

Smithsonian American Art Museum
Wall Text & Extended Labels



Aaron Douglas (1899–1979) was one of the first artists to place African American culture at the center of modern art. Inspired by African art and the rhythms of Negro spirituals, he crafted an original artistic language to convey a compelling social message.

Douglas was born in Topeka, Kansas, the son of a laborer and a homemaker. He earned a BFA degree at the University of Nebraska in 1922, and taught at an elite all-black high school in Kansas City. He moved to New York in June 1925, drawn by an article in *Survey Graphic* magazine entitled “Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro.” Three months later, philosopher Alain Locke invited him to contribute illustrations to his forthcoming book *The New Negro: An Interpretation*. Douglas was soon recognized as an active member of the thriving cultural milieu known as the New Negro Movement or Harlem Renaissance. A modernist and activist at heart, he developed a distinctive style in which silhouetted forms and fractured space express both the harsh realities of African American life and hope for a better future.

By the late 1920s, Douglas was a frequent contributor to *Opportunity*, the National Urban League’s journal, and *Crisis*, the magazine of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson, Countee Cullen, and other noted writers asked him to create cover designs for their books, and in 1930, at the invitation of Nashville’s Fisk University, Douglas began a large mural cycle for the new library building. By the mid-1930s, Douglas was in demand as a muralist, illustrator, and educator. In 1937 he returned to Fisk to found the art department, which he chaired until his retirement in 1966.

Throughout his life Douglas provided a dignified voice of opposition, insight, and aspiration through powerful and provocative images. This exhibition is the first nationally touring retrospective to examine the art of Aaron Douglas, who is today considered the foremost visual artist of the Harlem Renaissance and “the father of Black American art.”

Aaron Douglas: African American Modernist was organized by the Spencer Museum of Art at the University of Kansas in Lawrence. The exhibition and accompanying catalogue 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.

The New Negro and Harlem

When Douglas arrived in the summer of 1925, he was astonished at the vitality of the two-square-mile section of upper Manhattan known as Harlem: "Seeing a big city that was entirely black, from beginning to end you were impressed by the fact that black people were in charge of things here."

Many of the avant-garde artists and intellectuals he met exemplified Alain Locke's notion of the self-determined "New Negro," individuals who celebrated their African heritage and possessed a strong sense of race consciousness and deeply felt racial pride. Inspired by Locke and by W. E. B. Du Bois, a host of young artists, writers, dancers, and musicians believed that artistic expression could bridge the chasm between African American and white worlds. Douglas was inspired by these progressive philosophical and political ideas and by Marcus Garvey's back-to-Africa movement, which prompted him to look for sources in the images and forms of African art.

God's Trombones

In the spring of 1927, James Weldon Johnson asked his publisher, Viking Press, to commission Douglas to illustrate *God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse*, a volume of poems based on the folk sermons of southern African American preachers. Johnson believed that the modernist energy of Douglas's hard-edged style would help make the free-verse poems appealing to contemporary audiences.

Douglas translated Johnson's words with an agility of line and an economic use of recognizable symbolic features. Each gouache is painted in a flat monochromatic style that borrowed heavily from African sculpture and from symbolism drawn from Negro spirituals. The resulting images infused Johnson's biblical references with visual cues connoting "blackness."

Douglas's cubist vocabulary and abstracted forms prompted *Time* magazine to call the artist a "race futurist," and Douglas's hometown newspaper, the *Topeka State Journal*, predicted a bright future for the native Kansan: "These illustrations are remarkable for their originality, their poetry of conception and their appropriateness to the text. They stamp Mr. Douglas as one of the coming American artists."

In the mid-1930s, Douglas painted a series of oils based on motifs he developed for *God's Trombones*. He executed these later works in oil in expressive color rather than the monochromatic palette of the 1927 gouaches.

Murals

Among Douglas's most important works are large-scale murals. Using a modernist language of geometric and abstract forms, he depicted slavery, emancipation, the power of education, and the contributions of African Americans to American culture and the nation's economy. Allegorical and epic, the narratives draw on Egyptian wall painting and Ivory Coast sculpture as well as modern architecture, jazz, and dance.

Douglas's major mural projects include a large cycle for Cravath Memorial Library at Fisk University (1930); *Harriet Tubman* (1931) for Bennett College for Women; *Aspects of Negro Life* (1934) for the 135th Street branch of the New York Public Library (the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture); the Hall of Negro Life at the 1936 Texas Centennial Exposition; and *The Evolution of Dance* for the Harlem YMCA (1933). He also received commissions for murals at Club Ebony in Harlem (1927) and the Sherman Hotel in Chicago (1930).

Aspects of Negro Life

In 1934, Aaron Douglas was commissioned by the Public Works of Art Project, the first relief program for artists sponsored by President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, to create a mural program for the 135th Street branch of the New York Public Library. The four panels of *Aspects of Negro Life* chart the progression of African Americans from Africa through slavery, Reconstruction, the Northern Migration, and the Great Depression. Using a stylized vocabulary, Douglas conveyed political and social messages and included allusions to Marxist theory that he and others in Harlem studied in the mid-1930s.

Aspects of Negro Life reveals the bold modernist risks Douglas was prepared to take at a time when regionalism was the norm. The layered, condensed space, geometric forms, and silhouettes draw on African, cubist, and constructivist motifs in an allegorical representation of issues central to African American history and contemporary life.

Fisk University

In the summer of 1929, Fisk University president Thomas Elsa Jones asked Charles S. Johnson, the editor of *Opportunity* magazine and a major figure in the Harlem Renaissance, to suggest an artist to create murals for the university's new Cravath Memorial Library. Johnson immediately recommended Douglas, and in the spring of 1930, Douglas began his first major mural commission.

Douglas chose the "panorama of the development of Black people in this hemisphere" as his subject. The series begins in Africa, the ancestral homeland of black Americans, and continues with images of captivity, slavery, emancipation, and modern life. To emphasize the importance of education, Douglas also depicted the liberal arts—poetry, philosophy, drama, music, and science—hoping the murals would promote black identity and a sense of dignity among the Fisk students. In 1937, after Johnson was named the first African American president of the university, Douglas returned to establish the art department.

