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## An introduction to artist A B Jackson and his portrayal of the American neighborhood

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AN INTRODUCTION TO ARTIST A.B. JACKSON  
AND HIS PORTRAYAL OF THE AMERICAN NEIGHBORHOOD

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A Thesis

Presented To  
The Faculty of the Department of American Studies  
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

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by  
Cindy R. Shepard

1984

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts

  
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Approved, June 1984

  
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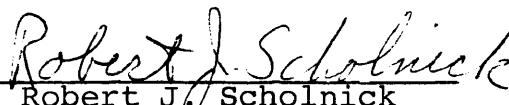
  
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Robert J. Scholnick

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An Introduction to Artist A. B. Jackson  
and  
His Portrayal of the American Neighborhood

ABSTRACT

A native of New Haven, Connecticut and graduate of Yale University School of Art and Architecture, Alexander Brooks Jackson, Jr. (1925-1981) moved to Norfolk, Virginia in 1956, where he established a career as an artist and teacher and attained local celebrity status. As originator of a series of drawings and paintings entitled The Porch People, Jackson communicated a nostalgia for a passing era by recording the aging residents and turn-of-the-century homes of Norfolk's Ghent community. Jackson's accomplishments take on additional significance when one recognizes that this artist was a black man who chose to live and succeed in a small Southern city during a period of racial strife. This paper explores the development of Jackson's career, including the conflict in his personal life, some of the implications of his portrayal of neighborhood life, and finally, his place in the mainstream of American art.

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## Introduction

At a time when art is becoming increasingly faddish and responsive to what Windham Lewis labeled "ahead-of-ism," A.B. Jackson is a traditionalist. His is an art of human values. That in itself almost amounts to rebellion today. Abstract expressionism and op and pop and who-knows-what next have given us an art that is dehumanized and personality-prone at the same time. Celebrity has come to have market value, and celebrity nowadays is painting Campbell's Soup labels or awning stripes or street signs.

But Mr. Jackson draws faces and figures and paints people and pigeons and trees--a world which is much the same as the one painters have pictured traditionally. He brings a brooding concern to his subject. The best of the drawings have an old master quality. There is an essential melancholy to the paintings, something which might be defined as serenity-the-hard-way. If his work is contemporary in the strategies with which he approaches a blank canvas, it is timeless in the reasons why he is a painter and a good one. He communicates the human condition powerfully and sympathetically.

William Tazewell<sup>1</sup>

Though dated, William Tazewell's remarks, written as a foreword to a 1965 Norfolk Museum (now Chrysler) exhibition catalog, introduce the artistic achievements of someone who ultimately became one of Norfolk's finest artists:



Alexander Brooks Jackson, Jr. (1925-1981). A native of New Haven and graduate of Yale University School of Art and Architecture, Jackson came to Norfolk in 1956 and for the next twenty-five years developed a career which brought him both local and national acclaim. While his oeuvre covers a wide range of topics including religious subjects and natural landscapes, much of Jackson's work reveals an abiding interest in ordinary people. His fondness for common folk coupled with his love of gingerbread houses attracted Jackson to Norfolk's Ghent section, a turn-of-the-century community of Victorian homes and aging residents. Jackson used Ghent and its people as a stimulus for his well-known Porch People, a series of drawings and paintings which extended throughout the 1960s and 70s. In 1979 Jackson paid tribute to neighborhood life in his publication As I See Ghent, a visual essay of photographs and reproductions of his art which explores the warmth of the Ghent community and the scars left by urban renewal. Among themes found in both the Porch People series and the visual essay are the celebration of porches as a place of privacy, repose, and conviviality, the dignity of neighborhood folk, often black or elderly, and the gradual destruction of a neighborhood community.

Jackson's accomplishments take on additional

significance when one realizes that he was a black man who chose to live and succeed in a Southern city during the turmoil of the Civil Rights Movement. One might expect him to have produced an art protesting racial injustices as did many of his black contemporaries. Indeed, several times Jackson himself was the target of racial prejudice. However, this artist defied stereotypes. Having taught at black and then white universities, he moved with relative ease within both social establishments. He thought of himself as an artist only and hated to be called a "black artist." A man of empathy and talent, Jackson created an art which transcended racial barriers and spoke of human universal values. As Thomas Styron, former curator of The Chrysler Museum, writes, Jackson made "intensely sensitive statements about the human condition in his own terms as a human being."<sup>2</sup>

Norfolk is fortunate to be able to claim Jackson as a local artist, for his talents could well have taken him away to New York. Unfortunately for Jackson, however, this small city failed to provide ample opportunity for his national importance to grow. Only three articles, two devoted entirely to Jackson, have appeared in significant publications. The first one, an editorial by Frank Getlein appearing in the August 13, 1962 edition of The New

Republic, denounced the bigotry of the Virginia Beach Boardwalk Art Show which excluded Jackson. Getlein examined the incident and its cultural ramifications for Tidewater Virginia and then brought his character into sharp focus in a few insightful paragraphs. In March 1967 Sidney Hurwitz, a Boston painter, wrote an article for American Artist entitled "A.B. Jackson: His Porch People" which serves as the first published introduction to his best known series. This article includes a number of fine examples of Jackson's Porch People. Finally, a brief one-page article appeared on the artist by Conway B. Thompson in the July/August 1978 edition of Art Voices/South. Less focused than the Hurwitz article, this one serves as a general introduction to Jackson and mentions the various pastoral and urban themes which he developed.

As no scholarly treatment of Jackson exists, I found it challenging as well as necessary to initiate a record of this artist's value to contemporary American art. In conducting this research, I have relied heavily on two sources: newspaper articles and personal interviews or correspondence with those who knew the artist. John Coit, a former writer for The Virginian Pilot/Ledger Star, was particularly helpful in providing access to newspaper files on him. A.B. Jackson, Sr. and Gabor Peterdi, a former

professor of Jackson at Yale, kindly took the time to answer my many questions via mail. Ann Dearsley-Vernon, Jackson's companion during his last five years, provided me with a wealth of information in the way of photographs, writings, and verbal reminiscence. Norfolk residents Fred Herman, Joel Cooper, Tony Cacolano, Howard Smith, Roderick Taylor, Mrs. Carlos Agnese, Charles Flynn, Wilbur Chadwick, Steve Georges, Billy Diggs, and Ken Daley, all colleagues or acquaintances of Jackson, graciously offered their recollections of the man and artist as they knew him. Of particular value was a tape of Jackson's introduction to a 1977 one-man exhibit for Roanoke's First National Bank lent me by Ken Daley. Other sources included the Chrysler Museum Art Reference Library's collection of photographs of his work as well as exhibit catalogs and brochures. The Chrysler Museum's Jackson Retrospective catalog and a copy of As I See Ghent donated by Donning Publishing Company of Virginia Beach, aided me in the beginnings of this research. Throughout this essay I have included examples of Jackson's poetry taken from these two works.

