and others is often invoked in scholarship sans this deeper contextualization, for instance in connection with assertions about Lawrence's humanism.

the Line: the Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence, ed. Peter T. Nesbett (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press in association with Jacob Lawrence Catalogue Raisonné Project, 2000), 122, 123, 134.

3. Ibid., 122.
4. Ibid., 121.

Art historian Lowery Stokes Sims's analysis of the artist's Builders works is one example: she cites Locke to support her argument for Lawrence as a humanist, universalist, and insider.[5] Sims's focus is the artist's "conceptualization of form," and in concentrating on the issue of abstraction and style, questions of the power dynamic between a young, Black, working-class artist and his mentor and a wealthy, largely white institution looking for suitable recipients of their charity are left unexplored as they do not pertain to her particular point, nonetheless, it demonstrates the possibility for misinterpretation where context is not included. Art historian Patricia Hills also uses Lawrence's humanism to posit that he, "did not feel himself at war with America" and "took the humanist view."[6] These statements, especially the bold claim regarding what Lawrence may or may not have felt, come across as dissonant when contrasted with the evidence of Lawrence's engagement with activism present in her own chapter. It is worth noting how humanism often appears alongside claims of Lawrence's apolitical nature, and how it may serve to soften or deflect uncomfortable truths.

The frequent linkage of humanism and Lawrence's supposedly apolitical nature is reminiscent of how the artist's work was often pacified in presentation and discussion. This making-safe was likely initiated originally by Lawrence and his mentors, as shown above, to help the young artist attain the financial resources he would need in order to succeed. However, this safe image was then co-opted by critics and a wider white audience once his art world stature began to rise. Racial tensions were high throughout the 20th century, and artistic institutions began to face more pressure from increasingly organized Black artists and critics to show their work. As so often happens when minorities fight for entrance into spaces historically restricted through the structures of white supremacy,

5. Sims, "The Structure of Narrative," 213-214.
6. Patricia Hills, "Jacob Lawrence's Paintings during the Protest Years of the 1960s," in Over the Line: the Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence, ed. Peter T. Nesbett (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press in association with Jacob Lawrence Catalogue Raisonné Project, 2000), 186.

one individual may be selected by the majority as a concession, a process commonly referred to as tokenism. Lawrence was the first Black artist to be represented by a mainstream New York City gallery and shortly thereafter, was the first to achieve such a high level of success and recognition. Throughout his career Lawrence would often be the first Black artist, or the first Black person, invited into various institutions, committees, and roles. This was no accident. Severe racial turmoil was a constant across the artist's 60-plus year career, from the red summer of his youth to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and beyond. As an artist who was 'made safe' – that is, popularly perceived as not openly hostile to institutions, the government, or whites – Lawrence was often used as an asset and as a balm against this wound, as in Portland, Oregon in 1943 when the *Migration* series was deployed to help quell tensions between white dockworkers and recently arrived Black workers. Though this issue of the Safe Jacob Lawrence can be difficult to detect definitively, it is worth remaining aware of its specter when considering scholarship on Lawrence as well as his treatment by institutions.

After this initial strategy was launched by Locke, Lawrence had many incentives to maintain it, or at least, not to actively dispel it. During his early career he was largely sustained by government work and charitable organizations. As a young artist, roughly between 1936 and 1939, Lawrence worked in the Civilian Conservation Corps, and later, for the Works Progress Administration. This work was financially indispensable to his family, and also meaningful to him personally: Lawrence often referred to his time in the WPA as his education.[7] Shortly thereafter he was assigned to the Coast Guard from 1943 to 1945, during which he experienced what he described as the "best democracy I've ever known" aboard the *Sea Cloud* (fig. 2).[8] Over the first 10 years of

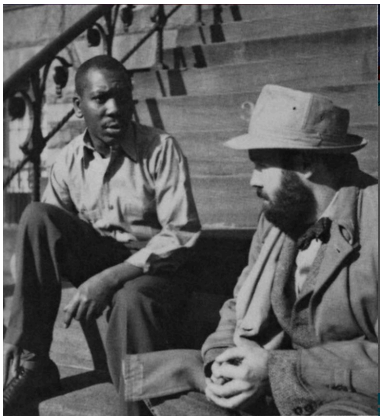
7. Elizabeth Hutton Turner, "The Education of Jacob Lawrence," in Over the Line: the Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence, ed. Peter T. Nesbett (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press in association with Jacob Lawrence Catalogue Raisonné Project, 2000), 100.
8. John Ott, "Battle Station MoMA," American Art 29, no. 3 (2015): 74.

Lawrence's career, he was often employed by the U.S. government, and from these comments, it seems to have been a mostly positive experience. This is to say that Lawrence depended on a working relationship with the government for his own material and often, artistic, well-being. It would not have been in his interest to alienate this valuable resource.

2. United States Coast Guard Public Relations Division, Brooklyn Guardsman Combat Artist in Atlantic, c. 1944. Photograph. Still Picture Branch, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD, 26-G-3807

The second source of Lawrence's finances, scholarships and fellowships from charitable institutions, is a fascinating story. Lawrence still needed to remain acceptable and avoid alienating important resources, but his financial connections also reveal involvement with leftist political groups, some of them quite radical. Beginning in 1937 with a two-year scholarship to the American Artists School, associated with both socialist and communist schools of thought, Lawrence was rarely without some form of institutional sponsorship. In 1940, and again in 1942, Lawrence would apply to and receive the aforementioned fellowship from the Julius Rosenwald Fund, a paternalistic foundation dedicated to the 'betterment of mankind.' It may be widely known that Lawrence was the frequent recipient of these types of awards, however, their size and significance has not been adequately acknowledged. Early in Lawrence's career he received a series of awards valuing between $20,000 and $50,000, adjusted for inflation.

Some of these financial connections had long durations such as the Rosenwald Fund who, in addition to the scholarship, also likely paid Lawrence's salary during his time at Black Mountain College, and in 1954 Lawrence was referred to a fellowship by his friend, Jay Leyda, curator at MoMA and a communist (fig. 3).[9] In short, Lawrence had enormous incentives not to do anything that would make him less appealing to scholarship selection committees, especially considering that he was funded alternately by left and right-wing foundations.



3. Jacob Lawrence with Jay Leyda, Brooklyn, 1941, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library

Later in his career Lawrence would encounter negative incentives from the U.S. government to maintain his semblance of neutrality. The McCarthyism of the early 1950s would threaten artists and progressives across the United States, including some that Lawrence knew, reaching its pinnacle in the House Committee on Un-American Activities of 1954. Between 1961 and 1964 both Jacob and Gwendolyn Lawrence were intermittently hassled over their trip to Nigeria, with the government even going so far as to take measures to deny them access to lodgings before retreating under threat of a lawsuit. Even without provoking attention, the Lawrences faced the threat of unwanted scrutiny. This likely explains some of Lawrence's more adamant refusals of involvement with politics. In 1952 Lawrence refused an invitation by the

9. Peter T. Nesbett, Michelle DuBois, and Patricia Hills, Over the Line: The Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence, (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press in Association with Jacob Lawrence Catalogue Raisonné Project, 2000), 28-38.

government to improve America's reputation by lecturing abroad.[10] This refusal has been read as a veiled critique of American democracy, along with the *Struggle* series completed during this time about which Richard Powell states, "Lawrence concealed [his] contempt for American chauvinism and intolerance with more subtle tactics: by revealing the absurdity of certain American symbols via modernist painting techniques and by presenting the often complicated truths of their subjects within a nonliteral framework."[11] It could also be viewed as a strategy of self-protection, a refusal to collaborate with the government on any project even vaguely political. Lawrence made a similar refusal in 1980 to President Carter when invited to the White House to be honored for painting pictures protesting racism. Lawrence objected to the use of the term protest, possibly feeling that it was too nakedly political.[12] He would have been far from the only Black artist during this time to make political art while remaining indirect enough to avoid confirmation by either the press or government of his views.[13] Before 1950 however, Lawrence's most significant experience with the government was his *Coast Guard* series.

Wartime

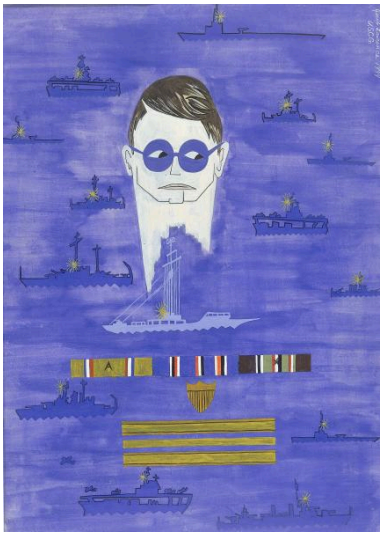
To begin analyzing Jacob Lawrence's Word War II subject matter, The most substantial scholarly studies of Jacob Lawrence's World War II subject matter are John Ott's 2015 article in American Art about the Coast Guard series, and a recent dissertation by Robert Ribera, *Between Patriotism and Pacifism*, which connects

10. Richard J. Powell, "Harmonizer of Chaos: Jacob Lawrence at Midcentury," in Over the Line: the Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence,ed. Peter T. Nesbett (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press in association with Jacob Lawrence Catalogue Raisonné Project, 2000), 163.
11. Ibid., 160.
12. Hills, "Jacob Lawrence's Paintings during the Protest Years of the 1960s," 189.
13. Powell, "Harmonizer of Chaos," 149.

Lawrence's three series on World War II. Both authors note the change in tone between the *Coast Guard* and *War works*, which gradually become more somber and meditative about the costs of war, and less focused on the opportunities military service presented for racial integration. This important shift in Lawrence's perspective set the stage for his increasingly condemning portraits of war throughout his career. In Battle Station MoMA, Ott argues that Lawrence's initial optimism in the *Coast Guard* series stemmed primarily from his posting aboard the first integrated ship in the navy, the *Sea Cloud*, under the progressive Captain Charlton Skinner. This context suggests that Lawrence was less a supporter of war itself than of the opportunities it presented for Black Americans, exemplified by the well-known double v campaign in the press in which the fight against white supremacy at home was linked to the fight against Nazi ideology abroad.[14] Only one of the *Coast Guard* paintings veers into the territory of glorification, *The Big Gun*, and even then, the weapon is not shown in action but is more akin to a prop in a genre scene of life aboard a military ship. It is also clear that Lawrence and Skinner were close, Skinner being the subject of one of Lawrence's few portraits. Based on the circumstances, it seems that the two men worked together to further a shared agenda for racial integration beginning with Skinner's promotion of Lawrence to a public relations position where he was encouraged to paint.[15]

14. Ott, "Battle Station MoMA," 66.
15. Ibid., 66.

With the War series of 1946-47, Lawrence turned his gaze to the costs of war rather than the opportunities it presented. His transfer to the *General Wilds P. Richardson* towards the end of his naval career may have contributed to this shift in tone. Lawrence described the experience in this way:



4. Jacob Lawrence, *Captain Skinner*, 1944, gouache on paperboard, 29 1/8 x 21 1/8 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

> I was on a troop transport ship which was a very sad experience, something that will remain with me for the rest of my life. We would go overseas carrying 5,000 troops and we would come back a hospital ship. I'm sure that many of these cases are in the hospital today – basket cases. I'll always remember the physical and psychological damage.[16]

Lawrence obviously took the tragedies he witnessed during this time very hard. His discussion of the "basket cases" and focus on psychological damage may even reveal a resonation with his own struggles with mental health. Regardless, it marks a stark contrast from the positive terms in which Lawrence discussed his time aboard the *Seacloud*. The *War* series also presents a blending in focus of the military experience of war and the civilian experience of war, as Lawrence himself explained:

16. Ibid., 74.

> I attempted to portray the feelings and emotions that are felt by the individual – both fighter and civilian. A wife or a mother receiving a letter from overseas; the next of kin receiving a notice of casualty; the futility men feel when at sea or down in a foxhole just waiting, not knowing what part they are playing in a much broader and gigantic plan.[17]

This trend is strengthened in the *Hiroshima* series which presents only the civilian experience, there is no visible evidence of a military presence except for the effects on the human body.

The Breaking Point

The violence of the 1960s played out in the clash over civil rights appears to have been a breaking point for Jacob Lawrence, pushing him out of his comfort zone and into more clearly political expressions. As I have argued, Lawrence was never a truly apolitical artist and consistently made work that functioned as political commentary, most recently in the *Struggle* series. However, his work produced in the '60s crossed a line.

17. Ibid., 73.

5. Jacob Lawrence, *The Ordeal of Alice*, 1963, egg tempera on hardboard, 24 x 20in. Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University; Gift of Dr. Herbert J. Kayden and Family in memory of Dr. Gabrielle H. Reem, 2013.105. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

The starkest example of this is the 1963 painting *Ordeal of Alice*, *in which* menacing demons 'demons' loom over the young girl (fig. 5). Lawrence explained the need for the figures by stating that they represented an ugly situation which could only be expressed

through distortion, a statement to keep in mind when examining *Hiroshima*, with its vibrating outlines. However, the most significant change in the civil rights works is the fact that they often depict specific moments and some compositions are even based on press photos, leaving behind the protective distance and identity of historian and engaging directly with the present moment. *Alice* is based on the famous photograph of Elizabeth Eckford attempting to enter a school that is being desegregated, white students' twisted masks of hatred visible all around her, while *American Revolution* called to mind photos of the attack dogs that had been recently unleashed on crowds in Birmingham.[18] *Confrontation on the Bridge* also shows a specific interaction between Martin Luther King Jr. and the police blocking the bridge to Birmingham.[19]

18. Hills, "Jacob Lawrence's Paintings during the Protest Years of the 1960s," 181.
19. Deborah Wye, Committed to Print: Social and Political Themes in Recent American Printed Art, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1988), 39.

6. Jacob Lawrence, *Wounded Man*, 1968, gouache on paper, 29.5 x 22 in. The Walter O. Evans Collection of African American Art. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Wounded Man, while not as clearly linked to a specific event, is the most graphic depiction of violence yet in Lawrence's career, with the man's side wound clearly foregrounded, his wound gushing blood on display (fig. 6). *Alice* too, is unusually violent with bloody arrows sticking out all over her body, especially given that the subject is a child.

Struggle II and *III* created during this time also feature blood prominently (fig. 7). They all do so in a markedly different manner than past images as well. Though Lawrence had shown blood before, such as in the *Struggle* series of the '50s, it tended to be used abstractly, often emerging from nowhere at all and scattered around the picture plane. In the '60s, the blood was coming from real people with real wounds. As Lawrence became more

7. Jacob Lawrence, *Struggle III—Assassination*, 1965, brush, ink, and gouache on paper, 22 x 30 1/2 in. Francine Seders Gallery, Seattle. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

disturbed by contemporary events, it seems he was compelled to impress upon his audience the gravity of these events and the toll they were taking on real bodies.

Lawrence's activism increased off the canvas as well as on. He took on leadership roles; in 1957 he served as the president of the New York Artists Equity Association, of which he was a founding member, and in 1963 as the President of the Art Committee of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Lawrence's involvement with the SNCC has been yet another point of misinformation in scholarship, with scholars citing SNCC frustrations with Lawrence and implying that he did not believe in their mission and that the two were incompatible.[20] In 1976 Lawrence would again co-found an organization focusing on issues of diversity in the arts, the Rainbow Art Foundation, which aimed to promote the work of underrepresented minorities. Lawrence would also come to be associated with activist groups, such as in his cooperation with Artists' Call Against U.S. Intervention in Central America in 1984. But according to Lawrence, by far the most important activism of his career can be found in his paintings, as he told Clarence Major in 1977:

> *Major*: [Marquez] said that if he had any commitment to revolution it had to be through his work. He felt that the very act of writing was a revolutionary act.
>
> *Lawrence*: Oh, I would agree with that. Sure, as an artist, I would hope to make a contribution. With my commitment to my fellow man, I would hope to make some commitment through my art.[21]

This quote is the key to understanding Lawrence's activism. He saw his art, and by extension his work in the art community, as a concrete and meaningful way to make the changes he wanted to see in the world. His art is his activism, or his contribution, as he calls it.

