

# TAKE A LOOK



NORTON  
MUSEUM  
OF ART

Jacob Lawrence (American, 1917-2000)  
*Man with Flowers*, 1954  
Tempera on gessoed masonite  
15 3/4 x 11 3/4 in. (40 x 29.8 cm)  
Purchase, R. H. Norton Trust, 95.21  
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Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York





NORTON  
MUSEUM  
OF ART

A CLOSER LOOK  
AMERICAN COLLECTION

Jacob Lawrence  
*Man with Flowers, 1954*



# ABOUT



## The Artwork

Jacob Lawrence's fascination with tools stemmed from his childhood in Harlem, New York City. Recalling his interaction with carpenters in that community, Lawrence said that he found their tools "aesthetically beautiful, like sculpture." The Lawrence painting in the Norton collection titled *Man with Flowers* features a frame within a frame as the viewer observes a man standing on the street before a galaxy of tools displayed in a shop window. Like a nervous suitor, the man, rendered in simple, flat colors, holds the bouquet behind his back. His mallet-like fist threatens to crush the fragile stems as he perhaps looks longingly at the window display of tools, gazing at their beauty.

## The Artist

Jacob Lawrence was born in Atlantic City, New Jersey. In 1924, when he was 13, Lawrence's mother moved the family to Harlem in New York City.

The Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s was making this area of uptown Manhattan a capital of African-American culture, and Lawrence was able to receive training and education in African and African-American history. His earliest exposure to art was at a community program called Utopia Children's House, which he attended while his mother worked. Lawrence continued his studies at the Harlem Art Workshop and at Charles Alston and Henry Bannarn's "306" Studio, where where he met writers such as Alain Locke and Langston Hughes. Lawrence also received support from sculptor and educator Augusta Savage, whose work is also in the Norton Museum of Art's collection, as is the work of Charles Alston and Henry Bannarn.

In his early 20s, he began working on two series of paintings called *The Life of Frederick Douglass* and *The Migration of the Negro*. He wanted his art to promote important stories of his community that had not been taught in school. Gallery owner Edith Halpert invited Lawrence to exhibit *The Migration of the Negro* in her gallery, making him the first African-American artist to exhibit in a prestigious Manhattan art gallery. This exhibition launched Lawrence's successful career as an artist. Although these series examined the collective history of many African Americans, Lawrence also portrayed images of everyday events taking place in the world around him, like *Man with Flowers*.

Jacob Lawrence (American, 1917-2000)

*Man with Flowers*, 1954 (detail)

Tempera on gessoed masonite

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# SEE



# THINK



## Observe & Describe

Have students take time to look at the painting and pay close attention to Jacob Lawrence's *Man with Flowers*. Ask them to observe shapes, lines, colors, textures, and the position of people and/or objects.

Encourage students to try to observe as many details as possible and ask them to describe the following:

- What is the first thing you notice about this painting?
- What colors stand out to you?
- Which areas of the artwork are emphasized by the artist? Why?
- Can you see any shapes? Please describe.
- Do you have other questions about what you see?

## Looking Closer

Ask students to look even closer at the painting and describe what they see. Provide time for students to answer the following questions:

- What is happening in this painting?
- What is the setting for the artwork? (a period of time or a place)? What makes you think that?
- How does the figure's dress and body language contribute to the painting's story?
- What relationships between the man, flowers, and tools can you identify?
- What mood is suggested by the colors in the artwork? What makes you say that?
- Are the lines expressive or do they lack emotion? Please explain why.

## Let's Compare

### Augusta Savage

A leader in the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and '30s, Augusta Savage was born in Green Cove Springs, near Jacksonville, Florida in 1892. In 1915, her family moved to West Palm Beach, Florida, where her art thrived. After winning an award at a county fair, Savage moved to New York where many other African Americans sought opportunity during The Great Migration.

This small sculpture called *Gamin* depicts a young street urchin. The work of art breaks from stereotypes through the careful portrayal of traditionally African-American features, without over-emphasizing them. The boy looks like an individual rather than a type. Savage wanted to capture this boy's pride, inquisitiveness, and dignity. Savage couldn't afford to cast her sculpture in bronze, so she cast it in plaster and painted the surface to imitate bronze.

Have students look carefully at the artworks by Jacob Lawrence and Augusta Savage. Ask students to observe as many details as possible from each artwork. Have students think about the following questions:

- How are these two artworks different?
- What is similar about each of these artworks?
- What do you think these artists were trying to communicate through their work? What makes you say that?
- Does either of these artworks feel familiar to you? Can you find a personal connection to it? How so?

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Augusta Savage (American, 1892-1962)  
*Gamin*, circa 1929  
 Height 9 in. (22.9 cm)  
 painted plaster  
 Purchase, R. H. Norton Trust, 2004.26



# WONDER



## For Older Students

Engage in discussion and writing activities.

Have students reflect on their previous observations.

- *What have you discovered from looking at this work of art?*
- *Have you learned anything about yourself or others?*
- *What do the artists' stories and their artworks tell us about the Harlem Renaissance?*
- *Do you like it more or less than you did when you saw it first? Why?*
- *This painting was made more than 60 years ago. If this painting were made today, how do you think the man might be different? What do you think he'd be examining through the store window?*
- *Anything else you wonder about this painting?*

## For Younger Students

Engage students in discussion and writing activities.

## Classroom Discussion

Jacob Lawrence's interest in tools stems from his childhood in Harlem. Recalling his interaction with carpenters in that community, Lawrence has said that he found their tools "aesthetically beautiful, like sculpture." Lawrence liked portraying images of everyday events taking place in the world around him.

Working in groups, students will brainstorm together using the following questions:

- *When you think of your community, what inspires you about it? Why?*
- *Have you and your family always lived in your present city? Where did your family come from? Why did they move?*
- *What is the most important place to you in your neighborhood? What makes you say that?*

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