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Illustration on p. 2: José Manuel de la Cerda. Tray (*batea*) with Turnus provoked into war by Aeneas, ca. 1764. See fig. 1, p. 41

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ABBREVIATIONS

MMA The Metropolitan Museum of Art
MMAB The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin
MMJ Metropolitan Museum Journal

Height precedes width and then depth in dimensions cited.

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Jacob Lawrence's Work Theme, 1945–46

CLAIRE ITTNER

In December 1945, the same month he returned to New York from service in the Coast Guard during World War II, Jacob Lawrence began work on *The Shoemaker*, a watercolor and gouache painting of a Black craftsperson in his workshop (fig. 1). Surrounded by the products of his labor—the strappy heels and sleek leather loafers that are heaped and hung around him—the shoemaker is poised to create still more, his massive hands wielding tools that will slice through a waiting piece of yellow leather. Rendered in the bold, unmodulated tones of vermilion red, cadmium yellow, blue-green viridian, cobalt blue, deep black, and earthy ocher associated with the artist's earlier historical cycles, the painting seemed to signal Lawrence's return, his own eagerness to get down to work.[1]

Metropolitan Museum Journal, volume 57, 2022. Published by The Metropolitan Museum of Art in association with the University of Chicago Press. https://doi.org/10.1086/723658.

fig. 1 Jacob Lawrence (American, 1917–2000). *The Shoemaker*, 1945–46. Watercolor and gouache on paper, 22¾ × 31 in. (57.8 × 78.7 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, George A. Hearn Fund, 1946 (46.73.2)

By all accounts, he did just that. *The Shoemaker* was likely the first in a robust group of paintings that Lawrence would make the following year, all focused on the work and workspaces of Black people across a range of occupations: cabinetmakers and watchmakers, steelworkers and stenographers, lecturers and barbers. Many are close-up images of individual figures at work, rendering them formally different from the dynamic street scenes and cityscapes with which the artist had captured life in Harlem since the mid-1930s. They might also be considered a focusing of that interest, however, as if Lawrence were painting the interior of each workshop on a single Harlem street.[2] The resulting dozen paintings offer a cross-sectional look at Black laborers, craftspeople, technicians, professionals, and other makers—a set of paintings coherent in theme as well as palette.

Despite this coherence, however, these paintings have not previously been considered in relation to one another. Part of the blame rests on the gallery system that was consolidating around Lawrence at the time, redefining his work. Edith Halpert, Lawrence's dealer and director of the Downtown Gallery, sold the paintings individually as they were completed; *The Shoemaker*, for example, entered the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art in April 1946, four months after Lawrence first began drafting it. Halpert's approach was distinctly different for Lawrence's historical series, which she made concerted efforts to place with single collectors or museums. She famously negotiated the joint sale of *The Migration Series* (1940–41) to the Phillips Collection, Washington, DC, and the Museum of Modern Art, New York, for example.

This article argues that Lawrence's Work paintings should be considered together, as one of the first of the artist's "themes"—a term Lawrence used to distinguish these groups of paintings from his more carefully planned, often historical "series."[3] The Work paintings should be held together, moreover, not despite but because of the way they were made and then sold, as Lawrence was settling into his role as a represented artist in a major commercial gallery. He was adjusting to a set of working conditions different from those he had encountered previously (as a student, a nonprofit-funded fellow, an artist-employee of the Works Progress Administration [WPA], or a combat artist).[4] This was the moment of Lawrence's transformation, as critics later described it, "from teenage prodigy to professional artist," as he was responding to expectations from his gallerist and critics, and to the demands of the emerging art market.[5] Lawrence turned to other Black workers, in other words, at a transitional stage in his career, in which the scope and nature of his labor as an artist were being reformulated by and within a professionalizing art world.

It would not be the first time Lawrence would make this move; the themes of work and art are deeply entwined in his oeuvre, a touchstone to which he would return over the course of his career.[6] The attributes of labor and craft, and sometimes the Work paintings themselves, frequently appear when Lawrence reflects on himself, often included in the background of his relatively rare studio scenes and self-portraits.[7] He revisited the theme at the end of his life, too—arguably, work is what holds together the racially integrated construction crews that appear throughout the *Builders* images that Lawrence created from the 1970s to the late 1990s.[8] As the starting point in this career-long preoccupation, the Work theme paintings of 1945–46 should be understood as more than genre scenes, occupational types, or one-off works produced between historical cycles. Instead, they mark the start of one of Lawrence's most consistent, sustained, and personal aesthetic investigations. Examining the works individually and in relation to one another allows us to see Lawrence turning his powers of observation on himself, as he meditates on his own work, its scope and its efficacy, especially within a new economic system and organization of labor. They also represent a deliberate shift in his working process, from tightly composed "series" to the more fluid and associative format of the "theme." This looseness is important in understanding how the paintings relate to wider debates around race and labor occurring in the inchoate moment immediately following the end of World War II. Created at this inflection point, Lawrence's Work theme can be seen as a bid for a specific postwar future—one that did not simply include Black workers, craftspeople, and technicians, but in fact depended on the repair and restoration work that they performed.

