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The African-American Image in Art

La Salle University Art Museum

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La Salle University Art Museum
February, 1990
AFRICAN-AMERICAN IMAGE IN ART

Coinciding with the recent publication of *The Image of the Black in Western Art* (a multi-volume ongoing project), the La Salle Art Museum, along with a number of larger museums, has chosen to mount a small exhibition of its holdings related to this subject. The exhibition consists of (with the exception of Tanner’s *Mary*) twentieth century African-American images by black artists and three white artists, Julius Bloch, Winslow Homer, and Ben Shahn.

While it is difficult to make any generalizations with such a small display, the works here suggest that many of the artists of the first half of this century limited their renditions of the black experience to portraiture and everyday life scenes which often recorded the black engaged in menial labor, other subservient positions or light entertainment. And often the mood of these works seems to be one of dignity and quiet resignation. However, when one becomes familiar with other works by Jacob Lawrence, Julius Bloch, Romare Bearden or Horace Pippin, expressions of suffering and outrage of racial injustices become more evident.

Although individual portraits of famous blacks were occasionally produced the many outstanding accomplishments and talents of African-Americans (as documented, for instance, in the exhibition of *Black Women: Achievement Against the Odds*, on the second floor of the Union building) were not visualized often enough.

While many African-American artists have chosen to work in styles based upon western traditions, more recently some artists such as Romare Bearden, Jacob Lawrence and Elizabeth Catlett have drawn heavily from their African heritage when forming their style. And their works echo the fractured, geometrical forms of African sculpture showing an emphasis on bright patterns of color and angular flat shapes resulting in a semi-abstract but immediately compelling images.
For further reflection on these observations we hope the student will take advantage of the current exhibition at the Philadelphia Museum of Art as well as consult the La Salle library's volumes of *The Image of the Black in Western Art* displayed in this exhibition.

Caroline Wistar
Curator
1. Julius T. Bloch (1888-1966), American

*Bobby Fields* 1948

Oil on canvas

From the estate of Julius Bloch

2. *Marian*

Oil on canvas

Lent by Benjamin D. Bernstein

3. *I Will Lift Up Mine Eyes Unto the Hills*

Lithograph

From the estate of Julius Bloch

3a. *The Man With the Blue Sweater*

Oil on canvas

Lent by Benjamin D. Bernstein

4. *Night*

Lithograph

From the estate of Julius Bloch

5. Study for "Alonzo Jennings"

Brown wash drawing

From the estate of Julius Bloch

6. (Hall cases)

*Ed’s Boot Black Parlor*

*In the Park*
Neighbors
Waiting for Shoe Shine
watercolors
Lent by Benjamin D. Bernstein

7. Shoe Shine Boy
Oil on canvas
Lent by Benjamin D. Bernstein

8. Dox Thrash (1892/93-1965), American
Girl Reading
Carbograph or carborundum print
Given by Benjamin D. Bernstein

9. Elizabeth Catlett (1919- ), American
Survivor 1983
Woodcut
Given by Mrs. Patricia Clifford

10. Romare Bearden (1914-1988), American
Louisiana Serenade
Color Lithograph

11. Alan Edmonds (1949- ), American
Untitled
Photo-silkscreen
12. Winslow Homer (1836-1910), American
   *A Shell in the Rebel Trenches*
   from *Harper’s Weekly*, Jan. 17, 1863
   wood engraving
   Given by Dr. & Mrs. Benjamin Yasinow

13. *A Bivovac Fire on the Potomac*
   from *Harper’s Weekly*, Dec. 21, 1861
   wood engraving

14. John T. Harris (1908-1982), American
   *Boy at Work in Recreation Center*
   pen and ink

15. *Checker Player at Marian Anderson Playground*
   carbon pencil

16. Jacob Lawrence (1917- ), American
   *Builders No. 3*  1974
   Silkscreen
   Given by Edward Bernstein

17. Ben Shahn (1898-1969), American
   Engraved by Stefan Martin (Contemporary), American
   *Martin Luther King*
   Wood Engraving
18. Paul Keene (1920- ), American,
   *The Sorceress*
   Oil on canvas
   Lent by Benjamin D. Bernstein

19. Henry Ossawa Tanner (1859-1937), American
   *Mary* 1898
   Oil on canvas