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Black Women Oral History Project

Interview with

LOIS MAILOU JONES

January 30, 1977

August 6, 1977

Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College

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ERRATUM

Page ii, second paragraph, fifth line, should read:

School in 1923.

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## INTRODUCTION

In July 1976 the Schlesinger Library, with a two-year grant from The Rockefeller Foundation, began a project of recording the autobiographical memoirs of a group of black American women 70 years of age and older. The purpose of the project was to develop a body of resource material on the lives and contributions of black women in the twentieth century, especially in the years prior to the Civil Rights Movement, and to make this material available to researchers and students interested in the struggles of women and racial minorities in the United States. The project has focused on women who have made strong impacts on their communities through their professions or through voluntary service. Interviewees have been active in such fields as education, government, the arts, business, medicine, and law.

In the past the black woman often has not created a written record of her experiences, and when such a record has been created, it is not usually found in libraries or archives, the traditional repositories for historical documents. One means of attempting to capture and preserve such lives is the oral interview, which explores the influences and events that have shaped each woman's experience and gives her an opportunity to reflect on the past and to present her point of view on historical events. The interviews of the Black Women Oral History Project offer fresh source material that can add an important dimension to the study of the history of the United States. They supplement and comment on other sources as they examine the active participation of a group whose members were previously overlooked as being only shaped by historical events.

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Lois Mailou Jones (Mrs. Vergniaud Pierre-Noël) is a painter and watercolorist renowned for her remarkable creative ability and for her strong commitment to teaching. Her role, in the broadest sense of the word, has been to communicate - to further understanding between accomplished artists and novices, between cultures, and between blacks and whites. Her travels in France, Italy, Haiti, and Africa have greatly aided her in these causes and have constantly brought new elements of color and design to her work.

Born in 1905 in Boston, Lois Jones showed a strong interest in art from a very early age. Because of the talent shown in her grammar school art classes, she was selected to attend the High School of Practical Arts, subsequently winning a four-year scholarship in design to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts School in 1923. Her family spent summers at Martha's Vineyard and it was there that she met Harry T. Burleigh, the composer; Meta Warrick Fuller, the sculptor; and Jonas Lie, President of the National Academy of Design, all of whom encouraged her work in painting and design. In 1928 she studied at the Designers' Art School in Boston. After two years as head of the art department at Palmer Memorial Institute in North Carolina, she went to Howard University in 1930 as a teacher of art. As a younger woman she had directed a group of thirty girls in community activities. Now again at Howard University, she took her art to the community through the Saturday Morning Art Classes. In 1945 she received the A.B. degree in Art Education from Howard University. For 47 years, as Instructor, as Associate Professor of Design, and later Professor of Design and Watercolor, Lois Jones has taught watercolor, advertising design, and mixed media, always encouraging her students to express themselves in the various forms of art, commercial as well as the fine arts.

In 1937 a General Education Foreign Fellowship enabled Miss Jones to spend a sabbatical year in France, painting, exhibiting, and studying, primarily at the Academie Julian in Paris with some of the leading French artists. She was delighted by the French life and landscape, and strongly influenced by the work of the Impressionists, as seen in her paintings of that period. Her work was highly praised in Europe by many eminent artists, including Emile Bernard, who corresponded with her after her return to the United States. Before the war and then again in the late 1940s and 1950s, Miss Jones returned to France on an almost annual basis. A second grant from the General Education Board in 1938 allowed her to spend a summer of travel and study in Italy.

In the 1940s Alain Locke, Professor of Philosophy at Howard University and leader of the Negro Renaissance, encouraged Lois Jones to work with black subjects and to make her contribution as an artist to the "New Negro" movement. As a result, she began to paint black American social and political subjects, an important step, especially for an artist who had often shipped her work to exhibits or submitted it through white friends in order to receive fair judgment.

Miss Jones met a young Haitian student in 1934, while both were studying at Columbia University. He unexpectedly came back into her life in 1952, and in 1953 she married Vergniaud Pierre-Noël, the highly respected graphic artist. They often work together in joint studios, each commenting on and supporting the work of the other.

Lois Jones' first visit to Haiti, as guest of the Haitian government, coincided with her marriage and honeymoon. During this period she painted a series of works showing Haitian life and the landscape. In 1954, when President and Madame Magloire visited the United States as guests of President Eisenhower, a special exhibit of this work was presented at the Pan American Union in

Washington. Haitian themes continue to appear in her work.

In 1970 Howard University awarded Lois Jones a research grant to study contemporary African art. She toured eleven countries, serving as a kind of artistic ambassador from black America, and returned to the United States with color slides and a wealth of information from interviews with black African artists. She had first used African design in her work as a student in Paris, after seeing an exhibition of African masks in a gallery. Her visit to Africa had an even greater impact on her style, her bold designs, vivid colors, and appliques of the early 1970s being reminiscent of tribal motifs found in African decorative art and stories.

Lois Jones has exhibited widely in the United States, Europe, Africa, and Haiti, having had over 40 highly successful one-woman shows. Her paintings and watercolors are part of many permanent collections in museums and galleries, and other public and private collections. Her many honors include a decoration by the Haitian government in 1954 as chevalier of the National Order of Honor and Merit, and election as a fellow to the Royal Society of Arts in London in 1963.

BLACK WOMEN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Lois Mailou Jones



Lois Mailou Jones Pierre-Noel

BLACK WOMEN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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School in 1923.

