

Art of Jacob Lawrence revisits Haitian revolution

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newwave@tulane.edu



Jacob Lawrence's "Ennery" (1989) is one of the works on display at the Amistad Research Center through Aug. 31. (Photo from the Amistad Research Center)

The Amistad Research Center at Tulane University is currently celebrating the centenary of artist Jacob Lawrence's birth and his artistic contributions with its latest exhibit, *To Preserve Their Freedom: Jacob Lawrence's Toussaint L'Ouverture Serigraph Series*.

In 1938, Lawrence, a 21-year-old graduate of the American Artist School in New York, completed his first major series. Named for the legendary Haitian leader Toussaint L'Ouverture, who helped to emancipate Haiti from Spanish and French rule, the series catapulted Lawrence into the national spotlight. The 41-panel Toussaint L'Ouverture Series was steeped in modernism, but blends elements of

expressionism and cubism. The series bears several influences. With an air of monumentalism and an epic show of struggle against oppression, the Toussaint L'Ouverture Series reflects the hallmarks of Mexican Muralists and Social Realists.

According to art historian Krista A. Thompson, "Haiti was in the imaginations of many African American artists throughout the 1920s and 1930s, a period that coincided with the U.S. occupation of the island." Her assertion is evidenced by the work of visual and literary artists of the period such as Langston Hughes, Lois Mailou Jones and William Edouard Scott.

Lawrence subsequently reimagined his original 41 panels as 15 dynamic serigraphs, which illustrate Lawrence's ingenious use of color, angled lines, stark figures and his command of composition. This exhibition of the Toussaint L'Ouverture limited edition print series is a testament to Lawrence's dexterity as an artist and his mastery of historical narrative.

Accompanying the prints are materials drawn from Amistad's various collections that illustrate how Lawrence, as well as other African American artists and writers, imagined Toussaint L'Ouverture and other leaders of the Haitian Revolution.

The exhibition is on display in the center's mezzanine exhibition gallery now through Aug. 31 from 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m., Monday-Friday, and 9 a.m.-1 p.m., Saturdays. The exhibition is free and open to the public.

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