Portraits, Prints, and Scenes of Daily Life

Douglas explored multiple styles throughout his career. The modernist "public" style for which he is best known features flat, silhouetted figures, a limited color palette, and radiating bands and circles of light. He typically painted portraits, landscapes, and genre scenes with a looser brush and more naturalistic approach in which space, volume, and light are realistically rendered.

The Legacy of Aaron Douglas

Aaron Douglas forged a powerful aesthetic that was conceptual yet optical, spiritual yet real, political yet visual. His vision of life and of the hardships and hopes experienced by African Americans influenced generations of artists during his lifetime and later. At Douglas's memorial service in Nashville in 1979, Fisk University president Walter J. Leonard praised the artist as "one of the most accomplished of the interpreters of our institutions and cultural values. He captured the strength and quickness of the young; he translated the memories of the old; and he projected the determination of the inspired and courageous."

Carl Van Vechten (1880–1964)

Aaron Douglas

1933

gelatin silver print

Fisk University Galleries, Nashville, Gift of Carl Van Vechten

Carl Van Vechten, a photographer and white patron of Douglas and other Harlem Renaissance artists, was the author of the controversial book *Nigger Heaven* (1926), for which Douglas created two advertisements. Van Vechten photographed a number of Harlem luminaries, including Douglas, seen here at age thirty-four. Van Vechten later provided funds to help start the art gallery at Fisk University in Nashville.

Into Bondage

1936

oil on canvas

The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Museum Purchase and partial gift from Thurlow Evans Tibbs, Jr., The Evans-Tibbs Collection

The Harmon Foundation commissioned Douglas to paint a four-panel mural cycle for the lobby of the Hall of Negro Life at the 1936 Texas Centennial Exposition that documented the history of African Americans from slavery to the present day. *Into Bondage*, the first panel, depicts shackled African men and women watching the arrival of slave ships on the horizon. A pink star at the upper left casts a brilliant ray of light and may prefigure the importance of the North Star as a guide in the night sky for slaves escaping to the North. The paintings were so popular that many white visitors doubted that an African American had painted them. In response, exposition organizers appended the following text: "These murals were painted by Aaron Douglass [sic], Negro artist of New York City."

Rise, Shine for Thy Light has Come

about 1927

opaque watercolor and black ink on paperboard

Howard University Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Douglas depicted a moment of transcendence or spiritual awakening expressed in the Old Testament book of Isaiah and the lyrics of a Negro spiritual. The words "Rise, Shine for Thy Light has Come" may also be a metaphor for the Harlem Renaissance and the New Negro. The figure's stylized, wavy hair suggests both ancient Egyptian wall painting and the dynamic lines characteristic of art deco. Alain Locke, an important philosopher and writer of the Harlem Renaissance, purchased the painting and bequeathed it to Howard University.

Sahdji (Tribal Women)

1925

ink and graphite on wove paper

Howard University Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Douglas created this drawing for Harvard-educated philosopher Alain Locke's influential anthology *The New Negro* (1925), a cross-disciplinary collection of writings by W. E. B. Du Bois, Langston Hughes, art collector Albert C. Barnes, Richard Bruce Nugent, and others. The work illustrated Nugent's short story about an East African girl named Sahdji. Its form and content reveal the potential for using African motifs to transform modern art that Douglas learned from his teacher Winold Reiss.

Printing block for *Defiance*
from *The Emperor Jones* series
1926
wood
Collection of Steven L. Jones, Philadelphia

Douglas created four woodblock prints inspired by Eugene O'Neill's 1920 Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *The Emperor Jones*. The drama follows the murderous Brutus Jones as he flees from prison to the West Indies, where he boldly declares himself emperor. Following the rebellion of his subjects, the "emperor" escapes into the jungle. As he attempts to hide, he is beset by hallucinations, tormented by his inner demons, and eventually captured and killed by a silver bullet. Paul Robeson's performance in the title role in 1924 may have inspired Douglas to re-create scenes from O'Neill's play.

Aaron Douglas (1899–1979)
Langston Hughes (1902–1967)
Opportunity Art Folio
1926
relief print and six letterpress sheets
Spencer Museum of Art, The University of Kansas, Museum purchase: The Helen Foresman Spencer Art Acquisition Fund, the Office of the Chancellor, and the Lucy Shaw Schultz Fund

In 1926, Douglas collaborated with poet and fellow Kansan Langston Hughes on a group of six prints for *Opportunity*. Their juxtaposition of image and text proved so popular that *Opportunity* made them available to subscribers in the form of an art folio. Drawing on both German Expressionist art and the rhythms of blues music, Douglas's angular, silhouetted forms create visual equivalents to Hughes's poems.

Cover for *The Sunflower*
1917
Topeka Room, Topeka & Shawnee County Public Library, Kansas

Douglas designed the 1917 yearbook cover as a senior at Topeka High School in Kansas. The distinctive typography that surrounds the stylized sunflower (the Kansas state flower) demonstrates his sophisticated sense of graphic design long before Douglas moved to New York. In the text beneath his class photograph, Douglas is recognized as the most talented artist in (the integrated) school.

Cover for *FIRE!! A Quarterly Devoted to the Younger Negro Artists*
November 1926
original edition
Collection of Thomas H. Wirth

In November 1926, Douglas joined forces with Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Wallace Thurman, Richard Bruce Nugent, Gwendolyn Bennett, and other leading figures to produce *FIRE!!* These young artists and writers envisioned a magazine that, as its title implies, would inflame the passions of its subscribers and metaphorically burn down the strictures of the more conservative cultural set. The endeavor was widely disparaged by the black press and never continued beyond this first issue. Douglas's cover image can be viewed either as a sphinx or as the profile of a face with a large dangling earring. He also contributed line drawings of an artist, a waitress, and a preacher to the magazine's interior pages.

