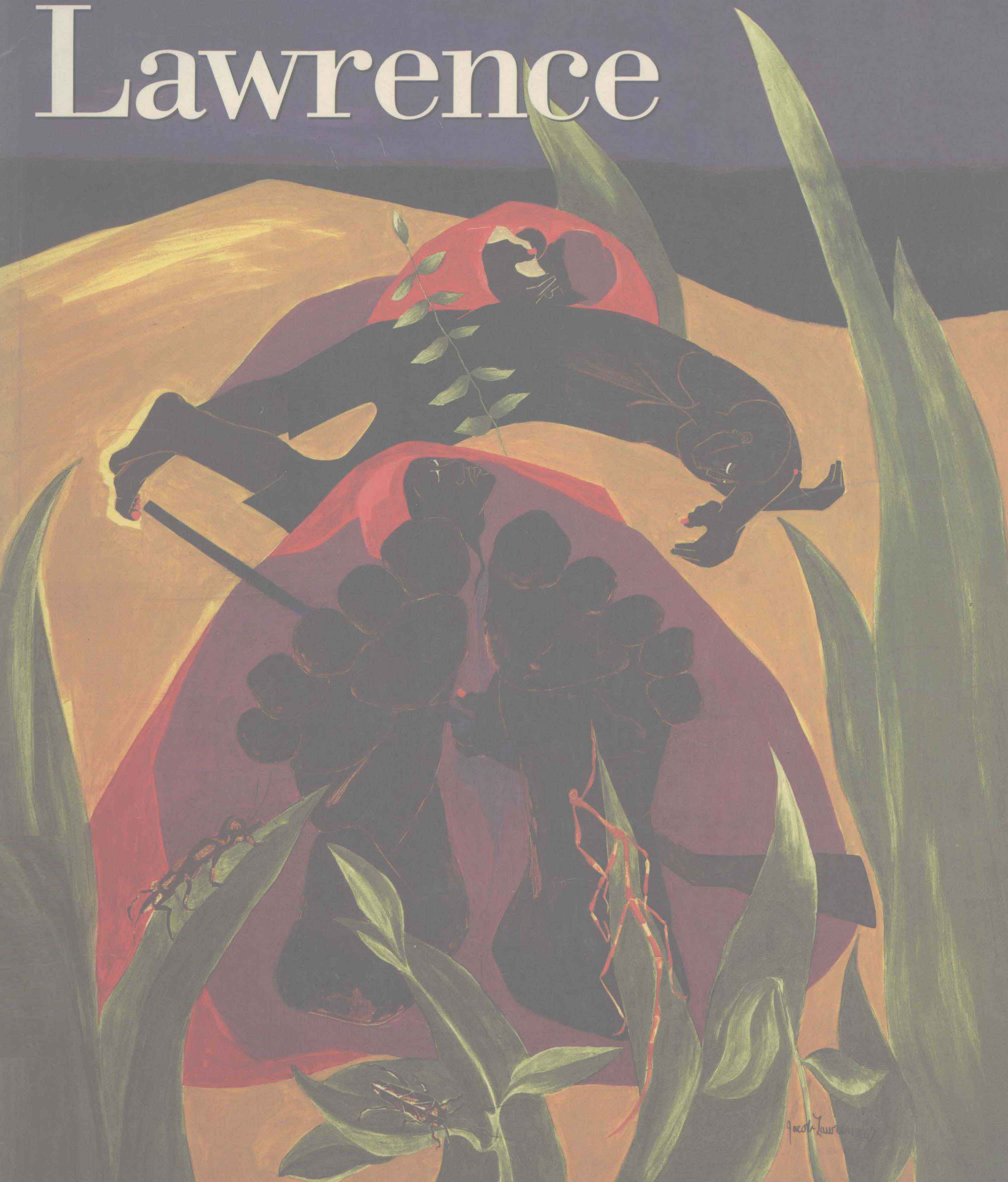


RIZZOLI ART SERIES

Jacob Lawrence



Jacob

Lawrence

By Richard J. Powell



RIZZOLI ART SERIES

Series Editor: Norma Broude

Jacob Lawrence

(Born 1917)

WHAT is it about Jacob Lawrence's paintings that puts them among the best examples of authentic American artistic expression? Why have his World War II-era images of the Haitian Revolution, nineteenth-century freedom fighters, the African-American migration experience, and other subjects endured the passage of time and shifts in taste and appear fresh, vital, and even relevant today? How is it that a young black artist working during the final years of this nation's most bleak economic period achieved unprecedented acclaim for his creations during that time and, subsequently, has continued to garner high marks, both from the critics and the greater public?

The answers to these questions are not found in the standard art history texts. Nor are they available in the growing literature on an American sensibility in the visual arts. Studies concerning a native realism, romanticism and an American ideal, and the ways in which rural and urban environs permeate the American artistic consciousness only scratch at the surface of these and other questions concerning Lawrence's unique position in America's cultural landscape. The standard conclusion about Lawrence and his work—that an ideological triumvirate of race, class, and caste largely determines what this artist creates—frequently falls short of the goal of providing a real understanding of Lawrence's artistic motivations and choices throughout his career.¹

In spite of the absence of an all-encompassing, working methodology that can explicate and give justice to an art of significant social dimensions such as Lawrence's, there are types of cultural and aesthetic inquiry that promise a more meaningful and sensitive avenue of study for this important artist. While not ignoring the weight of racial identity, class consciousness, and other cultural signifiers, there are strategies for investigations into Lawrence's life and art that yield a universe of symbols: motifs and emblems that cannot be reduced to some purely racial or social formula.