MAKING IN SMALL SPACES: LAWRENCE'S WORK THEME AND CONTAINMENT

A viewer looking at the *The Shoemaker*, very likely the first of the Work images that Lawrence painted, might understandably expect the theme to be a meditation on the limiting conditions often placed on work. Lawrence chose to paint in the ceiling of the room that the shoemaker occupies, for example, a choice that serves to narrow its space and further exaggerate his already large, blocky body. The sharp angle his shoulders make, as he uses his full force to cut through a piece of leather,

fig. 2 Jacob Lawrence. *The Seamstress*, 1946. Gouache on paper, 21⅝ × 29⅞ in. (54.9 × 75.9 cm). University Museum, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois

also pierces the band where the blue ceiling and wall meet, as if the room can barely contain him. Art historian Lowery Stokes Sims has argued that Lawrence brings his art to bear on the confinement of Black workers in a wider sense, too—commenting on the limited range of occupations open to Black people at mid-century.[9] He pictures workers in small trades and crafts, reflecting the way that newer trades and many trade unions were largely closed to Black people, forcing them to take the lowest-paying and most physically demanding jobs. He also depicts the kinds of work that his neighbors performed to get by during the Depression and throughout World War II, like taking in tailoring in their apartments. In *Seamstress*, a woman operates a hand-crank sewing machine mostly used by home sewers, and long outdated by 1946 (fig. 2). In this way, Lawrence may be expressing ambivalence about the verdict of the Double V campaign against fascism and racism launched during World War II—and pointing, as labor organizer A. Philip Randolph had, to the fact that this fight played out in the treatment not only of Black soldiers, but also of Black workers.[10] It is relevant that the months following the end of the war were rife with tensions in the U.S. labor force, resulting in a wave of strikes in 1945 and 1946.[11] The way that the United States would rebuild itself, in short, was far from secure in the minds of many citizens, particularly Black Americans.

While commenting on the status of Black workers at a moment of particular tension, Lawrence also arguably reflects on the containment of his own movement, despite his seemingly full embrace by the professional New York art world. As a 1952 *Life* article made clear, by the beginning of the following decade Lawrence had been fully integrated into the cohort of professional artists associated with Halpert. The article groups him with the established "old-timers" of Halpert's Downtown Gallery, like Ben Shahn and Charles Sheeler, despite

the fact that he was only twenty-eight at the time.[12] What the article does not include, however, is the way that Lawrence was plagued, in the same period, by continued critiques about the "naive" nature of his work. Writers described the "kindergarten gayety" of his visual sensibility, his use of "crude brilliant colors," and compositions that arose from the "Negro's instinct for rhythm."[13]

The professional status that Lawrence attained did not insulate him from these kinds of racist assumptions, but indeed may have added to them. Halpert's plan at the time she mounted Lawrence's first exhibition was to press a number of other galleries to accept one Black artist each into their rosters. Although it would have resulted in a significant increase in gallery representation for Black artists at the time, the plan had its limits;

fig. 3 Jacob Lawrence. *Watchmaker*, 1946. Opaque watercolor and graphite pencil on paper, unframed 29⅝ × 21⅞ in. (74.5 × 54.5 cm). Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, Gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn, 1966 (66.2914)

notably, it imagined equity as the compulsory creation of identity-specific slots within an otherwise unchanged market system.[14] Perhaps more importantly, Halpert's approach to marketing Lawrence depended on his exceptional status. As art historian John Ott has illuminated, Halpert often used racializing language in her press releases—linking Lawrence's work to the "traditionally rhythmic work songs of the negro," for example—in a way that both emphasized and capitalized on Lawrence's racial difference.[15] Although Halpert's representation of other artists was similarly informed by the perceived connection between modern art and the so-called folk traditions of an imagined past, Lawrence was particularly uncomfortable with the implicit qualification of his work often embedded in its racialization.[16] Lawrence's discomfort does not necessarily indict Halpert as malicious or misguided, but it does surface a certain closeness between the structure of the art market at this moment and the logic of exceptionalism, one that worked to continuously circumscribe the work of those on the margins.