Aspects of Negro Life: The Negro in an African Setting

1934

oil on canvas

Art & Artifacts Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

Douglas described this painting: "The first of the four panels reveals the Negro in the African setting and emphasizes the strongly rhythmic arts of the music, the dance and sculpture which have influenced the modern world possibly more profoundly than any other phase of African life. The fetish, the drummer, the dancers in the formal language of space and color recreate the exhilaration, the ecstasy, the rhythmic pulsation of life in ancient Africa."

Noah's Ark

1935

oil on fiberboard

Fisk University Galleries, Nashville

Douglas painted this large oil in 1935, and based it on the original gouache used in *God's Trombones* in 1927. He combined silhouetted forms, motifs from African sculpture, dynamic diagonals, and a compressed and layered use of space to convey the Old Testament story. In Douglas's interpretation Noah possesses facial features similar to the masks of the Dan people of the Ivory Coast.

James Weldon Johnson (1871–1938)

Aaron Douglas (1899–1979)

God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse

1927, first edition

New York: Viking Press

Collection of Thomas H. Wirth

Douglas contributed eight illustrations to James Weldon Johnson's *God's Trombones*. The collaboration elicited accolades. The Harmon Foundation awarded Johnson first prize for literature for his "vivid impression, realistically conveyed, of the imaginative creation of the old-time Negro preachers." Critics praised Douglas for the synergy with which his illustrations complemented and enlivened Johnson's words.

Study for God's Trombones

1926

tempera on board

Harmon and Harriet Kelley Foundation for the Arts

Although called a study for *God's Trombones* and dated to 1926, this work does not appear in Johnson's 1927 book. The style, subject matter, and distinctive plant forms relate more closely to Douglas's mural *Harriet Tubman*.

The Judgment Day

for *God's Trombones*

1927

gouache on paper

The Walter O. Evans Collection/SCAD Museum of Art

. . . Early one of these mornings,
God's a-going to call for Gabriel,
That tall, bright angel, Gabriel;
And God's a-going to say to him: Gabriel,

Blow your silver trumpet,
And wake the living nations.

And Gabriel's going to ask him: Lord
How loud must I blow it?
And God's a-going to tell him: Gabriel,
Blow it calm and easy.
Then putting one foot on the mountain top,
And the other in the middle of the sea,
Gabriel's going to stand and blow his horn,
To wake the living nations. . . .

(James Weldon Johnson, "The Judgment Day," *God's Trombones*)

The Creation

1935
oil on fiberboard
Howard University Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Douglas offered a peaceful view of God creating humankind. After establishing day and night, forming the land and sea, and shaping the moon and the stars, the great hand of the Creator hovers in the heavens above the first man. In this later oil version Douglas added a scattering of pink stars not present in the original gouache.

The Creation

for *God's Trombones*
1927
gouache on paper
The Walter O. Evans Collection/SCAD Museum of Art

In his poem "The Creation," Johnson wrote that God "rolled the light around in his hands" to fashion the sun, then gathered the light that remained into a "shining ball" that he flung against the darkness "spangling the night with the moon and stars." The circles of varying sizes and tones at the center of the gouache suggest the ball of light used to create the celestial bodies.

Go Down Death—A Funeral Sermon

for *God's Trombones*
1927
gouache on paper
The Walter O. Evans Collection/SCAD Museum of Art

. . . And Death didn't say a word,
But he loosed the reins on his pale, white horse,
And he clamped the spurs to his bloodless sides,
And out and down he rode,
Through heaven's pearly gates,
Past suns and moons and stars;
On Death rode,
And the foam from his horse was like a comet in the sky;
On Death rode,
Leaving the lightning's flash behind;
Straight on down he came. . . .

(James Weldon Johnson, "Go Down Death—A Funeral Sermon," *God's Trombones*)

Go Down Death

about 1934

oil on fiberboard

The Cleveland Museum of Art, John L. Severance Fund and Gift of Prof. and Mrs. David C. Driskell

Douglas added a radiating star to this later version of *Go Down Death*. It has been suggested that the inclusion of the star alludes not only to "Old Death / Coming like a falling star" in Johnson's verse, but also to the North Star fugitive slaves followed to freedom and to Douglas's interest in communism in the mid-1930s.

Douglas created dust jackets and illustrations for books by James Weldon Johnson, Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, and other important Harlem Renaissance writers that vividly capture the spirit of the time. The popularity of the books ensured that Douglas's distinctive style became widely identified with the ideas and philosophy of the Harlem Renaissance.

Dust jacket for *The Blacker the Berry* by Wallace Thurman

1929

New York: Macaulay

Collection of Thomas H. Wirth

The jacket for *The Blacker the Berry*, Wallace Thurman's tale of racial prejudice within the black community, presents a stylish woman in a fractured space.

Dust jacket for *Banjo* by Claude McKay

1929

New York: Harper & Brothers

Collection of Thomas H. Wirth

Douglas used silhouetted figures to set the stage for a story about the exploits of an African American expatriate musician in Marseilles, France.

Dust jacket for *Home to Harlem* by Claude McKay

1928

New York: Harper & Brothers

Collection of Thomas H. Wirth

Douglas's dust jacket for Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* portrays a strong figure poised between the two opposing worlds of the New Negro: the secular, represented by a New York skyscraper, and the spiritual, symbolized by a Gothic-styled church tower. Musical notes in 6/4 time unite the two structures. *Home to Harlem* was the first novel by a writer from Harlem to reach the best-seller list.

Dust jacket for *Caroling Dusk: An Anthology of Verse by Negro Poets* edited by Countee Cullen

1927

New York: Harper & Brothers

Collection of Thomas H. Wirth

The dust jacket for Countee Cullen's anthology of verses by African American poets features an all-over composition of interlaced vines, suggesting Douglas's interest in abstract visual forms.

Dust jacket and book cover, *For Freedom: A Biographical Story of the American Negro* by Arthur Huff Fauset
1927
Philadelphia: Franklin Publishing and Supply Co.
Collection of Thomas H. Wirth

Douglas repeated the dust jacket design of Fauset's *For Freedom* on the cover of the book but reversed the colors of figure and background.