20. Hills, "Jacob Lawrence's Paintings during the Protest Years of the 1960s," 186.
21. Clarence Major, "Clarence Major Interviews: Jacob Lawrence, The Expressionist," The Black Scholar 9, no. 3 (1977): 20.

Hiroshima, Again

8. Sharyn J. Skeeter, Jacob Lawrence and Clarence Major in Lawrence's studio in the University of Washington Art Building, January 10 1977. Photograph published in *The Black Scholar*.

In 1970 Lawrence accepted a professorship at the University of Washington that would last until his retirement in 1986 (fig. 8). His longtime commitment to painting his surroundings, what he knew, and the experiences of those around him did not waver with the relocation out west. Given this approach, Lawrence's choice to take on the Hiroshima series might be seen in part as a product of his new environment. The population of Asian Americans, and in particular Japanese Americans, was much higher in Seattle than in New York City, proportionally. Unfortunately, one of the reasons for this higher concentration of Japanese Americans is the location of the Japanese internment camps on the West Coast. Lawrence's interest in the people and history around him may have prompted him to explore a related topic, though there is no explicit evidence linking Lawrence's move to Seattle or relationships with Japanese Americans to his decision to depict *Hiroshima*.

However, Lawrence's relocation combined with the current

events during his Seattle period may have brought Hiroshima to mind, specifically, the Three Mile Island disaster of 1979. The disaster, involving a partial meltdown of a nuclear power plant in Pennsylvania, remains the most devastating nuclear accident to occur in the United States. The event was a catalyst for anti-nuclear activism and prompted a demonstration of over 200,000 people in New York City at one point. A proliferation of anti-nuclear artist activity occurred as well with groups such as Artists for Nuclear Disarmament, as well as many artists tackling the subject independently. This event occurred in the middle of the 1970s and '80s, a period afflicted with widespread Cold War anxieties and an "all-pervasive and universalizing notion of the atomic threat" in which many Americans were genuinely worried about the threat of human extinction due to nuclear war.[22]

In February 1983 the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians convened to investigate the Japanese internment camps, supposed justifications for their formation, and impact on Japanese Americans unanimously concluded that the internment camps were unjustified and caused mass harm both material and psychological, and recommended that reparations be made. While this verdict was received well by both the public and government officials, subsequent attempts to actually provide reparations failed repeatedly through 1988. Nevertheless, it brought renewed attention to the topic of the Japanese internment camps, a trauma the nation seems perpetually in danger of forgetting. Though Lawrence had already selected the topic of Hiroshima by 1982, he did not finish the paintings until 1983, so it is not impossible that the announcement factored into his process.[23] Regardless, it contributed to the environment in which Hersey's reprint and the *Hiroshima* series were received.

After attaining a stable position and income as a professor at

22. Kyo Maclear, Beclouded Visions: Hiroshima-Nagasaki and the Art of Witness, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 93-94.
23. Professional Files, Box 23, Folder 31, Jacob Lawrence and Gwendolyn Knight papers, 1816, 1914-2008, bulk 1973-2001. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

the University of Washington and spending the 1970s relatively peacefully in pedagogical pursuits, Lawrence was once again compelled to "make a contribution" through his art. Though in 1981 Lawrence sent his regrets to the Limited Editions Club as he did not feel he could take on a book illustration project at the moment, by 1982 Lawrence had apparently changed his mind. In a letter from the Limited Editions Club from August of that year, Sidney Shiff expressed his pleasure at meeting the Lawrences in person in New York and coming to an agreement on Hiroshima.[24] What could have compelled this change of course? On June 12, two months earlier, the largest political demonstration in American history took place against nuclear weapons and the Cold War with over one million people filling Central Park. Shiff's letter says they met in person that summer, so it's even possible that the Lawrences were in New York during the protest. In any case, Lawrence was a historian at heart, and history was unfolding that summer. It would have proved nigh irresistible for Lawrence not to chronicle the movement.

And so it was that 36 years after Lawrence had last painted on World War II, he picked up his brush again. Since the *War* series Lawrence had been moved to complete two serious forays into political art with the *Struggle* series and the works completed during the Civil Rights Movement era, with Lawrence's criticism becoming more pointed in the second set of works. He returned to the theme of World War II as an artist of the highest echelon, an accomplished professor, and an experienced activist. Lawrence had gone from the soldier's perspective in *Coast Guard* to the family at home's perspective in *War*. In *Hiroshima*, Lawrence at last turned his compassionate gaze to the 'enemy.' The subjects of the series are often emphasized in scholarship as universal, and not a specific representation of the Japanese at all, and this is true to a certain extent. Lawrence did state that he made no attempt to render the Japanese features and that the series was a portrait of "man's

24. Sidney Shiff to Jacob Lawrence, April 14, 1981. Box 23, Folder 31, Jacob Lawrence and Gwendolyn Knight papers, 1816, 1914-2008, bulk 1973-2001. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

inhumanity to man."[25] But however universally the images are viewed, it remains fact that the atomic bomb has only been dropped on one country and one people, and these images are placed alongside highly personal descriptions of the impact of the bomb on those people. Lawrence may not have created an overly specific depiction because he did not need to, these images were created to accompany this text. This universalism could just as easily be contextualized by the political climate of the 1980s and its extinction fears as the humanism that it is typically ascribed to. Given the publishing of the series the same year as reparations for Japanese Americans were recommended and denied, it is also possible to see a very intentional representation of Japanese subjects. In light of this chapter's questioning of assumptions about his politics, contextualizing of his activist works within his career as a whole, and exploration of his possible motivations, a possibility is opened for viewing Jacob Lawrence as a complex and dynamic visual activist.

25. Paul J. Karlstrom, "Modernism, Race, and Community," in Over the Line: the Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence, ed. Peter T. Nesbett (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press in association with Jacob Lawrence Catalogue Raisonné Project, 2000), 241-242.

12. Provisional Humanism

Jacob Lawrence's Engagement with the Philosophy of Humanity

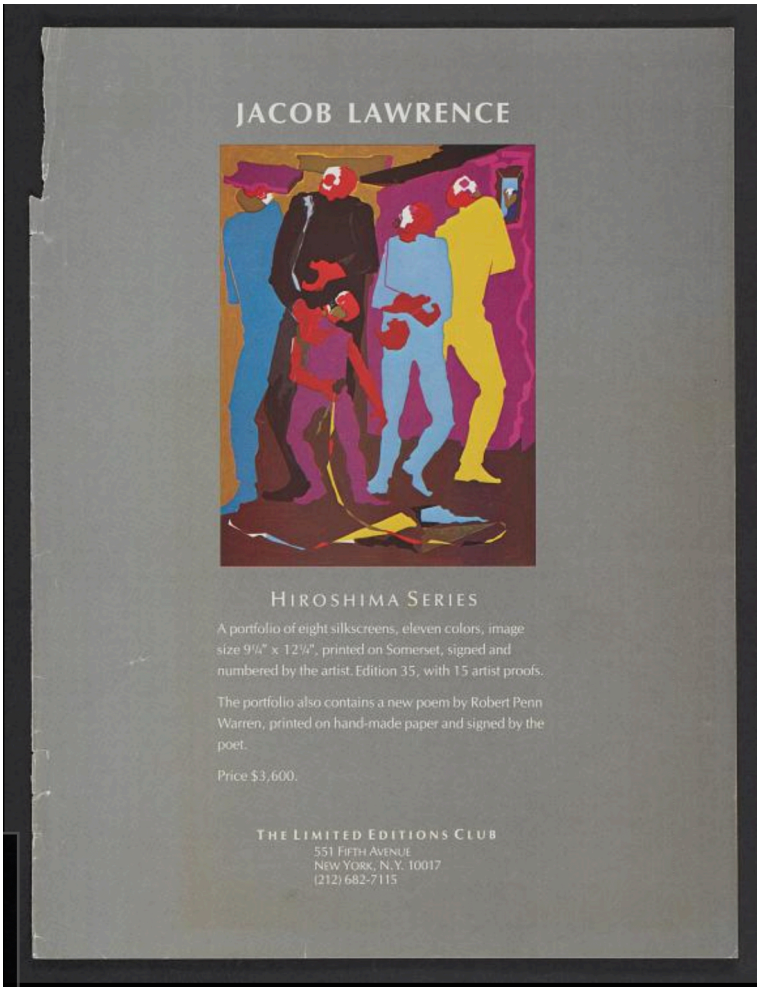
SAMANTHA SEAVER

Abstract

Artist Jacob Lawrence has been dependably analyzed through cultural and historical perspectives rather than the psychological and philosophical lenses utilized to describe other artists of the time. Scholars tend to focus on the first three decades of his life, concentrating on how he was a child prodigy and involved in the Harlem renaissance, but leaving the works from the majority of his career (spent in Brooklyn and Seattle) neglected. The emotional complexity present in his art demands to be looked at with similarly intricate theories and outlooks.

This essay will explore the philosophical theory of humanism and how it applies to Lawrence's art, focusing on his 1983 *Hiroshima* series, eight paintings that Lawrence created to accompany a reissue of John Hersey's 1946 book with the same name. While the series is often described as an outlier, it may instead be a more explicit example of themes and thoughts Lawrence engaged in and depicted in both earlier and later works. I will be arguing that Lawrence expressed a blend of both religious and secular humanism throughout his career and that the Hiroshima series is a special example of provisional humanism, an exploration into how humans can lose their humanity. This is shown through Lawrence echoing a similar metaphorical approach to Hersey's, his inclusion of

depersonalized and universal imagery, and focusing on everyday rituals that are neither explicitly religious nor definitively secular.



1. Portfolio jacket of *Hiroshima* series. Box 23, Folder 31, Jacob Lawrence and Gwendolyn Knight papers, 1816, 1914-2008, bulk 1973-2001. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Jacob Lawrence's work has been consistently analyzed through cultural and historical perspectives rather than the psychological and philosophical lenses ascribed to other modern art. When one is a minority in America and reaches levels of accomplishment usually only available to the majority, those watching can become blind to anything but the person's biography, oftentimes viewing them as less of an individual and as more of a spokesperson for their entire community/culture. Writings on Lawrence's life almost always focus on his childhood, how he was a child prodigy and involved in the Harlem renaissance, then take this upbringing and wield it as a lens through which to view the rest of his career. The other main thread of analysis is likewise reductive, focusing on Lawrence's place in modernism but often straining to fit him into pre-established categories and genres of the time period. In recognition of this persistent dynamic, Peter Nesbett, who co-led the Jacob Lawrence Catalogue Raisonné Project, challenges those interested in researching Lawrence to situate his works "within theoretical contexts that free it from narrow, historical accounts of 'the modern' and modernism"—a call to which this essay responds.[1]

While Lawrence is consistently compared to artists like social realist Ben Shahn and cubist Picasso, it feels as though many of his works, which can be read through lenses other than "modernist," are neglected. There are a variety of reasons why Lawrence's works have not received the same level of analysis as other art of the same time. Critics and viewers of Lawrence have been hard-pressed to fit him into a pre-established genre or theoretical movement. A large part of this is that he did not have his own Pocket Art Critic, in the way that Pollock had Greenberg, Cézanne had Fry, and de Kooning had Rosenberg (to name a few of many). This is not to say that Lawrence had no supporters or scholars on his side, but he

1. Peter Nesbett, *American Masterworks from the Merrill C. Berman Collection* (New York: Alexandre Gallery, 2015), Exhibition catalogue, 40.

did not have an established art critic showing him off as a prime example of some cerebral and experimental new art movement. We need to start recognizing in his oeuvre the same psychological and philosophical complexity that critics and scholars seem to require to analyze a work beyond visual and biographical appraisal. This essay will take the lead in that charge by exploring the philosophical theory of humanism and how it applies to Lawrence's art, focusing on his 1983 *Hiroshima* series (both cerebral *and* experimental) as the most explicit example of humanism and demonstrating that it did not diverge as severely from his oeuvre as has been popular thought (fig. 1). I will argue that Lawrence engaged in both religious and secular humanism throughout his entire career and that focusing too heavily on historical context can occlude us from his psychological intensity.

Philosophical humanism is one of the messiest and most highly debated stances of the 20th century. Humanists have existed long before the 1900s, but in 1945, philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre gave a lecture in Paris in a valiant effort to not define it, but help thinkers feel alright with its uncertain definitions. Sartre argued that that humanism has two very different meanings. The first was a belief system designed to uphold man as the "supreme value," aka the concept of man as the measure of all things—an example is the notion that humans are above animals because animals are slaves to their appetites and we are slaves to something above earthly affairs. There are understandable religious connotations here.[2] Religious humanism today is common in the United States and entails centering congregational activities and practices on individuals' needs, desires, and happiness. During Lawrence's involvement in the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, he may have been exposed to this kind of thinking.[3] The second meaning, according to Sartre, is that there is no legislator of man but himself; "that he himself,

2. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism" (lecture, Club Maintenant, Paris, October 29, 1945).
3. "Jacob Lawrence: Eight Studies for the Book of Genesis," Henry Art Gallery, accessed May 29, 2021. https://henryart.org/exhibitions/jacob-lawrence.

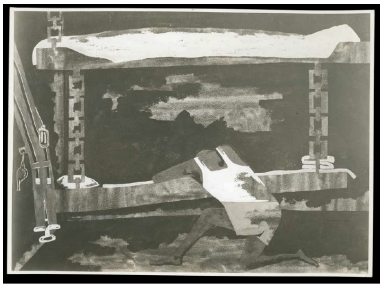
thus abandoned, must decide for himself."[4] This, known as secular humanism, is equivocally atheistic—the claim centers human as not only above other beings, but also as in control of and responsible for themselves. Many thinkers believe that secular humanism bottoms out at religion anyway, but that is for a different essay.

Many of writers have labeled Lawrence a humanist, but seem to employ the term only as an explanation for why Lawrence paints about issues beyond race. When historian Paul Karlstrom touches on the Hiroshima series, he writes, "While grounded in Harlem and black heritage, Lawrence here declares his independence from group—and indeed from community—and his participation in the broader humanist discourse."[5] For scale, throwing out the label of "humanist" is as complex and rich in potential discussion as casually mentioning that Lawrence was a Marxist and then not elaborating on what humanism actually is or how potent a lens it is through which to view his art. Due to the undefined and uncertainty of humanism, there have been generalized applications of the term "humanist," such as Karlstrom's, that differ from employing the term "philosophical humanist," a label that denotes more theoretically involved invocations. Lawrence's position as a philosophical humanist extends beyond the conceptually emptied meaning of "humanist" and acknowledging this will allow us to see the different techniques that reflect his theoretical complexity.