The result of my research is an essay which serves to introduce Jackson to interested scholars unfamiliar with his life and work. The first part of the essay explores his development as an artist and educator from his childhood to

his early death at age fifty-five. In this section I hope to convey a portrait of a complex man whose artistic integrity surmounted racial constraints. The second section will focus on the neighborhood imagery found in Jackson's work. While the goal of this second section is to examine the themes and techniques of the Porch People series, the discussion will begin with an exploration of As I See Ghent. My reasons for beginning with As I See Ghent are twofold. First, the photographs comprising the bulk of the visual essay were collected over a twelve-year period. Therefore, many of them may have been taken before the various Porch People evolved. Secondly, according to Ann Dearsley-Vernon, Jackson always used photographs as a stimulus for his paintings and drawings. Thus, it seems appropriate that the structure of this section mirror Jackson's own artistic process.

## Chapter I. The Development of Jackson's Career

As long as he could remember, Alexander Brooks Jackson, Jr. had "always wanted to make things." Years later the successful artist would humorously recall his first artistic medium:

I remember getting a lot of conversation from my parents at the table about playing with my mashed potatoes and peas. My language was very limited then and I had difficulty getting across to them that I wasn't playing with my mashed potatoes and peas but I was sort of sensitively rearranging the mashed potatoes and peas. Probably my first tool was a fork. Now you can do some really exciting things with a fork in mashed potatoes....

And Jackson went on to discuss the beauty of parallel lines crisscrossing in the potatoes, the peas lining up nicely along them. Even before he could articulate its importance for him, Jackson revealed his love of visual imagery.

Fortunately, the young artist's parents did not discourage their son's "strange and peculiar behavior."<sup>4</sup> Born April 15, 1925, in New Haven, Connecticut, Jackson was the product of a mixed marriage between a white Irishwoman (Mabel) and a black man (Alexander Brooks Jackson, Sr.). Two younger brothers, H. Frisby and Robert, and a younger sister, Kathryn, completed a family of six. A child of the

Depression, Jackson must have experienced an impoverished life. Although Mr. Jackson was fortunate to have a job during the Depression, apparently his income as a redcap for the New Haven Railroad Station barely covered family expenses. As an adult, the artist would place a high value on financial security, sometimes stashing away one-hundred dollar bills in books around his house. Nevertheless, his parents recognized him as "a born artist" and at considerable cost to the family determined to send him to college.<sup>5</sup> Ann Dearsley-Vernon, Jackson's companion of his last five years, indicates this decision may have caused some friction within the family, for the parents were unable to finance their other children's educations.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to parental encouragement, a series of fortunate incidents afforded Jackson the opportunity to develop his artistic talents. Ironically, his asthma, an illness which plagued him from birth, contributed to his artistic development. His father writes that "this condition was helpful in improving his interest in art, since he was unable to take part in rugged sports."<sup>7</sup> According to his father the young Jackson experimented with painting and sculpture. Luckily, he attended Hamden High School, where as an art major he had the unusual opportunity to take two or three periods of art a day. An art project

in his senior year led to his acceptance at Yale University School of Art and Architecture. Assigned to do a drawing of an outstanding figure, Jackson, for some unknown reason, chose to make a pen and ink drawing of Dr. William Lyon Phelps, the highly acclaimed English professor at Yale. Mr. Jackson, Sr. frequently saw Dr. Phelps at the railroad station and happened to show him the likeness. Later he would recall Dr. Phelps' remarks: "Obviously your son is quite talented. I think he would be an excellent candidate for the Yale School of Fine Arts."<sup>8</sup> Dr. Phelps arranged an interview for Jackson with Dean Heller, and in September 1946 Jackson entered the Yale University School of Art and Architecture.

Jackson's father recalls his son's years of extreme dedication and hard work at Yale:

Unlike his high school schedule, Alex's work hours became strict and regimented. He worked a great deal at home. His sleeping habits changed. Often he would paint or draw most of the night, the somber tones of Wagner's Tannhauser echoing through our sleeping home as the young artist sought inspiration. The bright lights from his studio cast crazy patterns under the casement of the door of our bedroom and the seductive aroma of brewing coffee made sleep impossible for us. But we did not protest too loudly, for we knew that a career was being molded.

Here Mr. Jackson's words indicate his son's complete



absorption in his art; however, a transcript of the artist's coursework at Yale reveals that he made halting progress through his undergraduate work. During his undergraduate years Jackson withdrew from the school three times, and between the autumn of 1944 and the spring of 1947 his record was dotted with incompletes. After his third withdrawal from Yale in June of 1947, Jackson did not return to the school until September 1951. During these years Jackson's job as a redcap for the railroad station may have interfered with his coursework. In addition, Yale graduate and close friend Tony Cacolano suggests that Jackson's love of women may have hindered his academic progress.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, despite his record, Jackson must have always showed promise, for according to Cacolano, Josef Albers, Chairman of the Art Department, personally asked Jackson to return to school.<sup>11</sup> After his reentry in 1951, when he began his third year, his grades improved dramatically. His undergraduate training consisted primarily of drawing, painting, and composition classes with occasional art history courses. Jackson's senior thesis on Paul Klee entitled The Element of Humor in Painting was completed and accepted in the spring of 1953.

The following autumn Jackson continued his study at Yale, this time pursuing an M.F.A. in Graphic Design.

This new artistic direction seems puzzling based on a knowledge of his undergraduate training. However, perhaps Gabor Peterdi, a renowned printmaker and professor at Yale, influenced Jackson's decision. During the summer of 1952, before his last year of undergraduate school, Jackson had the opportunity to attend a six-week workshop in the Berkshires along with twenty-five other students. In this stimulating atmosphere he apparently worked closely with Peterdi and would later give this professor the credit for turning him around artistically.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps this contact with Peterdi spurred Jackson to take his first graphic design course that fall and then pursue a degree in graphic design the following year.