We might justifiably look for Lawrence's response to this narrowing in his art from the same period, perhaps even seeing an equivalence between the confined space of the shoemaker's workshop and Lawrence's own boxed-in position in the art market. Close inspection of the Work paintings, however, evidences less Lawrence's attempt to expose his own containment than it does his desire to study and highlight the innovations of other Black makers who created within, and against, small spaces. We notice, for example, the elegance of the dainty shoes on the wall in *The Shoemaker*; the watchmaker's delicate creations (fig. 3); and the careful choreography of the cabinetmakers' movements, even within their rather close quarters (fig. 4). Lawrence seems to be celebrating the specialized handwork and knowledge that these figures employ. An atmosphere of absorption pervades the paintings; the makers are deep in their work, eyes trained in concentration in a way that conveys dedication and expertise.

Lawrence seems to make the same claim for his own work. Far from the surfacing of a "naive" or racial essence that Halpert and other critics had described, his paintings are the products of skill, careful planning, technical knowledge, and labor. Lawrence often explicitly claimed associations with craft, in fact. In the questionnaire he completed at the time The Met acquired *The Shoemaker*, for example, he listed his training as an "artist apprentice" at Henry Bannarn and Charles Alston's studio, known as 306, one of the most important gathering spaces for the art and literary

fig. 4 Jacob Lawrence. *Cabinet Makers*, 1946. Opaque watercolor and graphite pencil on paper, framed 30⅞ × 36¹⁵⁄₁₆ in. (78.4 × 93.8 cm). Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, Gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn, 1966 (66.2915)

communities of Harlem in the 1930s.[17] Lawrence's description may be more than analogy, too. While at 306, a massive converted stable on 141st Street, with classrooms, studios, and workshops, Lawrence became acquainted with the Bates brothers, a trio of cabinetmakers whom he cited as inspiration for the 1946 Work painting *Cabinet Makers*.[18] He would later describe Addison, John, and Leonard Bates in terms of the unique proximity of craft and art-making practices at 306: the cabinetmakers were "close to the arts," whose tools ("like sculpture") he had the chance to observe because "we all worked together at the center."[19] In fact, Lawrence's first solo exhibition, at age nineteen, was held in the Bates' workshop-salon.[20] The whole of the Work theme, indeed, could be seen as a reflection on a number of workplaces in Harlem, many of which he would have seen in and around 306—the Bates brothers' workshop, but also the radio repair shop that was located just across the street, and the shoe stores catty-corner to it.[21] Although places not strictly devoted to "fine art" but where many different kinds of making took place, these were the spaces that Lawrence counted as his schools and training grounds, where he learned what it meant to create.

MORE THAN THE POSITIVE IMAGE: MAKING, SELF-MAKING, AND WORLD-MAKING

Lawrence's Work paintings constitute powerful counterimages to the racist characterizations that Black workers across occupations faced. But they do not function solely as what Michele Wallace calls "positive images," meant simply to offset racist images; nor does Lawrence claim positive image-making for his art.[22] Lawrence's paintings are certainly stirring images celebrating Black makers, but their power is also more expansive than the positive/negative binary allows.

This power, importantly, is not as narrowly "productive" as it might appear on first glance. Although Lawrence focuses attention on the makers and their work, he does not fetishize the finished product. He pictures tools and raw materials, works in progress—the heap of fabric on the seamstress's table, the fiddly screws and gears of the watchmaker's workbench. This emphasis on process allows viewers to focus, in turn, on the bodies of the makers as they engage in work, and especially the way they bend themselves to their tasks: the jutting diagonal of the shoemaker's shoulders, or the leaning and squatting and kneeling of the cabinetmakers. We might say that Lawrence is interested in the

way that work shapes its maker as much as the maker shapes their materials. It is not only that the lecturer makes his body into a vehicle for his instruction, for example, but that his stance resembles the stable architecture of the building that he describes (just as his hand, wielding a pointer, points to the word "pointed") (fig. 5).

This focus on the repetitive actions of labor and their power to shape the worker's body might recall arguments about the influence of a Taylorian organization of labor (based on the principles of Frederick Winslow Taylor's organization of labor) on modernist art, especially on its emphatic optical flatness. Art historian David Joselit's claim that Jackson Pollock's drip paintings index "if not quite the codified movements of the factory worker," then certainly the "disciplinary beat of repetition," comes to mind. Similarly, Barbara Jaffee's assertion that Pollock's "gestures appear not so much spontaneous as mechanical—repetitive marks arrayed diagrammatically" reminds us that modernist art in the United States was "produced under the standardizing imperative of industrialism."[23] Do Lawrence's paintings, created only a few years before Pollock's, also register the alienation of work, or the formation of the workers' bodies and selves through the repetitive actions of an internalized discipline? It is true that Lawrence's paintings make no attempt to insert optical depth, remaining emphatically flat; his figures are planes of unmodulated black, often set against backgrounds of a much brighter color. This effect works against the perception of optical depth, forcing the shallow space of the workshops back toward flatness.

fig. 5 Jacob Lawrence. *The Lecture*, 1946. Gouache on paper, 22 × 29½ in. (55.9 × 74.9 cm). Location unknown

Yet Lawrence's flatness is not the same as Pollock's; nor does it operate in the way that Joselit or Jaffee describes, even if Lawrence does focus on how that work shapes human bodies. For one thing, Lawrence seems to take each instance of making out of the wider context of capitalist exchange; there are no customers in these images, no currency, bosses, or even—for the most part—completed products. This allows us to consider the possibility that there is more being made in these spaces than commodities. We notice, for example, the way the seamstress's red thread, on its path from the spool through her machine to the textile she is working on, seems to migrate to her face; there it defines her features, the charged field of her individual subjectivity, in an act we might call self-authorship.