Much of the evidence for Lawrence's humanism seems to stem from his focus on human subjects in most of his works. However, philosophical humanism extends beyond simply acknowledging humans. One can see Lawrence employing philosophical humanism in how he addresses religion. In a 1944 interview, Lawrence identified *Prayer* (figure 2), which portrays a figure on his knees in

4. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism" (lecture, Club Maintenant, Paris, October 29, 1945).
5. Paul J. Karlstrom, "Jacob Lawrence: Modernism, Race, Community," in *Over the Line: the Art of Jacob Lawrence*, ed. by Peter T. Nesbett and Michelle DuBois (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2001), 242.

prayer, leaning heavily on his bunk at sea, as his favorite work of the Coast Guard Series.[6]



2. Jacob Lawrence, *Prayer*, 1944. Courtesy of Swann Auction Galleries. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Interviewer Aline Louchheim describes the work as a "completely subjective painting," depicting a "vastness, not only of the sea, but of the universe, and in the solitary figure in his moment of intense privacy," in which Lawrence had "captured the loneliness of the ship on the sea and of man seeking contact with God."[7] Centering a religious scene around one person's immediate needs, as shown through the loneliness of being at sea and hinting at a greater psychological or spiritual struggle, is a technique used in a philosophically-grounded religious humanism. Using a man as the measure here, Lawrence zooms in on his situation while what he actually evokes is something much larger. This generalizability or relatability as shown through an individual or small group is a trend in Lawrence's art, and one of his primary goals as an artist. Shortly before his death, Lawrence reflected on this conviction, stating that, "For me a painting should have three things: universality, clarity and strength.... It is necessary in creating a painting to find out as much as possible about one's subject, thereby freeing oneself of having to strive for a superficial depth."[8] Here, Lawrence articulates that one must go vertically into a subject's experience rather than horizontally, just scratching the surface of a concept.

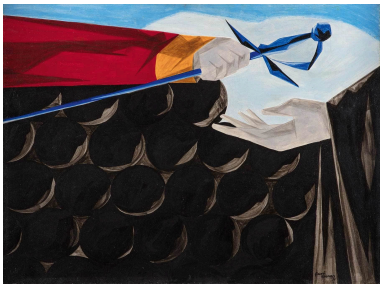
Lawrence found someone who approached social commentary in a

6. Aline B. Louchheim, "Lawrence: Quiet Spokesman," ARTnews, October 15, 1944, https://www.artnews.com/art-news/retrospective/jacob-lawrence-interview-1944-1202676195/.
7. Ibid
8. Patricia Hills, *Painting Harlem Modern: the Art of Jacob Lawrence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 133.

similar way in journalist and author John Hersey. Lawrence was in the last two decades of his career when Sidney Schiff, president of the Limited Editions Club reached out to him to choose any book he wanted for a special edition publication.[9]

Lawrence chose to illustrate their 1983 edition of journalist Hersey's *Hiroshima*, first published as an article in the New Yorker in 1946 (fig. 1).[10] Hersey wrote about the lives of six survivors of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima, starting at the morning of the bomb and following them through the days immediately surrounding the event, ending a few months after. Perhaps Lawrence was drawn to Hersey's own experimental style of art; Hersey was a pioneer of "New Journalism"—a writing style that borrowed fictional writing techniques, highlighting a subjective perspective and emphasizing "truth" over "facts."[11] In other words, New Journalists used man as the measure—elevating a person or group of people's subjective experience to a place of evidence, resulting in a piece of journalism positioned around this human-centered way of knowing. This seems remarkably similar to Lawrence's approach to art. Hersey zoomed in on six survivors to comment on the brutality of a global war and the dangerous inhumanity of technological advancements; likewise, Lawrence zoomed in on thirty panels to comment on the entire history of America's founding (*Struggle* series, 1954-56).

9. Sidney Schiff to Jacob Lawrence, April 14 1981, Box 23, Folder 31, Jacob Lawrence and Gwendolyn Knight papers, 1816, 1914-2008, bulk 1973-2001. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
10. John Hersey, "Hiroshima," The New Yorker, August 31, 1946.
11. Nicholas Lemann, "John Hersey and the Art of Fact," The New Yorker, April 22, 2019, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/04/29/john-hersey-and-the-art-of-fact.



3. Jacob Lawrence, *Victory and Defeat*, 1955, egg tempera on hardboard, 12 × 16 in. (30.5 × 40.6 cm). Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

His approach to painting history has always focused on highlighting individuals, as seen in the *Struggle* series, where most of his panels depict a handful of people even if the event is as large as a civil war, such as in Panel 13, *Victory and Defeat* (figure 3). This is revisited in both men's approaches to Hiroshima, both men break down the whole into its respective parts, then go even further—focusing on how individuals' experiences can speak to larger issues, paying attention to subjective "truths" over surface-level facts.

Hills writes that Lawrence "attempted not to illustrate Hersey's account but rather to evoke the horror in metaphoric visual terms."[12] While terms like "metaphoric" demonstrate the conceptual nature of Lawrence's works, we may better understand the intention behind his techniques through the artistic and literary devices of "synecdoche," using the name of one thing to represent something related. Hersey uses these devices as well, as the meaning of his work was not in only these six survivors' tales, but in what they stood for—six stories representing the whole event and each one consisting of identifiable details that one can relate to their own experience. When introducing one of the six, Dr. Masakazu Fuji, he writes that on the morning of the bomb, "He ate breakfast and then, because the morning was already hot, undressed down to

12. Patricia Hills, *Painting Harlem Modern: the Art of Jacob Lawrence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 255.

his underwear and went out on the porch to read the paper."[13] The simple universality of his experience is not limited to Dr. Fuji's experience. That morning, everyone all around the world ate their breakfast, including the people in the sky and the people down below. This is combined with the vulnerability of Dr. Fuji. He, like others that Hersey included, was in his underwear when the bomb struck. This aggressively human thing of wearing underwear, something that sets us apart from all other animals, speaks to the larger human condition.

Lawrence approached his illustrations in a similar way. He created eight paintings to accompany Hersey's book, each one consisting of synecdoche to create grander implications. In his artist statement, Lawrence writes that "Because this book is such a strong statement of man's inhumanity to man, I found this work to be a most challenging book to illustrate."[14] Here we see Lawrence's interest in "provisional" humanism—he is concerned with how we can lose our humanity towards one another and finds it to be a challenge, but one that he has volunteered to take on. Provisional humanism is a subset of philosophical humanism that explores how humanism is not the same as optimism.[15] Provisional humanism rose to the philosophical forefront during WWII as a way to explore concepts like Hiroshima and Nazi concentration camps, investigating how humans can lose their humanity, because they obviously can, and that just because humanism puts humans at the center of the discussion does not mean they are without fault.[16] Lawrence engages in this exploration here, writing,

> "In my attempt to meet the challenge, I read and reread this work several times and, in doing so, I began to see great devastation in the twisted and mutilated bodies of

13. John Hersey, "Hiroshima," The New Yorker, August 31, 1946.
14. Patricia Hills, Painting Harlem Modern: the Art of Jacob Lawrence (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 255.
15. Richard Norman, *On Humanism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 20.
16. Ibid

> humans, birds, fishes and all of the other animals and living things that inherit our earth. The flora and the fauna and the land that was at one time alive, was now seared, mangled, deformed, and devoid of life."[17]

This imagery is seen in his paintings—while they all center human figures as the focal points, he depicts dead birds and fish as well.

17. Patricia Hills, *Painting Harlem Modern: the Art of Jacob Lawrence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 255.

4. Jacob Lawrence, *Man with Birds*, 1983, tempera and gouache on paper, 23 x 17 1/2 in. (58.42 x 44.45 cm.). Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Alexander Harrison Fund. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

His *Man with Birds* (figure 4) is particularly exemplary of his artist statement. While the man appears to be another victim of the bomb,

as the style in which Lawrence painted him does not differ from the other subjects, he also appears to be quite literally twisting and mutilating the crows' bodies. This reads as a metaphor for how man is not guiltless—it is us inflicting the pain on ourselves, a humanist struggle, one inseparable from our concept of humanity. The man, bloodied and skeletal, is also active in another being's suffering. There is no accusation or assignment of responsibility here, simply an acknowledgement of the vicious cycle of "man's inhumanity to man."[18]

In a perfect blend of religious and secular philosophical humanism, Lawrence asks in his artist statement,

> "What have we accomplished over these many centuries? We have produced great geniuses in music, the sciences, the arts, dance, literature, architecture and oratory among many other disciplines. And we have in the meantime, developed the means to destroy in a most horrible manner, that life that is our God-given right."[19]

He questions how men are capable of doing what they do when they are also capable of such beauty. He says that life is God-given, yet that it is also a right, hinting that while humans are still under the influence of God, they also have a rightful duty or responsibility to one another, not only to the powers that be. Historian Tania Tribe eloquently explains the religious connotations of the series, noting "a subtle secular eschatological tension… forcing himself to 'think the unthinkable': the possibility of a real end to the world, an end now made possible by humans themselves."[20] She claims that the series deals with eschatology, the aspects of theology concerned

18. Ellen Harkins Wheat, "Jacob Lawrence," PhD diss., (University of Washington, 1987), 36.
19. Patricia Hills, *Painting Harlem Modern: the Art of Jacob Lawrence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 255.
20. Tania Costa Tribe, "Slavery to Hiroshima and beyond: African-American Art and the Apocalypse," Word & Image 29, no. 3 (July 1, 2013) https://doi.org/10.1080/02666286.2013.822146.

with death and final judgments, but that what Lawrence is finding is that there is no God creating the end of the world here. It is humans.

5. Jacob Lawrence, *Family*, 1983, tempera and gouache on paper, 23 x 17 1/2 in. (58.42 x 44.45 cm.). Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Alexander Harrison Fund. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Family (figure 5) from the series perhaps demonstrates this best. In it, a family sits around a table, perhaps sitting down to a breakfast like in Hersey's accounts. Their faces are turned up to the sky and their skin is already flayed, demonstrating, along with the dead crow on the windowsill, that the scene takes place in the moments of that "noiseless flash" that Hersey reiterates as a common memory of the bomb. What is particularly interesting here is that their arms are all on the table and their palms are upturned, outstretched to one another, as if they were just about to, or in the middle of saying grace. Their chain of hands was interrupted, breaking their prayer, and suggesting that there is a human interference with God's plan occurring. Here is that secular-religious tension, one that Hersey engages in as well, as he includes much discussion of religion. In Hersey's text, one of the six survivors is German priest Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge and another is Reverend Mr. Kiyoshi Tanimoto, pastor of the Hiroshima Methodist Church. Six months after the bomb, Father Kleinsorge visits a survivor in the hospital. She asks him, "If your God is so good and kind, how can he let people suffer like this?" and makes a gesture that Hersey describes as toward her injuries, the hospital room, and "Hiroshima as a whole," another example of synecdoche—one patient's injuries represent the hospital room, which also stands for the entire city, which is now a reflection of the entire world [21] Hersey appears to take a provisionally humanist, or at least more skeptical stance to Father Kleinsorge's response, writing, "He went on to explain all the reasons for everything" and ending the chapter there.[22]

Like Hersey, Lawrence does not elaborate on or represent the reasons for anything in the series other than each other. He says that he wanted to "get the feeling of this tremendous tragedy in a very symbolic way. There are a lot of symbols in the works. I

21. John Hersey, "Hiroshima," The New Yorker, August 31, 1946.
22. Ibid

use a drooping flower and broken trees—things that are in the process of dying: moribund."[23] His use of universal symbols and synecdoche allows the viewer to feel connected to the figures and the situation, so connected that one may even feel, in a small way, responsible. A small child flying a kite, such as in *Boy with Kite* (figure 6) commonly evokes feelings of life and hope.[24] The belly-up crows are a recurring symbol throughout the series, standing for the death of many beings.

6. Jacob Lawrence, *Boy with Kite*, 1983, tempera and gouache on paper, 23 x 17 1/2 in. (58.42 x 44.45 cm.). Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Alexander Harrison Fund. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

23. Ellen Harkins Wheat, "Jacob Lawrence," PhD diss., (University of Washington, 1987), 36.
24. Tania Costa Tribe, "Slavery to Hiroshima and beyond: African-American Art and the Apocalypse," Word & Image 29, no. 3 (July 1, 2013) https://doi.org/10.1080/02666286.2013.822146.

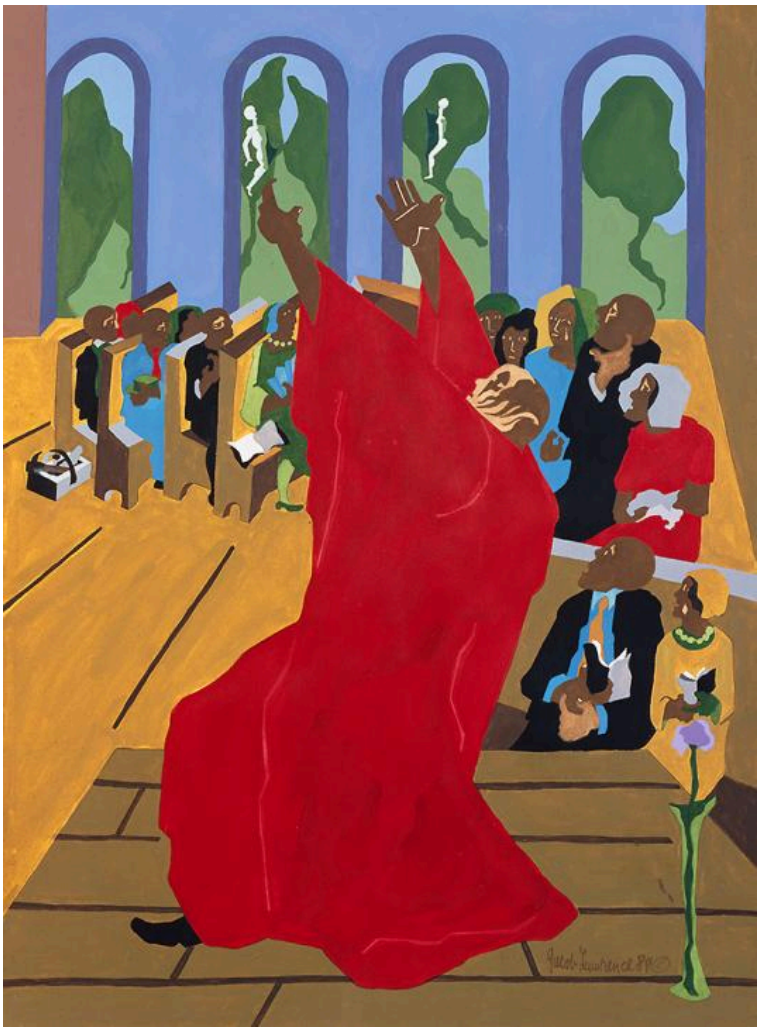
The marketplace in *Market* (figure 7) is something any viewer can put themselves inside. The busy stands where one runs into neighbors and meets strangers, the fish, the meat. Yet here the fish bare gruesome, deathly faces and the conversation partners are skeletal, bleeding, and grabbing at their skin—at once the same on the inside and completely split apart. Marketplaces are locations that provide the most human contact people may have all week. Going to the market is usually a social event, one that ties people from a community together over a necessity—food. Lawrence's inclusion of this scene as one of the eight is poignantly symbolic of the importance of community, perhaps on an international scale, and how if every culture in the world has a marketplace in common, then why is this not enough to bond us. He uses the synecdoche of a small section of a marketplace to speak to this entire human experience. The universal cultural imagery differs from Hersey's highly-detailed account that places the reader in Hiroshima, but only releases his synecdoches and universal symbols from a cultural binding, creating a larger, international scope of effect. Lawrence said this was intentional, telling Ellen Harkins Wheat the year after the commission, "I used my own experience...I don't think I could have executed the Japanese [features], and I don't think it was important either. I didn't want it to be an illustration of that sort; I wanted it to be one in

7. Jacob Lawrence, *Market*, 1983, tempera and gouache on paper, 23 x 17 1/2 in. (58.42 x 44.45 cm.). Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Alexander Harrison Fund. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

terms of man's inhumanity to man—a universal kind of statement."[25] Here Lawrence directly connects his series to provisional humanism, indicating a concern that he has addressed over many decades, but never so literally as in the *Hiroshima* series.