Implying that Jackson and Peterdi were temperamentally compatible, Ken Daley, a graduate of Yale and one of Jackson's colleagues at Old Dominion University, calls Peterdi "very much the romantic."<sup>13</sup> A Hungarian born painter and printmaker, Gabor Peterdi (1915- ) studied in Rome and then Paris, where through his association with Atelier 17 he found himself in the "midst of the avant-garde movement."<sup>14</sup> Due to the turmoil of Paris in the years prior to World War II, Peterdi headed to the United States before ultimately entering the war. Vincent Longo writes that before the 1950s Peterdi's prints, based on his

experience of the world around him, were full of "uncertainty, turbulence, and despair."<sup>15</sup> The period between 1950 and 1953 became for him a transitional period from which evolved "a detached study of natural forces."<sup>16</sup> Peterdi himself emphasizes that his visual experience affects his art. Peterdi claims that one of his mistakes as a beginning artist was his attempt to "start with a general idea and turn it into a unique, personal experience."<sup>17</sup> According to Peterdi, "most of the significant works of art originated the other way round--a personal experience made into a universal statement."<sup>18</sup>

Small wonder, then, that Peterdi should encourage Jackson to use his personal experience to find himself artistically. The few student works available by Jackson suggest that the artist attempted an abstract style unsuccessfully. While prevailing tendencies in art of the late 40s and 50s were toward abstract expressionism or hard-edge paintings, according to Peterdi, Jackson was "always a figurative artist."<sup>19</sup> Peterdi urged Jackson to develop the style and subject matter which suited him best. In October 1967 Jackson wrote an article for The Virginian-Pilot, the local newspaper, in which he recalled a conversation he had had with Peterdi at that summer workshop in 1952:

I was at that point where I had to question my work. I had been trying to do hard-edge things in printmaking trying to 'do something with meaning'. Peterdi recognized the problem I was having and asked to see my portfolio. He looked the prints over, closed the folio and in his own special Hungarian Goulashian English talked about how one has to work his way out of these difficulties and how one must be himself. In so many words he admonished me to put away the masking tape approach and get back to the figure. And it was then that he said something that stuck with me over the years. 'Why is it,' he puzzled, 'that Americans do not talk about American things in their work like maybe baseball'... and he went on to list other things truly indigenous.

Ironically, it took this Hungarian artist to point Jackson in the direction of the American subject matter which would later become his forte.

During his years at Yale Jackson found another source of inspiration from a professor far more exacting than Peterdi: Josef Albers. Chairman of the Yale Art Department and renowned artist, Albers made his reputation primarily through his work during the 1920s and 30s at the Bauhaus in Germany. Operating on the premise that "less is more," Albers created an austere, sophisticated art from the manipulation of geometric forms. His well-known Homage to the Square series demonstrates the "hard-edge" style with which Jackson had such difficulty.

Ambivalence seems to have characterised Jackson's relationship with Albers. Reminiscences from Jackson's friends conflict on Jackson's perception of Albers. Tony Cacolano says that Albers was like Jackson's "guru".<sup>21</sup> While their styles were very different, each respected the other. Apparently, Albers was responsible for getting Jackson to return to Yale after he had withdrawn. A demanding professor, Albers exacted dedication from his students, not conformity to his particular ideology. Sometimes late in the evening Albers would come into the art building where each student had his own cubicle for a studio. If any lights were out in the cubicles, the following day Albers would ask those particular students if they had been ill the previous night.<sup>22</sup> While Jackson was not the strong disciplinarian that Albers was, he later expected the same kind of dedication to art from his own students.

Remarks from one of his colleagues at Old Dominion as well as from a poem written by him suggest an underlying tension between Albers and Jackson. Upon nearing completion of his M.F.A., Jackson was offered a teaching position at Southern University in Baton Rouge. He described his excitement at the prospect of a university position and his eagerness to share his good news with Albers in the

following poem:

I was really excited  
 about that letter  
 confirming my appointment  
 as a brand new, cherry teacher.  
 I met Albers on the stairs  
 and sort of stood in his way  
 naturally anxious to share my news.  
 We did that back and forth dance  
 he trying to get by  
 and me trying to hold him still  
 long enough to lay  
 this world-shaking news on him.

Finally, weary of this game he stopped  
 and listened  
 still moving in his special stammer step.

"Yah boy!" he whispered,  
 I cringed a little  
 (but, it being no time for a cause...)  
 "You have something I must know?"  
 His eyes were closed now.  
 I remember looking hard at his  
 pink and grey and white  
 and another-guy face  
 saying without words  
 "Jackson, now that I'm here  
 perhaps I will hear your important news."  
 An instructor in a large,  
 predominantly black university  
 in Louisiana--\$3,400 a year  
 big money!  
 His eyes now open--he shuffled a little  
 and said "Yah boy, make them want you!"  
 With that he feinted to the right  
 and moved by me to the left.  
 "Make them want you" sort of echoed  
 through Street Hall  
 and still haunts me  
 because<sub>3</sub> I could have asked him  
 "How?"<sub>23</sub>

This poem demonstrates that Jackson's feelings about Albers  
 were a mixture of admiration and antagonism. While

"naturally anxious to share (his) news," Jackson also conveys a distance from this "another-guy face" that condescends to hear his "important news." The phrase "it being no time for a cause" as well as Albers' use of the word "boy" for Jackson suggest a racial tension between the two men. It could be that some racial conflict marred the relationship between this professor and student. Instead of congratulating him, Albers urges Jackson to "make them want you," revealing in these words the kind of integrity Albers demanded of his students and himself. This friction with Albers may very well have been important to the development of Jackson's sense of himself and his artistic integrity.

After a successful two years of graduate school taking graphic arts and drawing courses, Jackson concluded his formal art training in 1955 and embarked on his career as artist and teacher. In the liberal environment of New Haven, he had developed from his parents and mentors such as Peterdi and Albers a strong sense of self. One can imagine the shock Jackson, unaccustomed to racial bigotry, experienced when he moved to the Deep South to teach at Southern University, a black college in New Orleans. Little is known about his year at Southern because he avoided talking about this period. However, according to Ann Dearsley-Vernon, Jackson found indignities such as separate

restroom facilities for "coloreds" appalling.<sup>24</sup> He would later remark that living in Louisiana was "like living in a foreign country."<sup>25</sup> After one year at Southern, he accepted a teaching position at another black college, Virginia State College (now Norfolk State) and moved to Norfolk, Virginia in 1956. A fortunate decision, Norfolk became Jackson's home until his death; here he found a subject for his painting and built a career.

