

## Two Generations



## Two Generations, 1979

### Artful Activism

The granddaughter of former slaves, **Elizabeth Catlett (1915–2012)** was born and raised in Washington, D.C. At Howard University, she studied design with Loïs Mailou Jones (1905–1998). Later, she turned to sculpture and printmaking through which she advocated for social change.

### Take a closer look

*Two Generations* illustrates Catlett's skill as a printmaker. The dramatic play of light and shadow reveals her subjects' physical features and psychological complexity. Here, the artist invites us to consider the relationship and life experiences of these individuals.

### In her own words

"I learned that art is not something that people learn to do individually, that who does it is not important, but its use and its effects on people are what is most important."

Elizabeth Catlett, *Two Generations*, 1979; Lithograph on paper, 17 x 20¼ inches; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Dorothy Stauffer Lyddon; Art © Elizabeth Catlett/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY



## Rainy Night, Downtown



### Bright Lights, Big City

Georgia Mills Jessup said *Rainy Night, Downtown* could represent a night scene in any U.S. city. Yet, the signs for the “Trans-Lux” Theatre and “St. H.N.W.” identify the location as Washington, D.C., the artist’s hometown.



## Rainy Night, Downtown, 1967

### Take a closer look

**Georgia Mills Jessup (1926–2016)** used abstraction, vivid colors, and dramatic contrasts of light and shadow to create a particular mood and energy in this scene. Her approach encourages us to imagine the sights and sounds that would greet us if we stepped through the frame.

### Something to talk about

The Trans-Lux Theatre, one of the landmarks featured in Jessup's painting, was located on the west side of 14th Street, NW, between New York Avenue and H Street, from 1937 to 1975. That means the scene depicted was about a block from where you are standing.

### Who knew?

Jessup, who described herself as a “melting pot,” was particularly proud of her American Indian heritage. As a descendent the Pamunkey tribe of Virginia the great Powhatan is her ancestral chief.

Georgia Mills Jessup, *Rainy Night, Downtown*, 1967; Oil on canvas, 44 x 48 inches; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Savanna M. Clark; © Georgia Mills Jessup







## Change of Scenery

Loïs Mailou Jones experienced prejudice in the United States based on her race and gender. She traveled to France in 1937, discovering a country more racially tolerant than her own. The inclusivity and tranquility of the French landscape beckoned Jones back throughout her life.



## Arreau, Hautes-Pyrénées, 1949

### Take a closer look

Vibrant green mountains contrast vividly with bold orange buildings in the artist's depiction of the southwestern French village of Arreau. **Loïs Mailou Jones (1905–1998)** applied broad, loose brushstrokes, adding visual energy to the peaceful setting.

### Something to talk about

World travel informed the artist's technique, style, and subject matter. How have journeys—near or far, physical or emotional—impacted your perspective?

### In her own words

"I can look back on my work and be inspired by France, Haiti, Africa, the Black experience, and Martha's Vineyard (where it all began) and admit: there is no end to creative expression."

### Who knew?

Jones influenced notable women artists including Elizabeth Catlett (1915–2012) and Alma Woodsey Thomas (1891–1978), both in the museum's collection.

Loïs Mailou Jones, *Arreau, Hautes-Pyrénées*, 1949; Oil on canvas, 19½ x 23¾ inches; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Gladys P. Payne; © Loïs Mailou Jones; Photograph by Lee Stalsworth



## Ode to Kinshasa



### Sense of Place

Lois Mailou Jones created *Ode to Kinshasa* as a tribute to the capital city of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire). The orange shape at the center of the work evokes the form and patterns of shields from the region.



## Ode to Kinshasa, 1972

### Take a closer look

**Lois Mailou Jones (1905–1998)** incorporated different materials to create this piece, including paint, gold foil, and handmade paper. Many African sculptures display rich textures, which influenced Jones's use of mixed media.

### Something to talk about

Abstract works like *Ode to Kinshasa* rely on the viewer's experience and associations to interpret the painting. How has the artist employed shape, color, and pattern to create a specific mood or sense of place?

