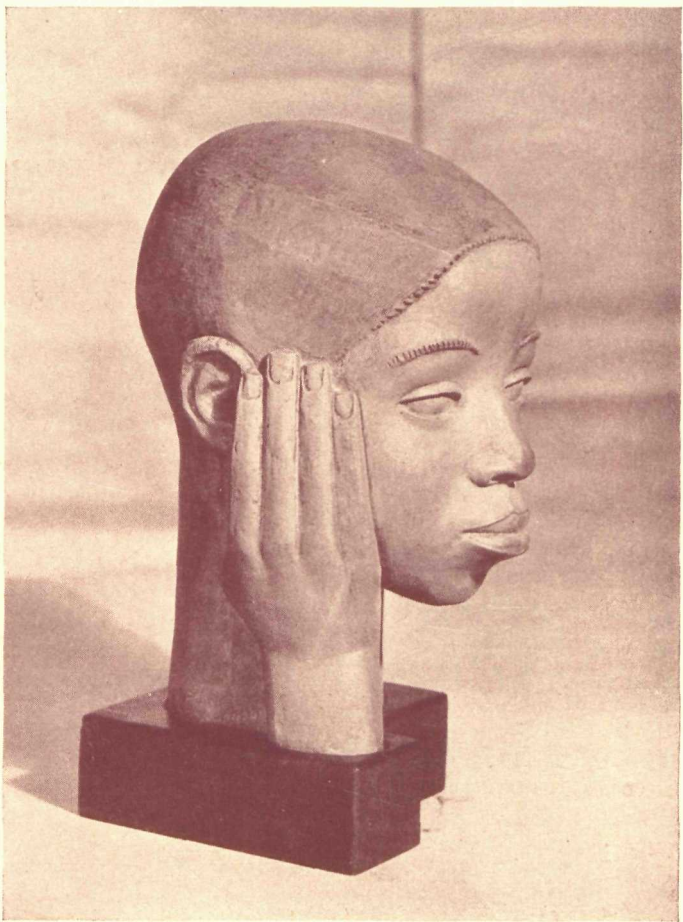


EXHIBITION
OF THE WORK OF
NEGRO ARTISTS



CHESTER

Sargent Claude Johnson

PRESENTED BY THE
HARMON FOUNDATION
AT THE
ART CENTER
1931

FOREWORD

WHEN THE HARMON FOUNDATION held its first exhibition of the work of American Negro artists in 1928, through the courteous hospitality of International House in New York, the organization was frankly feeling its way in a comparatively new field. It was hoped through this assembling to acquaint and interest the public more generally in the creative accomplishments in fine arts by Negroes, thereby assisting this group to a more sound and satisfactory economic position.

Perhaps most important of all was the desire to encourage the Negro endowed with high creative ability to give a wider expression to this genius.

While there has been regret that the exhibitions in the past have had comparatively little to offer that has been a genuine interpretation of racial backgrounds, it has been realized that if such a real, stimulating and vital contribution is to be made to art development in America, the Negro must be able to get his work before an appreciative and compelling public.

As the Foundation has followed and studied art activities during the last few years, it has become increasingly convinced of the importance, not only of stirring wider attention to Negro contributions, but of the greater importance of getting members of the race to appreciate and effect an increasing demand for the work of their group. As such creative expression weaves itself into the life fabric of the race, it will inevitably take its rightful place in the art life of our country.

While the Harmon Foundation has held its exhibitions in New York, artists from North, South, East and West, and even some who have been studying abroad, have had their work hung in these exhibits. They have been

MAY 7 1931

MAY 7

X 06 2725

available, however, to more than a New York viewing through extended travelling exhibitions.

From the number of pictures which have been purchased, from the comment in the press, from spontaneous expressions of interest and from the increased number of productions by Negroes shown in general art exhibits, it is evident that there is a very remarkable advance taking place in this field.

No mention of the contributions to Negro art in this country can be complete however without referring to the very splendid work which has been and is being done in at least eight different centers. In the far South at Atlanta University, Dr. John Hope has personally given great encouragement to many a struggling artist, and in recent years has started the nucleus of an art collection at Atlanta University. Other pages of this publication tell of the very progressive and complete service which Howard University is rendering, not only in training teachers in the field of Fine and Applied Arts, but also in making possible with its travelling exhibits throughout the South and its own well-equipped art gallery, a wider appreciation of art.

The program of annual exhibitions of Negro art in San Diego, California, the assistance and encouragement that artists of this group have had in Boston, Chicago, Indianapolis, New York, Philadelphia, St. Louis, and many other cities, is indicative of the growing participation of the Negro in art production. This has been stimulated by such groups as the Y. M. C. A., Y. W. C. A., Interracial Committees, local women's organizations, City Clubs, churches and the like.

For years, the 135th Street Branch of the New York Public Library has given unusual encouragement to strug-

gling Negro artists by making space available to them. The growing value of connecting the art and cultural life of the community with the library service has been clearly demonstrated, and it is earnestly hoped that in the next few years there may develop in that locality, a center which will not only be a vital factor in the cultural development of Harlem, and an asset to New York, but a definite contribution to the country as a whole.

Of unusual and important encouragement to the Negro artists as a group as well as to the individuals receiving recognition, have been the Otto H. Kahn prizes each year, granted for the best single pieces in each of the Harmon Foundation's exhibitions.