Like his former teacher Josef Albers, Jackson developed a reputation as a dedicated teacher. At Virginia State he taught courses in basic design, drawing, printmaking, and painting. Former colleague and ceramicist Howard Johnson recalls Jackson as "very interested in his students."<sup>26</sup> Committed to the idea of "practice what you preach," Jackson later explained his teaching philosophy in a 1967 interview by Boston artist Sidney Hurwitz for American Artist:

As for teaching, I feel that a large part of what the learning process involves is exposure. If the young people are not exposed to the man who practices what he preaches, there are always the 'professional educators' hanging on. Part of the reason for my teaching is born of my determination to keep these people out. Don't get me wrong about professional educators...some of my best friends are in this group. The problem is that,



although these professionals have the ABC's to teach almost anything by virtue of their limited interest in the actual doing they fail to set a valid example for the student.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, Jackson served as a model for his students. Jackson's high expectations from his students, however, had its drawbacks. Former colleague Wilbur Chadwick indicates that Jackson often failed to "take the level of his students into consideration."<sup>28</sup> Having studied at Yale under "giants in the area of teaching," Jackson often applied a set of standards which his Norfolk State students could not meet.<sup>29</sup> His style of teaching inspired the self-motivated student but intimidated the average student. Nevertheless, Norfolk State administrators must have thought highly of Jackson, for in 1960 he became Art Department Chairman.

Not only did Jackson teach in Norfolk, but he also found time for his artistic career. It seems that the bulk of Jackson's work from about 1955 to the early 60s was in printmaking. Two woodcut prints, Woman at the Window (1955) (fig.1) and The Nun (1958) (fig.2) reveal the same expressive qualities Jackson would later incorporate in his Porch People. As a matter of fact, Bob Trotter, art critic for The Virginian-Pilot/Ledger-Star, calls these early woodcuts "vital predecessors" of the series.<sup>30</sup> In the



(fig. 2)



(fig. 2)

early 60s Jackson began the series of drawings and paintings which would bring him his greatest acclaim--the Porch People. Unlike his radical contemporaries such as Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, or George Segal, who seemed to satirize the banality and emptiness of Americans and their values, Jackson celebrated the commonplace. For him, simple people, especially those neglected by society be they black or elderly, deserved to be dignified in art.

About the time that he began to develop his Porch People theme, a racial incident sparked a controversy which suddenly brought Jackson both local and national attention. Although exclusionary rules for the Virginia Beach Boardwalk Art Show never actually existed on paper, it was common knowledge that the show prohibited black entries. Not one to provoke controversy, Jackson had never applied to the show or attempted to protest its bigotry. Several of his white friends, watercolorist Kenneth Harris among them, stayed away from the show for ideological reasons. However, in 1962 Harris was commissioned by The Ford Times to draw sketches of the show. So that Harris could comfortably accept the commission, Jackson determined to enter the exhibit and thus integrate it. The administrators of the event never answered his letter, obviously because they knew he was black. Art critic Frank Getlein covered the event

for The New Republic and wrote a caustic article denouncing the event's total lack of professionalism. Getlein remarks that the art show was run not by professionals but by "Ladies" who "did it all themselves and with unerring instinct embraced immorality, stupidity and Jim Crow."<sup>31</sup> Several of the better artists in Tidewater boycotted the show and Getlein points out that the show "...lily-white, dropped vastly in quality and created a situation in which next year's show, if there is one, will almost have to be integrated."<sup>32</sup> In keeping with his nonpolitical stance, Jackson ignored the request of his white friends to show up at the Boardwalk and invent the "paint in" as a form of civil rights protest.

While Jackson refused to identify himself with the black cause, he was far from naive about the racism which surrounded him in Norfolk. Frank Getlein described him as a "shrewd observer of the social scene" and revealed Jackson's astute assessment of the climate around him:

Jackson talks brilliantly on the rise of the Negro bourgeoisie and its underground alliance with Southern segregationists; Jackson, in his late twenties, feels he owes his own position to the South's determination to maintain separate facilities. In open, inter-racial competition, he'd never have<sub>33</sub> made head of the department at his age.

Jackson could look critically at his social environment while recognizing its advantages and functioning well within it. Jackson was well aware that he competed not among a large body of well-educated artists, but only among black artists. White artists with a background comparable to Jackson's would shun teaching at the predominantly black Norfolk State. Among black artists probably few could even meet Jackson's impressive Yale education. Consequently, the artist rose to eminence at the black college rather quickly.

Nevertheless, the racial issue at the Boardwalk Art Show may very well have been the impetus which launched Jackson's career, for in the next several years Jackson achieved acclaim both locally and nationally. In Norfolk he took best-in-show for Remnants Revisited, a montage in oil, at the Unitarian Art Show in March 1963. That summer Jackson finally became the first black admitted to the Boardwalk Art Show. In August 1963 his one-man show at Art Galleries, Ltd. in Georgetown drew critical acclaim. Both Leslie Judd Ahlander of The Washington Post and Frank Getlein, this time of The Washington Star, praised his work. Ahlander called Jackson "a traditionalist and a classicist," adding: His painting recalls Rembrandt in its use of dark brown tones, its rich glazes, its formal insistence on drawing....His graphic work is of great power, finely drawn,

subtle and expressive."<sup>34</sup> Getlein noted the "survival of abstract sensitivity" in Jackson's figures and then commented: "In the period of adjustment we are now witnessing, with American art pushing, sometimes painfully, beyond abstraction, it is good to see a new artist who has made the transition with power and meaning."<sup>35</sup> Jackson's work also impressed Washington dignitaries and government officials; then Secretary of Labor Willard Wirtz and First Lady Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson purchased several paintings from this exhibit. As a reminder of his experience with "Ladies and Art," the show included a painting of "two grandes dames in velvet and lace" which Jackson said, "represent(ed) the last vestiges of something I don't understand."<sup>36</sup> This painting alluded to the women responsible for excluding him from the Boardwalk Show in 1962. Ever the diplomat, Jackson commented that he had "made some fast friends among them this year."<sup>37</sup>

Jackson's next show in a major city occurred in Boston in December 1966. Bostonians embraced Jackson, whose one-man exhibit at The Tragos Gallery on Newberry Street included the Porch People series. According to gallery owner Stuart Denenberg, "Jackson's work is welcome to Boston. We're interested in a humanistic, not mechanistic art here."<sup>38</sup> University sculptor and painter Sigmund

Abeles commented that "Jackson fits in as if he lived and worked in Boston." Pointing out the humanistic tradition in Boston's art, Abeles said, "Jackson looks at man squarely, head-on. He gets to the issues in a very contemporary way, with a sense of the nineteenth century attitude and very current techniques."<sup>39</sup> Several people at the opening also praised the lights in his paintings.<sup>40</sup> Boston painter Sidney Hurwitz met the artist here and made plans to write an article on him which was later published in American Art(previously quoted).

