

WILLIAM H. JOHNSON

AN AMERICAN MODERN

EXHIBITION PROSPECTUS
Now available for booking

Developed by the
JAMES E. LEWIS MUSEUM OF ART,
MORGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
Organized for travel by the
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION
TRAVELING EXHIBITION SERVICE



Smithsonian



EXHIBITION AT A GLANCE

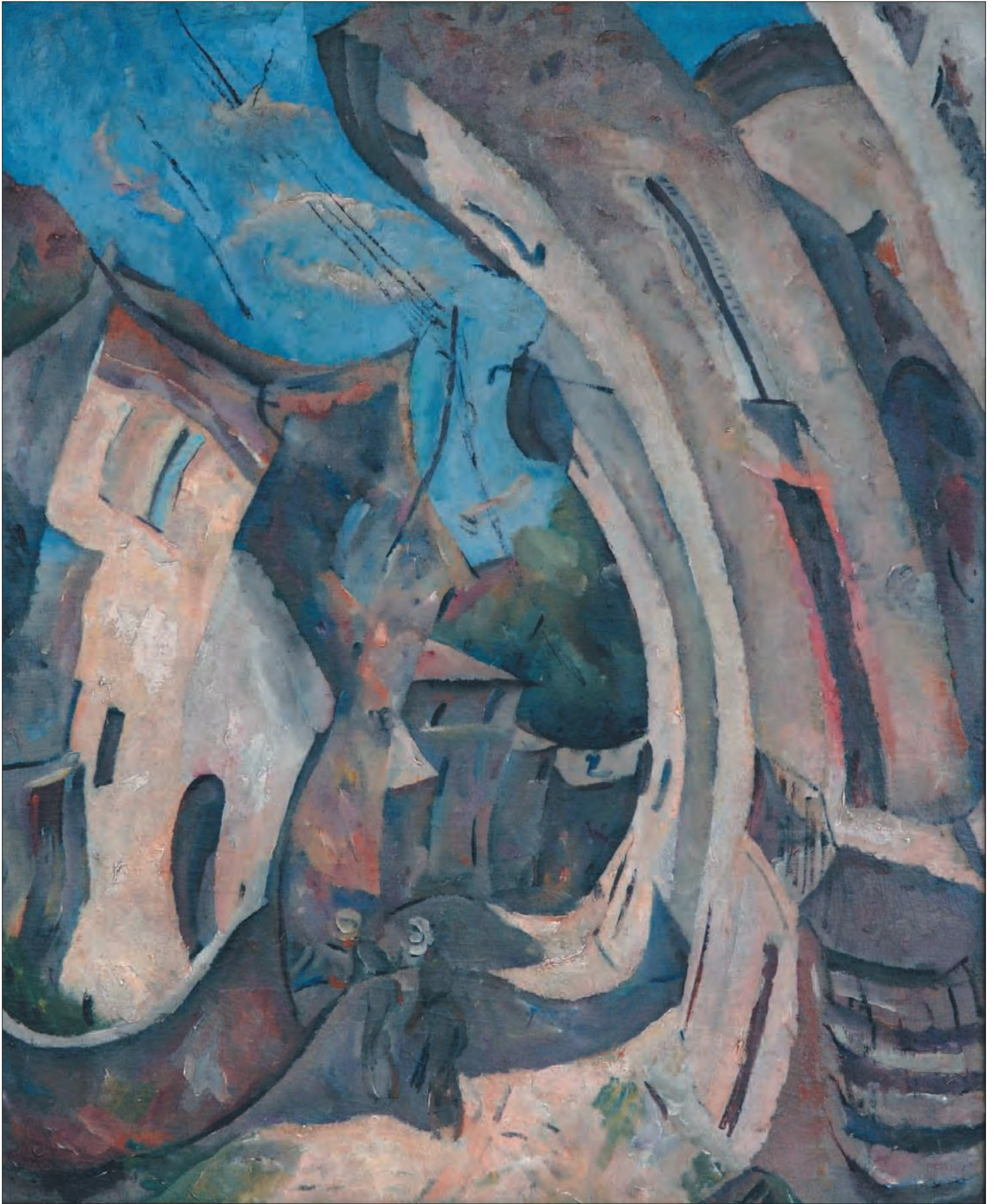
- 15 framed paintings, 5 framed works on paper, text and object labels
- \$20,000 per 12-week booking period, plus prorated shipping
- 300–325 running feet
- High security
- Tour begins September 2011



Still Life, 1938

An important artist, a significant collection

WILLIAM HENRY JOHNSON (1901–1970) is a pivotal figure in modern American art. A virtuoso skilled in various media and techniques, he produced thousands of works over a career that spanned decades, continents, and genres. Now, on view in its entirety for the first time, a seminal collection covering key stages in Johnson's career will be presented in *William H. Johnson: An American Modern*. Developed by the James E. Lewis Museum of Art, Morgan State University, and funded in part by the Henry Luce Foundation, this SITES traveling exhibition represents a unique opportunity to share the artist's oeuvre with a broader audience.