Importantly, though, this is not a subjectivity that requires depth; the seamstress's features remain on the surface of the painting, her face like a mask.[24] Flatness seems to insist on itself across the Work theme, even where we would most expect depth. The cabinetmakers, for all their focus, remain among the planes and boards of their workshop, which never resolve into full, dimensional cabinets. They stay in a similar two-dimensional space: the painting's brown ground plane is turned up like a flat wall, the background blocked by the red plane of one of the cabinet's boards. It is not depth that Lawrence is after here, nor depth that the cabinetmakers create, but instead a surface dynamism, a rhythm that emerges from the cabinetmakers' careful coordination with each other. Matching diagonals are drawn by their leaning backs and bracing legs, for example; a precise choreography allows one worker's foot to carefully frame one side of another's head. This coordination is present in other compositions, too. The steelworkers link their bodies into the piped network they are constructing, not so much in alienated subjection, as Joselit or Jaffee would describe it, but in what appears as something like a dance (fig. 6). *Barber Shop* shows the intimacy between barber and customer in their rhyming postures, which unite each pair into a single, flattened group (fig. 7). The flatness of Lawrence's paintings, in short, implies not the crushing imposition of an exterior, disciplinary force, but instead a kind of lateral coordination between figures, and between figures and the materials and environments around them. This coordination brings into being nothing short of a world—a world not "flat" in the sense we usually mean, but instead in colorful, rhythmic two dimensions, calling attention to what Fred Moten has called the radical "richness of two-dimensionality."[25]

This world-making becomes apparent across the Work theme, in which the act of work often seems to

fig. 6 Jacob Lawrence. *Steelworkers*, 1946. Gouache on paper, 14 × 21 in. (35 × 53.3 cm). Private collection

fig. 7 Jacob Lawrence. *Barber Shop*, 1946. Gouache on paper, 21⅛ × 29⅜ in. (53.7 × 74.6 cm). Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio, Purchased with funds from the Libbey Endowment, Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey (1975.15)

fig. 8 Jacob Lawrence. *Radio Repairs*, 1946. Gouache on paper, 23 1/16 × 31 3/16 in. (58.6 × 79.2 cm). Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, Massachusetts, Anonymous gift (M.2003.31)

seep outward from the object-maker relationship, into the environmental surround. The radio repairmen work not only on radios, but seemingly within one; their shop is defined by loops and coils, as if within a complicated matrix of wirings and connections (fig. 8). So too does the shoemaker's yellow leather seem to envelop him, while the shape of a shoe sole migrates across the composition to his stool; and the seamstress's background comes to resemble a printed textile. Importantly, these are not simply design devices on Lawrence's part, the repetition of vocational attributes throughout flattened, allegorical portraits. Rather, Lawrence suggests the participation of the workers in the creation of something more than a set of consumable products—their ability to make a world, to shape through their work what Hannah Arendt calls "the objectivity of a world of our own from what nature gives us."[26]

If the formulation recalls earlier images of work, like Lewis Hine's power-makers and machine-masters, the metalworker of José Clemente Orozco's *Science, Labor and Art* (fig. 9), or Thomas Hart Benton's burly steel or construction workers in *America Today* (fig. 10), it is significant that Lawrence focuses on less muscular kinds of labor, even those that would be societally labeled "feminine."[27] These smaller, less conventionally heroic forms of work, Lawrence seems to be saying, have the capacity to build worlds, too. And while Hine, Orozco, and Benton had each attended to the labor of immigrants, indigenous peoples, and ethnic minorities, especially in physically demanding and dangerous jobs—Benton's *City Builders* shows an integrated workforce arguably prefiguring Lawrence's later *Builders* series—it is important that *all* of Lawrence's workers are Black.[28] It is a Black worker at the center of each of the scenes, unattached to White foremen, bosses, employers, or customers—a pointed allusion to the importance of Black ownership and entrepreneurship to the worlds Lawrence is picturing.