Dust jacket for *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* by James Weldon Johnson
1927
New York: Alfred A. Knopf
Collection of Thomas H. Wirth

In 1927, the year he collaborated with Johnson on *God's Trombones*, Douglas created the dust jacket for Johnson's previously anonymous exploration of race relations in the reprint of *Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*. Johnson taught at Fisk University in the 1930s.

Madison Davis Lacy (born 1944)
with Britt Bradley and Freddy Rhoads
Rhythms on the Wall: The Murals of Aaron Douglas
2007, digital video, 6.5 mins.
Spencer Museum of Art, The University of Kansas, in cooperation with Oldfather Studios. The video was made possible through the generosity of the Judith Rothschild Foundation, the Office of the Chancellor at the University of Kansas, and Ann Thompson

The Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, commissioned this high-definition digital video to show the permanent murals at Fisk University in Nashville and at the Harlem YMCA in New York. The video interweaves recent footage of the murals with archival film and still images and includes statements by noted scholars of African American art and culture.

Cover for Fisk Jubilee Singers, *The Gold and Blue Album*
about 1955
Private collection

The Fisk Jubilee Singers is a touring a cappella choral ensemble founded in 1871 by Professor George L. White to earn funds for the fledgling university. During its early years, the group sang traditional spirituals on stages throughout the United States and Europe, performing for England's Queen Victoria and at the White House for President Ulysses S. Grant. In 1873, funds generated by their acclaimed tours allowed the university to construct its first permanent building, aptly named Jubilee Hall.

Listen Lord
1935
oil on fiberboard
Howard University Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Douglas repeated the arching forms and concentric, radiating circles of the original gouache in this later version of *Listen Lord*.

Study for *Listen Lord*

for *God's Trombones*

1927

graphite and gouache on paperboard

Collection of Dr. Sheryl L. Colyer, New York, New York

This study for the first of the eight illustrations Douglas created for *God's Trombones* draws on Johnson's text, "O Lord, we come this morning / Knee-bowed and body-bent / Before thy throne of grace." Douglas presented a simplified, geometric human form on bended knee, engaged in supplication.

The Negro Spiritual

1930

gouache on paper

Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Gift of Mrs. Leonard Granoff

In this study for a Cravath Library mural frieze, Douglas paid tribute to African American gospel songs by including references to "Gabriel blow your horn," "I Want Two Wings," "Arise, Shine for Thy Light is A-Comin'," "Steal Away," "My Ship is on the Ocean," and other popular spirituals. He treated the figures emblematically, using flat rather than naturalistic forms.

The Negro in Industry

1930

gouache on paper

Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Gift of Mrs. Leonard Granoff

Douglas described the scene depicted in this sketch for one of the Cravath Library friezes at Fisk University:

In all the work an expression of beauty of the rhythmic motion of arms, legs and bodies is always one of the ideas. At the extreme end of the wall a laborer sits upon a slope, hammer in hand, gazing toward a factory just beyond. Behind him a railway train moves in the distance; the three figures are railway workers. Further on, farmers are at work in the field, cotton pickers gather their crops; miners work their way into the earth. At the extreme end of the wall a tiny figure turns questioningly toward a compact mass of skyscrapers. Will the Negro become a machine-tending city dweller or will he remain a rural people?

Aspects of Negro Life: An Idyll of the Deep South

1934

oil on canvas

Art & Artifacts Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

An Idyll of the Deep South is the third in the *Aspects of Negro Life* series. Douglas stated that it "portrays Negroes (1) toiling in the fields, (2) singing and dancing in a lighter mood, and (3) mourning as they prepare to take away a man who has been lynched." As in many of his works, Douglas combined images of the harsh realities of African American life with more positive, uplifting vignettes. Artist and scholar David C. Driskell recalled conversations with Douglas in which he indicated that the star symbolizes not only the North Star that led many slaves to freedom, but also the star of communism. At the time that he painted the *Aspects of Negro Life* series, Douglas shared a belief with many other progressive thinkers that equality might be possible only under socialist political systems.

Dance Magic

1930

gouache on paper

Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Gift of Mrs. Leonard Granoff

Dance Magic is a study for a mural cycle Douglas created for the College Inn Room, a popular nightclub and restaurant in Chicago's Sherman Hotel. Referred to as both *Dance Magic* and *Birth o' the Blues*, the murals emphasize two important themes in Douglas's work: the development of black music and the evolution of black dance forms. Photographic enlargements of Douglas's original sketches were used instead of painted mural panels to fill the art deco-style restaurant.

Study for *Haitian Mural*, Wilmington, Delaware

1942

oil on canvas

Collection of Wilson, Deborah & Lauren Copeland, Detroit, Michigan

In 1942, four years after he journeyed to Haiti on a Julius Rosenwald grant, Douglas painted a mural for the Wilmington, Delaware, home of Dr. and Mrs. W. W. Goens. The Goenses were consistent patrons of Douglas who commissioned two residential murals and a number of portraits. The mural for which this work is a study remains in situ in Wilmington. Although it was executed for a private residence, Douglas painted in the style he often reserved for public works with explicit social content.

The Founding of Chicago

1933-40

gouache on paperboard

Spencer Museum of Art, The University of Kansas, Museum purchase: R. Charles and Mary Margaret Clevenger Fund

Douglas portrayed Jean Baptiste Point du Sable, a fur trader from Haiti who founded Chicago, emerging from a rural setting with an enchained mother and freed baby. Structures rising in the distance symbolize the promise of urban life and jobs in the North. This gouache may be a preliminary design for a mural for the American Negro Exposition in Chicago in 1940. A modernist allegory, the painting indicates the clarity with which Douglas understood the reverberations of history.

Untitled (African Ritual)

1948

crayon on paper

P. Bruce Marine and Donald E. Hardy Collection

Douglas gave this crayon drawing to Loren Miller, an NAACP lawyer who wrote articles for the *Crisis* in the 1940s and owned the African American newspaper the *California Eagle* in the 1950s. Miller served as an attorney of counsel with Thurgood Marshall in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, the landmark 1954 public school desegregation case. Douglas presented this drawing to his friend when the attorney was battling the Federal Housing Administration against segregation in housing.