Taking a bird's eye view of Lawrence's career, one can see a diverse array of paintings used to convey complete philosophies. What Lawrence continues to revisit is this provisional humanism—a call to action for fellow humans to take control of their lives and the lives of others, to notice how connected we all are, to reflect on the damage we have done. The religiosity in *Hiroshima* is not to send a message that this is all part of God's plan, but to say the opposite: we are interfering with something sacred, with our God-given life, and we must take responsibility.

25. Ellen Harkins Wheat, Jacob Lawrence, American Painter (Seattle: University of Washington Press in association with the Seattle Art Museum, 1994), 154.



8. Jacob Lawrence, 7. *And God created man and woman* from *Eight Studies for the Book of Genesis*, 1989, gouache on paper, 29 3/4 x 22 in. (75.6 x 55.9 cm.) The Walter O. Evans Collection of African American Art, SCAD Museum. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

The shaky, flimsy quality of the *Hiroshima* series is seen again in his

Eight Studies for the Book of Genesis (1989), where he used silkscreen prints to remember his time growing up in the Abyssinian Baptist Church and watching preachers deliver their sermons. It is interesting that the title recalls the Book of Genesis, yet the focus is once again on the commonplace experience of going to church, rather than the spiritual and supernatural experiences detailed in the actual bible. His focus is always on humans—on their lives, their experiences, and their "truths." The *Hiroshima* series is where he does this most overtly, but this approach can be seen in his career-wide engagement with religion, race, labor, and truly any of his scenes including human subjects. In an interview with Avis Berman, Lawrence says that he took the *Hiroshima* commission "because I wanted to contribute something that will stand against this whole terrible course of human destruction."[26] Through synecdoche, universality of symbols and imagery, relatability of content, and a questioning of humanity and inhumanity, Lawrence helps the viewer to feel connected to the situation and each other—so connected that one may even feel, in a small way, responsible. Perhaps this is how we preserve our humanity.

26. Avis Berman, "Jacob Lawrence and the Making of Americans," ARTnews 83 (1984): 86.

13. Painting Human Suffering through a Universal Lens

Lawrence's Hiroshima

ASHLEY TSENG

Abstract

Jacob Lawrence was not one to overtly verbalize his political opinions, but how he dealt with themes of struggle, war, and protest give us a glimpse into how the artist's ideologies and politics evolved throughout his career. In 1982, Lawrence was commissioned by the Limited Editions Club of New York to create a series of illustrations for a book of his choosing, and he chose John Hersey's 1946 *Hiroshima*. Lawrence's 1983 *Hiroshima* series consists of eight paintings that capture the suffering of Japanese civilians in scenes of everyday life at the moment of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima at the end of World War II.

This essay examines how Lawrence's approach to representing war and political statements in his work shifted with his growing interest in creating universal statements about humanity and inhumanity. To understand the changes in how Lawrence expressed his politics as an artist, it is valuable to consider Lawrence's experience in the United States Coast Guard during World War II. In the *Hiroshima* series, Lawrence depicted an event from American history that is connected to a larger universal history and the future of humanity. Lawrence's strong values of community create an empathic narrative in the *Hiroshima* series that represents the horrific experience of the bombing victims through a universal and humanist lens.

1. Jacob Lawrence, *Hiroshima: Family*, 1983, tempera and gouache on paper, 23 x 17 1/2 in. Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Alexander Harrison Fund. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

The Challenge of Universal Struggle in

Hiroshima

In 1982, Jacob Lawrence was asked by the Limited Editions Club of New York to create a series of illustrations for a book of his choosing.[1] The book he selected was John Hersey's 1946 *Hiroshima*, which tells the story of six individuals who survived the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, Japan on August 6th, 1945 at the end of World War II. The paintings Lawrence made were translated into silkscreen prints that would be used as illustrations for a special edition release of Hersey's book.[2] Lawrence's *Hiroshima* series (1983) consists of eight tempera and gouache paintings that each show a different scene of daily life: a family inside their home, farmers in a field, people in a park, a man with birds, a street scene, children at a playground, a boy with a kite, and a marketplace. These paintings capture the horrific moment in which the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, interrupting and stealing away the lives of innocent Japanese civilians.

Throughout his career, Lawrence created many works portraying war and struggle, such as his *Struggle: From the History of the American People* (1954-56) and his *War* series (1946-47). Lawrence often drew upon his own experience as a black American in his work to represent universal struggle when creating scenes of American history. In the *Hiroshima* series, however, the artist took on a different challenge: painting an event that never experienced. The result was a vision of history as seen through the eyes of the victims of the United States' actions in war.

Lawrence's dedication to humanism and portraying universal struggle can be seen throughout his career, but this does not mean his approach to creating political statements in his work remained static throughout his entire life. As I will argue, the *Hiroshima*

1. Peter T. Nesbett, *Jacob Lawrence : The Complete Prints, 1963-2000 : A Catalogue Raisonné* (Seattle: Francine Seders Gallery, in Association with University of Washington Press, 2001), 42.
2. Peter T. Nesbett and Michelle DuBois, *The Complete Jacob Lawrence* (Seattle: University of Washington Press in Association with Jacob Lawrence Catalogue Raisonné Project, 2000), 190.

paintings focus on the suffering of individuals to portray war through a humanist and universal lens. By combining themes of war, struggle, and community, Lawrence created scenes of human suffering that evoke empathy and create an antiwar statement that speaks to all of humanity.

Humanism and Empathy in *Hiroshima*

In the *Hiroshima* series, Lawrence intentionally avoided representing the figures with Japanese features. As he told biographer and student Ellen Harkins Wheat, he did not think he could have properly depicted the physical features of the Japanese people and he "didn't think it was important either."[3] If Lawrence had chosen to paint Japanese features, he could have easily fallen into the dangerous territory of stereotyping and creating an "othering" of the Japanese civilians, especially since there is a long history of American media portraying the Japanese and Asians as a different and even "uncivilized" species in racist propaganda. For example, right after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, there were many American editorial cartoons that showed caricatures of the bombing victims with stereotypical Japanese features being "blown to pieces" by the atomic bomb.[4] Lawrence's decision to paint human figures without clear racial or ethnic indicators reflects his dedication to creating a universal statement in an event that he and his community did not personally experience .

The main color palette of the *Hiroshima* paintings consists of bright reds, yellows, blues, and pinks. Wheat describes this combination of colors as "oddly dissonant" but in a way that

3. Ellen Harkins Wheat, "Jacob Lawrence," PhD diss., (University of Washington, 1987), 194.
4. Patrick B. Sharp, "From Yellow Peril to Japanese Wasteland: John Hersey's "Hiroshima"," *Twentieth Century Literature* 46, no. 4 (2000): 438.

effectively reflects the horror of the bombing.[5] The forms in the *Hiroshima* series are fragmented and made up of jagged lines, in contrast to Lawrence's typical use of strong linear planes and outlines in his previous works, such as his *Migration* series (1940-41) and *Struggle* series (1954-56). In *Hiroshima*, most of the figures have their heads tilted upwards and are staring at the sky, which clearly marks them amidst the tragic moment in which the atomic bomb has been dropped. Figures are stripped of the skin and features on their faces; only their skulls remain. We may feel disturbed by the skulls and bright red flesh of the figures, but Lawrence does not allow us to turn away in disgust. Instead, he works to evoke empathy by placing these figures in common scenes of daily life such as eating with family, sitting at a park, and going to the market, which are able to resonate with most people regardless of cultural background.

Although the Hiroshima bombing was not an event that Lawrence experienced, he drew upon his personal experiences to paint it. In the panel entitled *Family*, the blast strikes down upon a family of four sitting at a table during their mealtime (fig. 1). The scene echoes multiple other works by Lawrence that take on the theme of family, such as *The Family* (1964) and *This is a Family Living in Harlem* (1943), which often show family members gathered together at a table sharing a meal. Lawrence is using daily scenes of life that he has seen in his own community to create the *Hiroshima* series. For instance, the scene of children flying kites in *Hiroshima: Boy with Kite* (fig. 2) is one that he has painted before in 1962, with *Street Scene (Boy with Kite)*. Lawrence's chooses to paint activities that are seen in many different cultures and not just unique to Japan. Furthermore, his inclusion of children among the figures in the *Hiroshima* series further intensifies the emotional impact of the work. Lawrence's depiction of child victims of the bombing emphasizes the innocence and loss that this atrocity caused. The

5. Wheat, "Jacob Lawrence," 194.

scenes in the eight *Hiroshima* paintings together as a series gives us a look into a dimensional human community that has just been struck by the inhumanity of nuclear war.

2. Jacob Lawrence, *Boy with Kite*, 1983, tempera and gouache on paper, 23 x 17 1/2 in. (58.42 x 44.45 cm.) Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Alexander Harrison Fund. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

While we can see the skulls of the figures peeking through their burning flesh, the settings surrounding them remain somewhat intact and recognizable. For instance, in *Hiroshima: Family* (fig. 1), the walls of the house are still standing and although the table and chairs look warped and are on the verge of breaking, they remain upright and able to support the sitting family members. Rather than focusing on the atomic bomb's destruction of infrastructure, Lawrence emphasizes the suffering of the civilians, which reflects his identity as a humanist who is committed to focusing on human content in his work. In the year following the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, U.S. military reports focused on the "strategic damage to the buildings, bridges, and other war-related infrastructure" rather than describing what had happened to the Japanese civilians who were victims of the atomic bomb.[6] By concentrating on human suffering rather than damage to infrastructure, Lawrence subverts the narrative that the U.S. military had tried to perpetuate and spread to the public.

Patriotism and Protest

When examining Lawrence's images of war, we can see the artist's inner conflict with patriotism and protest that arose from the tension between his past experience serving in the U.S. military during WWII and his desire as an artist to express human suffering that is inseparable from war. During his time in the military , Lawrence was a member of the Coast Guard and served on the U.S.S. *Sea Cloud*, which was the first naval boat with a racially integrated crew.[7] The integrated groups of servicemen working

6. Sharp, "From Yellow Peril to Japanese Wasteland: John Hersey's "Hiroshima"," 440.
7. John Ott, "Battle Station MoMA: Jacob Lawrence and the Desegregation of the Armed Forces and the Art World," *American Art* 29, no. 3 (2015): 59.

together in harmony were a major focus of the paintings he created while deployed. Art historian John Ott argues that Lawrence's Coast Guard paintings and *War* series show the artist's advocacy for racial integration within and beyond the military, an institution that Lawrence once called "the best democracy I've ever known."[8] After Lawrence's experience in the Coast Guard, we see him gain a stronger fascination with showing human struggle and experience within the larger theme of universalism. For instance, The *War* series (1946-47), painted by Lawrence not long after his military service came to a close, takes on a much darker and muted palette than his earlier paintings of community and shared labor amongst the boat's integrated crew. The works from the *War* series portray integrated groups of black and white WWII soldiers, but rather than focusing on harmony and collaboration, Lawrence highlights their shared experience of struggle and trauma. *War Series: Beachhead* (fig. 3) is one such vision of psychological turmoil. In the intense scene of black and white American soldiers fighting together and supporting each other in battle, the struggle of war and its destructive nature are captured through the injured soldier being carried on a stretched amidst the battlefield. Decades later in the *Hiroshima* series, Lawrence would return to these themes, confronting the atrocities committed by the U.S. government and military on a global scale.

8. Ibid, 74.

Figure 3. Jacob Lawrence, *War Series: Beachhead*, 1947, egg tempera on hardboard, 16 x 29 in. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

To understand Jacob Lawrence through the lens of patriotism and activism, it is important to consider the pressures he may have faced due to his connections to government-funded arts programs, his position as a black artist who was active during the McCarthy era, and his service in the U.S. military during WWII. All these aspects of his experience add to the challenges Lawrence faced in creating political statements, but they are also what make his art so politically and socially complex. During the 1940s and 1950s in the United States, The Red Scare and McCarthy era targeted communism and accused many artists of having leftist affiliations. Art historian Patricia Hills has suggested that Lawrence's endorsement of progressive causes and organizations put him at risk of being targeted by anticommunist politicians in the United

States, like many other artists at the time.[9] The *Hiroshima* series acts as a form of a protest and social commentary, as these paintings were made in the midst of the nuclear arms race during the cold war. However, the political message in Hiroshima feels more directed towards the entirety of humanity rather than the United States government or military. Lawrence also must have had to reconcile the fact that the United States' supposed "fight for democracy" identified communism as its ideological enemy, and directly resulted in the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the start of an era marked by the threat of nuclear warfare.

4. Jacob Lawrence, *Struggle III—Assassin ation*, 1965, brush, ink, and gouache on paper, 22 x 30 1/2 in. Francine Seders Gallery, Seattle. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Similar to the scenes portrayed in the *Hiroshima* series, Lawrence's

9. Patricia Hills, *Painting Harlem Modern: The Art of Jacob Lawrence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 207.

protest works of the 1960s are designed to capture human struggle in a manner that evokes empathy and resonates universally. In 1965, Lawrence created *Struggle III—Assassination* (fig. 4) as part of a series of ink drawings that portray scenes of police brutality. In the black and white drawing of *Struggle III—Assassination*, the only pop of color comes from the two washes of bright red ink used for the blood of the injured civilians. In this piece, Lawrence uses flat washes of black ink to clearly depict two of the civilians as black, while the race of the other figures is left ambiguous. By focusing on human struggle rather than race, Lawrence is able to frame police brutality and the fight for civil rights as an issue that concerns humanity as a whole. 1965 was also a time in which the antiwar movement was gaining prominence in the United States.[10] Lawrence donated *Struggle III—Assassination* to be used for the Artists' Call Poster in January 1984, for an organization that was protesting U.S. military policies in El Salvador.[11] This goes to show how even though Lawrence served in the military during WWII and admires the integration he had experienced in the Coast Guard, he still had a strong commitment to creating works that condemn oppressive acts perpetrated by American authorities. Patrick B. Sharp discusses how the "U.S. military seemed most concerned with suppressing or refuting stories that discussed human suffering in Hiroshima."[12] Although the *Hiroshima* series was created almost forty years after the bombing, the act of choosing to create illustrations for Hersey's *Hiroshima*, and painting the horror inflicted upon Japanese civilians by the United States' decision to use the atomic bomb, is a significant act of protest.

10. Patricia Hills, "Jacob Lawrence's Paintings during the Protest Years of the 1960s," In *Over the Line: the Art of Jacob Lawrence*, ed. Peter T. Nesbett and Michelle DuBois, (Seattle: University of Washington Press in Association with Jacob Lawrence Catalogue Raisonné Project, 2000), 184-186.
11. Wheat, "Jacob Lawrence," 195.
12. Sharp, "From Yellow Peril to Japanese Wasteland: John Hersey's "Hiroshima"," 440.

