

## Climbing Up the Mountain: The Modern Art of Malvin Gray Johnson

February 10-April 19, 2002

Opening Reception: Sunday, February 10, 2002, 2 to 4 p.m.

North Carolina Central University Art Museum will present *Climbing Up the Mountain: The Modern Art of Malvin Gray Johnson*, February 10-April 19, 2002. This is the first retrospective exhibition devoted to the work of the Greensboro native and Harlem Renaissance master since his death in 1934. Included in this exclusive collection are more than 50 of the known 60 works that exist, spanning from watercolors, drawing, oil painting and much more.



Unique to the presentation of *Climbing Up the Mountain* are the recently discovered works *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*, and *Roll, Jordan, Roll*. Shown together in a museum setting for the first time, Johnson's paintings on Negro spirituals were considered his greatest paintings by some of his contemporaries. Today they are recognized as benchmarks in his career and present technically provocative design relationships that hint at the modernism to come in later works.

The exhibition features five recently discovered works produced in Greensboro during his formative years. An untitled seascape believed to be his earliest work from ca. 1905 will be included. *Untitled (Oriental Scene)* of 1911, *Untitled (Pocahontas)* of 1912, and *Cowboy With Horse* of 1912 are being conserved by Regional Conservation Services of the North Carolina Museum of Art. The only surviving work from his student days at the National Academy of



Design, a pen and ink drawing titled *Study of a Head* of 1920, will also be shown.

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The exhibition also shows that Johnson's increasing focus on complex technical concerns did not overshadow his concern with providing a glimpse of the day-to-day lives of the men and women of Harlem through brilliant portraits. The astonishing recently discovered portrait *Meditation*, until now only reproduced in black and white, makes its first museum appearance. *Postman*, *Negro Soldier*, *Sailor*, *Ermia*, and *Millie* are additional portraits that will be included in the exhibition. The cityscapes *Come Up Sometime*, *Pulley Lines*, and *Tenements* will provide another exciting facet of Johnson's work.



The exhibition documents for the first time the final year of Malvin Gray Johnson's life beginning with employment on the Public Works of Art Project (P.W.A.P). He produced fifteen watercolors and sixteen oil paintings in a modern-folk style that culminated his stylistic development. Over two-thirds of the work produced during this explosive period is in the exhibition. *Thinning Corn*, *Uncle Louis*, *First Sunday With Dinner on the Ground* and *Convict Labor* are a few of the oils included. Among the watercolors *Platform Dance*, *Pigs*, *Corn Field*, and *Cow and Calf* will provide a rare opportunity to examine his compelling draftsmanship and handling of this exacting medium.

**Publication**

The publication *Climbing Up the Mountain: The Modern Art of Malvin Gray Johnson* by North Carolina Central University Art Museum Director Kenneth G. Rodgers, with essays by Jacquelyn Francis and Perry Hurt, accompanies the exhibition.

**Sponsorship**

The exhibition has been made possible by grants from the [North Carolina Arts Council](#), [The National Endowment for the Arts](#), and the [Rockefeller Foundation](#).

**Educational Programs**

A series of public programs accompanying *Climbing Up the Mountain: The Modern Art of Malvin Gray Johnson* include a panel discussion with contemporary African American Art historians, a scholarly lecture by Malvin Gray Johnson scholar and University of Michigan professor Jacquelyn Francis, a series of lectures at venues, statewide, conducted by art historian Shawnya Harris and family programs. Contact the museum for further details.

Admission for the exhibition is free. NCCU Art Museum is located on Lawson St. across from the Farrison-Newton Communications Building. For general information call (919) 560-6211. Museum hours are Tuesday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. Group visits may be arranged by calling Tuesday - Friday from 10 A.M. to 4 P.M., or by leaving a message at other times.