Let us consider, for example, the motif of steps that appears throughout Lawrence's art. I propose that his recurrent images of ladders, brownstone stoops, fire escapes, and even illusory, steplike motifs are more than a favorite visual trope or simply the random inclusion of observations from the environment. It seems that Lawrence's use of steps is a visual Morse code tapping out a message having to do with ascension and climbing. Lawrence's steps embrace a world of allusions: the literal and formal, as well as the metaphoric and emotional.

And let us also consider the documentary and humanistic

focus of Lawrence's art. I propose that his fascination with recording significant events in history, coupled with his keen interest in individual struggle and perseverance, suggest a desire to produce an art of social realism. But not social realism in the antiquated sense of proselytizing or propagandizing a particular political stance or belief. Lawrence's social realism has to do with visualizing events and people in an effort to *define* them at their most historic and human levels. Lawrence's objective in much of his work seems to be a "concretization" and an elucidation of social intercourse in history. Or, in other words, an effort simply to *clarify*.²

When asked some years ago about the specific meanings, if any, invested in his frequent depictions of ladders, Lawrence replied that "the ladders are probably there because Harlem was full of fire escapes," and "I guess I like the shape of ladders." He went on to explain that, on a conscious level, he denied being "aware of the ladders representing anything but themselves."³

Of course, Lawrence's depictions of ladders, brownstone stoops, and fire escapes are derived from close observation of his environment. Harlem's web of fire escapes, creating a kind of geometric scaffolding in front of multistoried tenements, might easily dominate any artistic depiction of the community. But in Lawrence's overviews of Harlem it is clear that he is doing much more than representing things simply as they are.

Lawrence's rooftop view of Harlem, entitled *This Is Harlem* (plate 6), is a brilliant, elemental rendering of buildings, pavement, signage, and the populace. This perspective-defying townscape literally "jitterbugs" before us. Our eyes leap with animated velocity from fire escape to fire escape and from window to window; the contrasting colors and patterns play havoc with our initial sense of order. Billboards and marquees proclaim the fads and fancies of this city-within-a-city: DANCE, BEAUTY SHOP, LUNCH, FUNERAL HOME, BAR. Though not immediately apparent, this rendering of a community is deeper than mere documentary reportage and illustration: it delves into the very psyche of the urban experience.

Lawrence's colorful, two-dimensional architecture in *This Is Harlem* calls to mind another painted homage to New York City, *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (1942–1943; The Museum of Modern Art, New York) by the Dutch painter Piet Mondrian. Like Mondrian's painted armature against a field of whiteness, Lawrence's fire escapes function as decorative directionals, leading us to a lofty vantage point from which we can observe the hustle and bustle that is Harlem. But rather than presenting the city as a pristine grid of primary hues and sequential rectangles and squares, Lawrence has captured an image of New York that is polychrome, polyrhythmic, slightly off-kilter, and consequently truer in form and spirit to the real thing.

Though the subject of Lawrence's 1938 *Blind Beggars* examines an entirely different aspect of the city, this painting also relies on Lawrence's ability to use forms to convey something of Harlem's urban tempo (plate 2). As the title implies, two blind mendicants feel their way through the city streets, but they are somewhat impeded in their journey by a roving band of flag-waving, parading children, who are seemingly oblivious to the sightless couple's condition. Frenetic, illusive, claustrophobic, and perhaps treacherous at times, the Harlem of *Blind Beggars* presents the

sometimes playful, sometimes grim simultaneity of city life. Like the works of Ben Shahn and Phillip Evergood—two other socially conscious painters of that era—*Blind Beggars* explores the cracked sidewalks and afflicted spirits of New York City circa 1938, taking into account the economic devastation and sociopolitical repercussions of life during the Great Depression. Social realism it is then, only if we allow social realism to contain a contradictory and emotionally complex component.

Lawrence's personal relationship to Harlem is, of course, well known. Born in Atlantic City, New Jersey, in 1917, and raised for his first thirteen years in Pennsylvania, Lawrence settled with his family in Harlem in about 1930. As an adolescent in Depression-era Harlem, Lawrence was exposed to myriad experiences and people, as well as to an atmosphere of inquiry and activism. Unlike Harlem during the period of its so-called Renaissance—that moment in the late 1920s when community artists found a broad audience for their racially self-conscious, creative expressions—Harlem during the 1930s was a community fully aware both of its assets and its liabilities. Even in the depths of the Great Depression, Harlem had a contingent of religious leaders, teachers, social workers, and other community activists who fueled a sense of hope and potential in the midst of economic despair and social ills. It was in this bubbling cauldron of urban malaise and committed, social welfare that Jacob Lawrence, through art, first began to brew his own concoction of historic document and human drama.