INTERVIEW WITH DR. LOIS MAILOU JONES (MRS. VERGNIAUD PIERRE-NOËL)

Theresa B. Danley:

This is a record of an interview with Dr. Lois Mailou Jones for the Black Women Oral History Project sponsored by the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library. Mrs. Jones lives in a high class, upper middle-class neighborhood in a beautiful spacious home on a tree-lined street and with all of the modern comforts. The interview takes place in her living room amid numerous paintings, sculpture, artifacts from Africa, and other foreign places she has visited, as well as beautiful textiles. Mrs. Jones, Miss Jones, or Mrs. Pierre-Noël as she likes to be called, is of medium height, well built and possesses such a vivacious manner that she gives the appearance of a person who is forever young. The date is January 30, 1977.

Dr. Jones, we are particularly interested at this time about your family background. Can you give us some information about your parents and your grandparents?

Dr. Lois Mailou Jones:

Well, both my mother and my father were born in Paterson, New Jersey. As a matter of fact, they went to school together as children so that it's very interesting that they both were born in the same place. When they were married, they moved to Boston, Massachusetts, and that is where I got the major part of my education.

Theresa B. Danley:

You say they went to school there in Paterson. How far did they go in school in Paterson?

Dr. Lois Mailou Jones:

Well, they went through high school, both of them.

Theresa B. Danley:

And what was the reason for the move to Boston?

Dr. Lois Mailou Jones:

Well, I think it was really a matter of my father getting a position as a superintendent of a building in downtown Boston, 28 School Street, which was located just across from the Boston City Hall. He was a man who was greatly interested in politics and studying law. As a matter of fact, I now have in my collection his degree in law from the Suffolk Law School\* which he received when he was in his late forties. That just goes to show you how determined a person he was to get that education. I think you know of Cliff Wharton, who was the Ambassador to Liberia?

\* Suffolk University Law School

- TBD: He was Ambassador to Liberia at one time and also the Canary Islands.
- LMJ: Yes. Well, he was much younger than my father but they studied together and they got their degree at the same time. And so, my father had that exposure. Living in that downtown busy section of Boston, and I remember him coming home many times talking about ... "he'd had a talk with Mayor Curley." Mayor Curley liked my father very much and took him into his confidence many, many times and they were very good friends. And I think all of that exposure to those businessmen and politicians greatly inspired him to go to Suffolk Law School and to earn that degree even at a very, very late stage in his life.
- TBD: Was he a part of ... or influenced in any way by The Guardian\* of which William Monroe Trotter was the editor.
- LMJ: Yes. I know they were very, very good friends, and I know he was very much interested in the various movements that Monroe Trotter carried on in Boston and which were important in his life.
- TBD: And what was his racial background?
- LMJ: Well, there was certainly on the part of his mother, Indian, American Indian heritage, and African on the side of his father. I can remember his sister Rachel who had such beautiful long black hair. She could sit on her hair. She was a typical Indian, features and all and that blood runs through the family. On my mother's side it was Scotch-African and that was very evident in the features of my grandmother. She was a very handsome person.
- TBD: That was your mother's ...
- LMJ: My mother's mother. Yes. And then, oh yes, the Dutch blood. Jersey Dutch heritage was very strong on the side of my father. His middle name, as a matter of fact, was Vreeland, Thomas Vreeland Jones, and I can remember him speaking some Dutch with my mother on occasion at home.
- TBD: Did you know your grandmother?
- LMJ: Oh yes, she was very, very close to me. She lived on Martha's Vineyard Island. That really was her home. Every summer of my early childhood, and even beyond that, we spent our summers at Oak Bluffs, on Martha's Vineyard Island. As a matter of fact, that's where I first began to paint. She lived with a rather wealthy family, the Hatches, and as a matter of fact she was really like the mother to all of them, because she raised the children and they just loved her as a member of the family. She did the cooking and carried on all of the cares of the household and "Phoebe," we called her, was really a very, very important person in the household. All that influenced me because as a child they accepted me as a member of the family, and named me "Lois." That's how I also got my name, Mailou, which is my middle name - the family name which came down from the Moseley family, the Jersey side of the heritage. But the Hatch family were very, very fond of me and encouraged me very much in my art because as a child I began to draw

\* The Boston Guardian

LMJ: (cont) at a very early age.

TBD: Now what do you mean by an early age? Can you recall your first drawing?

LMJ: Yes, even at the age of three or four. I was given colored crayons and paper and I was always drawing. The happiest part of my childhood was to draw. And so, the Hatch family and also the customers of my mother at Martha's Vineyard Island were a great inspiration to me.

TBD: Oh. Now that's one thing. Your mother, I believe, had self-employment. Was it outside of the home?

LMJ: Yes, she was a hairdresser, and she had a hairdressing establishment in Boston with a French lady. And in the summers she did her work privately and had many customers of very wealthy families in Vineyard Haven and in West Chop, Massachusetts.

TBD: That's in Martha's Vineyard?

LMJ: Martha's Vineyard Island. And I think that also had a great influence on me because I was exposed to the luxury and beauty of the homes of those wealthy people who would receive me. I remember one family had a very beautiful home in Vineyard Haven and I was asked by the lady of the house to do a watercolor painting of the garden. She wanted this painting to be framed and put in her living room.

TBD: How old were you at that time? Do you recall?