While Jackson's artistic career flourished, his position at Norfolk State was undermined. According to Dr. Roderick Taylor, current Art Department Chairman at Norfolk State, around the mid- sixties the administration pushed to add professors with doctorates to their staff.<sup>41</sup> Tony Cacolano claims that Jackson's power as department chairman was usurped during a four-month sojourn to Mexico in 1966.<sup>42</sup> The following year Old Dominion College announced that Jackson would join their staff as the first full-time black professor. A letter written by Parker Lesley, Chairman of the Art Department, congratulating Lewis Webb, President of Old Dominion, on the addition of Jackson to the staff claims that this accomplishment was both "expedien(t)" as well as "academically fortunate."<sup>43</sup>



Certainly, during the racially troubled sixties the addition of a black professor to the ODC staff would only be a boon to the school's reputation. Whatever animosities existed when Jackson moved to the predominantly white college, one can imagine Jackson's irritation when his position at Norfolk State was filled by an art educator, Dr. James F. Wise.

Disappointment marked Jackson's years at Old Dominion. According to Ken Daley, Jackson was apparently promised an art studio which never materialized.<sup>44</sup> Impatient with paperwork and countless committees proposing a Fine Arts building, Jackson eventually ceased attending faculty meetings. At the same time, Jackson became increasingly unhappy with teaching. Throughout the 1970s Jackson found his students less vital, more apathetic, than those of the 60s. A committed artist and teacher, Jackson was bothered by student disinterest. In 1977 speaking at the opening of his exhibit at Roanoke's First National Exchange Bank, Jackson recalled a conversation with a talented young high school student who wanted to buy a Honda with the money he should have used to attend college:

He was surprised that I'd be surprised that he wanted to spend his money on a Honda. He said, 'Well, Mr. Jackson, I have to walk all that distance to

Norfolk State, you know,...' and it was about eight or ten blocks, a pretty rough hike.....He said, 'I can't be walking all that distance, man. I gotta ride, I gotta ride.' I said, 'Listen, when I was a kid I used to have to walk all this distance.' And he said, 'Yeh, I know, and you<sup>45</sup> used to read by candlelight.'

Underneath the humor in his anecdote lies Jackson's firm belief that development of one's artistic abilities should take precedence over immediate material gain. Small wonder that in the late 1970s the decreased interest in hard work and commitment on the part of his students caused Jackson to consider leaving the teaching profession and supporting himself solely as an artist.<sup>46</sup>

Fortunately, during the late 60s and throughout the 70s Jackson's reputation as a professional artist continued to widen. In 1968 he exhibited in two traveling shows, one sponsored by the American Federation of Arts, the other by the Smithsonian. He served as artist-in-residence for the Living Arts Center in Dayton, Ohio in 1969 and for Dartmouth College in 1971. He also had one-man exhibits at the Jacksonville Art Museum in Florida and the Mint Museum in Charlotte, North Carolina in 1970 and 1973 respectively. Who's Who in American Art listed Jackson for the first time in their 1972 edition. In 1976 Jackson participated in a traveling exhibit assembled by the High Museum of Art in

Atlanta, Georgia.

Although Jackson's Porch People brought him the greatest applause, he, by no means, limited himself to this subject. Another subject which occupied many of his works was his Man and the Wall series. In this work he communicated the alienation of the individual, again often black, in an unsympathetic society. Another facet of his work included a series of pastoral works, many of them inspired by visits to his farm in Rockbridge County. Aside from his Porch People, Jackson also revealed his love for the many different types of common people who inhabited his neighborhood such as Corner Man, Balloon Man, Market Man, or Wine People.

Ironically, although humanism characterised Jackson's art, destruction and torment marred the artist's personal relationships. Social acquaintances describe Jackson as a charming and entertaining man. The artist achieved celebrity status among art collectors in Norfolk, and many people still like to claim they knew A.B.Jackson. However, those who knew Jackson well describe him as "difficult to get along with," even violent at times.<sup>47</sup> The artist's bad temperament revealed itself particularly in his relationships with women. During the 1960s Jackson experienced two failed marriages. Little is known about

Jackson's first wife, Joyce, a woman he met while teaching at Norfolk State. Several sources confirm, however, that this marriage ended when Jackson broke her arm. A second marriage to a woman named Fay ended similarly. According to Mrs. Carlos Agnese, a close friend of the Jacksons during the 60s, Jackson became provoked after his wife left a party briefly with Mrs. Agnese to get some ice. That night he beat her so badly that she was out of work for several days.<sup>48</sup> After the breakup of his second marriage, Jackson never remarried or sustained a monogamous relationship. In the 1970s the artist carried on simultaneous relationships with two very different women: Ann Dearsley-Vernon, Education Curator at The Chrysler Museum, and Pat Perrin, an artist with whom he shared a farm in Rockbridge Farm. Tony Cacolano suggests that Jackson found these relationships a source of inner conflict.<sup>49</sup>

In the late sixties and into the seventies several other factors contributed to the deterioration of Jackson's personal life. In January 1970 his old three-story home in Ghent was flooded when a pipe burst on the third floor. Friends say that Jackson seemed unable to recover from this disruption; the water damaged numerous paintings. Waiting for his insurance company to reassess his losses properly, Jackson retreated to a single room in the house for his

living quarters. Occasional threatening notes from Ku Klux Klan did little to ease the tension in his life.<sup>50</sup> A chronic source of torment, the artist's asthma became more severe with his emotional turmoil. Charles Flynn observed that Jackson never went anywhere without an inhaler.<sup>51</sup> During especially severe bouts of the illness Jackson had nearly driven his wife Fay crazy by taking four and five steam baths a day.<sup>52</sup> Increasingly, he relied on marijuana to relieve his symptoms.<sup>53</sup>

According to Ann Dearsley-Vernon, art alleviated the tension Jackson experienced in his personal life.<sup>54</sup> The peaceful occupants of his Porch People drawings and paintings contrasted sharply with the conflicted artist's life. His particular interest in the neighborhood of Ghent may have represented a nostalgic longing for a quieter, easier existence. A turn of the century neighborhood, Ghent retained the community flavor often missing in large cities. Jackson once said of Ghent:

This is the most exciting place I've ever lived. It's always changing. There's a certain character about Ghent that other communities don't have....It's the kind of place where you see someone for years and never know his name, but you miss him if he's not there, you know? There are people here you just identify with the community.<sup>55</sup>

From this community evolved the subjects of many of Jackson's drawings and paintings, particularly his Porch People. In 1979 Jackson published his visual essay As I See Ghent. Acknowledging this neighborhood as a source of his work, Jackson wrote in the preface: "This book...is, in part, my way of putting a little something back. I gratefully dedicate this book to all of the people of Ghent--then and now."<sup>56</sup> The photographs in this book reveal Jackson's abiding interest in architectural detail and, more importantly, the neighborhood's people.