Painting War and Struggle

Lawrence's *Struggle: From the History of the American People* (1954-56) series and *War* series do not glorify war, but they also do not contain a powerful antiwar statement like the one that is overwhelmingly visible in the *Hiroshima* series. In his *Struggle* series, Lawrence highlights the contributions of marginalized peoples' role in American history. In a 1968 interview with art historian Carroll Greene, Lawrence describes how black people have been excluded from American history and not acknowledged for their role in building the nation. European immigrants were "all mentioned as to their contributions," but the contributions made by black Americans went unrecognized and unappreciated by historians.[13] Lawrence's *Struggle* series and *War* series shows us a more integrated narrative of United States history and society that does not exclude people of color. And with the Coast Guard works, John Ott states that Lawrence "adopted a contributionist viewpoint, advocating a more egalitarian and far-reaching integration than that disseminated by military publicity agencies ."[14] Ott's argument shows how Lawrence believed in a more integrated future that encompasses all aspects of American society. Lawrence's contributionism focuses on emphasizing black peoples' role in building the United States, and also their struggles and achievements. Although Lawrence's contributionist approach in the *Struggle* series, *War* series and his Coast Guard paintings helps highlight and tell the stories of marginalized peoples who have been exploited and left out of American history, the celebratory nature of focusing on contributions can make it difficult to condemn the United States' history of war. For instance, in the *War* series and Coast Guard paintings, we can see the patriotism, struggles, and

13. Jacob Lawrence, "Oral history interview with Jacob Lawrence," interview by Carroll Greene, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, October 26, 1968.
14. Ott, "Battle Station MoMA: Jacob Lawrence and the Desegregation of the Armed Forces and the Art World," 67.

valuable contributions by black Americans during WWII, but until the *Hiroshima* series, we do not see the other side of the war that suffered from U.S. military decisions.

5. Jacob Lawrence, *War Series*: *Going Home*, 1947, egg tempera on hardboard, 16 x 29 in. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Although Lawrence's *War* series might not condemn the U.S. government or military, they do demonstrate the struggles and trauma experienced by the soldiers. In the 1947 painting *War Series*: *Going Home* (fig. 5), Lawrence depicts a racially integrated group of American WWII soldiers aboard a ship on their journey back home. The blue color palette of the panel creates a melancholy atmosphere that shows the harsh reality of war. However, even though the soldiers are injured and clearly suffering both physically

and mentally, they still have a home to return to. In the *Hiroshima* series, Lawrence is depicting civilians entangled in the war rather than soldiers. War has infiltrated their home: they can neither leave nor return. The theme of home and community in *Going Home* and the *Hiroshima* series helps humanize the figures inside his art and emphasize their struggles. However, in *Hiroshima*, Lawrence is painting the story of the Japanese civilians who had their lives, homes, and communities taken away by the atomic bomb.

To represent the destruction of life and a tragedy he did not personally experience in the *Hiroshima* series, Lawrence said he used various symbols such as flowers and trees in the process of dying.[15] This use of nature as symbolism can also be seen in panel 26 of Lawrence's *Struggle* series, titled *Peace* (fig. 6). In *Peace*, the landscape is dried and cracked, but there are still new flowers sprouting through the ground, symbolizing a new beginning and hope for the nation after the War of 1812. However, in the *Hiroshima* series, nature appears to have been devastated beyond repair. For instance, the trees in the *People in the Park* painting are fragmented and devoid of life (fig. 7). The charred and frail branches are on the verge of collapse and eerily frame the park goers who had been peacefully sitting on benches at the moment of the explosion. The absence of optimism in the *Hiroshima* series emphasizes the universal statement Lawrence creates to warn humanity about the irreparable damage of nuclear warfare and its degree of inhumanity.

15. Wheat, "Jacob Lawrence," 194.

6. Jacob Lawrence, *Struggle: From the History of the American People: Peace*, 1956, egg tempera on hardboard, 11 3/4 x 15 3/4 in. Courtesy of Bill and Holly Marklyn. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

7. Jacob Lawrence, *Hiroshima: People in the Park*, 1983, tempera and gouache on paper, 23 x 17 1/2 in. Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Alexander Harrison Fund. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Universalism, Community, and Lawrence's

Experience

With the *Hiroshima* series, Lawrence stated that he wanted to create a universal statement addressing "man's inhumanity to man."[16] And previously in 1961, when reflecting upon his *Struggle* series, Lawrence had called it a turning point and said that "years ago, I was just interested in expressing the Negro in American life, but a larger concern, an expression of humanity and of America, developed."[17] The *Hiroshima* series can be considered a further evolution of Lawrence's desire to express a larger vision of humanity that extended beyond his personal background. He conveyed a narrative of U.S. history in which Americans are not the main characters, and instead centered the story on the Japanese civilians and on their suffering.

Art historian Paul J. Karlstrom has argued that in *Hiroshima*, Lawrence "declares his independence from group — indeed from community — and his participation in the broader humanist discourse."[18] I disagree with this assessment. Instead, I argue that community and a universalist approach are not mutually exclusive in Lawrence's works. Lawrence's development of embedding universal messages into his works does not sacrifice his dedication to community. In fact, we see how Lawrence takes his own experiences to create an empathetic portrayal of the Hiroshima bombing victims. W hen talking about his approach to the *Hiroshima* series, Lawrence said: "I used my own experience. How people live, people at the table, in the park, in the marketplace. I didn't follow something out of the book."[19] The activities and setting

16. Ibid.
17. Elizabeth Hutton Turner, "Reading History: Recovering Jacob Lawrence's Lost American Narrative," in *Jacob Lawrence: the American Struggle*, ed. Elizabeth Hutton Turner and Austen Barron Bailly, (Salem, Massachusetts: Peabody Essex, 2019), 30.
18. Paul J. Karlstrom, "Jacob Lawrence: Modernism, Race, and Community," in *Over the Line: The Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence*, ed. Peter T. Nesbett and Michelle DuBois, (Seattle: University of Washington Press in Association with Jacob Lawrence Catalogue Raisonné Project, 2000), 241.
19. Wheat, "Jacob Lawrence," 194.

in the Hiroshima series are not distinctly Japanese, they are scenes that are familiar to not only Lawrence, but also people all over the world. The *Hiroshima* series can be seen as a culmination of Lawrence's ability to represent war, struggle, and scenes of daily life drawn from his own personal experiences. And through this approach of using his own experiences to paint the human suffering of others, Lawrence creates a universal message that condemns the inhumanity of war.

14. From Mask to Collage

Lawrence's 1977 Self-Portrait

MONICA IONESCU

Abstract

Jacob Lawrence created this self-portrait to be presented with his induction into the National Academy in December 1977. Almost instantly, critics and art historians analyzed this work as "elusive" and "mask-like" due to the block colors that form his face and the artist's race.[1] While this statement may hold some truth, Lawrence's race has been either explicitly or implicitly tied to what he creates. Critics have also described Lawrence's work as childlike or simple, un-educated while his contemporaries are seen as geniuses though their styles are similar; as one writes about Picasso: "the young genius destined to lead this movement."[2] [3] Many of Lawrence's contemporaries used inspiration from African masks in order to create their "primitive-style" Modern works – but was Lawrence equally inspired, or is this self-portrait created in pure cubist style and others project what they want to see on the work? And if it lacks this inspiration, how can this image be categorized instead?

---

1. Berman, Avis. "Jacob Lawrence and the Making of Americans." *ARTnews* 83 (1984): 78.
2. Lawrence, Jacob, Brown, Milton W., and Whitney Museum of American Art. *Jacob Lawrence*. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1974.
3. Patricia Hills. "Cultural Legacies and the Transformation of the Cubist Collage Aesthetic by Romare Bearden, Jacob Lawrence, and Other African-American Artists." *Studies in the History of Art* 71 (2011): 221-47.

1. Jacob Lawrence, *Self-Portrait*, 1977, gouache and tempera on paper, 30 x 22 in. Collection of Seattle Art Museum. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

In His Own Words

Throughout his entire career, art historians fall into analyzing Lawrence as an outcome of his environment, rather than looking at his works with a theoretical, formal, or analytical lens. As Peter Nesbett, a prominent art historian puts it, "First, they characterize his entire career through the lens of Harlem, where he lived roughly from the age of 13 until he was 26 (1930–43), with some extended out-of-town travel. (The majority of his adult life as a working artist was spent in Brooklyn and Seattle.) Secondly, they filter all interpretations through early formation and biography. For an artist

who painted professionally for nearly sixty years, doesn't this emphasis seem odd?"[4]

Much of this racialized lens stems from a 1936 essay by Alain Locke. Ultimately, Locke argues that African art must be a central inspiration for African-American artists, though also claims, at times, that the lineage between African culture and Black Americans is one that is hard to trace and quite separate from one another.[5] His essay became a point of high debate between various artists of various identities. James Porter, an African-American art historian, artist, and teacher, critiqued Locke's pamphlet as follows:

> Dr. Alain Leroy Locke's recent pamphlet, 'Negro Art: Past and Present,' is intended to bolster his already wide reputation as a champion of Africanism in Negro art. This little pamphlet, just off the press, is one of the greatest dangers to the Negro artist to arise in recent years. It contains a narrow racialist point of view, presented in seductive language, and with all the presumption that is characteristic of the American "gate-crasher." Dr. Locke supports the defeatist philosophy of the "Segregationist." A segregated mind, he implies, is only the natural accompaniment of a segregated body. Weakly, he has yielded to the insistence of the white segregationist that there are inescapable internal differences betweenwhite and black, so general that they cannot be defined, so particular that they cannot be reduced through rational investigation.[6]

Porter and Locke taught at the same university during this time

4. Peter Nesbett, "The Incomplete Jacob Lawrence." In *American Masterworks from the Merrill C. Berman Collection*, 2015. https://www.alexandregallery.com/catalogues/american-masterworks-from-the-merrill-c-berman-collection
5. Locke, Alain LeRoy. *Negro Art : Past and Present*. District of Columbia: Associates in Negro Folk Education, 1936, 1936.
6. Bradley, Rizvana Natalie. "James A. Porter & Alain Locke on Race, Culture, and the Making of Art: A Roundtable." *Callaloo* 39, no. 5 (2016): 1169-185.

period, in art history and philosophy, respectively.[7] Using their debate, this essay hopes to break apart the traditional readings of Lawrence's work, as desired by Locke, while pushing forward a possible new interpretation.

Of Lawrence's 1977 self-portrait (fig. 1), a critic writes "His formidable expression challenges the viewer. But then one perceives that the sitter's head seems to be floating on the surface of the picture plane, apparently kept in position by the right hand. Perhaps the face is merely a mask being help up for the benefit of the audience." Bergman, the critic, seems to fall into the same trap that claimed Lawrence's early works. The classical style which he mentions is an ode to traditional Modernist approaches, focusing on form, color, and a compressed picture frame. However, this critic claims what many others have also done; that Lawrence's representation of self is understood as through a mask, rather than a flattened, cubist-style plane. In this image, Lawrence's background consists of paintings that don't actually reside in his studio which he seemingly felt represented him, both as an artist and individual. Works from his *Harriet Tubman* series and *the Builders* populate the frame, however, critics latch on to the idea of a mask rather than questioning how these reproductions may add to his identity and self-representation.

In an interview that took place less than a year before his induction, Lawrence states:

> I went through Africa for eight months, but I realize that's not much of an experience because I wasn't born to. There are some young artists who hope to find this African-American idiom, this form. But I don't know how they can because if you're living in this culture, you're a part of Western culture. To try to work like the African, the black American artist becomes pseudo something… I'd like to

7. Bradley, Rizvana Natalie. "James A. Porter & Alain Locke on Race, Culture, and the Making of Art: A Roundtable." Callaloo 39, no. 5 (2016): 1169-185.

> mention, though, that you can do it as a Western artist if you do it deliberately as Picasso did. You see, he did it in a very intellectual way to probe cubism. Many black artists also use African art, intellectually, to enhance the Western tradition in their work. We could go on and on with this but to answer your question very simply, I would say, no, I don't see a particular black American style.[8]

To which the interviewer responded "Yet, some of your critics will stress the 'African heritage' which they believe is in your work. They always seem to do that with black artists. Whether it's a writer, a painter, or what-have-you, both black and white critics will, from time to time, find some way to show a correlation between your aesthetic experience and African heritage."[9] Lawrence seems to believe that his work falls within the Western tradition, and at most is intellectually stimulated by African art in order to enhance his art, not inspire it. Picasso's primitive works found blatant inspiration from Africa, yet Lawrence wasn't necessarily looking to do this. The intent of reflecting African culture or roots isn't explicit in either his work or this interview response.

A few years later, Lawrence doubles down on this sentiment, claiming "You take the French Modernists such as Picasso and the Cubists — you have a very positive (African) influence there. I don't think you see this as much in my work after my trip" as if African influence falls upon individuals of any race, inspires any artist. Yet, Lawrence's style remained relatively the same, with him stating "I was very much motivated and stimulated by the marketplaces, the textures, the color, the movement-that was very exciting. So, I did about eight paintings on that theme-cloth markets, meat markets; this is what my content consisted of while in Africa. I really enjoyed being there. But this is not different from what I had been doing

8. Major, Clarence. "Clarence Major Interviews: Jacob Lawrence, The Expressionist." The Black Scholar 9, no. 3 (1977): 14-27.
9. Major, Clarence. "Clarence Major Interviews: Jacob Lawrence, The Expressionist." The Black Scholar 9, no. 3 (1977): 14-27.

in the Harlem community before going to Africa." Later, the interviewer asks: Do you feel your roots there (Africa) or do you feel them here? To which Lawrence responded "Well, I think I'm Western, if that's what your question means. But this is a very difficult question to answer. My culture's Western, yet I know my roots came from Africa, you see."[10]

Lawrence's Personal Style

Lawrence created a small series based on his time in Nigeria. The images look quite different than his 1977 self-portrait (fig. 1). Rather, the color, rhythm, and movement that Lawrence described in a later interview are prominent. Even in the heart of his supposed inspiration, Lawrence stays true to his style, drawing inspiration from texture and vibrant color, but not necessarily traditional art. *Market Scene* (fig. 2) maintains the same characteristics as those in his overarching library of works; layered colors and shallow planes which create a collage of overlaid narratives.

10. Rosenblum, Paula. "Seeing and Insight: An Interview with Jacob Lawrence." Art Education (Reston) 35, no. 4 (1982): 4-5.

2. Jacob Lawrence, *Market Scene*, 1966, gouache on paper, 10 1/2 × 14 1/2 in. (26.7 × 36.8 cm). Chrysler Museum of Art. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Lawrence created one image that focused on African masks, in 1954, about six years before traveling to Nigeria. Just as in his self-portrait, the image plane is flat, seemingly compressed into two dimensions rather than three. The masks are scattered around the room, painted in bright block colors that follow a loose Cubist style.

3. Jacob Lawrence, *Masks*, 1954, egg tempera on hardboard, 24 x 17.75 in. Elizabeth Marsteller Gordon. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

There are some similarities between his African masks and self-portrait. Lawrence sectioned off parts of the face, often

differentiating between forehead and cheekbone/eye sockets. The slit-like almond eyes are also a prominent, unifying characteristic. While parallels can easily be drawn here, I argue that these methods of depicting individuals are prominent throughout Lawrence's entire oeuvre, particularly in his earlier works. And, while the masks bear some resemblances to the style of African masks, Lawrence is working in a Modern style that can be traced throughout his entire career, cultivating into one self-portrait that is meant to define him, not only as an artist but as an individual as well.

4. Jacob Lawrence, *Street Orator's Audience*, 1936. Tempera on paper, 24.125 x 19.125 in. Collection of Tacoma Art Museum. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Roger W. Peck by exchange. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Lawrence's use of block colors to create two-dimensional faces can be seen as early as 1936 (fig. 4). In *Street Orator's Audience*, each individual is constructed of neutral shapes which form a face. Their eyes are even similar to those in his self-portrait. Lawrence's long history of depicting faces on two-dimensional planes makes his self-portrait fall well within his traditional style, and yet pushes back against the projected Africa-inspired analysis that art historians place upon him.