LMJ: I must have been in early teens, probably 16 or 17. And I remember doing that painting, and then doing one or two other paintings for that family, so that I was at least exposed to the luxury of their living, the beautiful interior decoration and paintings and sculpture and all of those things, which I learned to appreciate.

TBD: Am I right in assuming that at that period you did not meet any particular racial prejudice but were thoroughly accepted on the basis of your talent and who you were?

LMJ: I would say more or less, yes, in Boston. That was the general feeling of equality which prevailed. However, I was annoyed as a child on Martha's Vineyard Island when my mother would go to give service as a beauty culturist to these people. It was a matter of her never going in the front door. It was always a matter of the side door, and if you were to eat, you ate in the kitchen. Those things always annoyed me because in Boston proper, going to the public schools, I felt really on an equal basis with whites. But there you felt among those wealthy people, that your mother, in a way, was still a servant and that hurt.

TBD: Do you feel that their treatment of her was different than what they would have treated a white servant?



- LMJ: No, I don't think so. As a matter of fact, they probably treated her better because there was something wonderful about her personality and she had a great influence on her customers. They conversed with her and they discussed personal matters with her and I think probably placed her on a higher plane than a white servant.
- TBD: Let's see. Let's go back then to your schooling in Boston. Since you lived in the center of town, I presume, what kind of an elementary school did you attend?
- LMJ: Well, I went to the Bowdoin School, which was in what we call the West End, and that was a school which was in a Jewish neighborhood. I went there, and then finally to the High School of Practical Arts, which was an unusual school because it gave me the opportunity to do special study in art.
- TBD: How did you get to that practical school? Were you referred by your elementary school?
- LMJ: Yes, and then I think I was searched out because of the talent that I seemed to have expressed in the grammar school. I was sort of singled out as a good prospect for the High School of Practical Arts ...
- TBD: Was there any particular teacher that ...
- LMJ: Yes. I was just about to say that Miss Laura Wentworth, who was the adviser for the students, took a great interest in me and also Miss Grace Starbird who was the head of the art division ... They followed me through my career for years. As a matter of fact, I was made Art Editor of the school magazine which was called The Shuttle, and I used to do the drawings for the cover. And then it was also my job to head up a division of designing greeting cards, Christmas cards. And that had a great influence, because later in life, as a free-lance designer, I went on with that work in that field of designing greeting cards. So that it was all a grand buildup and a grand foundation as a student at the High School of Practical Arts where I was greatly encouraged and admired by most everyone, the faculty especially. It was an experience which strengthened me for the work that I was to do in later years.
- TBD: Were you in school with many, shall we say, black students?
- LMJ: At the High School of Practical Arts there were quite a number, because they could major in home economics and those fields which proved interesting to blacks. But the school was predominantly white.
- TBD: Did your work in that time indicate anything that would identify your racial background?
- LMJ: I would say no. I was really an "American child" and worked right along with my white classmates and I didn't have any feeling of any particular direction of "blackness." Nothing like that at that time.

I remember during those high school days of meeting Grace Ripley, who

- LMJ: (cont) was a designer on downtown Boylston Street. She designed the costumes for the Ted Shawn dancers and the Braggiatti sisters. She heard of me as an outstanding, talented student at the High School of Practical Arts and hired me to work with her in her studio on Saturdays. That was an excellent experience because I had the opportunity to carry through and actually make the masks and the decorations for the costumes, which she would more or less suggest to me with a little rapid pencil doodle. She'd say, "Well, Lois, I know you can carry this through; this is what we want." And I would carry the design right through to the finish. If it was to be something that involved batiking or tie-dyeing, I could handle it. All of that experience tended to strengthen my work during those high school days.
- TBD: All right. Let's get the economic background. Was there any problem of financing your education?
- LMJ: I would say no, because my parents were all for my education and they did everything possible to give me the opportunity to advance.
- TBD: Did you get paid for any of those greeting card designs, or was that just part of your schooling?
- LMJ: That was part of the schooling, and of course the money that was realized, in return for the sales of the cards, was for the Division of Art. So that it was a matter of getting experience, which meant so much to me.
- TBD: Now let's see, you have a brother, I believe, who's considerably older.
- LMJ: Yes, Wesley is nine years older, John Wesley Jones. He was also very talented but didn't follow an art career. We tried to get him interested in dentistry, but the war took him so he joined the army.
- TBD: That was World War I?
- LMJ: That's right, yes. And then after that he served as a clerk in the Post Office as so many blacks did in those days. That was his work until he retired.
- TBD: He was not really a playmate with you since he was older ...
- LMJ: No ...
- TBD: Did he have any particular influence on you in your teens? Or he was away in the army at that time, wasn't he?
- LMJ: Yes, and then being nine years older, we weren't really very close. As a matter of fact, I was rather a lonely child living down there in School Street. My playground was the roof of the building. And I can remember going up ladderlike steps to my playground, and looking over all of the big buildings, the City Hall, and those office buildings all around the city, and seeing the smoke and the ... sort of duskiess, the greyness of all of those surroundings ...

LMJ: (cont) There was one little girl, a little German girl, whose father had a restaurant in the little alley that went up the street from School Street, and we used to play together on that roof. We built a little house up there, out of old tapestries and rugs, and used to take the cats and play with them and our dolls up there.

It was a very lonely life that I had. And I think that's why it meant so much to me to leave the smoky city and go to Martha's Vineyard Island as soon as school was over for the summer. I can always remember the great preparation of packing and shipping our trunks to Oak Bluffs to arrive there in June. What a joy it was to see the buttercups and the fields of daisies and the beautiful blue of the ocean. Indeed it was a great inspiration. I just fell in love with nature. That island is greatly responsible for my love of nature and for art as a career.