Study for mural *Cravath Hall, Fisk University*

1929

gouache on illustration board

Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York

Rectangular voids indicate the location of doors and architectural elements in this study for a section of the mural in the north reading room of Cravath Library, Fisk University. Douglas modeled the silhouetted forms of the toiling men after ancient Egyptian wall paintings. He also adopted and slightly modified the Egyptian perspective system in which a figure's shoulders are portrayed parallel to the picture plane

rather than receding in space. In the late 1920s, black Americans increasingly considered the art of ancient Africa, and especially Egypt, to offer an alternative to the classical traditions of Western art.

Centennial

1966

tempera

Fisk University Galleries, Nashville, Gift of the John C. Taylor Estate

Douglas depicted Fisk University students on graduation day one hundred years after the university's founding. They embody Douglas's message to young men and women to go out into the world as ambassadors for African American culture. On his retirement from the faculty at Fisk in 1966, the year he created this painting, Douglas described his teaching philosophy:

Because of my training and experience I have always tried to hold to a program which looked at art from the viewpoint of the studio, the artist, the worker. I have always endeavored to present art to our students as an objective toward which the majority of mankind has expended some of its best thoughts, feelings, and labor since the beginnings of recorded history.

Study for mural in the home of Dr. W. W. and Mrs. Grace Goens in Hockessin, Delaware

about 1963

oil on canvas board

Collection of Wilson, Deborah & Lauren Copeland, Detroit, Michigan

Douglas depicted what he considered two of the most important contributions African Americans had made to United States culture: the creative arts and labor. Flanked by pyramids and a sphinx symbolizing Africa and by smoke-belching factories and a cogwheel denoting labor, two figures offer their creations to the cosmos as universal symbols of the creative process. Lightning bolts in the upper left may suggest that threats to African Americans remained a constant presence.

Photograph of the home of Dr. W. W. and Mrs. Grace Goens, Hockessin, Delaware

about 1963

Collection of Wilson, Deborah & Lauren Copeland, Detroit, Michigan

The allegory of black achievement Douglas painted for the Goenses' Hockessin home is visible on the left. His 1944 portrait of Grace Goens hangs on the back wall; at right is his portrait of opera singer Marian Anderson.

Harriet Tubman

1931

oil on canvas

Bennett College for Women Collection, Greensboro, North Carolina

Douglas used modernist forms to depict Harriet Tubman, who led more than three hundred slaves to freedom by way of the Underground Railroad. The painting was commissioned by Alfred K. Stern of Chicago, son-in-law of philanthropist Julius Rosenwald. In 1932, Douglas wrote in the *Crisis* that he portrayed Tubman as a heroic leader breaking the shackles of bondage and pressing on toward a new day. Behind her and stretching back symbolically to Africa are the black men and women who toiled and prayed through three hundred years of servitude. . . . The group of figures to the right. . . symbolizes the newly liberated people as laborers and heads of families. The last figure symbolizes the dreamer who looks out towards higher and nobler vistas, the modern city, for his race. He represents the preachers, teachers, artists, and musicians of the group. The beam of light that cuts through the center of the picture symbolizes divine inspiration.

Cover for *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races*

January 1930

Collection of Thomas H. Wirth

Douglas regularly read articles printed in the *Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* while a student at the University of Nebraska. He described the progressive political journal, which was edited by W. E. B. Du Bois and published by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), as "different," with "poems and other creative works . . . by Negroes about Negroes." Believing Douglas could fill the need for an authentic black voice in the visual arts, Du Bois hired him in November of 1925 to work in the journal's mailroom and shortly thereafter commissioned him to create cover illustrations for the magazine.

Paul Morand (1888–1976)

Aaron Douglas (1899–1979)

Black Magic

1929, first edition

London: William Heinemann Ltd.

Collection of Thomas H. Wirth

Douglas supplied eight chapter-opening illustrations for *Black Magic* (1929), the English language edition of French surrealist author Paul Morand's fictional travelogue *Magie noire*. The collection of short stories explores encounters between blacks and whites in Africa, Europe, and the Americas. The *New York Times* praised Douglas's images and characterized Morand's text as "profound," "savage," "magnificently fascinating," and "disquietingly unanswerable." Douglas's gouache illustrations suggest the appeal of his sophisticated artistic ethos among key literary figures of the Harlem Renaissance.

Cover for *Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life*

February 1926

Collection of Thomas H. Wirth

Douglas began creating graphic works for important civil rights journals soon after he moved from the Midwest to Harlem in the summer of 1925. His cover for *Opportunity's* "Industrial Issue" features an image of two laborers toiling at a forge in a fractured, cubist space. *Opportunity*, which was first published in 1923, was the National Urban League's official journal of culture and was edited by Charles S. Johnson, who later became the first black president of Fisk University.

Aspects of Negro Life: From Slavery Through Reconstruction

1934

oil on canvas

Art & Artifacts Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

Douglas wrote that the second panel of *Aspects of Negro Life* is "composed of three sections covering the periods from slavery through the Reconstruction. From right to left, the first section depicts the slaves' doubt and uncertainty transformed into exultation at the reading of the Emancipation Proclamation. The figure standing on the box in the second section of this panel symbolizes the careers of outstanding Negro leaders during this time. The third section shows the departure of the Union soldiers from the South and the onslaught of the Klan that followed."

Study for *Aspects of Negro Life: From Slavery Through Reconstruction*

1934

gouache over graphite on paper

The Baltimore Museum of Art: Purchase with exchange funds from the Edward Joseph Gallagher III Memorial Collection

Douglas replaced the chained figures and men carrying rifles that appear in this study with hooded members of the Ku Klux Klan riding horses in the finished mural.

W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963)

Aaron Douglas (1899–1979)

What the Negro has Done for the United States and Texas

1936

pamphlet, U.S. Department of Commerce

Collection of Thomas H. Wirth

Douglas designed the cover and W. E. B. Du Bois wrote the text for this pamphlet, which was distributed at an information desk in the lobby of the Hall of Negro Life at the Texas Centennial Exposition in Dallas in the summer of 1936.