Cagnes White Houses, c. 1928–29



Boats at Kerteminde, 1938

The Harmon Foundation

When it closed its doors in 1967, the Harmon Foundation, a nonprofit organization that promoted African American achievements across various fields and disciplines, gave more than a thousand Johnson paintings, watercolors, and prints to what is now the Smithsonian American Art Museum. The Museum in turn transferred portions of the collection to historically black colleges and universities, including Morgan State University in Baltimore.

Today, Morgan's James E. Lewis Museum of Art houses 20 Johnson canvases and works on paper that scholar James Lewis discerningly selected from the Smithsonian's trove. Because of the ephemeral materials that Johnson used as canvases, many of his pieces have been too fragile for public study and display, making this traveling exhibition all the more significant.

The complexity of simplicity

William H. Johnson: An American Modern explores the intricate layers of Johnson's diverse cultural perspective as an artist and self-described "primitive and cultured painter." Through 20 expressionist and vernacular landscapes, still life paintings, and portraits, the exhibition positions the artist's aesthetic within the context of modernism.

Johnson's "primitivism" was a conscious response to prevailing conventions of sophistication, taste, and artistic beauty. His use in later works of flat, elongated human forms in bold shapes of intense color, flanked by seemingly simple curves and lines, was not a modernist interpretation of ethnographic art but rather a reclamation of an African aesthetic. Johnson's visual vocabulary disguised the complexity of his "simplicity."

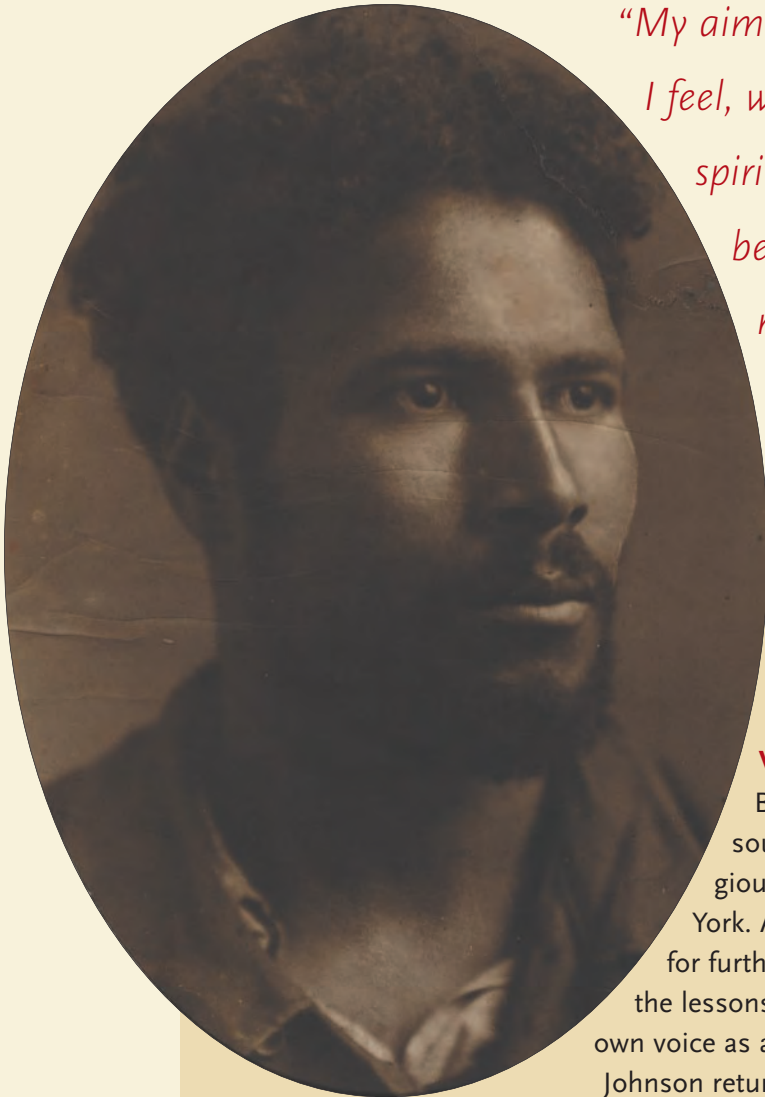
Scholarly contributions

The exhibition also recognizes the little-known contributions of scholars, such as James Lewis, who pioneered the art collections at historically black colleges and universities. Lewis, founder of the museum and fine arts department at Morgan State University, selected the pieces for the university's collection in the 1960s, and his choices demonstrate an insight into Johnson's work long before substantive research on the artist had been published.