Besides such paintings as *This Is Harlem* and *Blind Beggars* in which he showed various aspects of Harlem's street life, Lawrence also tackled subject matter far-removed from the city streets, such as the Haitian Revolution in the late eighteenth century. Lawrence's principal figure within this historical theme, the former slave-turned-revolutionary leader Toussaint L'Ouverture (1746–1803), was the catalyst behind making Haiti—at one time France's most profitable sugar-producing colony—the first independent black-ruled republic in the New World. Titling his forty-one tempera paintings on the Haitian Revolution the Toussaint L'Ouverture series, Lawrence embarked on a multiple-panel format that would define his formal painting strategy as a painter for the rest of his career. Although scholars have attempted to link Lawrence's use of the serial format to his early affinities for artists who painted in serial formats, such as Giotto and Goya, one is perhaps on sturdier art historical ground for understanding this tendency by simply looking at Lawrence's immediate visual resources: namely, the artistic and intellectual community of Harlem itself. Besides the illustrated history books at the local library that informed the twenty-year-old artist about serialized, visual narratives, Lawrence was also cognizant of older artists in Harlem, particularly Aaron Douglas, whose murals and book illustrations provided Lawrence with examples of multipaneled, historically thematic images.⁴

Light years removed from Harlem in the 1930s, Haiti's political drama of oppression, intrigue, uprising, and liberation was accessible to Lawrence largely via Harlem's Schomburg Library, where books about black history were available to local patrons. Because this fascinating, true-to-life story involved real, flesh-and-blood black men and women, one can understand that Lawrence identified with and was inspired by this historic event. The Toussaint L'Ouverture series is, then, also an *homage* to Harlem itself,

in that the Schomburg—a major cultural resource in Harlem—inspired in Lawrence the belief that documenting and collecting black history were valid community pursuits.⁵

Panel no. 17 from the series, *Toussaint captured Marmelade, held by Vernet, a mulatto, 1795*, is a fascinating blend of illustration, design abstraction, and pure imagination (plate 1). Interestingly, Lawrence's narrative title for this panel provides us with little more than the name of the central figure and his implied plan of action. We are presented with a succession of repeated, intricately staggered shapes, occasionally interrupted by a slightly different form in a contrasting color. By repeating and staggering these various shapes, Lawrence was able to imply a sense of movement in spite of the painting's explicit two-dimensional nature. The riders, horses, and tall grass all appear as if they are multicolored wisps of cloth waving against a cool gray expanse.

For Lawrence, the Haitian peasantry's struggle for freedom in the eighteenth century had thematic resonances for the long-term struggles for freedom of black women and men in the United States. In a succession of serial paintings he made after the Toussaint L'Ouverture series, Lawrence brought this domestic concern for individual and collective struggle into a unique, African-American perspective. Starting with his Frederick Douglass series of 1938–1939, Lawrence embraced the range of experiences, trials, dilemmas, and triumphs of selected personalities in African-American history, providing viewers with an extra-literary sense and feeling for these important people and episodes. For example, in several of the panels from his Harriet Tubman series of 1939–1940, a strict, illustrative rendering of this nineteenth-century tale about a woman shepherding fellow bondsmen from slavery into freedom is supplanted by an expressive, sometimes dreamlike conceptualization of her true story. At times more a symbolist than a social realist, Lawrence bypassed superficial features of the events and figures in Harriet Tubman's story, searching instead for the inner, emotional truths of her heroism. Panel no. 18, which has a strange, anthropomorphic landscape, carries the equally surreal title *At one time during Harriet Tubman's expedition into the South, the pursuit after her was very close and vigorous. The woods were scoured in all directions, and every person was stopped and asked: "Have you seen Harriet Tubman?"* (plate 3). Despite his stylistic evolution into more organic, almost surreal imagery, Lawrence still incorporates his career-long concern for making the story of African-Americans explicit and vivid. Interestingly, Lawrence's creative license both with the Harriet Tubman narrative and with pictorial realism is revisited almost thirty years later in another painting on the Harriet Tubman theme. Entitled *Daybreak—A Time to Rest*, this 1967 painting—with its exaggerated perspectives and telescopic focus on Harriet Tubman's Gibraltarlike, gnarled feet—serves its accompanying narrative in a riveting, forceful way that a more realistic image probably could not achieve (plate 11).⁶

In panel no. 21 from the John Brown series of 1941 (fig. 1), Lawrence also used a simplified, monolithic form to represent the white protagonist and to convey a world of feelings that would have been lost had the artist interjected more realistic details into his painting (plate 6). The abolitionist's inflammatory, zealous call for slaves to rise up and slay their masters is skillfully articulated by the inclusion of a few eloquent components (the crucifix and the



1. John Brown series, no. 21: *After John Brown's capture, he was put on trial for his life in Charles Town, Virginia. 1941.* Gouache on paper, 20 × 14". © The Detroit Institute of Arts. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Milton Lowenthal

flamelike hair). As with the Harriet Tubman panel, this image from the John Brown series utilizes simplified yet allusive forms in service both to a narrative and to emotions.

Several panels from *The Migration of the Negro* series (1940–1941) were reproduced in the November 1941 issue of *Fortune* magazine. For the relatively young Lawrence, the appearance of his work in a national magazine of the stature of *Fortune* was both a major accomplishment and a wondrous event.⁷ Although Lawrence had shifted his focus from painting the story of one historic figure to painting the story of an entire people, his simplified visual narrative still enabled him to plumb the emotional and psychological depths of his subjects. In panel no. 3 from the series, *In every town Negroes were leaving by the hundreds to go North to enter into Northern industry*, the grouping of Lawrence's black migrants—echoed by the instinctive migration north of the six birds shown overhead—is in the form of a human pyramid (fig. 2). This fusion of social history, animal behavior, and an Egyptian allusion illustrates Lawrence's all-encompassing grasp of such a significant, far-reaching experience as the African-Americans' migration from the rural South to Northern cities in search of a better life. As with Lawrence's more literal use of the step motif, the implication underlying a symbol such as the pyramid is the representation of the idea of progress, both literally and figuratively.

