

70-Year Retrospective Highlights African, Caribbean and American Iconography



Loïs Mailou Jones, *Sedalia, North Carolina*, 1929. Watercolor on paper. Collection of Drs. Christopher and Marilyn Chapman.

WASHINGTON, DC.- [The National Museum of Women in the Arts](#) presents Loïs Mailou Jones: A Life in Vibrant Color, the first major retrospective surveying Jones' wide array of subjects and styles. Loïs Mailou Jones is on view October 9, 2010, through January 9, 2011.

"It is a privilege to posthumously honor this iconic Washington artist who left her mark on generations of Howard University graduates and had such stature in the national art scene from the 1930s to the 1990s," said NMWA Director Susan Fisher Sterling.

The myriad themes explored by Loïs Mailou Jones (1905-1998) over the impressive length of her career makes for a dynamic exhibition of more than 70 works, including paintings, drawings and textile designs. The retrospective begins with her early textile designs and sketches from the Harlem Renaissance. After graduating from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, at a time when racial and gender prejudices pervaded society, Jones began her career as a textile designer. She sold her bold fabric creations to department stores until a decorator told her that a colored girl wasn't

capable of producing such beautiful designs. This incident prompted Jones to shift her artistic focus to the fine arts so she could sign her name to her works.

During a brief teaching stint at Palmer Memorial Institute, a preparatory school in Sedalia, North Carolina, Jones created several paintings that marked her transition from design to fine art. The paintings *Negro Shack 1*, Sedalia, North Carolina (1930) and *Brother Brown* (1931) demonstrate the Regionalist character of her early paintings. Though far less vivid than the later works for which she became famous, these early paintings still clearly show her fascination with color and culture.

Jones' influences were extensive throughout the remainder of her career. Her lush oil paintings of the French countryside and traditional fruit and flower still lifes highlight her skillful observation of nature. The influence of philosopher Alain Locke, who encouraged Jones to draw inspiration from African art, is evident in many of her later works, such as *Irma* (1972). She also conveyed the social struggles of African-Americans through powerful psychological portraits such as *Mob Victim* (1945) and *Jennie* (1943). Her marriage in 1952 to noted Haitian graphic artist Louis Vergniaud Pierre-Noël instigated a change in the subject matter and palette of her paintings. Her frequent trips to Haiti re-energized her strong design sense and inspired vivid acrylic and watercolor paintings that displayed a marked fascination with Caribbean culture. After additional travels that included African countries, her work became characterized by brilliant color, rich patterns and a variety of Haitian and African motifs.

In addition to her outstanding accomplishments as an artist, Jones was also a noted educator at Howard University in Washington, D.C. for 47 years. It has been said that Jones was just as involved in her students' career developments as her own. Among her illustrious students are David Driskell, Elizabeth Catlett and Robert Freeman.

President Jimmy Carter honored Jones for her outstanding achievements in the arts in 1980, and in the last ten years of her life both President Bill Clinton and French President Jacques Chirac met the artist and collected her work. During a six-year solo exhibition tour, the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. held an 89th birthday party for Jones and apologized for previous prejudicial policies. Loïs Mailou Jones continued to create her vibrant paintings until her death in 1998.

A 144-page exhibition catalogue showcasing the life and work of Loïs Mailou Jones accompanies the exhibition. Published by the Mint Museum of Art, the catalogue includes essays by Dr. Edmund Barry Gaither, director of the National Center of Afro-American Artists, Boston; Dr. Lowery Stokes Sims, curator of the Museum of Art and Design, NYC; Dr. Cheryl Finley, associate professor of Art History, Cornell University, and an interview with artist and student of Loïs Mailou Jones, Tritobia Hayes Benjamin.

Carla M. Hanzal, curator of the exhibition, has been writing about, researching and lecturing on contemporary art since the 1990s. She regularly serves as juror for national and regional exhibitions and is the recipient of both a Truman Scholarship and a Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. Since 2003, she has been curator of Contemporary Art at the Mint Museum, Charlotte, NC.

The exhibition opened at the Mint Museum of Art in Charlotte, NC, from November 14, 2009 through February 27, 2010. Scheduled exhibition tour dates for Loïs Mailou Jones: A Life in Vibrant Color are

as follows: Polk Museum of Art, Lakeland, FL (July 3, 2010 through September 26, 2010); National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, DC (October 9, 2010 through January 9, 2011); Hunter Museum of Art, Chattanooga, TN (January 30, 2011 through April 24, 2011); Lauren Rogers Museum of Art, Laurel, MS (August 27, 2011 through November 6, 2011); Mitchell Gallery at St. John's College, Annapolis, MD (January 12, 2012 through February 23 2012); dates subject to change.

The National Museum of Women in the Arts | Lois Mailou Jones: A Life in Vibrant Color | Washington | Carla M. Hanzal |