A planned exhibition catalog will feature essays by noted scholars on such topics as primitivism, modernism, and African American art; African American artists and the art historical canon; identity and aesthetics in art; and art and art scholarship at historically black colleges and universities.



Bazaars Behind the Church of Our Savior, c. 1935



“My aim is to express in a natural way what I feel, what is in me, both rhythmically and spiritually, all that which in time has been saved up in my family of primitiveness and tradition, and which is now concentrated in me.”

William H. Johnson (1901–1970)

Born in Florence, S.C., Johnson left the south at age 17 to study art at the prestigious National Academy of Design in New York. After graduating in 1926, he left the U.S. for further study in France, where he absorbed the lessons of European artists and discovered his own voice as a painter.

Johnson returned to New York in 1929, but a year later, aware of the difficulties facing black artists in America, moved to a small fishing village in Denmark, where he married Danish textile artist Holcha Krake. The couple exhibited together and traveled throughout Scandinavia, Europe, and North Africa before moving to New York in 1938. This return to the U.S. marked a decisive shift in Johnson's art. Like his younger contemporaries Jacob Lawrence and Romare Bearden, Johnson began probing the black experience, drawing imagery from his childhood memories of the rural south and the upbeat urban ambience of Harlem.

Although Johnson attained a certain level of artistic success in the U.S. and abroad, financial security remained elusive. Following his wife's death in 1944, Johnson's physical and mental health deteriorated severely, and he spent the final 23 years of his life in a state hospital on Long Island, N.Y.

Despite the tragic circumstances of his later years, Johnson's life can be seen as a triumph. He created a body of work that celebrates the dignity and vitality of individuals and the energy and beauty of the land.



Ring Around the Rosey, 1942

PROJECT PARTNERS

James E. Lewis Museum of Art

Located in the Murphy Fine Arts Center at Morgan State University in Baltimore, the Museum evolved from a teaching collection in the 1950s to a superlative home for thousands of works of art and rare artifacts. The Museum reaches diverse audiences through exhibitions, artifact loans, community arts programs, and professional development workshops. With art from every continent from antiquity to the present, the James E. Lewis Museum of Art is where art, histories, and cultures meet. www.murphyfineartscenter.org

Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service

SITES has been sharing the wealth of Smithsonian collections and research programs with millions of people outside Washington, DC, for more than 50 years. SITES connects Americans to their cultural heritage through a wide range of exhibitions about art, science, and history, which are shown wherever people live, work, and play. www.sites.si.edu



Loftsen Island, 1937

EXHIBITION SPECIFICATIONS

CONTENTS: 15 framed paintings, 5 framed works on paper, text and object labels

PARTICIPATION FEE: \$20,000 per 12-week booking period, plus prorated shipping

SIZE: 300–325 running feet

SECURITY: High

SHIPPING: Prorated, SITES-designated carrier

WEIGHT: 2,100 pounds

CRATES: 6–7

TOUR BEGINS: September 2011

A COMPLETE PACKAGE

The exhibition itself is only a portion of what SITES delivers. You'll also be provided with these additional resources to enhance your presentation:

- Complete curatorial and registration information
- Complete shipping, handling, and installation instructions
- Wall-to-wall fine-arts insurance coverage under the Smithsonian's policy
- Public relations support, including sample press release, images, logos; digital graphic templates of promotional materials; and advice on promoting the exhibition and hosting special events
- Planned exhibition catalog featuring essays by respected scholars David C. Driskell, Edmund Barry Gaither, Leslie King-Hammond, and Richard J. Powell
- Educational and programming resources, educator resources, speakers list, bibliography
- Exhibition website and ability to link to and from the SITES website

DISPLAY, CARE, AND SECURITY REQUIREMENTS

This exhibition has been designated high security and will be offered only to institutions able to meet the following requirements. High security is required for exhibitions containing objects that are of special cultural significance, highly valuable, sensitive to light or climatic changes in humidity and temperature, or of an especially fragile nature.

Space

- Exhibitors must have a limited-access gallery of sufficient area and wall space to accommodate the exhibition. An open mall, hallway, or lounge area is not acceptable.
- Functioning fire prevention systems and fire protection devices that alert guards and/or local fire department must be available in the exhibition, staging, and storage spaces. Fire prevention and protection systems must meet local ordinances and are subject to SITES' approval.
- Smoking, eating, and drinking are prohibited in exhibition gallery, staging, and storage spaces.
- The exhibitor must have a recording hygrothermograph(s) in the exhibition space.
- Empty crates and other packing material must be stored in a secure, pest-free, and temperature- and relative humidity-controlled storage space. No part of this exhibition may be stored, crated, or moved off the premises without prior authorization from SITES.
- Facility reports for exhibitors must be reviewed and approved by SITES.