Panel no. 16 from the Migration series, ironically entitled *Although the Negro was used to lynching, he found this an opportune time for him to leave where one had occurred*, expresses an altogether different mood (plate 4). Here, a woman's sorrow—initiated by the death of a loved one from racial violence—is exemplified by her curled-up, resigned figure. That these and other figures (like those, for example, in the 1948 gouache *Kibitzers*; plate 7) operate both as characters in a narrative and as emotive, geometric abstractions, attests to Lawrence's perceptive understanding of the expressive potential of composition and form. Lawrence's subtle yet pungent statements in these two works are perhaps classic examples of his painterly process toward visual and thematic clarification.

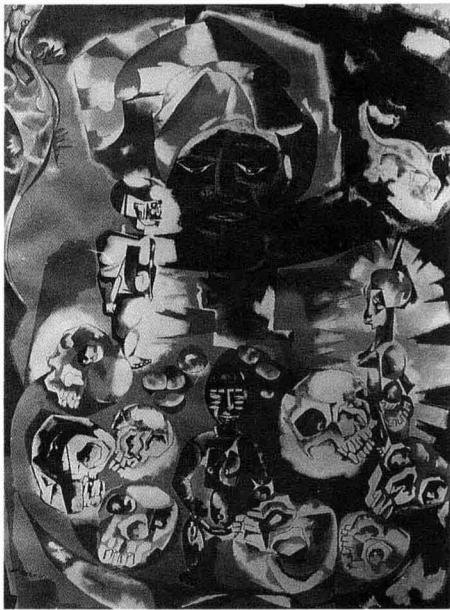


2. The Migration of the Negro series, no. 3: *In every town Negroes were leaving by the hundreds to go North to enter into Northern industry. 1940–1941.* Tempera on masonite, 12 × 18". © The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C. Acquired 1942

Tombstones, a 1942 painting by Lawrence, takes yet another approach to the black migrant and the urban experience (plate 5). In contrast to Lawrence's earlier depictions of a carefree, frenetic Harlem, the mood in *Tombstones* is solemn. People lean on windowsills and against doorways. People climb the building's stone stoop while others sit on the stoop and its adjoining platform. Some are hunched over, while others seemingly pull their heavy weight up the brownstone stoop and into the building itself.

Lawrence's transparent color washes and modulated brushwork on the stoop, doorways, windows, pavement, and on some of the tombstones evoke a sense of mystery and evanescence, especially in comparison with the solid colored figures, the sign, and the building itself. That this stoop is more than just a distinct, urban, architectural element, that it is a symbolic yet concrete manifestation of transitions in life, is encoded throughout the composition, as it is in countless other examples of early to mid-century African-American art in which spiritual connotations are attached to the step motif (e.g., Langston Hughes's 1922 poem "Mother to Son"; the popular, all-black, 1930 musical *The Green Pastures*; Augusta Savage's 1939 sculpture *Lift Every Voice and Sing*; the all-black, 1943 Hollywood movie *Cabin in the Sky*; and Mahalia Jackson's 1947 hit gospel recording "Move on up a Little Higher").⁸ A white crucifix boldly situated in the lower center of the painting contributes as well to a metaphysical reading of this scene, which transcends a purely urban and so-called social realist description. The very word TOMBSTONES and its central position in the composition also insinuate that this place, in addition to being an inner-city market for funerary monuments, is an architectonic construct of life, death, and spiritual resurrection.

Many of Jacob Lawrence's paintings from the 1950s and 1960s possess an ethereal, otherworldly quality that is related to the spiritual allusions in *Tombstones* and other works. For example, in the painting *Marionettes* (from Lawrence's Theater series of 1951–1952), the artist used a decidedly baroque, more decorative realm of imagery, in which references to real people, actual places, and historic events are shrouded in veils of shadows and modulated colors (plate 8). This shift to a spiritual art, achieved through an intentionally fractured, layered sense of pictorial space, is most evident in the 1956 painting *Palm Sunday* (plate 9). Its obvious religious context notwithstanding, *Palm Sunday*



3. Nigerian series: *Antiquities*. 1964–1965. Gouache on paper, 30 $\frac{3}{4}$ × 22". The James E. Lewis Museum of Art, Morgan State University, Baltimore, Maryland

is a colorful, cubistic revelry. An African-American minister and a family of churchgoers are literally one with a multifaceted field of ovals, arcs, and diamonds. Yet Lawrence never strays too far afield in these paintings from an art *of, about, and for* people and human emotions.

This interest of Lawrence's in the intangible, fanciful, and enigmatic in life becomes even more complex when it is juxtaposed (in the early 1960s) with his reinvigorated, heightened interest in the personal and political realities of black people. Though rarely discussed in the literature, Lawrence's paintings during this tumultuous period in America stand out for their deep, introspective character, presenting the black experience as something unique, as seen in its various configurations, and universal, as evident in its common themes and goals. In *Antiquities*, a gouache painting from Lawrence's Nigerian series of 1964–1965, the artist makes an important statement about Nigeria's cultural legacy to black Americans, as well as about Nigeria's own legacy of art, spirituality, and reverence for the ancestors (fig. 3). Painted by Lawrence after he enjoyed a seven-month artist-in-residence position in the West African nation, *Antiquities* and the other eight paintings in the Nigerian series continue his engagement with a mystical, yet solidly humanistic sensibility in art.