TBD: Did you have playmates in Martha's Vineyard?

LMJ: Yes, and the association there was just wonderful, because it was there that I met Harry T. Burleigh, the great composer of Negro spirituals, and Meta Warrick Fuller from Framingham, the sculptor. They were very influential in my life. I can remember Harry Burleigh meeting with our young group of people, Dorothy West who now is a very well known writer, and Thelma Garland whose father was one of the great doctors, my New York cousins, John, Tom and Emma Moseley, and the Dabney family. They were all children of very fine black families and Harry Burleigh took an interest in our little group.

We had some seven or eight who would meet with him. And he would take us off to the parks and the hillsides there at the Vineyard and tell us about his trips to Paris and to Germany and especially to Switzerland, because, he said, "That's where I go to write my music because I'm inspired by the blue of the beautiful lakes. And when I can't go to Switzerland, I go to Martha's Vineyard Island where the blue of the ocean is a similar inspiration to me." I shall always remember his advice to me when he said, "Lois, you know, you are a very talented young girl and I'm looking forward to you having a very brilliant future, but you're going to have to go to Europe if you want to arrive. That's what I had to do and am still doing." Take for example, Marian Anderson, she too had to flee to Europe. Meta Fuller said the same thing. "Lois, if you want to have a success, you've got to go abroad to study and Paris is the place to go." She had gone there to study and met and was encouraged by the famous French sculptor, Rodin. If you know of her work, the power of her sculpture, you can feel the influence of Rodin in her work. And all those things encouraged me to set a goal, and that goal was that I would have to go to France to study.

TBD: Did they use as an example Henry O. Tanner?

LMJ: Yes. Of course in the conversations with Harry Burleigh much was said of Henry O. Tanner, who lived in Paris and whose works were exhibited at the Luxembourg Museum. That was a great inspiration, and I began to think what a thrill it would be if I could ever meet him, Henry O. Tanner, the pioneer of black artists. And so, I set that goal to go

- LMJ: (cont) abroad to Paris to study.
- TBD: I gather that was in your early teens, when you set that goal.
- LMJ: Yes.
- TBD: I also sense that the fact that you were a girl made no difference, what they were saying to you, they were also saying to the boys who might have similar talents.
- LMJ: Yes, it was really the advice that they gave us in those days. It was awfully hard to make it in the States. It was necessary to go abroad. Emphasis was also placed on a Negro "to go that extra mile." And so it was at the Boston Museum School of Fine Arts, where I received scholarships for four years, that I had to work very, very hard because I was constantly "on the spot." I had keen competition and I had to go that "extra mile."
- TBD: Were they the teachers there at that school who were asking you to go that "extra mile" or was it your friends, your black friends on Martha's Vineyard who impressed that upon you?
- LMJ: Yes, the friends at Martha's Vineyard, Harry Burleigh and Meta Fuller did impress it upon me but I think it also came from within. The pride that I had caused me to want to be at the top. I had to show. And so it was at the High School of Practical Arts, and winning the High School Vocational Drawing Class Scholarship which carried me through four years of high school vocational drawing class study at the Boston Museum. I practically lived there because every afternoon at two o'clock I was excused from the Practical Arts High School to go to the Boston Museum where I studied every day in the week through Saturdays doing drawing and painting from those beautiful works, textiles and ceramics. I was especially interested in the textile division and I made many beautiful studies of the fabrics and the Oriental porcelains, the designs and the tapestries. It was really a marvelous thing for me to have had that exposure for four years before going to the Boston Museum School as a student majoring in design on a Susan Minot Lane Scholarship.
- TBD: I gather that your intense concentration left little time for any hobbies other than what your career was directing or for any social life?
- LMJ: You know, it's an interesting thing and this still holds true, so many people say, "Lois, how do you do so many things?" Just as my life is so full today, so it was then because I was not only a very hard-working student as an artist but I had great interest in community activities. I was the founder of the Pierrette Club. That was a group of 30 girls, a little younger than myself, which was organized at the League of Women for Community Service in Boston. I was the president and my mother was the club mother. We met every Saturday and we put on plays and entered competitions. They kept me as president for some ten years and I loved working with those girls.

LMJ: (cont) Even today, many of them are still living, and I receive notes from them and greetings from them. They never forget me and when I go back to Boston to see them, as I did a year ago, they gave me a wonderful reception and a dinner party and talked over those wonderful days that we had together as young girls. And then, I was a very athletic person. I liked very much swimming and tennis and I used to even play in tennis tournaments. I remember going to Hampton Institute and being a runner-up in the tennis tournament.

TBD: Where did you get to practice tennis? In Martha's Vineyard?

LMJ: I played with a young group of college students on the Harvard University tennis courts. We met in the good weather and played from 6:00 A.M. on ...

TBD: Now, was that a strictly racial group or was that a mixed group?

LMJ: It was more or less racial and we really worked together. I was also very much interested in basketball and was the captain of the basketball team of girls. We would play the preliminary games before the Alpha Phi Alpha team or the Omega Psi Phi team played. Those were all racial movements. I was a very active person in all of them, as well as on the swimming team, because going to Martha's Vineyard, I got to be a very good swimmer. My father was a very good swimmer who taught me how to swim. All of these activities made my life so full and helped me to be a very healthy person.