On March 23, 1981 two years after the publication of As I See Ghent, Jackson died suddenly in his home of a heart attack. At his death writer John Coit described the love Jackson had always had for Norfolk. "Tidewater held a fascination for him, even if at times it treated him with a shabby sort of ignorance...."<sup>57</sup> The following October Norfolk paid its tribute to A.B. Jackson in a retrospective of his works at The Chrysler Museum.

Chapter II. The American Neighborhood: Selected Themes from  
As I See Ghent and The Porch People

Throughout his career A.B. Jackson experimented with a variety of media and themes. His oeuvre included woodcuts of nuns, realistic renderings of butterflies, abstract landscapes of Rockbridge County, and montages of suffering Christs. However, one theme emerged continually in the 1960s and into the 70s: his love of the neighborhood and its people. Rarely did a critic fail to mention the word "humanism" when writing about his work. An examination of Jackson's photographs, writings, drawings, and paintings reveals a nostalgia for the past, an empathy especially for the elderly, and a disdain for modern "craft". Both Jackson's visual essay entitled As I See Ghent and his Porch People series demonstrate his appreciation for the old neighborhood. Although As I See Ghent was published only two years before Jackson's death, the book was a product of many years of seeing. In the preface Jackson acknowledged that Ghent was "his principal source of picture material for a long time."<sup>58</sup> Jackson used his photographs as a stimulus for his drawings and paintings. As a result, it seems appropriate at this point to survey the neighborhood environment as Jackson viewed it through the camera before looking at the drawings and paintings which it inspired.

Clearly, Jackson appreciated the architecture and environment of this turn-of-the-century neighborhood. One of the first arresting statements in the book is the contrast between a photograph of a nineteenth-century Ghent church, Christ and St. Luke's, and a bottle littering the Hague, an inlet which borders a part of Ghent. A closeup of the church facade shows three niches with saintly figures. The central figure, probably Mary, is partially covered by steeple-shaped canopy. This photograph demonstrates the importance placed on detail by nineteenth-century builders. In contrast, modern man throws his talents away on mass-produced items such as bottles which ultimately litter our environment. Jackson's accompanying words point out this dialectic: "A castaway bottle in the Hague suggests a craft of tomorrow in sharp contrast to a timeless Christ and St. Luke's just a corner away."<sup>59</sup> Two other photographs reveal Jackson's regard for the craft of yesterday. A photo of a porch railing shows the detail of carved wooden rungs while another draws attention to the scrolled and turned wrought iron of a fence rail. Jackson's lens focuses on ivy-covered turrets against a background of vivid blue sky, the gingerbread detail of an almost-forgotten abandoned home, or old stone arches embracing French doors. Stone columns flank steps edged with intricate wrought-iron



railing; beveled glass windows sparkle in the sunlight. Jackson remarks with nostalgia: "The charm of stone and weed and brick and ivy/Now almost second to aluminum siding."<sup>60</sup>

At times Jackson's visual essay almost becomes a kind of protest against urban renewal and modernity. Jackson captures the neighborhood in transition. Empty lots, abandoned or boarded-up buildings, bulldozers, and wrecking cranes characterise a chapter entitled "There Goes the Neighborhood." A floor is littered with discarded books, obviously a place where the inhabitants are long gone. An empty, weed-ridden lot contains a bright blue sign bearing the message "worth waiting for...A New Ghent."<sup>61</sup> A wrecking crane chews into the top portion of an old brick home. A bulldozer surrounded by piles of debris, lumber, and beat-up aluminum trashcans makes up another ugly picture of urban renewal. Jackson's attitude toward this transformation is evident when he writes "change cuts a swath."<sup>62</sup> Urban renewal scars the beauty of an aging neighborhood.

Beyond his appreciation for the environment, Jackson demonstrates a deep empathy for the neighborhood folk, especially the simple and elderly. Jackson respects the common people of Ghent. A photo of the West End

Confectionary shows a storeworker sweeping out the floor of this small shop. Jackson writes: "A comfortable blend of then and now is the West End Confectionary where a lot of people depend on Nick and his lady for a lot of needs. One of the few remaining corner stores."<sup>63</sup> He captures a pair of feet resting on one of Ghent's many outdoor benches. A lined black hand at the end of a ragged blue sleeve extends across one page palm up begging for "two cents".<sup>64</sup> An old man, steps unsure, shuffles down the street, packages in hand. "Sometimes you know his name...or her name--sometimes you don't, but either way you get to look forward to seeing them on a porch or as passersby."<sup>65</sup>

Not everyone agrees that Jackson's work was a deliberate protest against urban renewal. As a matter of fact, friend Tony Cacolano explains that most of the meaning in Jackson's work was merely "residual."<sup>66</sup> Jackson never consciously intended to protest urban renewal and had certainly demonstrated in his life a desire to remain uninvolved in social issues. Nevertheless, one can detect in his work and some record of his words a distaste for urban renewal. In 1977 he implied criticism of city planners when he recalled as a youth planning cities in rows of dirt in a nearby grape arbor:

Maybe I was destined to be a city  
planner. But I don't know that I would  
have a made a very good city planner  
because I really have an interest  
in people and I'm not always sure city  
planners<sup>67</sup> have an interest in  
people.

The following poem written by Jackson and published in  
the Retrospective catalog after his death also reveals his  
concern for those displaced by urban renewal:

The three men sat sunning on a once grand porch on a once-was house on a once-was street in East Ghent. The men were black but grey as the house was grey. They sat among the rubble perched in what seemed to be a familiar but somehow uncomfortable posture.

We said names.

A few words passed between us and before long they relaxed a bit and I relaxed a little and the language came easier.

The man in the middle of the three seemed anxious to talk about his neighborhood.

"I'll tell you," he said, scooting forward and rearranging a sprung spring with the movement "most of Ghent has went... over here I mean...this part of Ghent."

He drew a picture of where he meant with his arm.

"Do you know how many times I have moved?

In just the last couple of years I mean...

I don't mean all my life or nothin' like that... I mean in the last couple of years...?" He didn't wait for an answer.

"I don't even know myself, man, it's been so many times."

"Man this was a nice place...once. Tell him Truitt," Middle man nudged Truitt.