In a series of paintings also from the mid-1960s entitled simply *Dreams*, Lawrence depicts sleeping people crowned and/or encircled by their dreams, nightmares, and innermost thoughts. *Dreams No. 2* portrays a sleeping woman, whose slumbry illuminations reveal her wedding-day fantasies (plate 10). In the hands of many artists, the subject of a wistful yet eager "maiden lady" would be prime material for a humorous or even farcical picture, but in Lawrence's hands, the subject receives a solemn, almost matter-of-fact treatment. Like the phantoms in Goya's *Los Caprichos* or the ghosts in August Wilson's play *The Piano Lesson* or in Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*, Lawrence's apparitions have a psychic weight and meaning that transposes seemingly surreal scenes into a reality that the artist seems to know all too well.

Jacob Lawrence's expressive, social vision in American painting, from his auspicious beginnings in Depression-era Harlem to his triumphs in contemporary art, largely grows



4. *Events in the Life of Harold Washington*. 1991. Unglazed ceramic mural, 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 15 $\frac{1}{4}$ '. Harold Washington Library Center, Chicago. City of Chicago Percent for Art Program

out of an independent, self-generated will to create. But many of Lawrence's most important contributions to American art, especially of the last two decades, also emanate from major commissions and outside assignments. His study for a poster commissioned and realized by the 1972 Munich Olympic Games Committee is a fascinating synthesis of his previous experiments with figural and perspectival exaggerations and his eternal involvement with black history and culture (plate 12). The Olympics' track and field events, dominated by African-Americans since Jesse Owens's, Eddie Tolan's, and Ralph Metcalfe's efforts during the 1936 Games in Berlin, were a fitting subject to which Lawrence could apply his special, artistic insights. Here, as in all of Lawrence's works, the triumph of the human spirit is as important as the skillful, exaggerated rendering of body mass and movement.

Events in the Life of Harold Washington, a large mosaic mural by Lawrence, confirms the artist's ability to respond appropriately to the particular requirements of a commissioned work (fig. 4). Aside from having the mammoth scale and material permanence of a public work of art, *Events in the Life of Harold Washington* directly and passionately speaks to the community it serves. In conjunction with the largest public art project ever mounted by the city of Chicago, the city's Public Art Committee selected Lawrence to create a mural in memory of the late Harold Washington, Chicago's first black mayor. Given the impact that Harold Washington had on Chicago, as well as the fact that the mural would be installed in the city's new Harold Washington Library Center, the committee wanted a mural that would touch an emotional and inspirational chord with the library's visitors and staff alike. As seen in *Events in the Life of Harold Washington*, Lawrence pays special tribute to Harold Washington's many accomplishments—as a scholar, athlete, Civilian Conservation Corps worker, soldier, lawyer, U.S. Congressman, and mayor of Chicago—in the form of broadly rendered, figural illuminations. These stages in the life of Harold Washington are depicted as pictures in books spread across the mayor's desk, which collectively create a rugged, mountainous form with a solitary, triumphant human figure at its apex. Lawrence's visual references here to manual labor, military service, academic achievement, and athletic prowess hark back to past works, but in this new context these themes have an immediate relevance and visual aliveness that belie their extended use by the artist.

The portion of the *Harold Washington* mural that depicts a



5. *Builders*. 1974.
Gouache on paper, 18 × 24". Collection of the
Vatican Museums.

hamr is a visual
them from the
1980 Lawrence's
parla tif in these
later works and, possibly, as a metaphoric incarnation of the artist as well. We encounter this figure (and variations of it) in countless paintings by Lawrence during the last several decades. As seen in the 1974 gouache *Builders*, the figure's huge arms and hands, the endless planks of wood, the assorted tools and equipment, and the intense, crouching bodies of bullocklike men define this subgenre of Lawrence's art (fig. 5).

In an autobiographical painting of 1977 entitled *The Studio*, Lawrence continued this investigation into the methods and materials of the builders, but with the added dimension of including himself in the midst of these enterprises (plate 13). As Lawrence walks up a staircase in his painting (which opens into an attic-turned-studio/workshop), we see on the surrounding walls and floor an assortment of paintings, many of which are from the *Builders* series. A red handrail creates a frame around his feet and, as it winds around to the rear of the scene, it appears as if it is an arrow, pointing upwards and terminating in one of Lawrence's hands and in the rear window. In his hands Lawrence holds a compass and paintbrushes. The window reveals a cityscape that resembles his 1942 painting *This Is Harlem*. And sitting conspicuously on top of the other end of the red handrail is a carpenter's plane.

In this personal acknowledgment of the many signs and symbols that the artist has held steadfastly to for over fifty years, *The Studio* evokes a kind of visual poetry from its many parts. The carpenter's plane, which is positioned at the opposite end of the red handrail from Lawrence's hand, takes on a special, symbolic role that perhaps has to do with the very nature of Lawrence's art. Lawrence's paintings, in spite of their expressionistic flavor, have the qualities of well-crafted, finished objects. The crisp lines, the draughtsmanlike work, and Lawrence's earlier technique of applying his colors one at a time recall the meticulous procedures and fully realized end products of a carpenter's workshop. In *The Studio*, Lawrence acknowledges that precision and polish by making direct references to such

tools as compasses, planes, and even ladders.

What these tools and Lawrence's self-portrait-in-motion connote is a special way of thinking for the artist. In a 1984 interview in *Art News*, Lawrence spoke at length about the depiction of tools in his art. "I like tools," said Lawrence. "I like to work with them, and I like to look at them. I think they are very beautiful. And they have a history. In many of the religious panels of the Renaissance, you see the same tools as carpenters use today. They haven't changed at all since then, so they've become a symbol of order and aspiration to me."⁹

The key to unlocking the meaning of Lawrence's *The Studio* or, for that matter, the meaning of *any* of Lawrence's paintings dwells in Lawrence's concept of tools as symbols of "order and aspiration." If one concentrates on just the lower half of *The Studio*, with its picture-within-a-picture of the staircase landing, Lawrence's legs, and the carpenter's plane, all these varying parts add up to a statement on artistic clarity and personal and professional attainment.