Lawrence's artistic practices deviate from traditional color-space theory, which theorizes how color can be placed in order to create a sense of depth on a two-dimensional plane (yellow "pops-out" and blue "sinks"). Even in his early works, Lawrence

blends these spaces.[11] You can find an example in *Street Orator's Audience*, the individual in the front is made up of the darkest skin tones, while another pops out of the background, consisting of the lightest colors. This same method is also prominent in his self-portrait; his face is painted with some of the darkest tones in the image. Merging and blending the layers in this way creates a collage-like image.

Artistic Inspirations

While the similarity between *Masks* and *Self-portrait* is fathomable, an even stronger relationship can be traced between other Cubist images and Lawrence's. Lawrence mentions Picasso a few times during his interviews as an artist who is inspired by African art and uses it as inspiration for his work. The flat picture planes, blocks of color, and collage-like effects are prominent characteristics of Picasso's work, for instance in paintings like *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (fig. 5). If Picasso is inspired by African art, and Lawrence is inspired by Picasso, does that mean his work is inspired by African masks? Or, as Lawrence tends to claim, it is simply a Western portrait, as he is a Western artist.

11. Sims, "The Structure of Narrative: Form and Content in Jacob Lawrence's Builders Paintings, 1946-1998" Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press in Association with Jacob Lawrence Catalogue Raisonné Project, 2000.

Lawrence's personal style can fall into the same cubist category as Picasso, as one can see from his *Guernica*, *Self-Portrait*, and *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*. It is no surprise that Picasso drew inspiration from African masks; even Lawrence mentions it in his interviews. This inspiration can easily be found in Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, where the faces, particularly on the right side of the frame, are made of stylized shapes and bright colors. Lawrence describes Picasso as explicitly inspired by African art and distinguishes his (Lawrence's) own style from other Western artists who pursue the same inspiration. Lawrence seems to develop an Americanized cubist style.

6. Pablo Picasso, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, 1907. Oil on canvas, 96 x 92 in. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Lawrence also states that he found inspiration from van Gogh's *The Potato Eaters* series (fig. 7). From there, one can build a bridge between Lawrence's use of block colors in the face and van Gogh's rendering. Both artists use cool, earth tones and chunks of color in order to create their faces. Lawrence's repeated return to this image implies inspiration to some extent. Lawrence states "I like symmetry, geometric design, composition, tonal color"[12]

12. Lovelace, Cary. "The Artist's Eye: Jacob Lawrence." *ARTnews* 95, no. 11 (1996): 79.

7. Vincent van Gogh, *Peasant Woman Digging up Potatoes*, 1885. Oil on canvas, 12.4 x 15 in. Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp, Antwerp.

While Lawrence discussed artists like Picasso and van Gogh, art historians continually placed him in conversation with other Black artists of his time, a prominent one being Romare Bearden. Bearden and Lawrence had different beliefs as to what being a Black artist in America meant. In a round table symposium, Bearden and Lawrence, along with a handful of others, were recorded in conversation, discussing what their roles and responsibilities were to their communities. Bearden argues strongly for an art that speaks to the Black community, claiming Black style is communicated through the image. Lawrence counters that without the artist standing beside the work, it is almost impossible to claim the racial identity of the artist. That their pieces are always placed in *Black* shows, rather than art shows.[13] While Lawrence remains proud of his identity and advocates for increased education and acceptance, he desires his art to be viewed through the lens of art, not a race.

Conclusion

Ultimately his self-portrait may be implicitly African-inspired but Lawrence made it clear that his art draws minimally from African culture and more from Western tradition. Calling this work mask-like without calling the work of Lawrence's white, cubist

13. "The Black Artist in America: A Symposium." Romare Bearden, Sam Gilliam, jr., Richard Hunt, Jacob Lawrence, Tom Lloyd, William Williams, and Hale Woodruff." *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 27, no. 5 (1969): 245-261

contemporaries the same is a form of racial projection — they aren't listening to the artist, himself. As he said, his roots may come from Africa, but his culture is Western. His roots may be hinted at in this piece, but ultimately Lawrence's self-expression stems from the tradition set up by Modern painters.

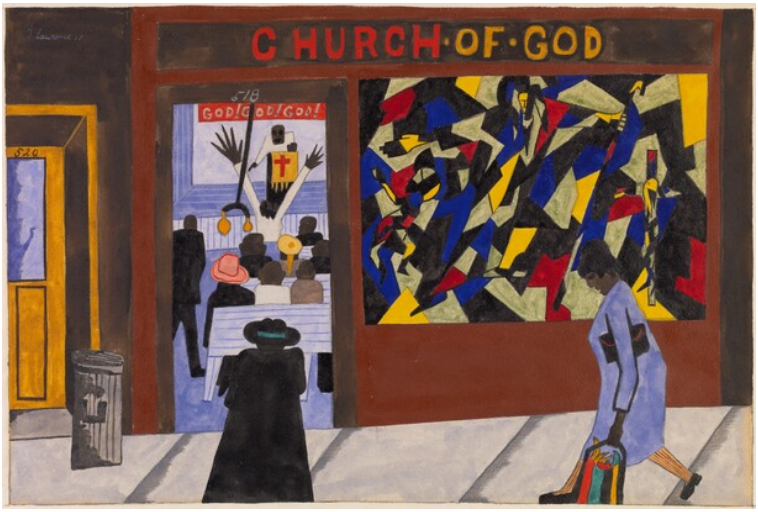
Rather, Lawrence leans into a layering method that lends itself to a collage-like feel. Instead of Lawrence hiding behind a mask, he highlights the layers and depth to which he represents himself by reflecting those ideals in his artistic practices. He draws from Cubist techniques and pushes the traditional boundaries of the style by pulling it into his personal, American-art twist. The conventional "African" reading of this image relies on his biographical history for analysis, rather than placing his works in the realm art history as a whole.

While the claim "African-inspired" may be unsubstantiated, it is hard to negate that Lawrence did not pertain to a particular African-American style of art (one he may simply call American). The collage aesthetic is used by a plethora of Black artists, and while it may be mildly African inspired through the cubist route, I argue that it is a practice that deserves recognition beyond its hyper-raced analysis. Artists like Romare Bearden, Lois Mailou Jones, and Kara Walker all employ a form of collage and layering that is extremely identifiable. What can this new method of analysis tell us that an "African-inspired" lens can not capture? As you begin to look at this image in terms of layers, the narrative changes. Perhaps it highlights a disjointed history, one that is distorted and erased by white oppressors, denying a coherent, unified story.

15. Sunday School

Lessons on Creation from Jacob Lawrence

NICOLAS STALEY



1. Jacob Lawrence, *There are many churches in Harlem. The people are very religious*, 1943. Transparent and opaque watercolor on paper; Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth, Texas. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

A young man steps off the train. It is 1942, and he is tired. The journey was long, and even now it is incomplete. His family is with him, and they are tired too. They have few belongings, but they have an abundance of hope. The man and his family walk down the street. Everyone they see is black, like them. Sounds of a man yelling waft through an open door. The family stops, stares, and listens. The yelling man is a minister, and his yelling is a sermon. Hovering above

them on the building's marquee are the words "Church • Of • God." *This is Harlem.* The minister sees the young family and ushers them in. The anxieties of travel are relieved. They listen as the minister speaks of community, class, and color. *Most of the people are very poor. Rent is high. Food is high.* The family stays for the sermon and leaves with renewed vigor. They walk down the street searching for their house. In Harlem, *They live in old and dirty tenement houses.* The family tells themselves that it is better than where they came from. They cannot find their building, but they see another church. Another man is yelling- it is another sermon. The family continues to pass churches in search of their home. *There are many churches in Harlem. The people are very religious.* They finally arrive, and while their journey is complete, their struggles are not. *This is a family living in Harlem.*

This is not a story of one family, but many. Hundreds, thousands, millions even. The family has fled the South, which held nothing for them. The North is somehow better, and they get to work improving their community. It is difficult, and even though they have fled Jim Crow, he seems to have followed them in a new form. This is Harlem: a black community constantly growing, fed by the Great Migration.[1]

This is Harlem. Most of the people are very poor. Rent is high. Food is high. They live in old and dirty tenement houses. There are many churches in Harlem. The people are very religious. This is a family living in Harlem. These crisp phrases title the individual panels of Jacob Lawrence's *Harlem* series, which he painted between 1942 and 1943 (fig. 1).[2] The series documents the living conditions in the Harlem neighborhood where Lawrence was raised, which are sometimes good, but mostly bad. One work stands out amongst the others in the *Harlem* series because it hides more than it shows. As its caption declares, people in Harlem *were* very religious, and

1. The Great Migration was the mass movement of nearly 6 million African Americans out of the South and into the rest of the United States, most notably the Northeast and Midwest. This migration occurred from roughly 1916 to 1970.
2. For more information on Jacob Lawrence's *Harlem* series, see Patricia Hills, "Home in Harlem: Tenements and Streets," in *Painting Harlem Modern: the Art of Jacob Lawrence* (2009): p. 169-204

through religion, they found the means to not only survive but thrive. This is not a story of one family, or hundreds, or thousands, or millions even. This is a story about religion, told by Jacob Lawrence in interconnected chapters across his long career, and he is about to take us to Sunday School.

Creating *Genesis*

This essay focuses closely on one chapter of Lawrence's narrative of religion and survival: The Eight Studies for *The Book of Genesis* (hereafter: the *Genesis* series), which he created for the Limited Editions Club (LEC) of New York (figs. 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11). The LEC aimed to create high-quality reproductions of classic literature. The *Genesis* series was not the first time that Lawrence had worked with the LEC; some years earlier in 1983, he provided the firm with eight paintings to illustrate John Hersey's *Hiroshima*. The eight works of 1989-1990 encompass Genesis 1, detailing the creation of the world and its living inhabitants. Printed in two separate editions, the eight works were also included in the LEC publication of the King James Version of the book of Genesis. Lawrence signed and numbered each book, of which 400 were made.[3] The *Genesis* works remain relatively ignored within Lawrence's oeuvre and thus provide a fresh opportunity to consider how, and to what extent, the artist's personal life, upbringing, and the community of Harlem shaped his art. Lawrence's *Genesis* series eschews the link between the crucified Christ and the motif of the lynched black man, instead refocusing the narrative to center on a Black God and his congregation. By intertwining the story of Genesis with that of the Great Migration, Lawrence empowers black Christians with the

3. Peter T. Nesbett, *Jacob Lawrence: The Complete Prints (1963-2000), A Catalogue Raisonne* (Seattle: Francine Seders Gallery, 2005), 50-51.

abilities of creation and enhancement. As God and his congregation create a world, so too do black Christians use religion as a tool to shape and form their communities in an era of mass migration and societal upheaval.

This analysis works to synthesize multiple histories that have yet to enter the collective conversation around Lawrence's art. These histories have provided invaluable knowledge and support to this paper, and as such, this essay is indebted to the phenomenal work of scholars of African American history and art. Scholars such as Kymberly Pinder, Phoebe Wolfskill, Kristin Schwain, Amy Hamlin, and many others have provided exceptional research into the life and art of Jacob Lawrence and his contemporaries.

2. Jacob Lawrence, *Genesis No.4, And God created the day and the night and God created and put stars in the sky*, from Eight Studies for The Book of Genesis, 1989-1990, silkscreen. Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University; Gift of Joelle Kayden© 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Embracing a Tradition

While the original eight works for the *Genesis* series were paintings, their status as prints is inextricably tied to their content and message. Printmaking was, and remains, popular among black artists; the widespread distribution and accessibility allowed for communities with little means to create easily distributable works of art.[4] Lawrence's personal history as a printmaker began in 1963 with his first published print and continued until his death in 2000.[5] Romare Bearden, a contemporary and close friend of Lawrence, was highly invested in printmaking as both a tool to create works of art and to enrich African American communities.[6] Given Lawrence's personal relationship with Bearden, who went on to found the art collective "Spiral", he was no stranger to the power of printmaking as a tool for enlightenment and equality.[7] His early-career chronicles of American history are echoed in the use of prints after 1963, as the medium itself became a staple within the art of black communities, he can be seen as further honoring this tradition. The democratization of printmaking reflected the environment of Lawrence's youth, with arts programs and workshops in Harlem. With the overall goal of teaching creative and marketable skills to the youth of Harlem, printmaking can be seen as the evolution of these ideas. Therefore, putting aside the content of the *Genesis* series, their material quality alone speaks to a legacy of communal betterment through art. The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, founded shortly before Lawrence's death in 2000, represents the continuation of these principles that helped

4. Allan Edmunds, "The Printed Image: Process and Influences in African American Art," in *The Routledge Companion to African American Art History*, ed. Eddie Chambers (Routledge, 2019), 395.
5. For more information about black printmaking, see https://www.bookprintcollective.com/
6. Edmunds, "Printed Image," 399, 404.
7. Spiral was an African American art collective founded by Romare Bearden, Charles Alston, Norman Lewis, and Hale Woodruff. For more information on Spiral, see Connie H. Choi, "Spiral, the Black Arts Movement, and "Where We At" Black Women Artists," in *Where we At? Black Radical Women 1965-1985: a Sourcebook*, p. 26-32.

shape both Jacob and his wife Gwendolyn, also an artist, throughout their early careers.

3. Jacob Lawrence, *Genesis No. 5, And God created all the fowls of the air and fishes of the seas*, from Eight Studies for The Book of Genesis, 1989-1990, silkscreen. Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University; Gift of Joelle Kayden © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

The Black Man of Sorrows

On August 31st, 1924, in Liberty Hall, New York, the "Fourth International Convention of Negroes of the World" concluded with a statement that corrected the "mistake of centuries" and ushered in a new era in African American Christianity: Jesus was a black man.[8] Some six thousand people gathered to hear a sermon by Sir George A. McGuire, Lord Primate of the African Orthodox Church.[9] The event concluded with the statement that Jesus was a "Black Man of Sorrows", and the Virgin Mary was "canonized as a Black Madonna."[10] These declarations extended from the same robust discussion about racial cooperation and self-determination that defined the Harlem Renaissance period from 1918 to the mid-1930s.[11] During this period, religion was frequently invoked as a balm for the injustices suffered during the ongoing fight for equality. The pain of this life was in service of salvation in the next, and the racial violence and inequality of America strengthened this faith.[12] Christ's own agony at the hands of his captors was seen as allegorical to the pain felt by black Christian communities throughout America. The endurance of such hardships within this life mirrored that of Christ, and his sorrows came to represent those of racial violence and systemic racism.[13]

8. "Religious Ceremony at Liberty Hall that Corrects Mistake of Centuries and Braces the Negro," *The Negro World*, September 6, 1924, 5.
9. Lord Primate is akin to an Archbishop.
10. "Religious Ceremony," *The Negro World*, 5.
11. Kymberly Pinder, "'Our Father, God; Our Brother, Christ; or are we bastard kin?': images of Christ in African American painting," *African American Review* 31, no. 2 (1997): 223-33.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.