"Man it was nice," Truitt nodded.<sup>68</sup>

One can easily visualize from Jackson's words these three elderly black men seated on a run-down porch, one lamenting the numerous moves he has made in "the last couple of years." Through the voice of Truitt Jackson indicates a preference for the "once-was" neighborhood. Urban renewal has not only displaced people but has also erased the flavor of the community.

Jackson's empathy for the human and especially the dispossessed or elderly found its finest expression in his drawings and paintings of people. Because Jackson was black, many people expected a black art and a man of protest; these people were disappointed. Jackson's subjects were not radical; his people were not always black. Calling Jackson "a champion of the common man," Ken Daley once said that Jackson "wasn't the type of man to march in a demonstration. He was just concerned that a man be treated as man."<sup>69</sup> While Jackson certainly painted a number of blacks, he did not limit himself to this subject. An artist first, Jackson believed that his first responsibility was to his art, and not to a cause. Jackson expressed this belief in the following statement: "I must get through the emotionalism first before I begin to paint. It can be blood and guts and 'let my people go,' but for me the craft must show through and it must be done well."<sup>70</sup>

Jackson's draftsmanship and evident humanism are at their best in his enduring Porch People series. Jackson began this series in the early 1960s and continued variations on this theme up into the 1970s. In an article for The Virginian-Pilot Jackson explained his interest in a subject seemingly so banal:

I 've always been interested in houses that happened at or before the turn of the century....Of all the features of these structures the porch is the real focal point or center of activity. It is the link between the "inside" and the "outside". There is a kind of privacy and anonymity possible here as happens nowhere else--a ringside seat for watching the world go by....

...Porches and Porch People are of another age. You've seen it...a whole neighborhood wiped out by what some men label "progress". Well...here's something truly American going the route of the buffalo. The rich, warm architecture of yesteryear is fast succumbing to the slick bathroom school of tile, plastic,<sup>71</sup> and other such shiny, slippery stuff.

Sidney Hurwitz credits A.B. Jackson with giving "an existence and a meaning to what might otherwise have gone unrecorded."<sup>72</sup> Jackson was able to find the beauty and dignity of the "American things" to which Gabor Peterdi had made reference. As Dick Cossitt, writer for The

Virginian-Pilot, pointed out, Jackson could "rework the commonplace into idylls of humanism."<sup>73</sup> The following examples are only a few of the many and scattered works comprising the Porch People series; however, together they demonstrate Jackson's ability as a draftsman and humanist.

In one of the earliest works, an ink and wash drawing from about 1963(fig.3), five figures are assembled on their porch steps. A young woman, her features indistinct, stands on the top step leaning against the railing with her body and head pointed to the right. To the left on the next step sits an elderly woman with stooped shoulders and sagging breasts, her hand resting on a baby carriage to the left. One step down and to the right sits an elderly man who, detached from the others reads a book. At the bottom stretches a young boy who seems to be talking with a young woman across from him. Here Jackson has captured three generations of a family resting on their small porch stoop. Except for the two young people at the bottom, there is little interaction among the figures. Their attitudes seem ones of indifference or boredom; as Sidney Hurwitz points out, the porch people are at rest, not leisure.<sup>74</sup> Jackson captures the quiescence of a family whiling away a summer evening. Omitting detail, Jackson demonstrates his draftsmanship here through the figures'



(E84)

1870-1873



postures.

A graphite drawing of 1963 (fig.4) exemplifies a type of composition Jackson frequently used in his work: the montage. This untitled drawing depicts an assemblage of elderly blacks who are perhaps reminiscing about their youths as they rest upon their porches. To the left an old woman slumbers in her seat. To the right and comprising the central focus of the work are the head, shoulders, and arms of a balding, heavy-lidded man whose gaze downward suggests he is lost in thought. Below him is the faint outline of the head of a younger man whose similar gentle expression suggests he is the old man in his youth. To the right of the old man sits a black woman whose head is turned to the left as if she stares out over the neighborhood. The profile of a younger black woman completes the far right edge of the drawing. Quiet slumber and reminiscence, not melancholy, characterise this drawing. In contrast to the previous drawing, Jackson demonstrates his facility at capturing expressions with a minimum of detail. Each of the figures' eyes are cast downward or away from the audience, their expressions gentle and pensive. Jackson once said it distressed him when people found his porch people sad; he felt better when a "lady psychiatrist" recognized them as merely peaceful.<sup>75</sup>



(fig. 4)

Flag Day(fig.5), which appears to be a graphite and watercolor composition, departs from the completely quiescent atmosphere of the previous two works. Here Jackson captures the contrast between the quiet haven of the porch and the street beyond it. For the first time the perspective is from within the porch itself. Three members of a black family are assembled while a marching band, obviously in celebration of Flag Day, passes by on the street. The central figure, a middle-aged woman, faces away from the parade and to the left with a look of disinterest. Her body posture indicates weariness; a cardigan sweater partially covers a faded orange dress. To the right and closer to the viewer is the profile of a middle-aged man whose half-smile and gaze seem directed toward the event. Leaning eagerly over the porch rail, a young boy displays the greatest interest in the band. Jackson accentuates the contrast of the peaceful porch and the marching band through his use of color. The faded orange of the woman's dress is the only bit of bright color on the porch. Beyond the railing reds and golds suggesting band uniforms and brass instruments stand out against a vivid blue sky; the red and white stripes of a flag are barely visible. Flag Day has provided a holiday from work; the atmosphere within the porch is one of rest, not celebration.



(fig.5)

One of Jackson's most dignified porch sitters can be found in his 1965 oil and acrylic painting Porch Lady(fig.6). In this painting a large black woman sits on a bench or porch swing, her left arm stretched along its back and her face directed toward something outside the picture. A white apron covers her ample figure; a red cap trimmed in white lace covers her dark hair. Contrary to some of his other porch sitters, this woman's presence is commanding; she does not slouch from weariness but poses as if she wants others to notice her just as she notices them. As a matter of fact, she may have even "dressed up" for the occasion. Jackson once wrote of his porch people:

It took all morning  
to get ready  
in our Goodwill finest

and now...  
after endless shifting  
and nestling  
in a lifetime friend  
called chair  
we're all set

for

watching Sunday go by.<sup>76</sup>

Jackson's Morning Duty(fig.7) of 1973 demonstrates the more abstract style of his later paintings. The porch sitter highlighted by white hair and dress appears almost lost in the abstract suggestions of flowers and trees



(fig. 6)



(fig.7)

surrounding her porch. The brushstrokes are wider here, and forms are less clearly defined. Only the use of white brings this elderly woman to our attention. Interestingly enough, the sitter here seems to be of an upper class. Several large glass windows and a door with a glass transom suggest one of the finer old Victorian homes of the Ghent area. Jackson did not always restrict himself to common or black folk in this series. Apparently he found the elderly, regardless of their status economically, a neglected group of people worth dignifying.