The step motif that Lawrence developed over the years has worked in concert with his personal philosophy of social engagement, producing a body of work that, despite its primary focus on Afro-America, informs *all* American culture. The climbing and clarifying that goes on in so many of Lawrence's works speak to this nation's eternal optimism while, at the same time, attesting to black America's legacy of struggle and achievement. Like the old woman speaking in dialect to her child in Langston Hughes's 1922 poem "Mother to Son," Jacob Lawrence has turned stoops, staircases, ladders, and other vehicles for ascension into artistic remonstrations on survival. That all of this has been brought about by an artist who has been closely attuned to the pulse, mind, and historical edge of Afro-America should challenge us to delve even further into Jacob Lawrence's genius.

NOTES

1. Unless otherwise noted, all biographical information in this essay is from Ellen Harkins Wheat, *Jacob Lawrence: American Painter* (Seattle: Seattle Art Museum, 1986).
2. In a telephone interview, Jacob Lawrence spoke at length about history as an essential, even intrinsic, component of his artistic enterprise. Jacob Lawrence, interview with author (from Chicago, Illinois), 20 June 1984. In addition, parts of this essay were culled from a lecture given by the author to the Departments of Art and Black Studies, Amherst College, Amherst, Massachusetts, 29 April 1991.
3. Jacob Lawrence, as quoted in Jane Van Cleve, "The Human Views of Jacob Lawrence," *Stepping Out Northwest* 12 (Winter 1982), p. 36.
4. In a paper for the College Art Association meetings in February 1992, art historian Patricia Hills examined Jacob Lawrence's reliance on African-American oral traditions in the construction of his Harriet Tubman series.
5. "I choose Haiti as my theme," said Lawrence in a newspaper interview, "because of the similarity of (the Haitian's) . . . fight for economic freedom (with that of the Negro in the United States)." Marvel Cooke, "Pictorial History of Haiti Set on Canvas," *New York Amsterdam News*, 3 June 1939, p. 11.
6. See Ellen Harkins Wheat, *Jacob Lawrence: The Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman Series of 1938–40* (Hampton, Virginia: Hampton University Museum, 1991).
7. ". . . And the Migrants Kept Coming," *Fortune* 24 (November 1941), pp. 102–109.
8. Langston Hughes's poem "Mother to Son" can be found in Arna Bontemps, ed., *American Negro Poetry* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1963), p. 67. Photographic stills from the play *The Green Pastures*, and the motion picture *Cabin in the Sky* are in Langston Hughes and Milton Meltzer, *Black Magic: A Pictorial History of the Negro in American Entertainment* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1967). A photograph of Augusta Savage's sculpture *Lift Every Voice and Sing* (also known as *The Harp*) appears in Deirdre L. Bibby, *Augusta Savage and the Art Schools of Harlem* (New York: The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, 1983). A version of Mahalia Jackson's recording "Move on up a little higher" is included on the album *The Gospel Sound*, Vol. 1, Columbia LP G31086.
9. Jacob Lawrence, as quoted in Avis Berman, "Jacob Lawrence and the Making of Americans," *Art News* 83 (February 1984), p. 86.

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Figure 4: photograph by Michael Tropea, Highland Park, Illinois

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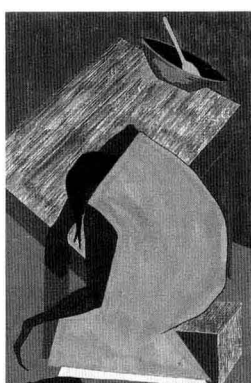
1. *Toussaint captured Marmelade, held by Vernet, a mulatto, 1795.* 1937–1938. “It was late in that year,” chronicled the *New York Amsterdam News* about Lawrence in 1937, “that he began the Haitian series, doing his research with the aid of the Schomburg Collection. . . . Although he has never been on the island, the authenticity of his work was gained from historical texts and novels.”



2. *Blind Beggars.* 1938. This was painted during Lawrence’s relatively brief stint with the “Easel Painting Section” of the New York City Works Progress Administration’s Federal Art Project (WPA/FAP). Lawrence was one of many WPA/FAP artists then subject to an eighteen-month limit on the government’s work relief rolls.



3. *At one time during Harriet Tubman’s expedition into the South the pursuit after her was very close and vigorous. The woods were scoured in all directions, and every person was stopped and asked: “Have you seen Harriet Tubman?”* 1939–1940. This delightful painting, with its odd combination of thick forest, starry sky, and ocular fantasy, is an image unparalleled in Lawrence’s oeuvre.



4. *Although the Negro was used to lynching, he found this an opportune time for him to leave where one had occurred.* 1940–1941. On page 105 of the original *Fortune* magazine article on the Migration series, panel no. 16 carried the equally apropos title and caption “Many families were in sorrow and despair.”



5. *Tombstones.* 1942. Future scholars of American art will no doubt look at an important work like Lawrence’s *Tombstones* and place it in the context of a cultural period—1938 through 1947—when African-American arts and letters were at an all-time creative peak.



6. *This Is Harlem.* 1943. Lawrence’s colorful, jazzy, and perceptive view of Harlem circa 1943 is probably a key source of inspiration for another seminal homage to that city-within-a-city, namely Romare Bearden’s 1971 *The Block* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).