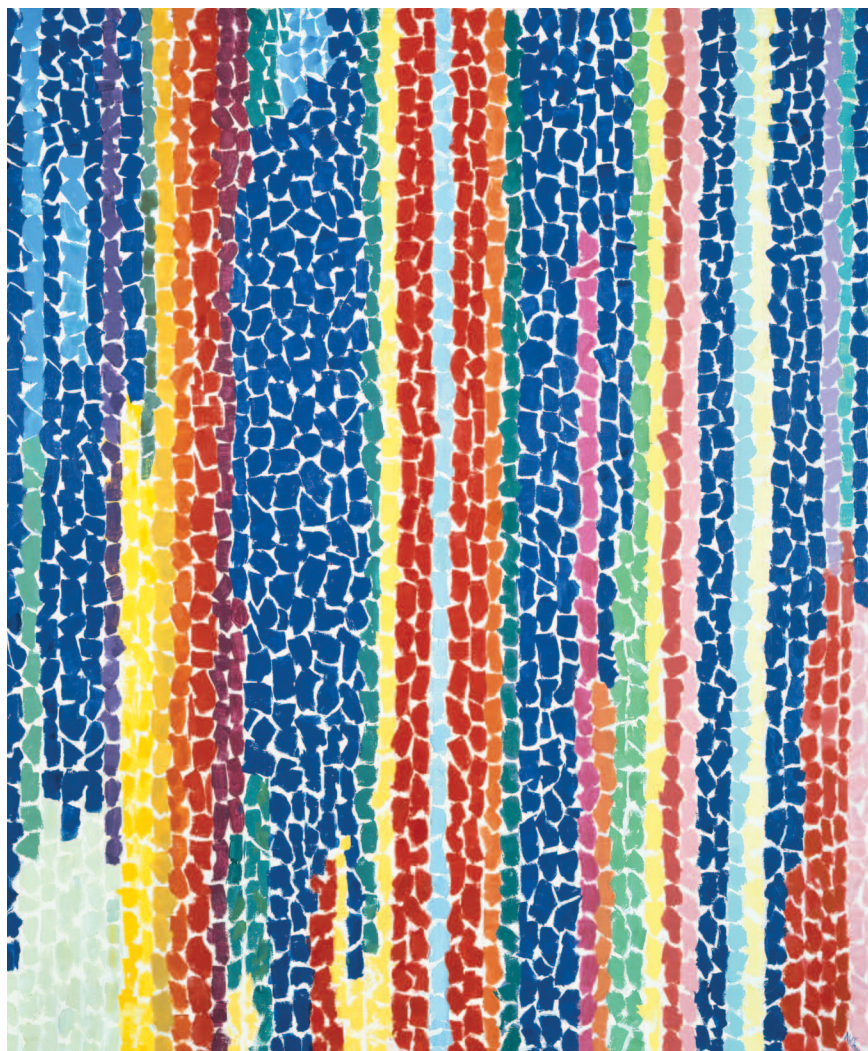
### Who knew?

Jones received a grant from Howard University to document contemporary African art of West and Central Africa, Haiti, and the United States in its original context. In 1970, she traveled to 11 African countries for research. This period of travel strongly influenced her art.

Lois Mailou Jones, *Ode to Kinshasa*, 1972; Mixed media on canvas, 48 x 36 inches; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of the artist; © Lois M. Jones







### Late Bloomer

After more than 35 years as a D.C. public school teacher, Alma Woodsey Thomas retired to focus on painting. She developed her signature style in her mid-70s. At 80 years old, Thomas became the first African American woman to have a solo exhibition at New York's Whitney Museum of American Art.



## Iris, Tulips, Jonquils, and Crocuses , 1969

### Take a closer look

**Alma Woodsey Thomas (1891–1978)** created paintings that appear quite structured, but individual brushstrokes reveal her spontaneity. Find evidence of her working process, including faint vertical pencil lines and overlapping colors. Observe the overall effect of the palette and pattern.

