

PRESS RELEASE:

January 18, 2010

For immediate release:

Through February 26, 2010

For more information:

Laura C. Lieberman, 770/949-2787

**AMERICAN MASTER JACOB LAWRENCE:
Posters & Prints from Hammonds House Museum**

Douglasville, Georgia – The Cultural Arts Council of Douglasville/Douglas County presents “American Master Jacob Lawrence” during February in celebration of Black History Month. Presenting posters and prints by one of America’s most important artists in partnership with Hammonds House Museum and Galleries, the exhibition opens on Friday, January 15th, and will be on view through February 26th at Cultural Arts Center. Hosted by the Douglas County Connection, the exhibition reception will be on Saturday, February 6th, from 6 until 9 p.m., at the Cultural Arts Center. On Sunday, February 7th, a special gallery talk and exhibition tour will be offered by Hammonds House curator Kevin Sipp, from 3 until 5 p.m. Both events are free and open to the general public.

Born in 1917 and raised in New York City, Jacob Lawrence became one of the most important artists of the 20th century, best known for his series of narrative paintings depicting important moments in African American history. Unlike Romare Bearden who was part of Harlem’s professional class, Lawrence grew up in a broken home and his mother was a maid. Lawrence was introduced to art in his early teens when his mother enrolled him in an after-school art program housed in the New York Public Library’s 135th Street branch in Harlem. In 1934 he had to drop out of school when she lost her job during the Depression; Lawrence worked in a laundry and a print shop before joining the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1936, working briefly in upstate New York before receiving a scholarship to study at the American Artists School in Manhattan. In 1938 he secured employment with the WPA Federal Art Project as an easel painter. Lawrence completed his first major work, a series of 41 paintings based on the life of Toussaint L’Ouverature, the Haitian revolutionary who established the first Black western republic. He continued celebrating his heroes with serial paintings on the lives of abolitionists Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and John Brown. *The Migration of the Negro*, one of his earliest and best known series, was completed in 1941 when he was only 23. With support from the Julius Rosenwald Fund, Lawrence established his studio in the same building where Romare Bearden worked. There, Lawrence was assisted in the completion of the 60-panel *Migration* series by Gladys Knight, an artist whom he married and who was his lifelong companion. The *Migration* series created Lawrence’s reputation – 30 of the paintings were purchased by the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C. and the others by Museum of Modern Art where he was the first African American artist to be represented in its permanent collection, those were also displayed to critical acclaim at New York’s Downtown Gallery, the leading venue of American art of the time.

In 1943 Lawrence joined the Coast Guard and served on the the first racially integrated ship in U.S. naval history. His Coast Guard paintings of its crew were exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in 1944. During the 1940s he exhibited regularly at the Whitney Biennial and participated in the Venice Biennale and Sao Paulo Bienale as well as illustrating a book by poet Langston Hughes and completing several major magazine commissions. In 1946 Lawrence began teaching at Black Mountain College at the invitation of Bauhaus master Joseph Albers who became a major influence on his art and his teaching. During the 1950s Lawrence joined the faculty of Brooklyn’s Pratt Institute and then taught at the New School for Social Research, Art Students League and Skowhegan School of Painting. During the 1960s he visited Africa for the first time, teaching in Nigeria and then returning with his wife to paint in Lagos and Ibadan. In 1971 Lawrence accepted a teaching position at the University of Washington in Seattle, retiring as a professor emeritus in 1986. The most widely acclaimed African American artist of this century, Lawrence continued to paint until his death in 2000.

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LAWRENCE/POSTERS & PRINTS**

Throughout the last 25 years of his career, Lawrence committed to commissions, primarily limited edition prints and murals and usually for progressive causes including the Amistad Research Center in New Orleans where he and his wife had honeymooned, the National Urban League, NAACP Legal Defense Fund, the Children’s Defense Fund. His murals can be viewed in Seattle, Washington, D.C. Chicago and New York where his 72-foot-long mural was installed in the Times Square subway complex the year after his death. Lawrence has been the subject of four major retrospectives organized by the American Federation of the Arts (1960), Whitney Museum of Art (1974), Seattle Art Museum (1986) and Phillips Collection (2001). He was the recipient of the National Medal of the Arts and the first visual artist awarded the NAACP’s Springam Medal; Lawrence was also awarded 18 honorary doctorates from universities including Harvard, Yale, Howard, Amherst and NYU.

The works on display at the Cultural Arts Center in Douglasville – 17 posters and prints from the permanent collection of Atlanta’s Hammonds House Galleries – reproduce many of Lawrence’s finest early works. Although none of his great multi-panel historical narratives can be seen as a whole, examples from the Tubman, Douglass and *Migration* series are on display. Critic Robert Hughes described the *Migration* series, which was inspired by the artist’s own parents’ journey from the South to the North along with tens of thousands of other Black workers at the turn of the 20th century, as “a visual ballad, each image a stanza compressed, like the blues, to the minimum needs of the narrative; and of No. 57, one of the highlights of the current exhibit, Hughes wrote: “...a laundress in a white smock stirring a vat of fabrics – blue, black, yellow, pink – with her pole: dense and well-locked composition, suggesting the permanence and resistance which is one of the underlying themes of Lawrence’s work.”

Lawrence described his style as “dynamic cubism,” but his aesthetic is more a deeply humanitarian, non-ideological social realism for all the cubist strengths of his flattened forms and geometric compositions. His genre paintings of Harlem Street life and domestic scenes are referenced in this exhibition with several from his *Builders* series where powerful Black workers hold the tools to build a better future and with a tiny serigraph, “The Birth of Toulouse,” a tender Madonna and child based on one of his earliest paintings. The show’s other serigraph, “The Library,” with its elegant palette of subdued browns and ochres accented with subtle reds, yellows and blues, is a master work. Its engaging image was surely inspired by Lawrence’s first experience of art, working in the 135th Street Library and studying the Schomburg Collection’s 14th and 15th century paintings in the New York Public Library where he learned to use tempera on board for those first works that established his reputation.

The mission of the Cultural Arts Council of Douglasville/Douglas County is to nurture, guide and stimulate the enjoyment of and participation in the arts among Douglas County residents by providing an atmosphere conducive to the arts, broadening the spectrum of quality exhibits and performances available to the community, and fostering individual interactions with the arts through a wide range of satellite groups. The Cultural Arts Council and its exhibitions at the Cultural Arts Center are supported in part by the City of Douglasville, the Douglas County Board of Commissioners, and the Georgia Council for the Arts, a partner agency of the National Endowment for the Arts.

The Cultural Arts Council of Douglasville/Douglas County is located at 8652 Campbellton Street in historic downtown Douglasville, Georgia. Hours of operation are Mondays through Fridays, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Sundays, 1 until 5 p.m. For directions and more information, please visit our web site, www.artsdouglas.org or contact the Cultural Arts Council at 770/949-2787.

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CALENDAR LISTINGS: EXHIBITS

TITLE: AMERICAN MASTER JACOB LAWRENCE:
Posters & Prints from Hammonds House Museum

PLACE: The Cultural Arts Center of Douglasville / Douglas County
8652 Campbellton Street
Douglasville, Georgia 30134

DATES: January 15 – February 26, 2010

RECEPTION: Saturday, February 6th, 6 – 9 p.m.

GALLERY HOURS: Mondays – Fridays, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m., Sundays, 1 – 5 p.m.

COST: Free and open to the public

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