7. *Kibitzers.* 1948. Lawrence’s pictorial interest in the common, everyday human experience, as seen in *Kibitzers*, was underscored by his collaboration with well-known author Langston Hughes on the illustrated book of poetry *One-Way Ticket* (also in 1948).



8. *Marionettes.* 1952. Although couched in the thematic framework of the theater, *Marionettes* (like the other paintings in Lawrence’s *Theater Series*) also carries a non-illusionistic, real-life message in its frieze of disembodied, expression-filled faces in the lower quadrant of this composition.



9. *Palm Sunday.* 1956. *Palm Sunday* was painted at about the same time that Lawrence produced another major, historical series, *Struggle: From the History of the American People* (1955–1956). Yet *Palm Sunday*, with its dreamy, diaphanous forms and heartfelt, spiritual tenor, could not be more dissimilar from the concurrent, seemingly agitated *Struggle* series.



10. *Dreams No.2.* 1965. Although entitled “Dreams,” the other works from this small series by Lawrence convey what appear to be nightmares, hellish creatures, and other imaginary specters. One can only assume that, like the dreamers in Goya’s *Los Caprichos*, Lawrence’s sleepers have within them the capacity to conjure all sorts of apparitions—sweet as well as scary.



11. *Daybreak—A Time to Rest.* 1967. By giving us—the viewers—the same vantage point as that of the insects in the foreground, Lawrence transforms the heroic and historic figure of Harriet Tubman into a literal, flesh and blood giant.



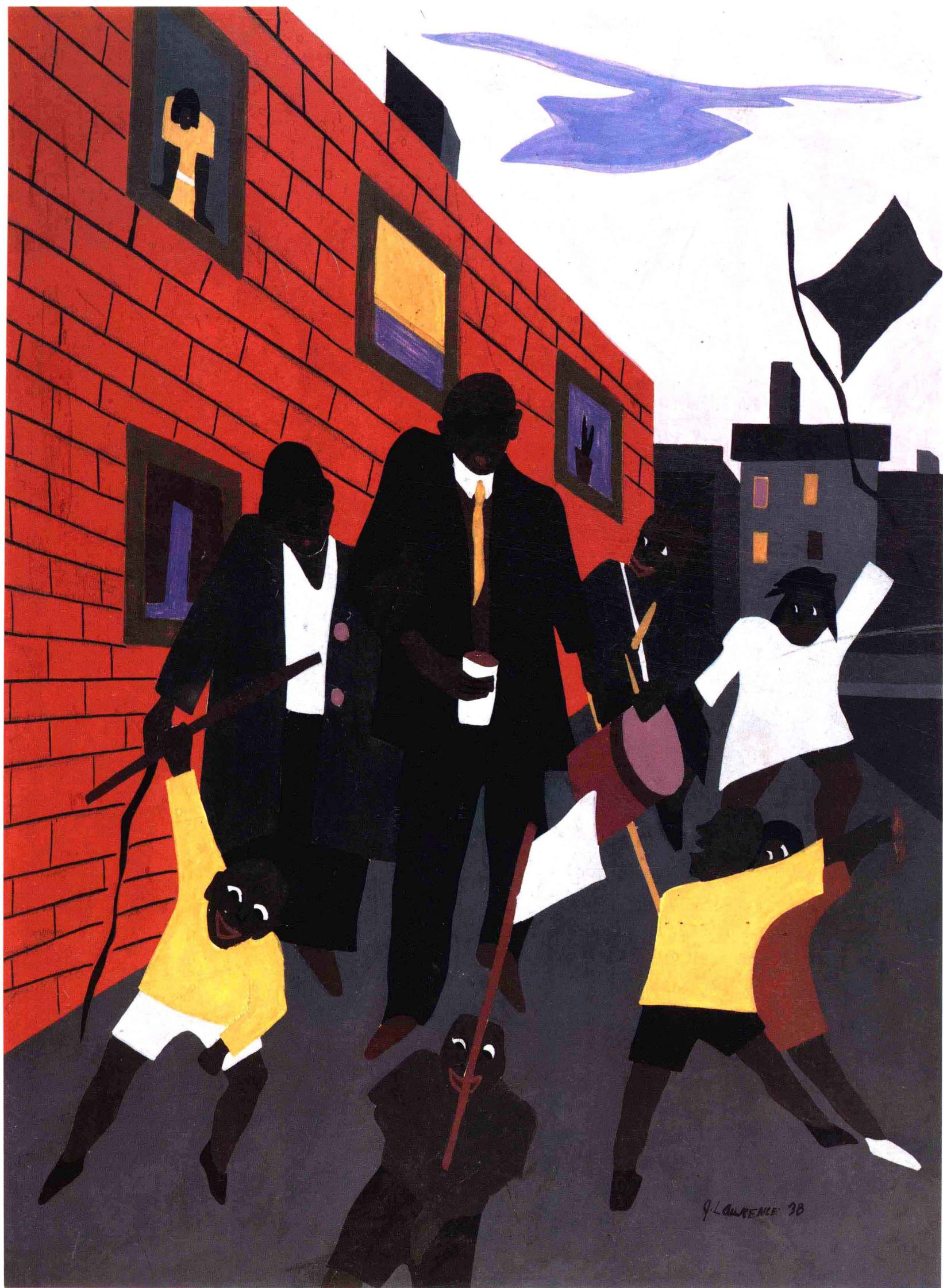
12. *Study for the Munich Olympic Games Poster.* 1972. Visually evocative as well as thematically precise, Lawrence’s study for the 1972 Munich Olympic Games poster is on a par with the classic poster designs of Mucha, Colin, or Cassandre.