TBD: Did you ever go into competitive swimming?

LMJ: No, no, I never went that far, but just enjoyed it and was a great diver. I remember my cousins from New York, the family of the actor, Thomas Moseley, who used to send their four children to Martha's Vineyard Island to spend the summer with me and with my mother, and what wonderful days we had going swimming every day. We would meet daily at eleven o'clock for swimming and go on picnics and outings to Gay Head where we had such beautiful scenery. All was so conducive to my work, which began during those days, as an artist.

There was a little village at Martha's Vineyard called Menemsha, a little fishing village. That's where I first began to paint seriously. It was there that I met Jonas Lie, the president of the National Academy of Design. I was painting, doing a watercolor from a high point, looking down on the harbor because I loved to do boats. He was standing behind me and finally spoke but I didn't know his importance or who he was. He said, "You have a lot of talent, young lady." And he gave me a little critique on reflections of the masts of boats in the water, how they followed directly vertically and not slanting as I was making them, and two or three other points. And then he said, "If you ever come up to New York, I'd be very happy to have you come to the National Academy of Design and bring your portfolio, and anything I can do to help you, I will." I didn't take advantage of that offer as he died, not too long after. I think that was during the time when I was probably in my teens, 18 or 19 years of age.

- TBD: One of the things that the Project was interested in is your attitude towards the woman's movement. I gather that there wasn't any significance, or you did not feel any particular prejudice in your career because of your sex. It did not necessarily mean that you are particularly interested in any so-called woman's movement other than what you had with these 30 girls?
- LMJ: Yes, I think that was really the strongest part of it, working with the girls. My mother was very much interested in the club movements at the Center and I got much from her and her experiences working with the women's organization. She was a very dynamic person and really a leader, which sort of carried over into my work, as a leader.
- TBD: I have the feeling that the women in our race have always been very dynamic and forceful and they didn't feel any particular frustration in their efforts to obtain any sexual equality.
- LMJ: Well, I would say that the Negro woman has really been the strength and really responsible for the success of our family life. So much reverts back to the black woman as a significant force in the totality of black American life. We can feel very proud of her contribution to our movement of racial growth.
- TBD: You were speaking of your mother so much. Your father did not live to see the peak of your career but he still was very interested in it ...
- LMJ: Yes, yes. And he lived to see a great part of it, because I remember when I was finally on the faculty at Howard University, he came to visit me in Washington, D.C., and was so proud to know that his daughter was a member of the faculty. And then of course to come to Washington, D.C., the Capitol, and to go to Congress, because that was the first place he wanted to go. He was a very distinguished looking gentleman, and I can remember how proud I was to take him around to the many important places that carried over into his work as a gentleman who had studied law. And how proud I was to introduce him to the professors at Howard University. So that he did, even though he died at the early age of 61, live to at least see me arrive at the place where I was a teacher at Howard University.
- ... and so in 1927 I graduated from the Boston Museum School of Fine Arts and received a special graduate scholarship to study at the Designers' Art School at the invitation of Professor Ludwig Frank, a very famous textile designer from Germany. I took up the study of textile design and did some very interesting designs for cretonnes. I took my portfolio to such companies as F. A. Foster Company in Boston, and in New York and to Schumacher Company. They bought many of my textile designs and they were printed and sold all over the country.
- TBD: You didn't meet then any prejudice when you were presenting them in person? Was any discussion made or were you made to feel that you were unusual because you were black?
- LMJ: Yes, because I remember at the beginning there was a classmate from

LMJ: (cont) Georgia, a white student at the Designers' Art School, who offered to take my cretonne designs in her portfolio because she felt I would meet up with some prejudice. It was sort of pitiful because she would say, "Well, I sold three of yours, Lois, but they didn't buy any of mine." And of course they never knew that the designs had been done by a Negro artist.

So that there was that fear of facing the art directors but I finally made it. I remember going to New York and taking my portfolio to F. A. Foster Company. While going up on the elevator I saw on the floor, where I arrived to meet the art director, a whole set of furniture upholstered with "Ganges," one of my textiles which they had purchased. When I went to the office of the art director I mentioned that I was Lois Jones, the designer of "Ganges" which is on display on your furniture, out there. Well, he was really quite shocked; he just stood back and said, "You mean you did that?" And I said, "Yes." He immediately called some eight or ten designers who were working in the studios to come out to see this artist. And of course it was quite something to realize that a Negro girl had designed the textile. So it was really an interesting experience going around to the various studios. I thought I would like to settle in New York and have a studio and free-lance and/or work in a studio. To try my luck I remember going to a studio in New York and showing my work to the art director who said, "Well, you really have some very fine stuff here. Wait just one minute." And he left his office. I remember the windows of his office were glass. And I saw people coming one by one passing the window and looking in at me, some eight or nine artists they appeared to be, and then he finally came back to me and he said, "Well, I think we can use you." Of course, what had happened was that I was reviewed by the staff who decided whether or not they wished to work with me. Apparently I had proved myself and they had okayed me. Those were just some of the things that happened during those early career days.