In this insistence on the world-making of Black workers, the position Lawrence is staking for himself becomes evident. By 1945 Lawrence had already been described as a consummate storyteller, whose work gave form to the experiences of Black Americans and built spaces in which narratives of Black liberation and creativity could take place. Lawrence repeatedly claimed for his art a purposefulness that correlates with the work of these makers; as he put it in 1945, the year he began the Work theme: "I want to communicate. I want the idea to strike right away."[29] Some ten years later he elaborated on the motivation behind his desire to "work constructively within our society":

fig. 9 José Clemente Orozco (Mexican, 1883–1949). *Call to Revolution and Table of Universal Brotherhood (Science, Labor and Art) from The New School Mural Cycle*, 1930–31. Fresco, 78 × 174 in. (198.1 × 442 cm). The New School Art Collection, New York

> in doing so, I do not think I am being any more intelligent than the farmer, or the bricklayer, or the baker, or the tailor, or the merchant, or the seaman, or the teacher, or the machinist. These tradesmen are as nourishing to me as my fellow artists—for without them, there would be no desire, no drive, there would be no motivating force for me to make pictures.[30]

Lawrence's paintings were not simply commodities for sale, but objects intricately wrought for the use of others. His paintings would not protect one's feet, exactly, but they might help to redefine a person's sense of reality, making it possible to see the impression that even the smallest form of labor leaves on the world.

RE-MAKING: MENDING AND REPAIR

Thus far, we have established that in 1945, Lawrence began a series of paintings that achieved the same end as the crafts, labor, and making practices that they depicted. They created more than single products or objects, but in effect made a world. This was a world in which Black expertise was given space and resources, where Black ingenuity was recognized and celebrated.

fig. 10 Thomas Hart Benton (American, 1889–1975). *City Building*, one of ten panels from *America Today*, 1930–31. Egg tempera with oil glazing over Permalba on a gesso ground on linen mounted to a wood panel with a honeycomb interior, 92 × 117 in. (233.7 × 297.2 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of AXA Equitable, 2012 (2012.478i)

The paintings showed abundance for Black people: vibrancy and industry, dancing shoes and delicate watches and the possibility of new construction.

At the same time, there is an argument to be made for the aura of nostalgia suffusing these paintings—the way that Lawrence seems to evince a preference for the artisanal over the industrial, even at a moment often remembered as the peak of U.S. industrial power. If Lawrence rightly points to the importance of ownership to Black communities, he might be questioned for an out-of-touch preference for craft and small-scale labor—his focus on the world-making powers of a previous generation of workers, no longer relevant by the mid-1940s.

There is more at play here, however, not least because the theme depicts a range of occupations beyond the craftsperson, from the academic to the flower vendor. Lawrence's larger aim becomes even clearer, moreover, if we loosen the assumed link between craft practices and the past, making it possible to see his interest in the handmade as part of a specific claim for how a postwar future for Black people could be built. This understanding requires us to see Lawrence's theme as an investigation of work, production, and industry, but also of repair, re-creation, and recovery. The paintings depict places where new products are made, but also where old or broken things are taken to be put back together. In a work like *Radio Repairs*, for example, Lawrence draws attention to the intricate knowledge that is necessary for repair work, which allows the technicians to enter the radios' depths, their heads disappearing into the intricate, wired interiors. The image evokes the "repair-thinking" that information scientist Steven J. Jackson argues is a kind of epistemology, a way of seeing and thinking about the world distinct to the fixer.[31] It is possible to revisit almost all of Lawrence's images of the Work theme through this new lens. The seamstress could as easily be mending a dress as making a new one. The watchmaker is surrounded by clocks that tell different times—more likely the future recipients of his precise attention than the display of his completed work (in some texts, the title is given as *Watch Repairs*, rather than *Watchmaker*). Even the pile of shoes behind the shoemaker, who might as accurately be called a cobbler, seems curiously mismatched, in need of his capable handling to be put right.

Lawrence is attending here to what Arendt calls the "durability" of the worlds that work creates—the ways that they could be broken, thrown out of sync, or undone.[32] Recall that these were the first paintings that Lawrence made upon his return from service in

fig. 11 Jacob Lawrence. *Home Chores*, 1945. Gouache and graphite on paper, 29½ × 21⅛ in. (74.9 × 53.5 cm). The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri, Anonymous gift (F69-6)

World War II, a moment shot through with questions about the possibility of reunifying a world riven by unprecedented loss and ongoing tension. Significantly, some chronologies place *Home Chores* (fig. 11), which pictures a woman tackling a pile of dishes at a tenement wash sink, among the first works that Lawrence made after the war, possibly even before *The Shoemaker*.[33] Positioned this way, *Home Chores* seems a likely reflection on the maintenance work that helped sustain the world Lawrence was able to return to. This was the kind of domestic labor that his wife, Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence, had performed alone while he was overseas, and that many other women had similarly undertaken, whether or not they were engaged in defense industry jobs (as Black women were less likely to be).[34] In focusing on this rather private, even mundane scene, Lawrence offers a view of wartime labor starkly different from others focused on battles, bombings, or even muscular, Rosie-the-Riveter-type women. In this view, maintenance work, of the kind that Christina Sharpe might term "ordinary," is as responsible for the world that emerged from the war as any combat action.[35] Lawrence would make a similar argument when describing the paintings he created while still in the Coast Guard, which centered not only soldiers in combat positions, but also cooks, mechanics, and signalmen:

