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Smithsonian American Art Museum Presents Free Public Programs in Conjunction with “Aaron Douglas: African American Modernist”

The Smithsonian American Art Museum will present a variety of public programs in conjunction with “Aaron Douglas: African American Modernist,” an exhibition that showcases more than 80 rarely seen works by one of the most influential visual artists of the Harlem Renaissance. Douglas’ bold paintings, murals and book illustrations vividly captured the spirit of his time and established a new black aesthetic and vision. “Aaron Douglas: African American Modernist” is on view from May 9 through Aug. 3, and all exhibition-related programs are generously supported by the Diane and Norman Bernstein Foundation Inc.

A complete schedule of events at the museum, from talks with artists to performances to behind-the-scenes tours, is available at americanart.si.edu. For additional information, the public may e-mail saamprograms@si.edu or call (202) 633-8490.

Free Public Programs

“Aaron Douglas: African American Modernist” Symposium

Friday, May 9; 1 – 5 p.m.

Celebrate the work and legacy of Aaron Douglas with scholars Richard Powell (Duke University), Amy Kirschke (University of North Carolina, Wilmington), Renée Ater (University of Maryland) and Susan Earle (Spencer Museum of Art at the University of Kansas, Lawrence). Kinshasha Holmon Conwill, deputy director of the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture, moderates; David Driskell, professor emeritus at the University of Maryland, will deliver the keynote address.

SAAM I Am—Aaron Douglas Family Day

Saturday, May 10; 1 – 4 p.m.

This soulful and spirited family day begins with a reading of Pamela Dell’s “Shaky Bones.” A puppet show entitled “Can You Spell Harlem?” and a performance by the Morgan State University Choir will keep visitors inspired while working on a community mural craft project. This program is supported, in part, by the Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation.

“Aaron Douglas: African American Modernist” Gallery Talk

Thursday, June 12; 5:30 p.m.

Discover the works of this renowned Harlem Renaissance artist as SAAM’s senior curator Virginia Mecklenburg leads a tour of some of Douglas’ bold paintings and artfully designed book covers.

“Langston Hughes: Working Toward Salvation”

Wednesday, June 18; 6 p.m.

Bruce Schwartz’s two-part work about Langston Hughes begins with the film version of Hughes’ coming-of-age story, “Salvation,” and concludes with a short documentary featuring interviews with Pulitzer Prize-winning author Alice Walker and renowned Hughes biographer Arnold Rampersad, who discuss “the poet laureate of Harlem.” (2003, 60 minutes)

Aaron Douglas and A’Lelia Walker’s Dark Tower Salon

Saturday, June 21; 3 p.m.

Author A’Lelia Bundles shares untold stories about her great-grandmother, A’Lelia Walker, a central figure of the Harlem Renaissance. Bundles is currently at work on a biography of Walker, who frequently hosted the likes of Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen and Aaron Douglas in her Harlem brownstone, often referred to as “the Dark Tower.”

Dark Tower Revisited: Music and Dramatic Readings of the Harlem Renaissance

Saturday, June 28; 3 p.m.

Relive the exuberant days of the Harlem Renaissance in A’Lelia Walker’s salon as Morgan State University Theater and Music Departments perform classics by Fats Waller and Bessie Smith, and present vignettes of plays and poetry by Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston.

Jazz in the Afternoon with Sounds Good!

Sunday, July 6; 3 – 6 p.m.

Bring the holiday weekend to a memorable conclusion by spending a lazy Sunday afternoon listening to the smooth jazz of Sounds Good! at the museum.

Advancing an African American Aesthetic: An Artist’s Response

Saturday, July 19; 3 p.m.

Was Aaron Douglas successful in contributing to an African American aesthetic for future black artists as directed by Harlem Renaissance philosopher Alain Locke? Discover how African American artists reacted to Douglas’ work with Keith Morrison, artist and former dean of Temple University’s Tyler School of Art.

Duke Ellington and More: Music of the Harlem Renaissance

Sunday, July 20; 4 p.m.

One Voice Chorus, an interracial community chorus from Richmond, Va., celebrates the music and heritage of the Harlem Renaissance, featuring works by Duke Ellington and other great musicians of that era.

“Zora Neale Hurston: A Heart with Room for Every Joy”

Thursday, July 31; 6 p.m.

Zora Neale Hurston, the author of the classic novel “Their Eyes Were Watching God,” received national acclaim as a writer, but she died in obscurity. Using interviews with her family and colleagues, this documentary illuminates Hurston’s legacy as a folklorist, ethnographer and literary leader of the Harlem Renaissance. A Films for the Humanities & Sciences Production. (2005, 42 minutes)

Credit

“Aaron Douglas: African American Modernist” was organized by the Spencer Museum of Art at the University of Kansas in Lawrence. The exhibition and accompanying catalog are made possible, in part, with support from the Henry Luce Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. The Diane and Norman Bernstein Foundation Inc. and PEPCO are proud to partner with the Smithsonian American Art Museum on the exhibition in Washington, D.C.

About the Smithsonian American Art Museum

The Smithsonian American Art Museum, located above the Gallery Place/Chinatown Metrorail station, is open daily from 11:30 a.m. to 7 p.m., except Dec. 25. Admission is free. Museum information: (202) 633-7970. Smithsonian Information: (202) 633-1000; (202) 633-5285 (TTY). Web site: americanart.si.edu.

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