

On Stage

Painter Jacob Lawrence Dies

BY BILL SCOTT  
FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

As an African American artist, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the going home of a marvelously gifted and courageous artist. Jacob Lawrence passed on early last week, as you may know.

The enormous talent of this man is only surpassed in the mind of this writer, by his courage and integrity as an artist. At a time when many Black artists sought refuge from racism by leaving for Europe, Jacob Lawrence stayed. Reginia Perry writes in "Free Within Ourselves", a book about the African American



artists with work in the collection of the National Museum of American Art: "Jacob Lawrence is one of the few painters of his generation who grew up in an African American community, was taught primarily by African American Artists, and was influenced by Black people".

Lawrence was also inspired by the politically committed art of painters like Francisco Goya, Jose' Clemente Orozco, and Honore' Daumier. There was little support for Black artists during the hard times of the 1930s and 40s, but Jacob Lawrence never the less had the courage to produce some very powerful political statements. Encouraged by Black Sculptor Augusta Savage, Lawrence joined an easel project with the W.P.A., and under the influence of Black historian and lecturer "Professor Seifert", became interested in the life of General Toussaint L'Overture.

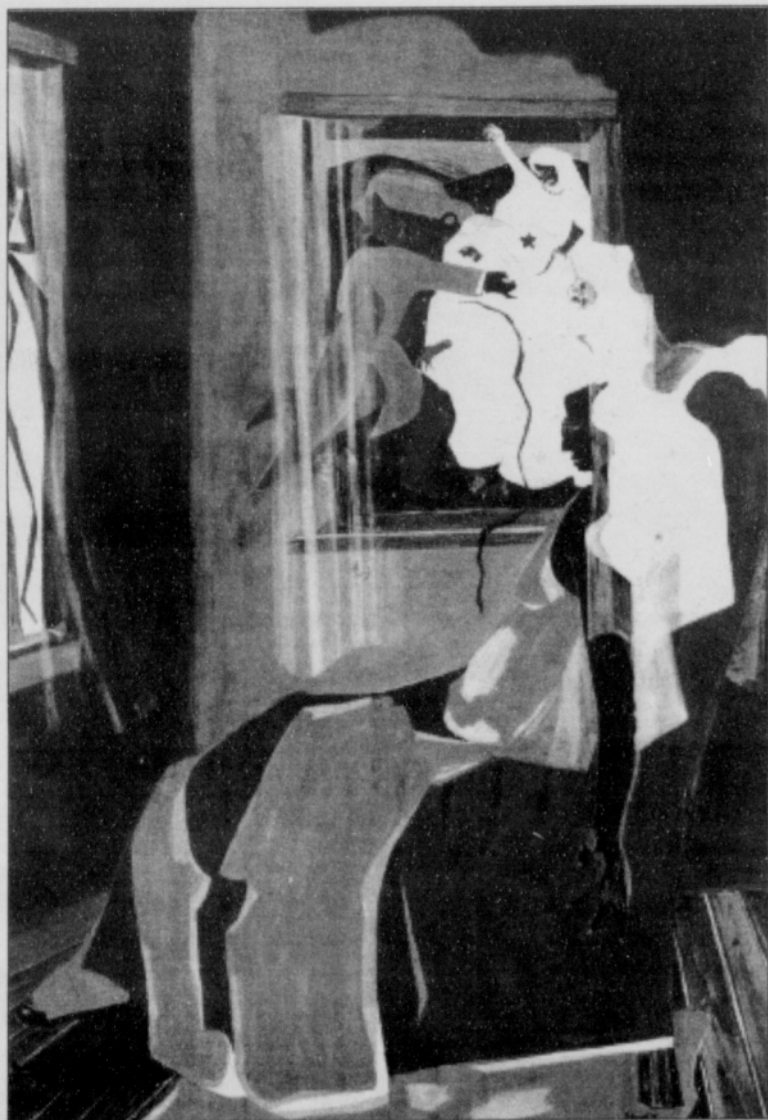
His Toussaint L'Overture series dealt with the kind of subject matter that African American artists in the thirties were not engaging. Of his series of paintings on the life of the General and the Haitian revolt against slavery, he said: "I didn't do it as a historical thing, but because I believe these things tie up with the Negro today. We don't have a physical slavery, but an economic slavery. If these people who were so much worse off than the people today, could conquer their slavery, we certainly can do the same thing." When contacted at his home in

Tuscon, Arizona and asked about his thoughts regarding Jacob Lawrence's passing, world renowned painter Robert Colescott

*"I admired most his ability to fuse abstract construction with representation and a strong narrative force, while maintaining a perfect balance. He was a wonderful, kind, and gentle man. He will be missed."*

-Robert Colescott

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