Aspiration

1936

oil on canvas

Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Museum purchase, the estate of Thurlow E. Tibbs, Jr., the Museum Society Auxiliary, American Art Trust Fund, Unrestricted Trust Fund, partial gift of Dr. Ernest A. Bates, Sharon Bell, Jo-Ann Beverly, Barbara Carleton, Dr. and Mrs. Arthur H. Coleman, Dr. and Mrs. Coyness Ennix, Jr., Nicole Y. Ennix, Mr. and Mrs. Gary Francois, Dennis L. Franklin, Mr. and Mrs. Maxwell C. Gillette, Mr. and Mrs. Richard Goodyear, Zuretti L. Goosby, Marion E. Greene, Mrs. Vivian S. W. Hambrick, Laurie Gibbs Harris, Arlene Hollis, Louis A. and Letha Jeanpierre, Daniel and Jackie Johnson, Jr., Stephen L. Johnson, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Latham, Lewis & Ribbs Mortuary Garden Chapel, Glenn R. Nance, Mr. and Mrs. Harry S. Parker III, Mr. and Mrs. Carr T. Preston, Fannie Preston, Pamela R. Ransom, Dr. and Mrs. Benjamin F. Reed, San Francisco Black Chamber of Commerce, San Francisco Chapter of The Links, Inc., San Francisco Chapter of the NAACP, Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity, Dr. Ella Mae Simmons, Mr. Calvin R. Swinson, Joseph B. Williams, Mr. and Mrs. Alfred S. Wilsey, and the people of the Bay Area

Aspiration is one of two surviving murals from the cycle Douglas created for the Hall of Negro Life at the 1936 Texas Centennial Exposition. Three silhouetted figures holding emblems of education turn away from chained hands in the foreground and look toward the illuminated city and factory at the upper right. Douglas's bold forms and the transparent layers connecting different elements emphasize the continuity of human ideals, architecture, and modernity. The radiating "Lone Star of Texas" provides a local note to this universal message of hope.

Untitled

date unknown

graphite on paper

Collection of Steven L. Jones, Philadelphia

This sketch offers a glimpse into Douglas's working methods. The head may relate to the figure of the seated man on steps in an untitled 1955 etching.

Subway Scene (Train Station)

date unknown

watercolor on paper

Collection of Dr. Sheryl L. Colyer, New York, New York

Like his 1934 oil *Power Plant in Harlem*, this watercolor shows Douglas's interest in everyday scenes of urban life.

Untitled

date unknown

pen and ink with graphite

Collection of Steven L. Jones, Philadelphia

Douglas portrayed a policeman as a brute, ready to wreak havoc on a bystander in the upper right quadrant of this undated drawing. It reflects a view of law enforcement held by many African Americans around the time of the Harlem Riot in March 1935. By setting this negatively charged image beside everyday scenes of African American life at left, Douglas may have been implying that the threat of oppression was a familiar possibility.

Cover of Spark: Organ of the Vanguard

1934

Conté crayon on board

Art & Artifacts Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

Douglas created this drawing of a fist raised in protest as the cover for a journal that was never published. Vignettes of marching troops, gunships, and a lynching, coupled with the raised fist, broken manacle, and fractured, cubist space, reveal Douglas's interest in politics, social justice, and Marxist theory during what has been called the "Red Decade." In subject matter and style this work connects Douglas with Depression-era social realist artists William Gropper, Philip Evergood, George Biddle, and Louis Lozowick, among others.

The Negro Speaks of Rivers (For Langston Hughes)

1941

pen and ink on paper

The Walter O. Evans Collection/SCAD Museum of Art

This drawing celebrates Douglas's friendship with and admiration for Langston Hughes. The title is taken from the 1922 poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" that Hughes wrote for W. E. B. Du Bois:

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.

I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

Song of the Towers

1966

oil on canvas

State of Wisconsin, Executive Residence, Madison

In 1966 the Milwaukee chapter of The Links, Inc., an African American women's civic organization, commissioned Douglas to create a painting for the Madison residence of Wisconsin governor Warren P. Knowles and his wife. Douglas chose to revisit the motif of the fourth panel of his 1934 mural cycle *Aspects of Negro Life*, and in the 1966 version added cotton plants in the lower right. He described the painting as follows:

We see a figure emerging from the gloom of the lower right corner. The figure carries a suitcase, and barely escapes the clutches of an enormous hand that tries to prevent his escape. . . . It hurriedly mounts a cog wheel, symbol of industrial, urban life. . . .

The whole composition is held together by an ever-expanding series of concentric circles that are powered by the Negro's love of freedom as represented by the Statue of Liberty and his devotion to the arts as represented by the uplifted horn.

The central figure seen waving a saxophone and with raised foot tapping out carefree rhythms of joy and exultation represents or symbolizes all aspects of the Negro's creative life. . . .

The large figure in the lower left . . . sinks wearily into a reclining posture as a fleshless hand held above its head bars its emergence into the light thereby condemning it to the fate of sinking ever farther beneath the cog wheel and into the yawning, glittering chasm, the symbol for Harlem and all of our other ghettos.

In the middle on the right hand side are rhythmic waves of smoke pouring from smoke stacks, symbolizing the great and prosperous days before the depression. On the left side this great activity has been reduced to a mere trickle from a single smoke stack.

The narrow bands of steam or smoke streaming across the center of the picture symbolize the various types of communication: railroads, planes, ships, automobiles. . . .

Untitled

1955

etching

Collection of Steven L. Jones, Philadelphia

Douglas used African motifs in realistically rendered images as well as stylized compositions. Traditional Akan art may have provided the source for the grimacing figure's tilted face and characteristically high forehead. As with many of Douglas's works, this etching may have been politically inspired. The domed structure under the dark cloud resembles the U.S. Capitol. To many in the mid-1950s, the Capitol symbolized government inaction in spite of landmark legal decisions such as *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954), which progressive-minded Americans hoped would promote rapid desegregation in all facets of society. The owner of this work writes: "There was particular outrage in the African American community over the federal government's neglect in not prosecuting the white perpetrators of the brutal murder in August 1955 of fourteen-year-old African American Emmett Till, whose killing was one of the catalysts for the modern Civil Rights Movement."

