



The Phillips Collection

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 17, 2014

Media Contacts:

Elizabeth Lubben, 202-387-2151 x235
elubben@phillipscollection.org

Online Press Room

www.phillipscollection.org/press

**THE PHILLIPS COLLECTION SHOWCASES JACOB LAWRENCE'S
*STRUGGLE ... FROM THE HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE***

**The paint-on-panel series illustrates challenges faced during and after
America's battle for independence.**

Washington, DC—The Phillips Collection announced today an upcoming exhibition of works by preeminent artist Jacob Lawrence. Produced between 1954 and 1956, *Struggle ... From the History of the American People* portrays scenes from American history, chronicling events from the Revolutionary War through the great westward expansion of 1817. The Phillips will display 12 panels from the series, on loan from the Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross collection, in *Jacob Lawrence: Struggle ... From the History of the American People*. The exhibition runs January 10 through August 9, 2015.

In 1954—a decade after completing his epic masterwork *The Migration Series*—Lawrence conceived of a new 60-panel series dedicated to telling the history of the American people. In his narrative, black freedmen, slaves, women, and Native Americans are the focal points in scenes of conflict and movement, accompanied by captions quoting such historical figures as Patrick Henry, James Madison, Tecumseh, and Henry Clay. The series—which marks the artist's last historical narrative of such scale and scope—built on the artist's earlier multi-panel cycles exploring the lives of noted historical figures including Toussaint L'Ouverture, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and John Brown; but Lawrence's approach to the *Struggle* series demonstrated his desire to broaden his concerns beyond the African American experience to "a larger concern [for] an expression of humanity and of America."



Jacob Lawrence, *Struggle ... From the History of the American People*, no. 13: *Victory and Defeat*, 1955-56. Egg tempera on hardboard, 16 x 12 in. Private Collection of Harvey and Harvey-Ann Ross. © 2015 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Lawrence originally intended *Struggle ... From the History of the American People* to be published as a book; however, after completing the first 30 paintings and exhibiting them at the Alan Gallery in 1956 and 1958, he never completed the rest of the series. In 1959, a private collector purchased all 30 panels and proceeded to sell them individually over the next decades, a dispersal that left *Struggle* largely understudied. Displaying 12 of the 30 panels, this exhibition presents a rare glimpse into this important

though long overlooked series while considering the power and meaning of Lawrence’s integrationist view of America during the height of the civil rights movement.

“The Phillips Collection has a proud history of presenting and studying Lawrence’s celebrated art and life; therefore we are especially pleased to shed light on the artist’s extraordinary achievement in the *Struggle series*,” says curator Elsa Smithgall. “Striking in both content and form, these paintings represent a turning point in Lawrence’s career at mid-century.”

The installation of Lawrence’s *Struggle series* coincides with the museum’s fundraising efforts surrounding plans to develop a robust Jacob Lawrence microsite. This site will engage the public and scholars alike by chronicling the powerful history and contemporary context of migration through the lens of Lawrence’s epic masterwork *The Migration Series*. The campaign has raised more than \$100,000 toward the development of the microsite, which is scheduled to be unveiled in June 2015 in advance of a major exhibition, *People on the Move: Beauty and Struggle in Jacob Lawrence’s Migration Series*, opening at the Phillips September 2016. The exhibition is part of a co-organized project with the Museum of Modern Art in collaboration with the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture that reunites the 60 *Migration Series* panels, on display at the Museum of Modern Art from April 3 through September 7, 2015.

**PANEL DISCUSSION: LAWRENCE’S STRUGGLE... FROM THE HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE
February 27, 2015; 2:30 p.m.**

University of Virginia Professor of Modern Art and former Phillips senior curator Elizabeth Hutton Turner moderates a discussion with leading scholars in conjunction with this exhibition. They consider how this little-known cycle launched a new type of social history at the height of the civil rights movement, while building on earlier epic narrative cycles. Panelists include:

- **Lonnie Bunch**, Director, National Museum of African American History and Culture
- **Spencer Crew**, Professor of American, African American, and Public History, George Mason University
- **David Driskell**, Artist, Scholar, and Founder of the David C. Driskell Center for the Study of Visual Arts and Culture of African American and the African Diaspora at the University of Maryland

JACOB LAWRENCE AND THE PHILLIPS COLLECTION

In 1942, museum founder Duncan Phillips expressed great enthusiasm for Lawrence’s *Migration Series* upon seeing it at the Downtown Gallery. That year, Phillips gave Lawrence his first solo museum exhibition, and soon after purchased the odd-numbered panels. The Phillips has remained deeply committed to sharing and expanding Lawrence’s legacy and achievements with broad and diverse audiences.

- In the 1990s, the Phillips organized an eight-city national tour of the complete *Migrations Series*. It also led a major study of Lawrence’s life through symposia, conferences, and interdisciplinary panels.
- In 2000, Lawrence personally selected the Phillips to organize his retrospective. The highly-acclaimed exhibition premiered at the Phillips and traveled to five other major cities.
- In 2007–08, the Phillips launched a five-venue NEA American Masterpieces touring exhibition featuring selections from the series. The tour brought Lawrence’s masterpiece to underserved communities throughout the US and was accompanied by a major educational outreach program.

The museum has led an ongoing educational dialogue with the community about *The Migration Series* for more than 20 years, from conducting focus groups with community leaders to producing an array of innovative programming including storytelling, literacy programs, and professional development for teachers. This spring, the Phillips's Center for the Study of Modern Art offers a practicum course focused on *Struggle ... From the History of the American People*. Taught by University of Virginia Professor of Modern Art Dr. Elizabeth Hutton Turner, students will utilize the museum's galleries as a laboratory for first-hand experiences with objects and conduct primary research to explore the significance of Lawrence's radical narrative invention.

ABOUT THE PHILLIPS COLLECTION

The Phillips Collection is one of the world's most distinguished collections of Impressionist and Modern American and European art. Stressing the continuity between art of the past and present, it offers a strikingly original and experimental approach to Modern art by combining works of different nationalities and periods in displays that change frequently. The setting is similarly unconventional, featuring small rooms, a domestic scale, and a personal atmosphere. Artists represented in the collection include Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Vincent van Gogh, Edgar Degas, Henri Matisse, Pierre Bonnard, Paul Cézanne, Pablo Picasso, Paul Klee, Claude Monet, Honoré Daumier, Georgia O'Keeffe, Arthur Dove, Mark Rothko, Milton Avery, Jacob Lawrence, and Richard Diebenkorn, among others. The Phillips Collection, America's first museum of modern art, has an active collecting program and regularly organizes acclaimed special exhibitions, many of which travel internationally. The Intersections series features projects by contemporary artists, responding to art and spaces in the museum. The Phillips also produces award-winning education programs for K–12 teachers and students, as well as for adults. The museum's Center for the Study of Modern Art explores new ways of thinking about art and the nature of creativity, through artist visits and lectures, and provides a forum for scholars through courses, postdoctoral fellowships, and internships. Since 1941, the museum has hosted Sunday Concerts in its wood-paneled Music Room. The Phillips Collection is a private, non-government museum, supported primarily by donations.

###