

# American Art Forms \_ Harlem Renaissance

In his 1925 essay, "The New Negro", Howard University Professor of Philosophy Alain Locke encouraged African American artists to create a school of African American art with an identifiable style and aesthetic, and to look to African culture and African American folk life for subject matter and inspiration.

Locke's ideas, coupled with a new ethnic awareness that was occurring in urban areas, inspired up and coming African American artists.

The New Negro movement would later be known as the Harlem Renaissance.

These artists rejected landscapes for the figurative, rural and urban scenes.

They also focused on class, culture and Africa to bring ethnic consciousness into art and create a new black identity.

Many, like Aaron Douglas, did large scale public murals as opposed to paintings that would be seen in art galleries and museums.

AARON DOUGLAS, Noah's Ark, ca. 1927.  
Oil on masonite, 4' x 3'. Fisk University  
Galleries, Nashville, Tennessee.





Influenced by African sculpture, Gauguin, Picasso and Matisse. Douglas developed a style for his work that was illustrative and powerful.

Murals represent origins, history, and development of a peoples identity.

Douglas designed a five part mural series titled, *Aspects of Negro Life*, commissioned by the 135th Street Branch of the New York Public Library, now the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, under the WPA Federal Arts Project. *Aspects of Negro Life* chronicles the journey of African Americans in a four-part series.

AARON DOUGLAS, *Aspect of Negro Life: Slavery to Reconstruction*, ca. 1929. Oil on Masonite, 4' x 3' . Fisk University Galleries, Nashville, Tennessee.

Palmer Hayden was known for his paintings of the African American scene. In an interview he described *The Janitor Who Paints*, created around 1930, as "a sort of protest painting" of his own economic and social standing as well as that of his fellow African Americans.



Palmer Hayden, *The Janitor who Paints*, ca. 1930.  
Oil on canvas, 39"x 33". Smithsonian

Hayden was among the first African American artists to use African subjects and designs in his painting.

In his later works Hayden focused on the African American experience, capturing both rural gatherings in the South and the urban milieu of New York.

Palmer Hayden, *Midsummer Night in Harlem*, ca. 1938.

