



For immediate release

Aaron Douglas continues KU's national success

Spencer-organized retrospective brings praise and attention to artist, KU; now on view at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C.

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PROMOTIONAL IMAGES AVAILABLE

Lawrence, KS—Rock Chalk! In what has been a high-profile year for the University of Kansas, an Orange Bowl title in football and a national championship in men's basketball aren't the only crowning achievements that Jayhawks can tout. Acclaim continues to come in for the Spencer Museum of Art-organized exhibition celebrating the life, art and legacy of **Aaron Douglas**, an African American artist from Kansas who went on to become the most important visual artist of the Harlem Renaissance.

Curated by Susan Earle, the Spencer's curator of European and American art, ***Aaron Douglas: African American Modernist*** is the first-ever national traveling retrospective of Douglas's work, and it brings together nearly 100 works from public institutions and private collections across the country. In the May 23 issue of *Antiques and the Arts Weekly*, reviewer Stephen May called the exhibition "a fitting tribute to the breadth, vigor, innovation, inspiring example and remarkable artistic impulses of this singular figure in American art history." And, in the June 1 edition of *The Washington Post*, art critic Blake Gopnik compared and contrasted Douglas's work with Jacob Lawrence's *Migration* series, which is currently on view at the Phillips Collection in D.C.

The exhibition debuted last fall at the Spencer, traveled this spring to Nashville's Frist Center for the Visual Arts, and is currently installed at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C., where it will remain on view through August 3. The national tour concludes this fall at New York City's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture (August 30 - November 30).

For more information about the exhibition, please visit www.aarondouglas.ku.edu.

ABOUT AARON DOUGLAS

Born to laborer parents in Topeka, Kansas, Aaron Douglas (1899-1979) overcame many obstacles to pursue his passion for art and ideas. He was one of the first African American artists to portray racial themes within the context of modern art, and his ambitious pursuit of justice through his paintbrush continues to influence artists today. After earning a BFA degree in 1922 from the University of Nebraska and teaching at Lincoln High School in Kansas City, he migrated to New York in 1925 to join in the cultural flourishing that has variously been called the New Negro Renaissance or the Harlem Renaissance. He later taught art at historically black Fisk University in Nashville.

A socially conscious artist, Douglas vividly captured the spirit of his time and established a new black aesthetic and vision. Working from a politicized concept of personal identity, he combined art-deco dynamism with African and African American imagery to produce a new visual vocabulary that evoked not only current realities but also hope for a better future. His work is the most powerful visual legacy of the Harlem Renaissance and has had a lasting impact on the art and cultural heritage of the nation.

Of special interest to the Spencer's exploration of Douglas and the Harlem Renaissance is the Midwestern origin of artists associated with what seems a distinctly urban and East Coast phenomenon. Douglas and his good friend Langston Hughes both spent their childhoods in Kansas, while other important writers such as Claude McKay and Countee Cullen both had Midwestern ties. The exhibition will illuminate not only the Midwestern roots of the "New Negro" outpouring in Harlem, but also how Douglas's influence extended far beyond the Harlem neighborhood and the years most closely associated with the Harlem Renaissance.

The exhibition is accompanied by a scholarly catalogue edited by Susan Earle, the exhibition curator and the Spencer's Curator of European & American Art, with contributions by leading scholars of African American art. Yale University Press co-published the exhibition catalogue with the Spencer. Support for the exhibition and catalogue comes from the Henry Luce Foundation, with additional exhibition support from the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency.

Support

Major support for the exhibition and catalogue for ***Aaron Douglas: African American Modernist*** is provided by The Henry Luce Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency.

Additional support comes from the Capitol Federal Foundation; the Judith Rothschild Foundation; the Office of the Chancellor of The University of Kansas.

Key Information

Organizer: Spencer Museum of Art, The University of Kansas, Lawrence
Website: <http://www.aarondouglas.ku.edu>
Curator: Dr. Susan Earle, Curator of European and American Art, Spencer Museum of Art
Coordinator: Stephanie Knappe, Spencer Museum of Art
Schedule:
September 8–December 2, 2007 Spencer Museum of Art

January 18–April 13, 2008 Frist Center for the Visual Arts, Nashville

May 9–August 3, 2008 Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.

August 30–November 30, 2008 Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York

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Spencer Museum of Art

The University of Kansas

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Lawrence 66045-7500

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Also find the Spencer...

- **On the Web:** www.spencerart.ku.edu
- **E-mail:** spencerart@ku.edu

Gallery hours

Tues., Wed., Fri., & Saturday 10 AM—5 PM

Thurs. 10 AM—9 PM

Sun. Noon—5 PM

Closed Monday

Museum Shop closes 30 minutes before the galleries close.

- **Free parking in Lot 91 after 5 PM on weekdays and all day weekends, excepting home football games.**
- **Parking garage adjacent to Kansas Union is \$1 per hour weekdays, free on Saturdays and Sundays (but unavailable on home football games).**