4. Jacob Lawrence, *Genesis No. 7, And God created man and woman*, from Eight Studies for The Book of Genesis, 1989-1990, silkscreen. Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University; Gift of Joelle Kayden © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Crucifixion and lynching, two extreme acts of violence with powerful parallels, came to embody the struggle of black

Christianity as a whole. The lynched black body became a symbol of martyrdom akin to that of the crucified Christ; these symbols served as concrete links between the religiosity of black communities and their struggle under an oppressive system.[14] Just as Christ's death was a pathway to salvation, so too was continual faith in the face of violent racism. During the same event in which Christ was deified as a Black Man of Sorrows, activist Marcus Garvey argued that it was imperative for black Christians to see God in "his own image and likeness" akin to Germans and Anglo-Saxons.[15]

It was against this historical backdrop that Lawrence painted a black crucified Christ in *Catholic New Orleans*, and in doing so aided in the continued elevation of this parallel (fig. 5). Within this work, a black woman approaches a collection of religious items. A number of crucifixes are strewn throughout the painting, but the one in the center carries a black body. The Christ on this cross is a black man, and next to him is a painting of the Virgin Mary, who is also black. The Virgin looks down at her crucified son, as many mothers had to look at their lynched sons. Both Christ and the black woman are given no features or defining characteristics, Lawrence rendered them as a stand-in for the black communities of America. Black Christians saw themselves reflected in Christ, and their battles were his battles, strength in faith mirrored strength in life.

14. Kymberly Pinder, "Black Grace: The Religious Impulse in African American Art," in *The Routledge Companion to African American Art History*, ed. Eddie Chambers (Routledge, 2019), 193.
15. "Religious Ceremony," *The Negro World*, 5.

5. Jacob Lawrence, *Catholic New Orleans*, 1941, gouache on paper, 28 1/4 x 34 1/4 in. University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Purchased with the aid of funds from the National Endowment for the Arts (Selected by the Committee for the Acquisition of Afro-American Art), 1971.22. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Migrants and Ministers

Lawrence's propensity to create sociopolitical art brings his own religion into question when examining the *Genesis* series. Although quite reserved, Lawrence did speak about his own religious upbringing and its effect on him while creating these pieces:

"I was baptized in the Abyssinian Baptist Church [in Harlem] in about 1932. There I attended church, I attended Sunday School, and I remember the ministers giving very passionate sermons pertaining to the Creation. This was over fifty years ago, and you know, these things stay with you even though you don't realize what an impact these experiences are making on you at the time. As I was doing

the series I think that this was in the back of my mind, hearing this minister talk about these things."[16]

The Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem is located on West 138th Street in Harlem and is still a central part of Harlem's community today. Liberty Hall, where Jesus was deified as a Black Man of Sorrows in 1924, was also located on West 138th Street only a few doors down from the church. The legacy of the 1924 sermon, and Garvey's speech, would undoubtedly be on the minds of those within the Harlem community around the time Lawrence was baptized. It was within this environment that Lawrence first embraced religion, and the lasting impact of this black Christian discourse can be seen nearly sixty years later within the *Genesis* series. The pastor of the Abyssinian Baptist Church during Lawrence's youth was Rev. Adam Clayton Powell Sr., who taught a message of "applied Christianity" that translated biblical teachings into public outreach.[17] The passion with which Rev. Powell Sr. went about his sermons was akin to the theatrics of pastors such as Junius C. Austin, who would begin each sermon at the Pilgrim Baptist Church in Chicago by emerging from a painted tomb, greeted by angels.[18] Rev. Austin's symbolic resurrection day in and day out was paralleled in his social reformist sermons, further strengthening the link between black activism and black Christianity.[19]

Men like Reverends Austin and Powell Sr. emerged as pillars within their communities, both spiritually and politically. The role of ministers within black Christian communities was central to instituting social and political reform and cemented the Black Church as an engine of societal change.[20] By 1937 the Abyssinian

16. Nesbett, *The Complete Prints*, 50.
17. Kristin Schwain, "Creating History, Establishing a Canon: Jacob Lawrence's *The First Book of Moses, Called Genesis*," in *Beholding Christ and Christianity in African American Art*, ed. James Romaine and Phoebe Wolfskill (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017), 168.
18. For more information on Jacob Lawrence's interest in theatricality, see Patricia Hills, "The Double Consciousness of Masks and Masking," in *Painting Harlem Modern: the Art of Jacob Lawrence* (2009): p. 205-230
19. Pinder, "Black Grace," 194-195.
20. Schwain, "Creating History," 170.

Baptist Church had grown to become one of the most powerful Protestant churches in the nation, boasting seven thousand members. Rev. Powell Sr. used this political capital to aid in the urbanization and migration of rural, Southern, and often impoverished, black Americans during the Great Migration.[21] Lawrence's *Genesis* series features an analog of Rev. Powell Sr. and thus offers insight into the artist's use of anecdotal personal experience in illustrating a universal message.

Exploring *Genesis*

Lawrence's *Genesis* series takes black Christian ideals of salvation through faith and suffering and reworks them as ideals of black power and black liberation through religion. The parallels between Lawrence's own Christian upbringing and the *Genesis* series are starkly apparent, and it is here that Lawrence's commentary shines through. Throughout the series, God is rendered as a black man, but where the black Christianity of Lawrence's youth equates the black body to that of a crucified Jesus through a shared form of suffering, Lawrence empowers the black body by linking it with divine power. God is not a black man beaten by an oppressive system, but an all-powerful being capable of creating life. His congregation looks on in awe as God fills the world. Through this imagery, Lawrence comments on the power of faith within the Harlem community, and its ability to shape and create. The black God is shaping a world for his black congregation, and they in turn use the teachings of God to enrich their community. Through the narrative cycle of the *Genesis* series, Lawrence reinforces the positive, life-changing, community building, powers of religion.

Genesis No.1 "*In the beginning all was void.*" commences the

21. Ibid, 168.

Genesis series with its cloying black void peering through the arcades of God's church (fig. 6). The congregation itself huddles together in a state of fear and anxiety. The woman closest to God sheds a single tear of anguish. God himself is down on one knee, with head tilted skyward, and arms outstretched in a plea of desperation. He encourages his congregation to create a world for him to populate.[22] A toolbox is placed near the congregation, its inclusion paramount to Lawrence's narrative: God has provided the tools for his congregation to create the world in which they live. Lawrence's fondness for tools- in his words, "the perfect symbol,"- is well documented.[23] The famous *Builders* series, examined earlier within this book, focuses heavily on tools within many different contexts and environments. The tools, bible, God, the church, and the congregation remain present throughout the entire series. A large vase with a single flower is also present in all but one of the works. Above God's head is the bible which is given a covered lectern to rest upon and never far from him, as the bible itself is central to Lawrence's story of Genesis. Furthermore, the inclusion of printed materials within these works provides metacommentary on the importance of printed materials within black communities, and on the role of the *Genesis* series itself as printed artwork.

22. Ibid, 171.
23. "Twenty Questions: Jacob Lawrence," *Philadelphia City Paper*, May 8-15, 1997.

6. Jacob Lawrence, *Genesis No.1, In the Beginning—All was void*, from Eight Studies for The Book of Genesis, 1989-1990, silkscreen. Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University; Gift of Joelle Kayden© 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Genesis No.2 "And God brought forth the firmament and the waters." sees all the familiar components of *No. 1* shifted,

transformed, and animated (fig. 7). A blue robe becomes gold, an orange floor becomes gray, brown tile becomes red, the white toolbox becomes yellow. These changes avoid repetition by creating a sense of energy and movement throughout the works, as well as spotlight progress within the congregation as they work in collaboration with God to continually reshape their environment. The bible is in the hands of a congregation member and the tools have moved back towards the arcades, as they are no longer in use. The congregation has created the world, it is now God's turn to fill it. Through the continued changes within the series, Lawrence highlights the symbiotic relationship between the black community and the church, both of them changing together for the betterment of their environment. The congregation must build a community for God to improve, akin to Harlem providing a community with which Rev. Powell Sr. could enact social justice and public outreach. It is through this narrative that Lawrence simultaneously acknowledges and eschews the tradition of the black lynched Christ in favor of the powerful black God and his thriving community. He assigns the role of creator to common black Americans, allowing "the minister [to form] the foundation on which his congregation builds community."[24]

24. Schwain, "Creating History," 171.

7. Jacob Lawrence, *Genesis No. 2, And God brought forth the firmament and the waters*, from Eight Studies for The Book of Genesis, 1989-1990, silkscreen. Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University; Gift of Joelle Kayden© 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Genesis No. 3 'And God said, "Let the earth bring forth the grass, trees, fruits and herbs." continues the pattern of movement and alteration

found within the previous work (fig. 8). The colors change, the congregation moves, as do their tools. The bible is back on God's lectern, and the flower within the vase has shifted from lavender to light green. *Genesis No.* 4-8 all continue with Lawrence's established rhythm. The pieces of the story move about and evolve, but the essential meaning remains the same. As art historian Kymberly Pinder argues, the kinetic energy present throughout the works speaks to a tradition of bodily participation within black Christianity. The ability to move about uninhibited "epitomizes [a] kind of freedom" inherited from West African religions and cultures.[25] The bodily agency that is afforded to God and his congregation serves to break the bonds of servitude that regulated the black body during slavery. The crucified Christ and the Lynched Black Man cannot move of their own accord, but God and his congregation have that freedom.

25. Pinder, "Black Grace," 193.

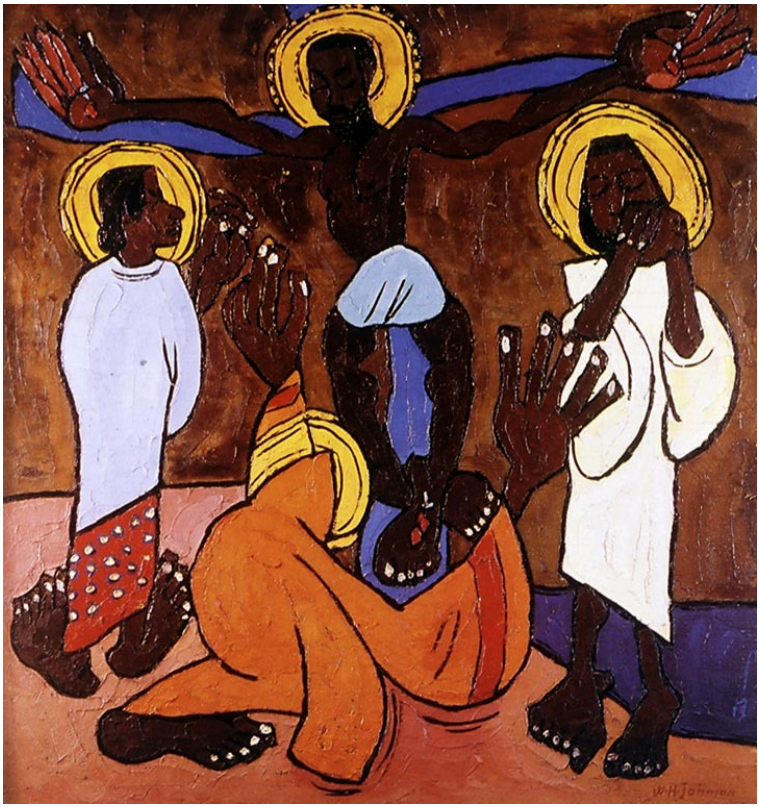
8. Jacob Lawrence, *Genesis No. 3, And God said, Let the earth bring forth the grass, trees, fruits and herbs*, from Eight Studies for The Book of Genesis, 1989-1990, silkscreen. Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University; Gift of Joelle Kayden © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Disrupting the Canon

William Henry Johnson's 1939 piece *Jesus and the Three Marys* embodies the canon which Lawrence's *Genesis* series ultimately transforms (fig. 9). Stylistically, Lawrence's *Genesis* series is not dissimilar to Johnson's work. Both feature relatively flat characters with exaggerated features and oversized extremities. The coloration is uniform, with little modulation to account for changes in light or depth. This is where the similarities end, however. Johnson's work embraces the traditional imagery of the crucified Christ, clearly referencing the lynched black man. This reference was commonplace among black artists in the 1930s and was explored again by Johnson in *Lynch Mob Victim*, also from 1939. Both of Johnson's works feature a black victim surrounded by three black women, echoing the crucifixion these men have been "unjustly accused" and killed by a "prejudiced and unenlightened mob."[26] Some of Johnson's works were featured in the 1935 Antilynching Exhibition curated by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).[27] While Lawrence references the pictorial tradition but ultimately alters it, Johnson's works reinforce and advance the link between lynching and crucifixion. The symbolism and expressionist forms, which favor emotional clarity rather than physical harmony, within Johnson's *Jesus and the Three Marys* serve to produce an "aesthetics of transcendence," disregarding formal pictorial language to radiate an "internal felt expression of Christianity."[28] Similarly, Lawrence's own forms and symbols transcend their semiotic structure. A black minister assumes the role of a black God, and this black God represents religion as a concept. The community of Harlem serves as a

26. Amy K. Hamlin, "Toward an Aesthetics of Transcendence: William H. Johnson's *Jesus and the Three Marys*," in *Beholding Christ and Christianity in African American Art*, ed. James Romaine and Phoebe Wolfskill (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017), 85.
27. Ibid, 87.
28. Ibid, 75.

congregation that becomes responsible for building their own world. Simple tools are transformed into instruments of divine creation which serve to reshape political and societal barriers.



9. William H. Johnson, *Jesus and the Three Marys*, ca. 1939. Oil on wood, 94.6 × 87 cm (37 1/4 × 34 1/4 in.). Howard University Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

Implementing Heritage

Panel six of *Genesis*, "*And God created all the beasts of the earth.*"

stands out from the rest of the series. God is seen with arms outstretched and head tilted towards the heavens. In the arcades of the church a panther, an elephant, and an antelope can be seen, all three of which are native to the African continent. Instantly a connection is made between African American ancestral heritage and black Christianity. Akin to the kinetic forms of God and his congregation, whose movement is West African inspired, so too are the animals chosen by Lawrence a reminder of collective black heritage. By deepening these connections within the work, Lawrence continues to reinforce the ideals of a black community made for, and by, black Christians. To illustrate each passage of Genesis, Lawrence evokes black protestant tradition by linking a specific biblical passage to its visual representation. Essentially, Lawrence presents what art historian Kristin Schwain describes as a "living document that creates community and shapes the lives of those who read, preach, and hear it."[29] Unlike the other works within the series, *Genesis No.6* does not feature a flower and vase. The outline of these objects can be seen within the lower right corner, but it seems Lawrence painted over them later. Furthermore, this work changes the composition of the congregation by having the churchgoers on either side of God. This choice will continue until the end of the series, with the congregation getting noticeably larger as the panels progress.

29. Schwain, "Creating History," 166.

10. Jacob Lawrence, Genesis No. 6, And God created all the beasts of the earth, from Eight Studies for The Book of Genesis, 1989-1990, silkscreen. Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University; Gift of Joelle Kayden © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Genesis No. 8 "*And creation was done-and all was well.*" provides a fulfilling conclusion to the series (fig. 8). God appears for a final

time with an upswept arm, which mirrors the arced shape of his congregation. Recalling Johnson's *Jesus and the Three Marys* and other works by Lawrence, the figure of God has a noticeably enlarged hand. A common feature within his *Builders* series, the enlarged hands, like the toolbox, act as highly visible instruments of work and creation. God and his congregation have finished their collective work, and while the churchgoers display their tools, God showcases his hand as an instrument of divine creation. Through this series, Lawrence has transformed the black body from a victim of racial violence to a powerful instrument of progress, a reversal emphasized through an absence, rather than a presence: the final panel is the only one that does not feature a figure shedding tears. The exclusion of such imagery points to Lawrence's faith by allowing religion to soothe the ailments of a fragmented society.

