

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Jacob Lawrence: Builders

May 5 – June 4, 2011

Opening reception: Thursday May 5, 6:00-8:00 PM

*I like the symbolism. ... I think of it as man's aspiration, as a constructive tool—
man building.* - Jacob Lawrence

Jacob Lawrence: Builders features paintings, drawings, and prints that communicate the artist's belief in the possibility of building a better world through skill, ingenuity, hard work, and collaboration. For the last three decades of his life, Lawrence (1917-2000) consistently pursued the *Builders* theme, creating a sequence of vibrant modernist images that highlight his pervasive humanist vision.

The *Builders* concept first appeared in Lawrence's work in the mid-1940s, but assumed greater importance in the late 1960s and soon became a major focus.

His subjects were carpenters, cabinetmakers, bricklayers, and construction workers in a variety of workaday and family situations. Overall, they came to symbolize some of his larger ideas about American culture, hope, persistence, and the shared responsibility for transforming society, inspired, as he once said, by his "own observations of the human condition."

As much as the *Builders* works embody these ideals, they are also about Lawrence's commitment to modernism. Bold, saturated colors, and solid, unmodulated shapes dominate the compositions. Foregrounds and backgrounds merge into the flatness of the picture plane, while the colors of the figures' faces, arms, and clothing often dissolve into



The Cabinet Maker, 1994. Gouache on paper,
29 3/4 x 22 inches.

similar colors in the spaces that surround them. Other figures are silhouettes with no recognizable features, ciphers that create further visual ambiguity.

Architecture, too, is reduced to basic elements, sometimes a series of arches that define windows and doorways or planes of color for walls and floors. Diagonals of planks, worktables, and window sills suggest depth, while often also referencing perspective in early Renaissance painting, which Lawrence credited as an important influence from the time that he first saw works by Giotto and other Italian masters in the Metropolitan Museum of Art when he was a young, aspiring artist. The *Builders* works, then, speak to Lawrence's past and present, eloquent statements of the importance of community rendered through his distinctively modernist viewpoint.

The paintings, drawings, and prints in the exhibition were created following Lawrence's move to Seattle to accept a tenured position at the University of Washington in 1971. After living in New York City for forty years, it was a significant change for him and his wife, fellow artist Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence. Teaching full time allowed him to bring new focus to his art, and also brought a welcome sense of financial security. He considered the move a "retreat ... not in the sense of defeat, but of renewal."

Away from Harlem and the urban environment that he had grown up in, Lawrence increasingly pursued more symbolic and universal subjects that were less overtly grounded in contemporary social issues than much of his earlier art. At the same time, the new work was also the result of his continued growth as an artist. As he explained in 1974, it was a "broadening of imagery, an expansion of my humanist concept. ... like most artists, I'm expanding, probing, constantly seeking new symbols—always within the humanist context."

Also on view: ***Mary Frank: Transformations, Wood Sculpture, 1957-1967, and Recent Photographs***

Upcoming exhibition: **George Tooker (1920 – 2011) Memorial Exhibition**, June 9 – August 5, 2011

DC Moore Gallery specializes in contemporary and twentieth-century art. The gallery is located at 535 West 22nd Street, 2nd Floor and is open Tuesday through Saturday from 10 to 6. Press previews can be arranged prior to the exhibition. For photographs, or to arrange a viewing, please call Kate Weinstein at 212-247-2111.