### Something to talk about

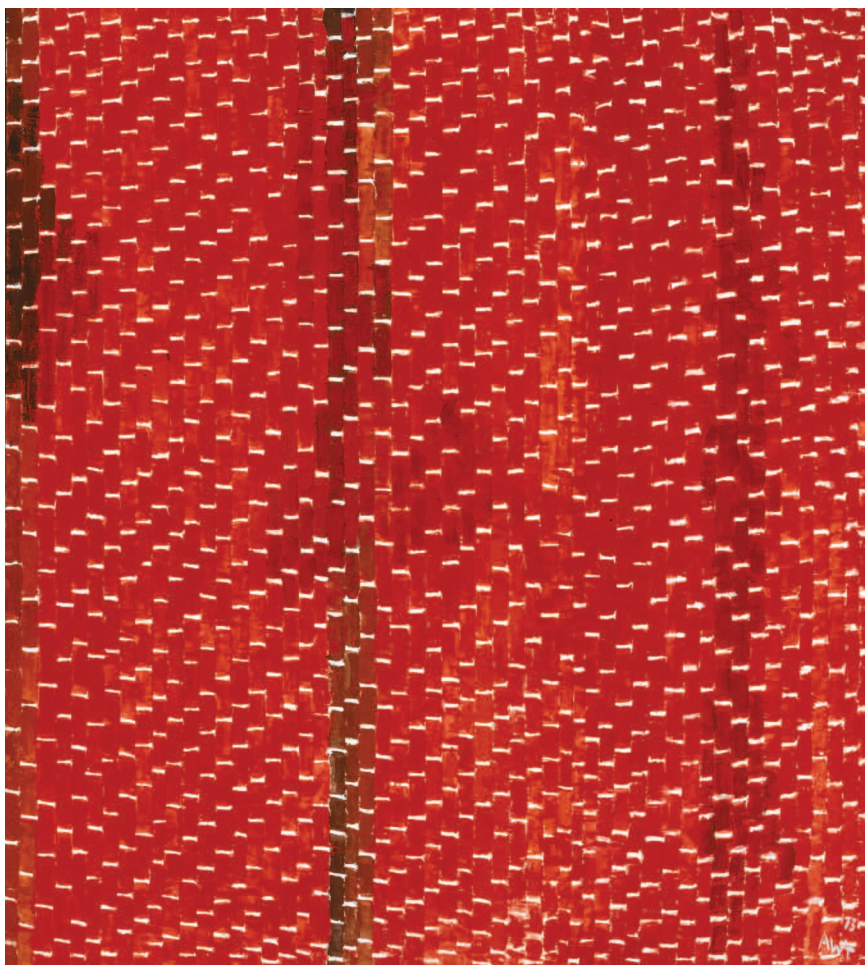
Thomas believed in the expressive quality of color. What mood or idea do her hues convey? How would we experience the work differently if it were monochromatic?

### In her own words

"My paintings reflect my communion with nature, man's highest source of inspiration."

Alma Woodsey Thomas, *Iris, Tulips, Jonquils, and Crocuses*, 1969; Acrylic on canvas, 60 x 50 inches; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Wallace and Wilhelmina Holladay; © Estate of Alma Woodsey Thomas; Photograph by Lee Stalsworth





### Shoot for the Stars

The Space Race, a rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States for spaceflight dominance, captivated Alma Woodsey Thomas. As the U.S. explored uncharted territory, the artist did too. Thomas landed on her abstract style just before the first astronauts set foot on the moon in 1969.



## Orion, 1973

### Take a closer look

**Alma Woodsey Thomas (1891–1978)** created her signature “Alma Stripes” by allowing the unpainted canvas to show between her freehand dabs of paint. Though linear in nature, her vertical lines and rectangular dashes are not perfectly geometric.

### Something to talk about

For Thomas, red symbolized the power required to break from Earth's gravity. Note the variations of that hue in *Orion*. What would you name them to describe this painting to someone who couldn't see it?

### In her own words

“The use of color in my paintings is of paramount importance to me. Through color I have sought to concentrate on beauty and happiness, rather than on man's inhumanity to man.”

### Who knew?

Born in the segregated south, the artist moved with her family to Washington, D.C., in 1907. The house that she called home and studio until her death still stands at 1530 15th Street, NW. It bears a plaque recognizing Thomas's artistic contributions.

Alma Woodsey Thomas, *Orion*, 1973; Acrylic on canvas, 59% x 54 inches; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Wallace and Wilhelmina Holladay; © Estate of Alma Woodsey Thomas; Photograph by Lee Stalsworth





### Colorforms

Anne Truitt often referenced the natural world through color and title. In Greek mythology, a dryad is a female spirit who inhabits forests, specifically oak trees.





## Summer Dryad, 1971

### Take a closer look

**Anne Truitt (1921–2004)** achieved her signature silken surfaces by methodically straining acrylic paint, applying up to 40 layers of pigment, and sanding between coats. View her simple geometric form from different angles, observing the play of light and shadow across its glossy green planes.

### Something to talk about

Truitt used sculpture to express abstract concepts like time and human existence. Her works invoke recognizable forms—crucifixes, tombstones, picket fences, solitary figures—to invite associations between the concrete and the intangible. What references does this piece bring to mind?

### In her own words

“I conceive the sculptural form in space, as if the color itself came into being as a form.”

### Who knew?

The artist created *Summer Dryad* at her studio in the Cleveland Park neighborhood of Washington, D.C., just a few miles northwest of the museum.

Anne Truitt, *Summer Dryad*, 1971; Acrylic on wood; 76 x 13 x 8 inches; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of the Holladay Foundation; © Anne Truitt