The Studio

1955

etching

Collection of Steven L. Jones, Philadelphia

Following the tradition of European masters, Douglas depicted his own studio.

The Junk Man

about 1955

probably printed by Stephanie Pogue about 1972-74

etching and aquatint

Collection of David C. and Thelma Driskell

Douglas preserved a glimpse of the neighborhood junk dealer leading his rickety, detritus-laden horse cart.

Window Shopper

about 1955

etching and aquatint

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Reba and Dave Williams

Douglas returned to New York in the summer of 1955 and enrolled in a printmaking course at the art school of the Brooklyn Museum. In *Window Shopper*, Douglas contrasts a radiantly lit store window with the nocturnal world of a young woman standing outside. He might be making a statement about racial inequality and segregation, or, like Ashcan artist John Sloan fifty years earlier, he may be offering a general comment on the disparity between the haves and the have-nots.

Self-portrait

1954

charcoal and Conté drawing on paper

Spencer Museum of Art, The University of Kansas, Museum purchase: Peter T. Bohan Art Acquisition Fund

In 1954, Douglas executed portraits of himself and several other faculty members at Fisk University. When the works were exhibited at Fisk's Carl Van Vechten Gallery, Douglas was praised for his ability to capture the spirit and appearance of his sitters in a commanding manner without flattery.

Betsy Graves Reyneau (1888–1964)

Aaron Douglas

1953

oil on canvas

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; Gift of the Harmon Foundation

In 1944 the Harmon Foundation organized *Portraits of Outstanding Americans of Negro Origin*, a touring exhibition that honored African Americans of great accomplishment with the aim of increasing racial harmony. Betsy Graves Reyneau and Laura Wheeler Waring portrayed twenty-three businessmen, authors, scientists, and artists. During the ten years that the exhibition traveled across the country, other portraits, including this likeness of fifty-four-year-old Douglas posing with *Aspects of Negro Life: Song of the Towers*, were added to the tour. The Harmon Foundation discontinued the tour in 1954 after the Supreme Court ruled segregation unconstitutional.

Zora Neale Hurston

1926

pastel on paper

Fisk University Galleries, Nashville

Douglas first met Zora Neale Hurston when the folklorist and author was completing her studies in anthropology at Barnard College in New York. Hurston became famous for short stories and novels, among them *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). Douglas rendered this sensitive pastel portrait the year they collaborated with other progressive African American creative thinkers to produce the journal *FIRE!!*

Alta

1936

oil on canvas

Fisk University Galleries, Nashville

Portraits became an important part of Douglas's work in later years, especially while he was teaching at Fisk University. *Alta* portrays Douglas's wife, Alta Sawyer Douglas, a Topeka native with an important professional profile in New York City, where she taught until her unexpected death in 1958.

Portrait of Grace Goens

1944

oil on canvas

Collection of Wilson, Deborah & Lauren Copeland, Detroit, Michigan

Douglas counted Grace Price Goens, a distant cousin, as one his closest friends. Goens was a pioneering supporter of cultural activities in Wilmington, Delaware, where her husband's medical practice was located and where she was often the only African American member of local arts councils. Goens's parents attended Nashville's Fisk University as did she (Class of 1927), her three siblings, and several dozen extended family members. Her niece Deborah Fitzgerald Copeland, who inherited this work, is also a Fisk alumna (Class of 1970).

Photographer unknown

Aaron Douglas (left) and Arthur A. Schomburg with Douglas's mural *Aspects of Negro Life: Song of the Towers*

1934

gelatin silver print

Photographs and Prints Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

Arthur (Arturo) A. Schomburg, an important scholar, writer, bibliophile, and patron of the Harlem Renaissance, was a native of Puerto Rico who came to New York in 1891. He quickly immersed himself in the world of the African American intelligentsia and began collecting materials by and about Africans and African Americans. He frequently lent his growing personal collection of books and art to the 135th Street branch of the New York Public Library in Harlem. In 1926 the New York Public Library purchased his collection of ten thousand items. From 1932 to 1938, Schomburg served as curator of the library's new Division of Negro Literature, History and Prints. When Schomburg died in 1940, the 135th Street branch was renamed in his honor and in 1972 was designated the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture of the New York Public Library.

Three pendants

1930s–50s

enamel

Private collections

In addition to paintings and works on paper, Douglas created enamel jewelry featuring motifs inspired by African masks and sculptures as well as fetish or fertility figures. He studied enameling along with printmaking at the art school of the Brooklyn Museum in 1955. These three enamels may date to that time or may have been done before his formal training.

Dust jacket for *The Black Venus* by André Salmon

1929

New York: Macaulay

Collection of Thomas H. Wirth

The central character of this novel by French surrealist André Salmon conceived the extraordinary idea of establishing a rubber plantation on the heights of Montmartre in central Paris, to which he took his "dark-skinned slave girl," the "Black Venus" of the title.

Dust jacket for *God Sends Sunday* by Arna Bontemps

1931

New York: Harcourt Brace

The Walter O. Evans Collection of African American Art

Arna Bontemps was an important writer of the Harlem Renaissance and a close friend of Douglas (both worked at Fisk University for many years). *God Sends Sunday*, his first novel, is set in the 1890s and tells the story of an irrepressible and self-destructive jockey named Little Augie.

Dust jacket for *Not Without Laughter* by Langston Hughes

1933

New York: Alfred A. Knopf

Collection of Thomas H. Wirth

Douglas embellished his cover design for the 1933 reprint of *Not Without Laughter* by fellow Kansan Langston Hughes with sunflowers (the Kansas state flower). The prize-winning novel, which is set in the fictional town of Stanton, Kansas, is based on the author's experiences growing up in Lawrence, Kansas, in the early twentieth century.