The previous works are just a few examples from the series which brought Jackson a wide reputation in Norfolk and elsewhere as an accomplished artist. Jackson began painting the Porch People in the early 1960s and continued to capitalize on his success with this subject matter throughout the rest of his career. His critics suggest that he failed to develop further artistically but instead milked a theme which brought him repeated acclaim. As Jackson grew older and more troubled, his style became looser, his palette darker, and his subject matter more obscure. At times Jackson considered moving to New York to pursue his career; instead he remained in Norfolk where he could continue to be somewhat of a celebrity. Sadly enough, Jackson's personal conflict may have immobilized him,



inhibiting his creative energy and stifling the continued growth of his career.

### Chapter III. Jackson's Place as an American Artist

Finally, because Jackson was a black and an artist during a period of raised ethnic consciousness and racial strife, any treatment of him is incomplete without consideration of the term "black artist" as applied to him. Since the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s the creation of distinctly black art within the mainstream of American art has been an issue for black artists and spokesmen. Prior to this time black artists such as Henry O. Tanner had portrayed members of their own race with the same nostalgia as the blacks found in the works of white artists such as Eastman Johnson or Winslow Homer. In 1925 Dr. Alain Locke, philosopher for the movement, urged black artists to return to their African ancestry for inspiration; subsequently, artists such as Aaron Douglas incorporated African imagery into their works. Because the recognition of a black identity became an issue during the Civil Rights Movement, the argument for creating a black art became more heated in the 1960s. Jackson must have been well aware of the dilemma facing him and other blacks which David Driskell points out in Black Dimensions in Contemporary American Art: "Is he to be first an artist and second a black American? Or is he...a black American responsive in his paintings to the injustices, hypocrisies and indignities suffered by the

black man as a second class citizen?"<sup>77</sup>

Black artists have been split on this issue. In 1963 a group of artists led by Norman Lewis formed the Spiral Group, "an organization of artists committed to documenting the essence of the Civil Rights Movement."<sup>78</sup> Lewis and other members determined to work exclusively in black and white. According to Samella Lewis, such artists firmly believed that they must "view themselves first as responsible members of cultural groups and only secondarily as individual contributors."<sup>79</sup> Yet Richard Doty in Contemporary Black Artists in America points out that "many Black artists refuse to be subjugated to collective aims."<sup>80</sup> Artist Malcom Bailey, whose subjects often refer to blacks, maintains "there is no definition of black art."<sup>81</sup> He continues, "It is absurd to take a group of painters whose various works and concepts differ, and categorize this group as exponents of black art just because of their skin color."<sup>82</sup>

One can imagine that Jackson, who never committed himself wholeheartedly to the black or white race, would have agreed with Bailey's remarks. Both black and white friends of the artist confirm that Jackson refused to identify with the black cause. Black artist Wilbur Chadwick suggests that because of his mixed parentage Jackson "did

not attach himself to either race securely."<sup>83</sup>

Unfortunately, while he moved with ease among blacks and whites, according to Thomas Styron, former curator of the Chrysler Museum, Jackson "was denigrated for being wholly neither."<sup>84</sup> Yet Jackson, who once said "black is many colors," recognized and transcended the limitations of a particular racial identity.<sup>85</sup> This attitude, reflected especially in the Porch People series, elevated the message in his works to the universal. Chadwick maintains that Jackson "did a greater service for black artists" by superseding ties to a specific racial group.<sup>86</sup>

If one cannot define Jackson's work as black art, perhaps it is more useful to place his oeuvre within the mainstream of American art. Certainly, Jackson's drawings and paintings have important analogies to his American predecessors. The realist elements in his work, especially his renderings of people, recall the tradition of Thomas Eakins, Winslow Homer, and Robert Henri. One of America's greatest realist painters, Thomas Eakins found a subject in ordinary people and dignified man such as in his treatment of Dr. Samuel Gross in The Gross Clinic. Frequently, Jackson's urban themes remind one of Robert Henri's Ash Can School and particularly John Sloan, who sought out the banalities of American urban life. At times his work even

approaches social criticism as in his Ghent Guardians, his indictment of urban renewal. In this sense, he may belong tangentially to the social realists such as Ben Shahn and Jack Levine. However, Jackson's later paintings often reveal an expressionist strain. In a work such as Morning Duty one has difficulty discerning whether the elderly woman on the porch is tending her plants (as one critic has suggested) or merely sitting on a porch surrounded by foliage.

As a matter of fact, Jackson's art crosses cultural as well as racial barriers and refers to the European masters of the past. According to Ann Dearsley-Vernon, Jackson sought inspiration in Rembrandt and his etchings.<sup>87</sup> In several examples (Rembrandt's Mother, Jan Lutma, Goldsmith and Sculptor, and Old Woman Sleeping) one can detect similarities to the Porch People. The same focus on the head, the shaded or averted eyes providing a kind of privacy, and the preoccupation with age are most apparent. Of Rembrandt, Jackson once said: "Rembrandt was, for me, the master of saying it with very little--what he left out was the secret. The marks he put down were beautiful areas collectively. He sacrificed detail for the impression of a moment."<sup>88</sup> Interestingly enough, critic John Levin praised Jackson's work for this very quality: "One of the

most satisfying qualities of a Jackson picture is the large amount of unfulfilled space which allows its viewers to supply their visualizations of the rest of the picture."<sup>89</sup> Sidney Hurwitz recognized this quality as "the power of understatement."<sup>90</sup>

Thus, one can conclude that while Jackson was influenced by several different factors, his work ultimately defies specific categorization. Jackson himself was never a radical or extremist, and it seems logical that he would refuse identification as a black artist, a realist, or an expressionist. Friend and critic Dick Cossitt once praised Jackson for his ability to wed techniques of the past with contemporary approaches: "Beginning with an academic drawing technique based on the Renaissance and Baroque masters, Jackson has managed to fashion a personal approach that has the legibility and the elegance of academic drawing without the restricted and dated appearance which usually plagues it."<sup>90</sup> This temperate approach in both his life and work perhaps accounts for Jackson's broad appeal. From an art historical point of view, Jackson's accomplishment as an artist was in his successful marriage of black and white with past and present to create an enduring and universal art.

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A. B. Jackson, Sr.

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