Collections Management

- Light levels, temperature, and relative humidity must be controlled at the specified levels while objects are on display.
- Light levels must be limited to no greater than 5 foot candles for works on paper and 10 foot candles for paintings. No direct sunlight may reach any of the works.
- The exhibition space, staging, and storage areas must have temperature and humidity controls to guarantee an environment of 50% relative humidity and 68–72 degrees Fahrenheit, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- A member of the exhibitor's professional collections management or conservation staff must make daily checks of the exhibition.
- No photography of exhibition components or objects are allowed without prior authorization from SITES.

Protection

- Trained professional guards, whose sole duty is to protect the exhibition, must be present in sufficient numbers to protect the exhibition adequately throughout the time it is on site. Security cameras may not substitute for human guards during public hours. Guard(s) need not be armed.
- Security must be maintained during hours when the exhibition is closed to the public, including either periodic checks of the exhibition space by guard personnel or adequately monitored electronic surveillance to detect motion, heat, and smoke.



Come Unto Me Little Children, 1939

- All handling, installation, and de-installation of objects must be performed by professional museum staff trained in handling, packing, and installing works of art.
- Venues must have a staff registrar and fine-arts conservator or access to a fine-arts contract conservator to oversee installation, monitoring, and de-installation.
- Venues must provide a minimum of two professional exhibition installers.
- The exhibition will be shipped by a Smithsonian-approved designated carrier.

SITES CONTACTS

Scheduling

Minnie Micu

202.633.3160 • micum@si.edu

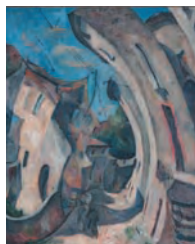
Content | Design

Marquette Folley

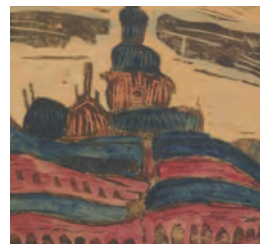
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CHECKLIST

Artwork dimensions (unframed) are height × width.



Cagnes White Houses, c. 1928–29
Oil on burlap
28 × 23"



Bazaars Behind the Church of Our Savior,
c. 1935
Woodblock print and watercolor on paper
19½ × 20¼"



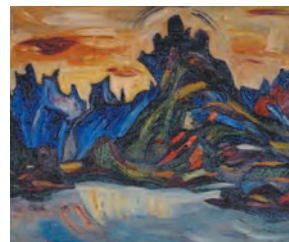
Street in Cagnes-sur-Mer, c. 1928–29
Oil on canvas
19 × 23"



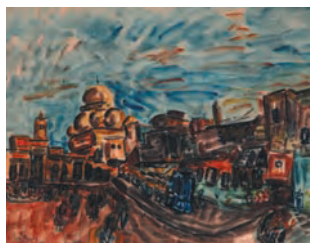
Untitled Still Life, c. 1936–38
Oil on burlap
28 × 22"



Danish Youth, c. 1930
Oil on burlap
25¼ × 21¼"



Loftsen Island, 1937
Oil on burlap
29 × 34"



Street in Tunis, 1932
Watercolor
26½ × 30"



Boats at Kerteminde, 1938
Oil on burlap
27¾ × 32½"



Fishing Boat, 1938
Oil on burlap
34 × 29"



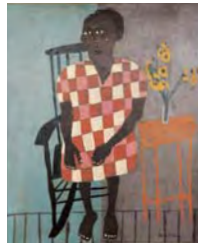
Come Unto Me Little Children, 1939
Oil on compressed cardboard
34½ × 31"



Jitterbugs, 1941
Tempera (Gouache)
21¾ × 16"



Kerteminde Harbor, 1938
Oil on canvas
28 × 38"



Aunt Alice, c. 1940
Oil on compressed cardboard
33¾ × 28½"



Blind Singer, 1941
Silkscreen
23 × 17⅛"



Still Life, 1938
Oil on burlap
25 × 28"



Mount Calvary I, 1940
Oil on fabric
30½ × 33¼"



Ring Around the Rosey, 1942
Oil on compressed cardboard
25½ × 24"



Untitled Landscape, 1938
Oil on burlap
20 × 25"



Sowing, 1940
Tempera
17½ × 21¾"



Christ Crucified, 1944
Oil on wood panel
25¾ × 28½"

SITES

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www.shows2go.si.edu



Front cover: *Aunt Alice* (detail), c. 1940

Back cover: *Sowing*, 1940

Images of artwork courtesy Morgan State University

Design by Carol Beehler

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