

African-American Art and France (Paris 9–10 Nov 2011)

Musée d'Orsay, 62 rue de Lille, 75007 Paris, France, Nov 9–10, 2011

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African-American Art and France: In Henry Ossawa Tanner's Footsteps

"In Paris, ... no one regards me curiously, I am simply 'M. Tanner, an American artist.' Nobody knows or cares what was the complexion of my forbears. I live and work there on terms of absolute social equality". Henry Ossawa Tanner.

Henry O. Tanner (1859–1937), a pioneering African-American artist raised in Philadelphia in the years after the Civil War, went on to become an American expatriate artist at the highest levels of the international art world at the turn of the twentieth century. He devoted 46 years of his life and career to France. Three religious paintings—a genre in which Tanner gained his fame—were acquired by the French State during the artist's life, and now form a part of the Musée d'Orsay's collection. They will be on display at the Musée d'Orsay during the study day, and shortly thereafter, travel to the United States - one of them, *The Resurrection of Lazarus* - for the first time.

Using the career of Henry Ossawa Tanner as a starting point, this study day will explore the century-long history of African American art and France, asking how racial and cultural identities interplayed with transatlantic exchanges from fin-de-siècle cosmopolitanism into the post-colonial age. A panel of international speakers will discuss the work of artists traveling to Paris specifically and France more generally. At first attracted by a rich artistic and intellectual scene and the possibility of artistic recognition that was not always to be found in their home country, these artists were later motivated by the vibrant and creative "années folles" to be found in Jazz Age Paris. African Americans played a noteworthy role in this new Bohemia, not only as the jazz performers who played the preferred music of the Parisian avant-garde, but writers and artists as well. During the 1920s Paris and Harlem together created new ideas of blackness and modernity. Artists such as Aaron Douglas, Lois Mailou Jones, and William H. Johnson were indebted to the legacy of Tanner.

From the Parisian art scene disrupted by World War II and the repercussions of these changes on the reception of black artists in Europe in the second half of the twentieth century, the study day will conclude with analysis of the celebration of post-modern artists such as Jean-Michel Basquiat in France, as well as examine the way contemporary African American artists continue a critical engagement with the French art world.

Organized by the Musée d'Orsay and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts with funding from the Terra Foundation for American Art

Reference:

CONF: African-American Art and France (Paris 9-10 Nov 2011). In: ArtHist.net, Sep 18, 2011 (accessed Apr 29, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/1850>>.