> It's the little things that are *big*. A man may never see combat, but he can be a very important person. The man at the guns, there's glamor there. Men dying, men being shot, they're heroes. But the man bringing up supplies is important too. Take a cook. He just cooks, day in and day out. He never hears a gun fired, except in practice. He's way down below, cooking.[36]

Lawrence's focus on work in 1945–46 amounted to a parallel interpretation of the immediate postwar moment, arguing for the significance of "little things" like repair and maintenance. His Work theme paintings expose the significance of this work, and celebrate the overlooked efforts of the Black workers who perform it. He highlights these practices of care, attention, and resourcefulness as forms of expertise in their own right, tactics with the capacity to build worlds from limited or broken materials—important models for how the world could be rebuilt in the postwar period.

Significantly, this was a vision of the postwar United States starkly different from those that conjured an America ascendant, its wholeness guaranteed by military might and large-scale industrial mobilization. Lawrence's Work theme, by contrast, implied a nation and a world in need of repair—in need, specifically, of the specific knowledge of Black technicians, domestic workers, cobblers, fixers, and seamstresses. They held the vital knowledge of how things could be put back together, and in a way that was better than before. In the process of illuminating their expertise, he offers a glimpse of the type of world that might emerge from the work they do—from the close examination of what is broken; from an intense, if small-scale, focus on reparation and renewal; from a dedication to the restoration of what is already at hand. He pictures the beauty and the vibrancy of a world remade.

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NOTES

1 For the ways that Lawrence's Coast Guard paintings responded to the U.S. military's policies and positions, see Ott 2015.

2 The catalogue raisonné is invaluable for tracking the evolution of Lawrence's interest in Harlem, beginning with his 1930s street scenes and interiors, through his 1944–45 Harlem series, to the Work theme; see Nesbett and DuBois 2000a.

3 In Lawrence's definition, a "series" had a tighter, often narrative-based, and at times sequential coherence. A "theme," while still a related set of paintings, held together more loosely, without a linear arc. See quotations in Wheat 1986, 143; and transcript of interview by Peter Nesbett and Michelle DuBois, June 7, 1999, 1–2, cited in Sims 2000, 215.

4 Lawrence was represented by Halpert beginning in 1941 and had sold works through her gallery as early as that year. December 1945 through fall 1946, however, marks a moment in which Lawrence was for the first time supporting himself not through fellowships, government employment, sales, or a combination thereof, but solely through the work he sold at the Downtown Gallery.

5 Berman 1984, 78.

6 Lawrence would return to images of work in 1957, in a concentrated period between 1968 and 1972, and consistently throughout the 1980s and 1990s, when he focused primarily on the *Builders*.

7 See, for example, *Self-Portrait* (1977), in which a miniature version of *Cabinet Makers* is pictured behind the artist and below a set of tools; or *The Studio* (1977), in which examples of Lawrence's later *Builders* series appear around the artist's workspace.

8 For a fuller discussion of the *Builders* series, see Nesbett 1998 and Sims 2000.

9 Sims 2000, 212–13.

10 Randolph was influential in pressuring Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman to issue two sweeping executive orders in the 1940s that were aimed at integrating the armed forces and securing fair employment in defense industries and government. Randolph (1941) 2014, 297. See also Bynum 2010, 157–84.

11 Although strikes led by the United Auto Workers and the United Mine Workers of America are perhaps the best known of this wave, in total more than five million U.S. workers participated in strikes in 1945–46 across a range of industries, from steel to lumber to railroads.

12 *Life* 1952, 87.

13 Riley 1943, 7; McBride 1941.

14 Halpert's 1945 exhibition, "American Negro Art," had as one objective the formation of a "Negro Art Fund," which would place works by Black artists in U.S. museums, as well as convince other gallerists to add Black artists to their rosters. See Shaykin 2019.

15 Ott (2015, 80) argues that Lawrence's "branding" not just as a Black artist, but as a "primitive," was established and sustained in part through Halpert's efforts—especially through her choice of words in her press releases, which often shaped the way that the media covered Lawrence's work.

16 On the importance of what Halpert called "American ancestors" to a "native" modern art, see Shaykin 2019, especially 87–113. In her 1950 interview with Lawrence, Aline B. Louchheim makes note of Lawrence's concern about the racial qualifiers used to describe him: "he was modestly worried that without the racial adjective he would not be considered a good artist." Louchheim 1950, 36.