11. Jacob Lawrence, Genesis No. 8, And creation was done-and all was well, from Eight Studies for The Book of Genesis, 1989-1990, silkscreen. Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University; Gift of Joelle Kayden © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Concluding Creation

"…I attended Sunday School, and I remember the ministers giving very passionate sermons pertaining to the Creation…As I was doing the series I think that this was in the back of my mind, hearing this minister talk about these things."[30] Jacob Lawrence's comments on his *Genesis* series begin to uncover the true depth he achieved within these works. Generations of storytelling culminate in a pictorial sequence that illustrates the religiosity of millions of Southern black migrants who sought out the North to join their Christian siblings. Employing a similar visual style to William H. Johnson, Lawrence references his forebears while reorienting that standard narrative to one of black empowerment. For Lawrence, religion is a tool that builds communities and provides them with the instruments to enact societal change. Relying on his own experiences as a youth in Harlem, Lawrence personifies his own religious upbringing within the black God of the *Genesis* series. Like the many migrant families who journeyed north, we too are taken on a journey of creation, community, and change, as Jacob Lawrence takes us with him to Sunday School.

30. Nesbett, *The Complete Prints*, 50.

Syllabus

The essays in this book were informed by the class meetings in the spring 2021 seminar *Art and Seattle: Jacob Lawrence*. An abbreviated course syllabus, which includes the required readings for each meeting, as well as recommended resources, is below.

PART I: Lawrence in Focus

The course is divided into two parts that progressively widen in scope. We will begin with an in-depth critical survey of Jacob Lawrence's major artworks and art historical contexts. Once we've established this foundation, we will expand outwards to consider Lawrence alongside other artists whose work intersects with related issues, themes, and debates in 20th century American art history.

Week 1: Introductions

Jacob Lawrence, *Self-Portrait*, 1977, Gouache and tempera on paper, 23 x 31 in. National Academy of Design, New York. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

- Milton W. Brown, *Jacob Lawrence* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1974), p. 9-14.
- Steve Locke, "I, Too, Sing America," in Elizabeth Hutton Turner and Austen Barron Bailly, eds., *Jacob Lawrence: The American Struggle* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019), 16-21
- Lizzetta Lefalle-Collins, "The Critical Context of Jacob Lawrence's Early Works, 1938-1952," in Peter T. Nesbett and Michelle DuBois, eds., *Over the Line: The Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press in association with Jacob Lawrence Catalogue Raisonné Project, 2000), 121-146

Week 2: Becoming an Artist

Kenneth F. Space, *Jacob Lawrence making block prints at a WPA Federal Art Project Workshop*, 1933-34. Photograph, National Archives, Harmon Foundation, 200[S]-HNE-18-15

- Elizabeth Hutton Turner, "The Education of Jacob Lawrence," in *Over the Line: the Art of Jacob Lawrence*, 97-120
- Patricia Hills, "Home in Harlem: Tenements and Streets," in *Painting Harlem Modern: the Art of Jacob Lawrence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 169-204
- Lowery Stokes Sims, "The Structure of Narrative: Form and Content in Jacob Lawrence's Builders Paintings, 1946-1998," in *Over the Line: the Art of Jacob Lawrence*, 201-228

Week 3: Representation and the Art World

United States Coast Guard Public Relations Division, Brooklyn Guardsman Combat Artist in Atlantic, c. 1944. Photograph. Still Picture Branch, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD, 26-G-3807

- John Ott, "Battle Station MoMA: Jacob Lawrence and the Desegregation of the Armed Forces and the Art World," *American Art* 29, no. 3 (September 1, 2015): 58–89

- Bridget R. Cooks, "A Note on Terminology" and "Negro Art in the Modern Art Museum," in *Exhibiting Blackness: African Americans and the American Art Museum* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), xv and 17-51.
- Kobena Mercer, "Black Art and the Burden of Representation," *Third Text* 4, no. 10 (1990): 61-78.

Week 4: (Re)constructing History

Jacob Lawrence, *The Libraries Are Appreciated*, 1943, gouache on paper, 37.3 x 54.9 cm., Philadelphia Museum of Art. The Louis E. Stern Collection. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

- Arthur A. Schomburg, "The Negro Digs Up His Past," in *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, ed. Alain LeRoy Locke (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925).
- Lonnie G. Bunch III and Spencer R. Crew, "A Historian's Eye: Jacob Lawrence, Historical Reality, and the Migration Series," in

Elizabeth Hutton Turner, ed., *Jacob Lawrence: The Migration Series* (Emeryville, CA: Rappahannock Press, in association with the Phillips Collection, 1993), 23-31.

- Leah Dickerman, "Fighting Blues," in Leah Dickerman and Elsa Smithgall, eds., *Jacob Lawrence: The Migration Series.* (N.Y.: The Museum of Modern Art, 2017), 10-31
- Sarah Kelly Oehler, "Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow: Charles White's Murals and History as Art," in Sarah Kelly Oehler and Esther Adler, eds., *Charles White: A Retrospective*, First edition (Chicago, IL: The Art Institute of Chicago, 2018), 21-38
- Austen Barron Bailly, "To and from Decatur Street: Jacob Lawrence's Brooklyn and the War of 1812 Struggle panels," in *Jacob Lawrence: American Struggle*, 48-63

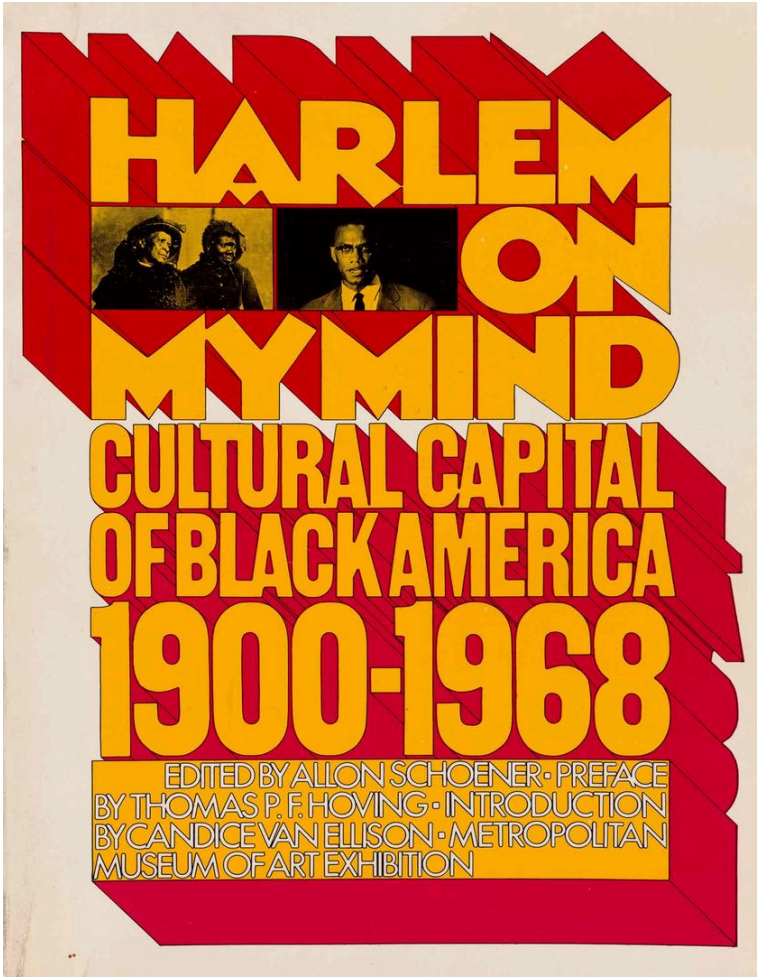
Week 5: The American Struggle

Jacob Lawrence, *We have no property! We have no wives! No children! We have no city! No country! -Petition of many slaves*, 1955, egg tempera on hardboard, 16 x 12 in, collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

- Barbara Earl Thomas, "Tender Beauty, Wounded Hope," in *Jacob Lawrence: American Struggle*, 13
- Elizabeth Hutton Turner, "Reading History: Recovering Jacob Lawrence's Lost American Narrative," in *Jacob Lawrence: American Struggle*, 24-47
- James Smalls, "A Ghost of a Chance: Invisibility and Elision in African American Art Historical Practice." *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America* 13, no. 1 (1994): 3-8.
- Eddie Chambers, "It's Time to Share," Colloquium, Panorama: Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art 6, no. 2 (Fall 2020)
- Eddie Chambers, "The Difficulty of Naming White Things," *Small Axe* 16, no. 2 (2012): 186–97
- Richard J. Powell, "Linguists, Poets, and "Others" on African American Art," *American Art* 17, no. 1 (Spring 2003). Special issue: Writing African American Art History.
- Seph Rodney, "Probing the Proper Grounds for Criticism in the Wake of the 2019 Whitney Biennial," Hyperallergic, 2019
- Simone Leigh, instagram post, May 6, 2019

PART 2: Lawrence in Context

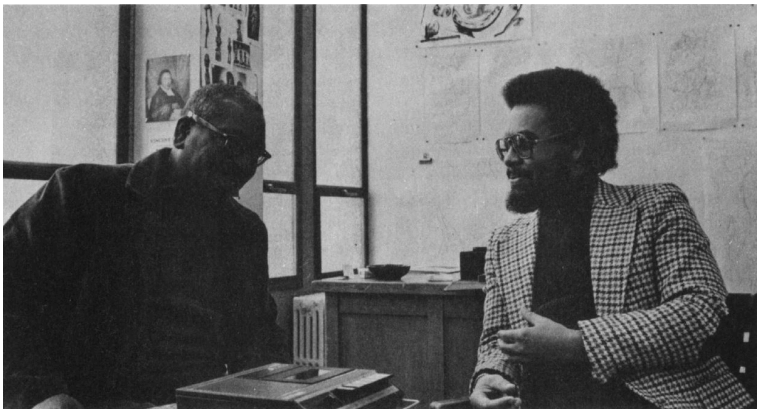
Week 6: The Black Artist in America



The exhibition catalogue for Harlem on My Mind, edited by guest curator Allon Schoener. via the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

- "The Black Artist in America: A Symposium." Romare Bearden, Sam Gilliam, jr., Richard Hunt, Jacob Lawrence, Tom Lloyd, William Williams, and Hale Woodruff. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 27, no. 5 (1969): 245-261.
- Tom Lloyd, "Black Art – White Cultural Institutions," in *Black Art Notes*, 1971
- Paul J. Karlstrom, "Jacob Lawrence: Modernism, Race, Community," in *Over the Line: the Art of Jacob Lawrence*, 229-246
- Connie H. Choi, "Spiral, the Black Arts Movement, and "Where We At" Black Women Artists," in Catherine Morris and Rujeko Hockley, eds., *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965-85: A Sourcebook* (Brooklyn, NY: Brooklyn Museum, 2017), 26-32
- Kelly Baum, Maricelle Robles, and Sylvia Yount, "Harlem on Whose Mind?": the Met and Civil Rights," February 17, 2021
- Holland Cotter, "What I Learned from a Disgraced Art Show on Harlem," *New York Times*, August 19, 2015
- Bridget R. Cooks, "Black Artists and Activism: Harlem on my Mind, 1969," in *Exhibiting Blackness : African Americans and the American Art Museum*, 2003
- Hannah Foster, The Black Arts Movement (1965-1975). BlackPast.org, March 2014
- "The Black Student Union at UW," Seattle Civil Rights & Labor History Project (https://depts.washington.edu/civilr/BSU_intro.htm)
- Marc Robinson, "The Early History of the UW Black Student Union," Seattle Civil Rights & Labor History Project (https://depts.washington.edu/civilr/BSU_beginnings.htm)
- BSU Letter to President Odegaard, May 6, 1968

Week 7: Style, Form, Composition



Interview between Jacob Lawrence and Clarence Major in Lawrence's Studio in the University of Washington Art Building, January 10 1977

- Clarence Major and Jacob Lawrence, "Clarence Major Interviews: Jacob Lawrence, the Expressionist." *The Black Scholar* 9, no. 3 (1977): 14-27
- Richard Powell, "Harmonizer of Chaos: Jacob Lawrence at Midcentury," in *Over the Line: the Art of Jacob Lawrence*, 147-174
- Mark Godfrey, "Notes on Black Abstraction," and Zoe Whitley, "American Skin: Artists on Black Figuration," in Mark Godfrey and Zoé Whitley, eds., *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power* (London: Tate Publishing, 2017), 147-225
- Bing Davis, "White Art Historians – Black Art," in *Black Art Notes*, 1971
- Sheehan, Tanya. "Confronting Taboo." *American Art* 28, no. 3 (2014): 28-51.

Week 8: Labor, Work, Tools

Jacob Lawrence, *Builders No. 1*, 1972, Watercolor, gouache, and graphite, 22 7/16 x 30 3/4 in. St. Louis Art Museum, Eliza McMillan Trust, 93:1972. © 2021 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

- David Ward, "The Face of Labor," in David C. Ward and Dorothy Moss, eds., *The Sweat of Their Face: Portraying American Workers* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books; In association with the National Portrait Gallery, 2017).
- Ethan W. Lasser, "Factory Craft: Art and Industry in Conversation," *The Journal of Modern Craft*, 6:3, 315-320, 2013
- Explore videos from "The Tool at Hand," Milwaukee Art Museum and the Chipstone Foundation, 2013
- Anthony Lee, "Workers and painters: social realism and race in Diego Rivera's Detroit murals" in 930s *in the Western Hemisphere*, Refiguring Modernism 4 (University Park, Pa:

Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006).

- Peter Nesbett, *Jacob Lawrence : the Builders, recent paintings*, 1998
- Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 1-39
- Smith, Pamela H. "In the Workshop of History: Making, Writing, and Meaning." *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture* 19, no. 1 (2012): 4-31.
- Ethan W. Lasser (2013) Scaling up: Theaster Gates, Jr, and His Toolkit, *The Journal of Modern Craft*, 6:1, 79-86
- Jonathan Weinberg, "I want muscle : male desire and the image of the worker in American art of the 1930s," in *The social and the real : political art of the 1930s in the western hemisphere*, 2006
- Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw, "Migration and Muralism: New Negro Artists and Socialist Art," in Barbara Haskell, ed., *Vida Americana: Mexican Muralists Remake American Art, 1925-1945* (New York : New Haven: Whitney Museum of American Art ; in association with Yale University Press, 2020)

Week 9: Legacies and Lineages

Jacob Lawrence, *Artist in Studio*, 1994, gouache and pencil on paper, 26 x 19 3/4 in. © 2020 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

- Julie Levin Caro, "Jacob Lawrence at Black Mountain College,

Summer 1946," in Storm Janse van Rensburg, *Jacob Lawrence: lines of influence* (Savannah, GA: SCAD Museum of Art, 2020), 131-144

- Julie Levin Caro, "The Legacy of Black Mountain College on Lawrence's Art Pedagogy," in *Between Form and Content: Perspectives on Jacob Lawrence + Black Mountain College* (Asheville, NC: Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center, 2019), 77-81
- Patricia Hills, "Epilogue," in *Painting Harlem Modern*, 259-270
- Peter Nesbett, "The Incomplete Jacob Lawrence," in *American Masterworks from the Merrill C. Berman Collection*, 2015
- Jacob Lawrence et. al., "Faculty Notes," in *Drawing, at the Henry: an Exhibition of Contemporary Drawings by Eighteen West Coast Artists, April 5-May 25, 1980*, Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington. Seattle: The Gallery, 1980.
- Victoria L. Valentine, "Lines of Influence: Commissioned Works by Barbara Earl Thomas and Derrick Adams Respond to Legacy of Jacob Lawrence," Culture Type, 2/4/2018
- Barbara Earl Thomas: the Geography of Innocence at the Seattle Art Museum