But I went back to the Museum School to talk with the director, because I had been praised so highly having been the winner of the Susan Minot Lane scholarships and the first awards in design, and I felt that maybe they could use me. So I asked Henry Hunt Clarke, the director, if there was any chance for me to perhaps work as an assistant. And I remember his very beautiful cold blue eyes staring at me and hearing him say, "Well, we have no opening here, but why don't you think of going South to help your people?" Well, I was just shocked. "To go South - to help my people." If you know anything about Boston people you will know that they probably knew about Fisk or Tuskegee, that is the younger ones of us, but to go South was sort of, in a way, insulting. We had been exposed to Harvard University, to Tufts College, to Simmons College, to Radcliffe, but to go South to help my people was just something that was just not to be thought of.

But I remember going to a forum which met every Sunday at a community center which was called "464 Massachusetts Avenue." The Negro students met at four o'clock every Sunday to hear speeches and to have discussions led by important Negroes from all over the country and on this particular Sunday, the speaker was Charlotte Hawkins Brown. She was a great orator

- LMJ: (cont) and a most dynamic personality who mentioned in her talk, "You young people must come to the South to help us. We need you. We need you in the South. Bring your education to us." And so I remembered, "Go South to help your people," and I went up to her at the end of the lecture and I offered my services as an art teacher or to even build an art department as she said they didn't have one. But she said, "You're much too young. I don't think we can use you."
- TBD: How old were you at that time?
- LMJ: I think I was probably 23, a young person. But I finally got the position and I did go South to Palmer Memorial Institute at Sedalia, N.C., and there I taught for two years. Not only did I teach art and build an art department, I had to teach physical education. I remember standing up in the studio and giving an art lecture or a demonstration and then jumping into my physical education outfit to go out on the field for basketball. I also taught folk dancing and had to play the piano for them to dance and hop and skip around. And then I had to travel with the basketball girls' team which I had to take to Greensboro or to Winston-Salem to play in other contests and so on so that I was really doing several things along with teaching art.
- TBD: And also you were organizing the art department. Or did you have any help in that?
- LMJ: No, it was really a one woman's job and I think I did a good job. On one occasion I had invited Professor James Vernon Herring, who was head of the art department at Howard University, to come down to give a lecture for me. When he saw the work that I was doing with the students, he took me over to the side and said, "You know, we need you at Howard." My response was, "But I have a contract here." He said, "Don't worry about that. We'll get you out of that, but I want you in September." Well, that was a coincidence, because at the time I had spoken to Henry Hunt Clarke at The Museum School about assisting in some way. I had written after that to Howard University on the advice of Professor William Leo Hansberry.
- I had gone to a party and I had met this very handsome gentleman who looked really like a strictly Harvard type who said he was from Howard, so I began to think, well, Howard after all must be something. And then he encouraged me to write, which I did, and I got a very very encouraging letter from Lewis K. Downing, who was the Dean of the Engineering and Architecture School, saying that they were considering me to come to teach design. Then later I got a letter saying that they had finally decided to hire James A. Porter who was just graduating but that I was on the list, in the file.
- TBD: Did you sense that he was chosen because he was male?
- LMJ: No, I think it was more that he was a graduate of Howard and I think James Herring wished him to have that position.
- TBD: Getting back to the ... your contract which you thought about severing,



- TBD: (cont) you were being paid as an artist or as a physical ed. teacher?
- LMJ: I was really being paid as an artist but I had all those other duties. Even on Sundays I had to play for the singing in the Sunday School.
- TBD: How much did they pay you in those days?
- LMJ: My salary was \$1,000 a year.
- TBD: That's what shocks so many of these young people nowadays.
- LMJ: It's unbelievable. But of course that was not a bad salary in those days. Professor Herring offered me \$1,500 to come to Howard.
- TBD: Also, did that include your board and room?
- LMJ: At Palmer Memorial Institute the \$1,000 a year included the board and room. Coming to Howard, I was offered the salary of \$1,500 but that did not include anything other than salary and that was in 1930.
- TBD: So, in the sense of economics, you did not better yourself.
- LMJ: No, it was many, many years before I ever realized an adequate salary. I think being a woman had something to do with that. At Howard, the women were not really paid the equal salaries of the men, and also promotions did not come easily. I think I must have been an instructor for some, maybe 14 to 18 years.
- TBD: But you had had some experience. Had you gone overseas before you went to Howard?
- LMJ: No, because that goal that I had set, way back there in those early days, to go to France wasn't realized until I received a General Education Board Fellowship for my sabbatical year in 1937 at Howard University. And that was my one opportunity to go to France to study at the Académie Julian where I had a wonderful exposure to study under some of the leading French artists, Montezin, and Bergès, Adler and Maury. I also had the opportunity to travel to Italy. The blossoming of my career was the year 1937 when I went abroad.
- I remember when I got to the French Line in New York, to board the Nor-mandy, the wonderful feeling that I had the minute that I got on the boat: it was "French soil." I was treated so beautifully. The courtesies that were afforded me and the whole atmosphere was conducive to an absolute freedom. How good it was to be "shackle-free."
- TBD: How was your French at that time? You didn't mention anything about studying the language.
- LMJ: I did take a year's study before going, which helped a little, but of course, the progress was made while living in Paris for the first month with the Achille family from Martinique. And I might say that that was one of the happiest years of my life because later I had the studio, that I had always dreamed about, with the skylight which looked up to