It is important to note that this reward for merit has carried with it, not simply the name of a well-known patron of the arts, but Mr. Kahn's current knowledge of, and keen concern in the Negro as he progresses towards greater achievement and wider recognition in the field of the visual arts.

Additional interest has been expressed in the art development of the group by Arthur B. Spingarn who has generously provided a special exhibit prize for outstanding productions in black and white.

The Foundation has been exceptionally fortunate in the helpful and constructive service which the judges have rendered each year in the selection of work to be shown, advice as to hanging, encouragement given to individual artists, and in suggestions for the future conduct of the Awards and exhibition. Whatever success has been achieved, is in a large measure due to the unusual concern of the judges to see that the productions shown should represent not the best that a Negro can do, but a high order of achievement in the field of art regardless of race.

SOME HISTORICAL REFLECTIONS

THE NEGRO ARTIST today comes to public attention and recognition as part of a movement to express race types and group tradition. In the past the Negro painter has been part of another tradition, and has achieved recognition accordingly as an individual, often with the fact of his racial identity ignored or forgotten. There are several such interesting instances worthy of mention to give historical background to the contemporary advance of the Negro as an artist.

Oddly enough two of the great Negro painters of the past were slaves, and later pupils and disciples of two of the world's greatest masters,—Velasquez and Murillo. Both were emancipated for their great talent, and lived to perfect their art so that eventually some of their works have long been attributed to their masters. Velasquez's slave pupil was Juan de Pareja, and Murillo's, Sebastian Gomez;—both recognized names in the galaxy of the Spanish school of Seville.

Juan de Pareja, born 1606, was apprenticed to Velasquez and ground his pigments, absorbing all the intimate secrets and experience of the master's workshop. In 1651, according to Bermudez, the art historian, Pareja's talent came to the attention of Philip IV, and he was manumitted; remaining as a valued member of the artist's household as his portrait in the Vienna canvas *The Family of Velasquez* will attest. The greatest authentic canvas of Pareja *The Calling of St. Matthew* is now in the Prado, but there are a number of his paintings in the Hermitage, one in the Munich gallery, one in the sacristy of the Trinity Convent, Toledo, and another, for a considerable while attributed to Velasquez, in the Dulwich Gallery, London. The master's *Moor with the Green Doublet and a White*

Collar is none other than this talented and devoted disciple by the hand of his great teacher and benefactor.

Sebastian Gomez had a career strangely similar. He was discovered by his overpainting of canvases during the night in the studio after the pupils of Murillo had gone. He was then received as a formal pupil, outstripping many of them, to become famous as the "Mulatto of Murillo". His birth date and place are unknown, but after years in Murillo's workshop, he died in 1680 in Seville. *A Virgin and Child* from his brush can still be seen in the Delscalozos portico at Seville; two large murals *Christ Attached to a Pillar* and *Saint Peter Kneeling* are in the vestry of the Capuchin Monastery of that city, and opposite his master's *Saint Anthony* in the Seville Bapistry, hangs this Negro painter's masterpiece, an *Immaculate Conception*. The Treasury of the same church houses his *Holy Family*. Indeed, the work of Gomez has both technical merit and individuality. Like Pareja, Gomez has a permanent place in the annals of Spanish seventeenth century art.

Bridging a considerable gap, we come to the early history of art in America. Here we find several notable names of artists with an ancestry forgotten or ignored by the average art historian, even when their work is mentioned. They deserve resurrected credit and mention as the immediate precursors of the Negro artist of today, who unlike them, is readily identified by his work and artistic affiliations. One of these was the pioneer American Negro painter, Edward M. Bannister of Providence, R. I., medalist of the Centennial Exposition of 1876 and founder of the Providence Art Club. Bannister was a landscapist of great talent. A less known contemporary was R. S. Duncanson, of Cincinnati, a figure painter, landscapist, and historical painter, who achieved consider-

able recognition between 1863 and 1866 in London and Glasgow. Later, he was awarded several private and municipal commissions at home in Cincinnati.

Still producing, alongside the younger artist whose careers have synchronized with the eventful five years of the Harmon awards for the stimulation of the Negro in art, are, of course, the two outstanding older Negro artists of the present generation, Meta Warrick Fuller, the sculptor, and the renowned painter, Henry O. Tanner. Students of the best American academies, they have matured under French instruction and influence, and taken high rank among their contemporaries without special reference to race or race materials. From 1903 to 1906, Mrs. Fuller was in the awards of the Paris Salon; and Tanner has had the recognition of many exhibitions and museum collections, the Luxembourg, the Pennsylvania Academy, the Chicago Art Institute, and numerous others.

But these successful individuals are, after all, most significant as evidences of the technical capacity and competence of the Negro artist when given the rare opportunity of contact with the best traditions and academic methods in art. This is taken for granted now, largely as a result of the pioneer initiative and effort of those we have mentioned; the goal of the Negro artist now reaches beyond this mere formal attainment to an art which expresses the race spirit and background as well as the individual skill and temperament of the artist. And so we have a new era of Negro art before us,—but we must never forget the forerunners and pioneers.

D. A. Schomberg
Curator of Negro Collections
Fisk University