Lagos, Nigeria

1956

watercolor

Collection of Steven L. Jones, Philadelphia

Douglas traveled to West Africa in the late summer of 1956 with his wife, Alta, and friends W. W. and Grace Goens. Their itinerary included the port cities of Dakar, Senegal; Accra, Ghana; and Lagos, Nigeria. In an interview following the trip, Douglas said he had not gone to the subcontinent in search of "face-types or jungle scenes to paint." Rather, his interest was in "seeing something of African urban life, its 'colorful' people, markets, houses and streets."

This image of the entry gate of a residential compound in the bustling central business district in Lagos features elements of the Afro-Brazilian architecture common in the Nigerian city. In the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries many previously enslaved people of African descent returned from Brazil to Lagos, where they combined indigenous Yoruba building designs with elements of Portuguese baroque architecture. Douglas, who had extensive knowledge of the African diaspora and a long-standing interest in architecture, probably recognized the eclectic architectural style.

Boy with Toy Plane

1938

oil on canvas

The Walter O. Evans Collection/SCAD Museum of Art

Douglas described the young boy named Joe who sat for this portrait as having "one of the most pitiful faces" he had ever seen. The artist believed that the portrait captured not only hardships endured by African Americans, but also their aspirations. For Douglas the toy plane symbolized the boy's lofty goals. The dark palette is reminiscent of New York's earlier Ashcan school and of European painters such as Diego Velázquez.

Window Cleaning

1935

oil on canvas

Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery and Sculpture Garden, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, NAA-Nebraska Art Association Collection

In 1936 the Nebraska Art Association honored Douglas, who had graduated from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 1922, by acquiring *Window Cleaning* for the university's permanent collection. Association members noted at the time that Douglas was the only African American student ever elected to membership in the University Art Club.

Power Plant in Harlem

1934

oil on canvas

Hampton University Museum, Hampton, Virginia

Power Plant in Harlem, which demonstrates Douglas's ongoing interest in the urban landscape, was shown in an exhibition of the 1930s antifascist group, the American Artists' Congress.

Photographer unknown

Douglas in front of the Louvre, Paris, France

1931

Private collection

Shortly after completing *Harriet Tubman*, Douglas sailed for Paris to study art. On his passport, he listed his occupation as "illustrator." During his year there, Douglas studied with painters Émile-Othon Friesz, a Fauve who painted in an expressionistic, decorative style, and Henri de Waroquier and sculptor Charles Despiau. Paris was an important gathering place for African Americans in the 1920s and 1930s. The city attracted painters William H. Johnson, Palmer Hayden, Lois Mailou Jones, and Hale Woodruff; sculptor Augusta Savage; and performer Josephine Baker, among others.

French Chateau

about 1931

watercolor

The Harmon and Harriet Kelley Collection

This almost-impressionistic watercolor depicting a large house in the French countryside is a rare surviving example of Douglas's work from his year in France.

Douglas's address book/sketchbook

about 1920s–60s

Private collection

Douglas sketched preliminary thoughts for the 1963 mural he painted for the living room of Dr. and Mrs. W. W. Goens's home in Hockessin, Delaware.

Edwin Harleston (1882–1931)

Portrait of Aaron Douglas

1930

oil on canvas

Carolina Art Association/Gibbes Museum of Art, Charleston, South Carolina

Edwin Harleston went to Nashville in the summer of 1930 to assist Douglas with painting the Cravath Library murals at Fisk University. Douglas asked him to monitor the project's progress and supervise four assistants (Andrew Foster, Cornelius Lunceford, Preston Peterson, and Julius Brown) while Douglas completed a mural for the Sherman Hotel in Chicago. Harleston, who was an accomplished portraitist from South Carolina, used a European old-master format in this portrait of Douglas, showing him holding brushes and a palette and working on a masterpiece—in this case the allegory *Science*, which Douglas painted for the library's card catalogue room.

Aspects of Negro Life: Song of the Towers

1934

oil on canvas

Art & Artifacts Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

Douglas explained the fourth panel of *Aspects of Negro Life*: “. . . a figure fleeing from the clutching hand of serfdom is symbolic of the migration of Negroes from the South and the Caribbean into the urban and industrial life of America during and just after World War I.” He described the saxophone player as emblematic of “the will to self-expression, the spontaneous creativeness of the late 1920s which spread vigorously throughout all of the arts in an expression of anxiety and yearning from the soul of the Negro people.” Douglas used the man at the lower left, grasped by a disembodied skeletal hand, to “recreate the confusion, the dejection and frustration resulting from the depression of the 1930s.”

Building More Stately Mansions

1944

oil on canvas

Fisk University Galleries, Nashville

Douglas created this epic painting for Nashville’s Fisk University, where he chaired the art department from 1937 to 1966. The painting conveys his interest in the symbolic relationship between architecture and humankind and serves as a metaphor for the past and present achievements of people of African descent. The title comes from the final stanza of “The Chambered Nautilus,” an 1858 poem by Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr.:

Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,
As the swift seasons roll! / Leave thy low-vaulted past!
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,
Till thou at length art free,
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life’s unresting sea!

Birds in Flight

1927

oil on canvas

Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York

Birds in Flight, which is reminiscent of synthetic cubist collages made by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque in 1912 and 1913, demonstrates Douglas’s knowledge of European modernism before he traveled to France in 1931. The three towering smokestacks also link Douglas with American modernists Arthur Dove and Charles Demuth.

Winold Reiss (1886–1953)

Harlem at Night

1924

ink on paper

Collection of Renate Reiss

Shortly after his arrival in New York in the summer of 1925, Douglas received a two-year fellowship to the art and design school run by German émigré artist Winold Reiss. Reiss, who had studied at Munich’s Royal Academy of Fine Arts and School of Applied Arts, was probably familiar with German Expressionism as well as with the German folk art technique of paper cutting known as *scherschnitt*, which produced flat images in silhouette. Reiss brought the European modernist use of African motifs when he immigrated to the United States in 1913, and encouraged Douglas to incorporate these influences in his work. Like Douglas, Reiss combined commercial work with “high art” production.