17 "'The Shoemaker' by Jacob Lawrence," May 7, 1946, MMA Archives.

18 For more on the influence of the figures at 306, and the wider Harlem community, on Lawrence's career, see King-Hammond 2000; Turner 2000; Hills 2009; Dickerman 2015; and Wilson 2021. Patricia Hills (2009, 265) argues that Lawrence also depicts Addison Bates (of the Bates brothers) in his 1957 *Cabinet Maker*, arguably the first of several returns to the Work theme.

19 Quoted in Wheat 1986, 143.

20 Nesbett and DuBois 2000c, 27.

21 As of 1940, a radio repair shop was located at 307 West 141st Street, and shoe stores were located at 2654 8th Avenue and 2642 8th Avenue. See New York City Department of Records & Information Services, Manhattan 1940s Tax Photos, https://nycma.lunaimaging.com/luna/servlet/view/search?search=SUBMIT&cat=0&q=Block%3D2043+AND+Lot%3D9&dateRangeStart=&dateRangeEnd=&sort=borough%2Cblock%2Clot%2Czip_code&QuickSearchA=QuickSearchA; https://nycma.lunaimaging.com/luna/servlet/detail/NYCMA~5~5~173897~537991:2654-8-Avenue?sort=borough%2Cblock%2Clot%2Czip_code&qvq=q:Block%3D2027%20AND%20Lot%3D1;sort:borough%2Cblock%2Clot%2Czip_code;lc:NYCMA~5~5&mi=0&trs=1; https://nycma.lunaimaging.com/luna/servlet/detail/NYCMA~5~5~173889~538142:2642-8-Avenue?sort=borough%2Cblock%2Clot%2Czip_code&qvq=q:Block%3D2026%20AND%20Lot%3D3;sort:borough%2Cblock%2Clot%2Czip_code&mi=1&trs=2.

22 See Wallace 1990, 1–5, and Mercer 1990.

23 Joselit 2000, 24; Jaffee 2004, 78, 79. Both Joselit and Jaffee resist Meyer Schapiro's reading of modernist art as a last refuge from the instrumentality implied by capitalism and industrial labor, wherein the flatness of Pollock's drip paintings implies spontaneity of movement; see Schapiro 1957. For Joselit, Pollock's painting is an anxious attempt to stave off the emptying-out of the notion of individual selfhood via what Joselit (drawing on Michel Foucault) calls "disciplinary regimes"—of which industrial forms of labor are a primary example. This emptying-out all but guarantees flatness in art; Joselit 2000, 22, 24. See also Greenberg (1948) 1986; Greenberg (1952) 1993a; Greenberg (1955) 1993b, 226. Jaffee makes the case that the technical design curricula that many artists received in the early twentieth century helped to "standardize" artistic work in much the same way that Taylorian systems standardized other kinds of labor—an analogy that authorizes her reading of Pollock's gestures as repetitive and mechanical. For more on the ties between modernist painting's formal qualities and labor in the postwar moment, see Jones 1996; Molesworth 2003; and Bryan-Wilson 2010.

24 Richard Powell's essay on Lawrence's work in the late 1940s and early 1950s analyzes the artist's mode of abstraction, including the two-dimensionality of his compositions examining performance and self-presentation; masks appear as a crucial motif in these investigations of superficiality and depth. See Powell 2000. See also Turner 2019.

25 See Moten and O'Meally 2022.

26 Arendt 1998, 137.

27 See Hine 1921. Hine's work strikes a formal chord with Lawrence's, given its focus on singular workers in close physical intimacy with the tools or machines they manipulate; see Lowery Stokes Sims's comparison of Lawrence's and Hine's work: Sims

2000, 210. It is important to note that Lawrence cited Orozco as a direct influence. Having met Orozco as he was working on his mural *Science, Labor and Art* at the New School for Social Research in New York in the early 1930s, Lawrence would have been able to observe firsthand Orozco's allegorical depiction of manual, intellectual, and artistic labor. He might also have observed that Black figures were at the center of Orozco's strategy for his wider New School mural suite.

28 See Griffey and Kornhauser 2015; in the same volume, see also Stephanie Herdrich's catalogue entries for "Deep South," 26–27, "Steel," 34–35, and "City-Building," 36–37.

