

## Studio Museum in Harlem holds Alma Thomas exhibit

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Alma Thomas was a Black female artist who depicted the light around her through her art, even as it was dimmed by the shadow of dominance by white male artists. Taking inspiration from her garden in Washington, D.C, Thomas painted the relation between the plants and the surrounding environment using an array of colors and abstract shapes.

In 1970, Thomas said, “Through color, I have sought to concentrate on beauty and happiness, rather than man’s inhumanity to man.” The moods and tones conveyed by Thomas’ art are refreshing and remind art lovers and the rest of the world to find the beauty in all things, despite the negative energy that might surround them.

Given the time period in which Thomas was creating her art, one can begin to understand why it was so important to her to paint positive and light images. The Civil Rights era of the 1960s was a time of great strife and tyranny, and her art was the breath of fresh air that the Black community needed. Since Thomas’ death in 1978, her artwork has been showcased in more than five museum exhibitions around the United States, and most recently, her art is currently featured at the Studio Museum in Harlem, located at 144 W. 125th St. Much as Thomas’ art played a key role during the Civil Rights era, it can also be of great significance to the Black audience of Harlem. The recent, and not so recent, shootings of Black men have the community rethinking the stability of their lives and the country in which they live. Perhaps the Alma Thomas exhibit at the Studio Museum in Harlem has more to offer than just pretty colors and interesting shapes.

When asked how Thomas’ art was fitting for a Harlem audience, Lauren Haynes, co-curator for the exhibit, said, “I think what we strive to do here is to have a range of exhibitions and to work within our mission to include art from Black artists. She [Thomas] created most of her work during the last 18 years of her life, after a full career as a teacher, and she was dedicated to learning about art for those years of her life. She spent summers here and took classes at Columbia and spent time in Harlem, so it’s really interesting to have another look at her work here.”

The exhibit is divided into four sections, based on either the type of painting or the tone of the piece. The first section is Abstraction, a collection of Thomas’ works that differed in style from her usual aesthetic. The first piece of art in the section is Thomas’ depiction of the March on Washington, “Sketch for March on Washington,” An oil-on-canvas piece that uses a combination of moody colors that both blend and are distinct enough that one can differentiate members of the march from the picket signs that they are holding up. The subtle blending of the colors creates a rhythm throughout the painting that reminds the observer of the steady chants of individuals marching to the Lincoln Memorial. Besides this major piece, other pieces in the section feature the same moody color palette and blending of colors and shapes.

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