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## **Exhibition Featuring Major American Artist William H. Johnson to Open at the University of Pennsylvania's Arthur Ross Gallery**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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A new exhibition from the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES) will feature rare paintings by William H. Johnson, from the collection of the James E. Lewis Museum at Morgan State University. An essential figure in modern American art, William H. Johnson (1901-1970) was a virtuoso skilled in various media and techniques, and produced thousands of works over a career that spanned decades, continents and genres.

***William H. Johnson: An American Modern*** will be on view at the Arthur Ross Gallery, University of Pennsylvania from January 18 – March 23, 2014 . It will then continue on a 10-city tour through 2014. The exhibition is made possible through the generous support of the National Endowment for the Arts, the Henry Luce Foundation and Morgan State University Foundation Inc.

The pivotal stages of Johnson's career as a modernist painter are assembled in this group of rarely seen paintings. Every step of his artistic development is conveyed—from his post-impressionist and expressionist works of the 1920s, to vibrant vernacular paintings from the end of his career in the 1940s, in which Johnson articulated his distinctive, unforgettable vision as an American modern artist.

The paintings boast a remarkable history. In 1956 the Harmon Foundation, a nonprofit that helped foster awareness of African art from 1922 until its demise in 1967, took ownership of Johnson's own collection of art—saving it all from being destroyed. When the foundation had to shut its doors, they donated more than 1,000 works to the Smithsonian's National Collections of Fine Arts (now the Smithsonian American Art Museum). The terms of the agreement called for the Smithsonian to donate artworks to several black colleges and universities, including Morgan State University. The founding chair of Morgan's art department, James E. Lewis, was first to carefully select these works for his museum's permanent collection.

The exhibition is complemented by an illustrated companion book ***William H. Johnson: An American Modern*** (University of Washington Press, 2011) with essays by Richard J. Powell, Leslie King Hammond and others. The book features some of the world's premier scholars of Johnson and African American art history re-examining the artist and presenting him in new, fresh ways.

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*The Gallery is located at 220 South 34th Street, Philadelphia, and is free and open to the public. HOURS: Weekdays 10:00am – 5:00pm; Weekends 12:00pm – 5:00pm. Closed Mondays. Visit us on Facebook and Twitter. To reserve a group tour please contact us at [arg@pobox.upenn.edu](mailto:arg@pobox.upenn.edu) or 215.898.3617. Additional information is available at **ArthurRossGallery.com** or 215.898.2083.*