13. *The Studio.* 1977. Aside from all of the telling, self-referential elements in *The Studio*, the centralized view of the urban rooftops (Seattle? Harlem? Every-and-any big town?) serves as a strong reminder that the city and its intricate “brick and bone” geometry are the heart and soul of Lawrence’s visual world.



1. Toussaint L'Ouverture series, no. 17: *Toussaint captured Marmelade, held by Vernet, a mulatto, 1795*. 1937–1938. Tempera on paper, 19 x 11".
 Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans



2. *Blind Beggars*. 1938. Tempera on paper, 20 x 15".

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



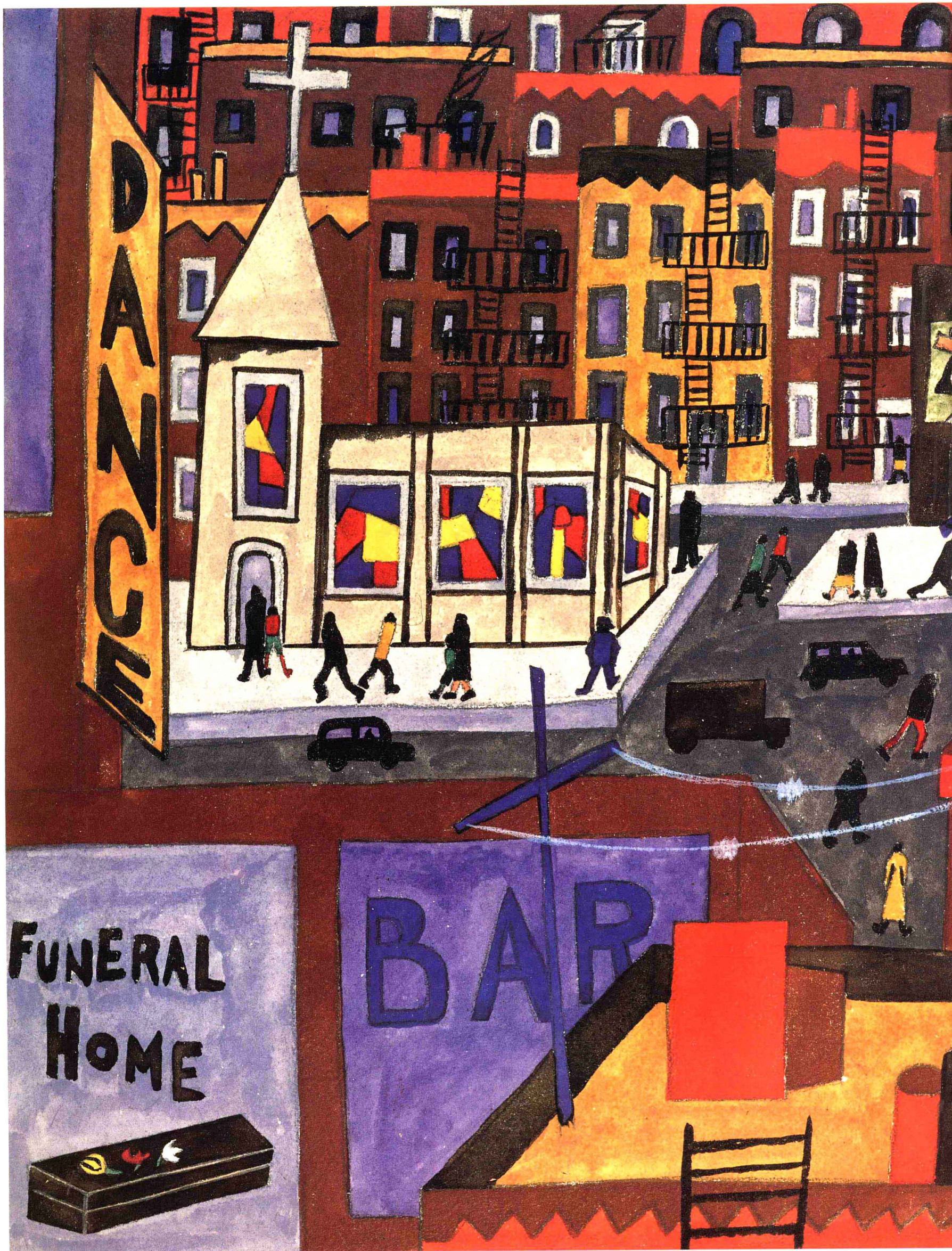
3. Harriet Tubman series, no. 18: *At one time during Harriet Tubman's expedition into the South, the pursuit after her was very close and vigorous. The woods were scoured in all directions, and every person was stopped and asked: "Have you seen Harriet Tubman?"*
1939–1940. Casein tempera on gessoed hardboard, 17 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 12". Hampton University Museum, Hampton, Virginia



4. The Migration of the Negro series, no. 16: *Although the Negro was used to lynching, he found this an opportune time for him to leave where one had occurred.* 1940–1941. Tempera on gesso on composition board, 18 x 12". The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Mrs. David M. Levy



5. *Tombstones*. 1942. Gouache on paper, Sight: 28¾ x 20½".
The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Purchase. 43.14



6. Harlem Rooftops series, no. 1: *This Is Harlem*, 1943. Gouache on paper, 14³/₈ x 21⁷/₈"



Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution. Gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn, 1966. Photograph by Lee Stalsworth

