



ALBANY MUSEUM OF ART

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ATTENTION EDITORS AND PRODUCERS: The attached photograph of artwork in *Fighters for Freedom: William H. Johnson Picturing Justice* is for use only with news coverage of this art exhibition, and must include complete caption information included in this news release. A higher resolution image may be requested for print use, but higher resolution images may not be used on websites.

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AMA ART CLASSES TO RELATE TECHNIQUES OF ARTIST WILLIAM H. JOHNSON

Two October Saturday Morning Workshops Will Be at the Albany Museum of Art

[For Release Sept 22, 2022 – Albany, GA] — Two Saturday morning painting workshops at the Albany Museum of Art will give participants the opportunity to explore the shapes, colors, and symbolism employed by renowned American artist William H. Johnson, whose works are currently on view in the AMA Haley Gallery.

The workshops are **10 am-noon on Saturdays Oct 22 and 29** in the AMA classroom. They will be taught by Michael Mallard, associate professor of visual art in the College of Arts and Sciences at Albany State University. A professional artist, Mallard was artist-in-residence at the Albany Museum of Art in 2021.

“Participants will be given the opportunity to react to William H. Johnson’s work in a hands-on and creative way, discovering the artist’s use of shape, color, and symbolism,” Annie Vanoteghem, director of education and public programming for the AMA, said. “Participants can attend one or both of the workshops.”

An exhibition of Johnson’s work, *Fighters for Freedom: William H. Johnson Picturing Justice*, continues through Dec 10, 2022, at the AMA. The exhibition is organized by the Smithsonian American Art Museum, with generous support provided by Art Bridges.

“The paintings in *Fighters for Freedom* were created by Johnson circa 1945,” Vanoteghem said. “He and his wife returned to the United States from Europe just before World War II started. In the series, which he only exhibited twice, he used colors, elongated figures, and symbols to recognize heroes who

fought for social justice and world peace. His style for these paintings was quite different from the Impressionist and Expressionist style works he created in Europe.”

Johnson (1901-1970) was born in Florence, S.C., but left the Jim Crow South for New York at age 17 to pursue his dream of becoming an artist. He enrolled in the National Academy of Design and worked with painter Charles Hawthorne, who raised funds to send Johnson abroad to study and paint. After college, he spent a decade traveling Europe, where he became known as an up-and-coming modernist for his Expressionist landscapes. During his time in Europe, his career included a gamut of styles, including Impressionism, Cubism, Fauvism, and German Expressionism. He met and married Danish artist Holcha Krake. They traveled to North Africa, and lived in Denmark and the Lofoten Islands in Norway before moving to New York in 1938 as the threat of World War II loomed.

After returning to the United States, Johnson departed from his brilliant landscapes as he shifted his focus to African American life in the United States. He began a style of “conscious naiveté” in which he used simplified forms, symbolism, and flat planes of vivid color.

“Each painting in *Fighters for Freedom* tells a complete story,” Vanoteghem noted. “For instance, in his painting of opera singer Marian Anderson, who became a civil rights icon when she sang for 75,000 people at the Lincoln Memorial in 1939 after she was denied the opportunity to sing at Constitution Hall, Johnson surrounds Anderson with flags and monuments that show how popular she was in Europe and South America.”

Johnson’s final years were tragic as his mental and physical health increasingly suffered after his wife died in 1944. His final exhibition during his lifetime was in 1947, and he spent his final 23 years in a Long Island, N.Y., hospital.

His entire body of work was almost lost when his caretaker could no longer pay storage fees. Friends of Johnson rescued the artworks, and donated them to the Harmon Foundation, which in 1967 donated them to the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

“While Johnson very tragically died in relative obscurity and was unable to paint over the last two decades of his life, he is now recognized as one of the most important African-American artists of his generation,” Vanoteghem said. “These workshops will be an ideal way for participants to study the work of this important American artist.”

The cost of each workshop is \$15 for AMA members or \$20 for future members. A secure link for online registration may be found at www.albanymuseum.com/whj-painting-workshops.

AMA EXHIBITIONS

- *Fighters for Freedom: William H. Johnson Picturing Justice* is in The Haley Gallery, Sept 1-Dec 10, 2022. Organized by the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Generous support is provided by Art Bridges.
- *Wayna: Her Dreams of Ethiopia, Works by Tracy Murrell* is in the East Gallery, Sept 1, 2022- Jan 7, 2023.
- *Georgia Artists Guild of Albany, 29th Juried Exhibition* is in the McCormack Gallery, Sept 1, 2022- Jan 7, 2023.

AMA EVENTS

- *AMA ChalkFest*, Nov 19, 2022, 10 am-5 pm, Front Street and Veterans Park Amphitheater. Admission is free. www.amachalkfest.com.

ABOUT THE ALBANY MUSEUM OF ART

The Albany Museum of Art is located at 311 Meadowlark Drive in Albany, Ga., adjacent to Albany State University West Campus just off Gillionville Road. The museum is accredited by the American Alliance of Museums. The Albany Museum of Art is open to the public 10 am-5 pm Tuesdays through Saturdays. Admission is free.

For more information about the AMA please visit our website, www.albanymuseum.com, or call 229.439.8400. Be sure to follow the @AlbanyArtMuseum on Twitter, AlbanyMuseum on Instagram, and AlbanyMuseumOfArt on Facebook.

CAPTION INFORMATION

At the William H. Johnson Painting Workshops on Oct 22 and 29 at the Albany Museum of Art, Albany State University Associate Art Professor Michael Mallard will instruct participants on Johnson's use of color, shape, and symbolism in his *Fighters for Freedom: William H. Johnson Picturing Justice* series, which includes this painting: *Marian Anderson*, ca. 1945, oil on paperboard, Smithsonian American Art Museum, gift of the Harmon Foundation. (Copyright: Smithsonian American Art Museum)

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