- LMJ: (cont) the stars at night. I could go out on the balcony and look at the Tour d'Eiffel and across the city. And then the opportunity to paint at the Académie Julian and to exhibit my work, purely on merit at the Galérie Charpentier, the Galérie de Paris, the Salon des Artistes Français, which is an international competition. To walk through those galleries of the Salon and to see my work hung with the thousands of works from all over the world was an experience which really was the making of me as an artist.
- TBD: At some point, though, in your life, you changed your style.
- LMJ: Yes. I must say that an artist who paints from feeling oftentimes changes style. For example, in Paris, I painted as an impressionist, typical of the era. I was thrilled by the beautiful grays of the sky, the grays of the buildings, that sort of mysticism, that overcast of a silvery misty gray which is evident in my early paintings of the little narrow streets and the buildings. It was all a marvelous experience, in contrast to painting in Southern France, where the skies were so blue and the orange rooftops of the old houses contrasted with the greens and the soft tones of the olive trees. That "Matisse-country," down around Vence, Valauris and Saint-Tropez and Cannes, offered me a grand opportunity to express, as a landscape painter, works greatly influenced by the epoch of impressionist painting.
- TBD: On the economic side of it, did your scholarship, you were on sabbatical, help to cover all of your expenses or did you have to rely on financial help from other sources?
- LMJ: No. It was a very healthy grant and as a matter of fact, I lived very well, and the studio which I had was very beautiful.
- TBD: How did you get that?
- LMJ: I went to the American International Center and it just happened that two American artists were giving up the studio to go back to the States and they offered it to me. It was something that was just unbelievable, a Negro girl being offered this beautiful studio at Rue Compagne 1er, near the Jardin du Luxembourg - which had an upstairs balcony overlooking the downstairs area and then another terrace on the very top where I had a roof garden which looked all over Paris. The rent was \$50 a month which was a very expensive studio in those days. But the exchange was wonderful for the dollar so that I really gained a great deal. I had such success exhibiting my work that the General Education Board gave me a second stipend to go to Italy and I had the experience of traveling to Rome and Naples and Venice and all over Italy.
- TBD: Was that the second year?
- LMJ: No. That was the summer following the major part of the sabbatical year. I painted and sketched and had a wonderful opportunity to visit the major art centers of Italy.
- TBD: Well, coming back to ... have you finished all you want to say about

TBD: (cont) that year?

LMJ: Well, I must really pay respect to the Tabary family. You asked about studying French. Of course, as I said, I just took one course at Howard before going to France. But at the Académie Julian, they had given me an interpreter, Céline Tabary, a very fine artist, who turned out to be really like a sister to me, because she was the one who was to show me the best restaurants for students, where I could save my money, because I was eating on the Champs Elysées, and the director of the studios said, "Mademoiselle, c'est trop cher. Oh!" Then she told Mademoiselle Tabary to take me to the students' restaurants where she ate. So there I went where I ate potatoes and yogurts and things very different from what I had pictured in the beautiful restaurants of Paris where I was spending so much money.

Later Céline wrote to her parents and told them about me. Incidentally, it is very hard to get on the inside of a French family. She explained about the talent that I had and how she would like to invite me for the holiday to go to Pas-de-Calais which was in the North. I had always wanted to do some painting of landscape very different from those city streets in Paris and that would have been my one opportunity. And so it was that the family invited me for two weeks. When I went, I was wholeheartedly received. They practically adopted me to this day. Céline and I were very, very serious about our careers to the extent that we painted from morning to night.

Her sister's husband had a little car and he would drive us out to beautiful spots in the Pas-de-Calais in northern France - all around Amiens and Houdain, those sections where the landscape again was decidedly different. One of my most successful works entitled Ville d'Houdaine, which I entered in the 8th Annual Atlanta University Exhibit, sponsored by Hale Woodruff who was the head of the art department there, won the first award for oil painting. That was the year I returned to the States and received the John Hope Prize. It is still in their collection along with some seven or eight other award paintings.

I regretted not to have met Henry O. Tanner whom I had heard so very much about through Harry T. Burleigh and Meta Fuller at Martha's Vineyard. He died about three months before I arrived in Paris and that was quite a blow to me because I had counted on meeting him and receiving his guidance.

TBD: Had you corresponded with him first?

LMJ: No. I hadn't. I was just taking my chances on meeting him on arrival. I did meet Albert Smith, a New York artist, a Negro artist, who had gone over to fight in the war and after the war was over, stayed and painted in France.

TBD: That was World War I.

LMJ: Yes. And then he went to Spain. He loved Spain because, as he told me, the light is so marvelous. He had a good number of paintings which he carried back to New York and he walked the streets trying to find a

LMJ: (cont) gallery and no gallery would show his work. He grew very bitter and he went back to Paris.

TBD: Why wouldn't they show it?

LMJ: Because he was black, a Negro. You just couldn't make it in those days. So he went back to France and married a French woman as had Henry O. Tanner and lived and died in France. He was a great help to me in advising me.

Before going to France, Mary Beattie Brady, who was the director of the Harmon Foundation, had been very instrumental in following my career, especially at Howard and up to the time of going to France. I remember her telling me that, "You know, you've got to make a success, Lois Jones. We want you to come back with an exhibit which will be outstanding and you'll have to work very hard. Take your sketchbook with you everywhere you go and just sketch all the time." ... She gave me in letters, which I received while I was over there, advice, advice, advice as to how hard "you're going to have to work as a Negro artist to make it. You're going to have to do this thing."

And so, I remember Albert Smith coming to the studio and looking at the work and saying, "Girl, you've really made it! How have you done it?" Because I had some 40 paintings all around on the walls because the ceilings were very high in those typical Paris studios. And he couldn't understand how I had done so much work. But he said, "I think you're going to make it, but write and tell me how they receive you when you go back; I'd like to know." And so it was that I kept my correspondence with Albert Smith.