29 Quoted in McCausland 1945, 251.

30 Jacob Lawrence, typed speech, delivered to Columbia University Teachers' Convention, 1954; Jacob Lawrence and Gwendolyn Knight Papers, box 14, folder 13, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

31 Jackson 2014.

32 Arendt 1998, 136.

33 The catalogue raisonné dates *Home Chores* to 1945 with greater certainty than *The Shoemaker*, which Lawrence probably painted in 1945, but only inscribed on the verso in early 1946. *Home Chores* features a date in the upper right corner and its date was later confirmed through consultation with the artist and his wife. This information makes it possible to imagine *Home Chores* as the start of the Work theme. See Nesbett and DuBois 2000b, 88–89; and Chris Bruce to Henry Adams, May 11, 1992, *Home Chores* object file, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri. I thank Stephanie Fox Knappe at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City for her generous help in facilitating my access to these materials.

34 See Honey 1999 and DuBois and Dumenil 2016, 497–98.

35 Sharpe (2016, 131–32) calls for "ethics of care (as in repair, maintenance, attention)," and specifically for practices of care that are "ordinary," in order to meet the ordinariness of the "weather" of antiblackness.

36 McCausland 1945, 251.

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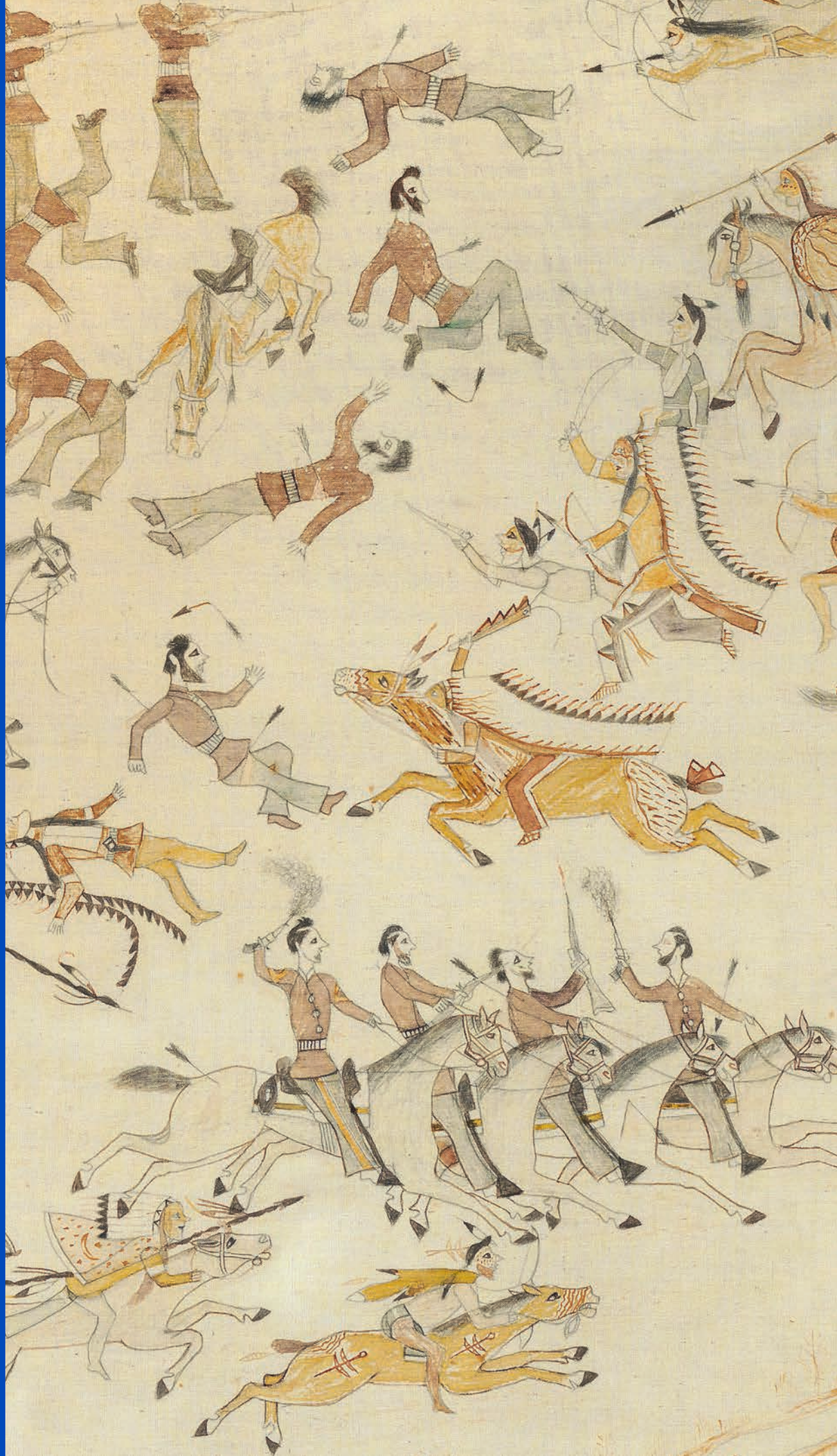

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