

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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**DAVIS MUSEUM AT WELLESLEY COLLEGE PRESENTS  
*JACOB LAWRENCE: THE LEGEND OF JOHN BROWN***

WELLESLEY, Mass. – The Davis Museum at Wellesley College presents *Jacob Lawrence: The Legend of John Brown*, a series of 22 narrative screen prints created by artist Jacob Lawrence about the controversial American abolitionist who devoted his life to overthrowing the slavery system. The portfolio depicts historical events in Brown’s life, including organized efforts to liberate enslaved people from Southern plantations. The Davis Museum purchased the portfolio of screen prints in 2015 and will present the acquisition for the first time in the Morelle Lasky Levine '56 Works on Paper Gallery from September 21 through December 16, 2018. Comprising the first works by Lawrence to enter the Davis collections, this portfolio filled an important gap in the museum’s representation of American art.

“Jacob Lawrence is among the most significant American artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His historical depictions of important figures in United States history addressed the African American experience in unique ways,” said Amanda Gilvin, assistant curator at the Davis Museum of Wellesley College, and curator of the exhibition. “In the case of John Brown, previous painters had romanticized his anti-slavery crusade. Lawrence instead explored the complexity of Brown’s biography, providing Brown’s life-long fierce Christian piety as context for his militant devotion to the abolition of slavery during the last twenty-two years of his life.”

John Brown (1800-1859) advocated for violent uprisings, and he was executed for his failed insurrection at Harpers Ferry, Virginia in 1859. A popular Civil War song memorialized him, and he remained a folk hero among African Americans for generations. In the 1930s and 1940s, African American artists, intellectuals, and political leaders made pilgrimages to Harpers Ferry and to his grave, while white historians of the time often dismissed Brown as an insane radical.

John Brown had many ties to New England. He was born in Connecticut and spent a lot of time in Massachusetts. Brown received much support from abolitionists in Boston, including Henry David Thoreau, who financed and promoted his work.

**The Artist**

Jacob Lawrence (1917-2000) was an influential educator in addition to being an artist. During his own educational journey, he had found that African American history was not taught in schools. This inspired

him to paint biographical series of significant historical figures like Frederick Douglass and Harriett Tubman.

Lawrence created *The Legend of John Brown*, his fifth series of history paintings in gouache, in 1941. In 1974, the Detroit Institute of Art, which owns the paintings, commissioned Lawrence to produce an edition of screen prints of the series, which he completed in collaboration with Ives-Sillman, Inc. (New Haven, Connecticut) in 1977.

With a style inspired by modern art, African art, print journalism, and popular film, Lawrence explained that he worked in series because: “I wanted to tell a lot of things. This was the only way I could work and tell the complete story.” The artist carefully researched John Brown, combining written scholarship with oral history and popular culture surrounding the white abolitionist icon.

***Jacob Lawrence: The Legend of John Brown*** is accompanied by the Davis mobile app, which includes a tour of the exhibition that incorporates historical research completed by Gilvin and two student interns: Siobhan Finlay '18 (Architecture) and Veronica Mora '18 (Art History). The Davis app is available for download at: <http://app.thedavis.org>.

The exhibition is presented with generous support by The Marjorie Schechter Bronfman '38 and Gerald Bronfman Endowment for Works on Paper.

## **EXHIBITION-RELATED EVENTS AND PROGRAMMING**

### **Fall Opening Celebration**

Thursday, September 20

5:30 p.m., Collins Cinema

*Artist's Talk: Christiane Baumgartner*

6:30 - 9 p.m., Davis Lobby

*Opening Reception*

6:45 p.m., Davis Lobby and Galleries

*Welcome Remarks*

The Davis Museum will host a reception for the opening of the Fall 2018 exhibitions—including five special installations that bring spectacular energy and creative artistic innovation to the Wellesley College campus. German artist Christiane Baumgartner will be in attendance for the debut of *Another Country*, her first major US museum solo exhibition. In addition, the second “Windows Invitational” project, featuring Associate Professor Daniela Rivera’s *Fragmentos para una historia del olvido/Fragments for a history of displacement*; *Sky Hopinka: Dislocation Blues*; *Jacob Lawrence: The Legend of John Brown*; and *A Critical Eye: James Gillray and the Art of Satire*, along with rotations that refresh the permanent collections galleries, will be on view.

**Lecture: Jacob Lawrence: Stories of Life, Iconic Heroes, and the Fight for Freedom**

Tuesday, October 23

4 – 6 p.m., Collins Cinema

Co-organized with the Wellesley College Art Department

Renowned art historian Leslie King-Hammond will analyze the legacy of Jacob Lawrence, who documented American and African American history, which was routinely denigrated, denied and erased in his era. Lawrence was a masterful storyteller who created modernist figurative compositions. He was especially inspired by the stories and histories of iconic freedom fighters like Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, and John Brown. The images of their tenacious struggles for liberation and freedom, created in series of paintings and prints, have helped to secure Lawrence’s revered place within the legacy of American modernist art traditions.

*This event is made possible with the generous support of the Wilson Lecture Fund, the Suzy Newhouse Center for the Humanities, and the Harambee House.*

**Gallery Talk: Jacob Lawrence, Artist and Historian**

Tuesday, Nov. 13, 4-5 pm

Join Assistant Curator Amanda Gilvin in examining Jacob Lawrence’s legacy as both an artist and a historian through a discussion of his series, *The Legend of John Brown*.



*Generous Support to the Davis Museum is provided by Massachusetts Cultural Council.*

### **ABOUT THE DAVIS MUSEUM**

One of the oldest and most acclaimed academic fine arts museums in the United States, the Davis Museum is a vital force in the intellectual, pedagogical, and social life of Wellesley College. It seeks to create an environment that encourages visual literacy, inspires new ideas, and fosters involvement with the arts both within the College and the larger community.

### **ABOUT WELLESLEY COLLEGE AND THE ARTS**

The Wellesley College arts curriculum and the highly acclaimed Davis Museum are integral components of the College's liberal arts education. Departments and programs from across the campus enliven the community with world-class programming—classical and popular music, visual arts, theatre, dance, author readings, symposia, and lectures by some of today's leading artists and creative thinkers—most of which are free and open to the public.

Since 1875, Wellesley College has been the preeminent liberal arts college for women. Known for its intellectual rigor and its remarkable track record for the cultivation of women leaders in every arena, Wellesley—only 12 miles from Boston—is home to some 2,400 undergraduates from 49 states and 58 countries.

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**Media Contact:** Mary Agnew  
617-512-7489, [Magnev@wellesley.edu](mailto:Magnev@wellesley.edu)  
*High-resolution images and interviews available upon request*