I did go back to the States and being a Boston girl I was invited to have my first one-woman show at the Vose Galleries. That was a wonderful experience because the Boston Transcript, The Globe, and all reproduced my work; they played it up. The Boston Museum School praised it highly and the critique was excellent. And so I was encouraged to return to France every summer until the war came and then after that for oh, 10 or 15 years. I would go as soon as Howard University classes were over. Immediately after Commencement, I was on the French Line on my way to Paris where I painted, preparing my exhibits for the year to follow.

For a long time, though, I shipped my work to the National Academy of Design. I shipped my work to the Pennsylvania Academy and the works were accepted purely on merit. I did not go to the openings to receive awards for some years in those late '30s and early '40s because the prejudice was so strong. I remember, at the Corcoran Gallery I had my work carried in by my friend Céline Tabary, who had come to visit for Christmas, on my return to the States. But the war came and she couldn't get back to France so she had to stay. It resulted in employment at Howard University where she taught drawing and painting and we had studios together and carried on our careers. We also carried our work to the children of the community through a "Saturday Morning Art Class," and we had 30 children who would come every Saturday from ten to twelve in the mornings and study with us. That went on for quite some time, until

- LMJ: (cont) her return to France after the war.
- TBD: Getting back to Albert Smith, was he successful, economically speaking, as a painter in France?
- LMJ: No, because he really gained his income as a musician playing in a nightclub. That was the only thing he could do. And of course, he sold some paintings from time to time, but he was never really too successful financially.
- TBD: Now, were you successful in selling paintings in France?
- LMJ: In France, it was a matter of exposure and of exhibiting. I really didn't think of selling at the Salon because I needed those paintings back in the States to try to put myself over competitively. Even at the Vose Galleries, I don't recall selling any paintings, even though the critique was very good. I gave one, I remember, to the High School of Practical Arts, Le Moulin de Fretan, a very outstanding piece of early work.

And then of course, to Howard University I have given two paintings, Green Apples, which is now in the Barnett-Aden Collection, a painting which was exhibited in Paris and which received very high comment because they felt that the artist was an admirer of Cézanne and that was interesting. However, I didn't know too much about Cézanne, but I did like doing still life, and that painting was in the Howard University collection until Alonzo Aden decided to have a gallery with James Herring as an independent venture. When he was leaving Howard University, he asked if he could take it with him and I did give my consent. So that that is one of the most important paintings today, Green Apples, Les Pommes Vertes, in the Barnett-Aden collection. But, as for selling, I can't say that there was a great opportunity and then too times were beginning to change.

Alain Locke, a very famous professor of philosophy at Howard, as you know, was very instrumental in promoting the appreciation of blackness and the heritage. As a matter of fact, I would say that we can say very definitely that he was the decided leader of the Negro Renaissance. I was exposed to that at that time and met Aaron Douglas, and Countee Cullen and all of that group in New York where I would go for a holiday or for vacations to stay with the Moseley family, my cousins there.

Alain Locke, on my return from France, met me on the campus and said he was writing a book on black artists and was going to use one of my paintings which had been exhibited at the National Academy of Design. It was of a street in Montmartre and he said that he liked the painting. "It is a good painting, but I wish you would do more with the black subject, Lois Jones. All of you artists have got to do something about this movement. You've got to contribute as artists."

So I took very seriously what he said, to the extent that I immediately went back to my studio apartment in Washington and decided to do a subject which would deal with lynching because we were having lynchings at that time in the '40s. I decided to do a painting which I would

LMJ: (cont) call Mob Victim. So I needed a model and it just so happened, I was walking along U Street in Washington and I saw an old gentleman, probably in his seventies, sort of a clochard looking type, wearing a long black overcoat and a sort of dark gray slouched hat with two guitars slung over his shoulder. And I noticed the expression of his bearded face, the expression of his eyes, and I felt that this man could be the subject for Mob Victim. I went up to him and said, "Excuse me, but have you ever posed for an artist?" And of course, he didn't know what I was talking about. I said, "Have you ever had your picture taken?" I thought perhaps he'd understand that and then I finally said, "I want to draw a picture of you. This is my address." I wrote it down. And I said, "Will you come to this address, and I am going to pay you. I am going to draw a picture of you." And so he consented, he said, yes, he would come, and sure enough, at the appointed time, he came to my studio. I asked him to take off his coat and sort of open his shirt and I explained to him, "I am going to do a study of you as if you were a man about to be lynched." So he spoke up; he said, "You know, I have seen a lynching." He said, "I worked on a plantation in the South and the overseer came to all of us and said that one of our brothers had committed a crime of thieving and that we were to get into the wagon and go to the tree to see him lynched." And he said, "We all went and he just stood there." And I said, "Well, how did he look as he stood in the wagon?" and he said, "Well, he just had his hands tied," and he crossed his hands, "and he just looked up to the heaven and fastened his eyes on the clouds in the sky." And I said, "Don't move. That is just the pose I need."

And so it was, and so we worked together. I tied his hands and then he took the pose with his opened shirt and took that wonderful expression and I did the painting which is now one of my acclaimed works, because it has been given the first honorable mention at the Salon des Artistes Français in Paris, and it has been exhibited from coast to coast. Just recently in 1976, it was exhibited at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in an exhibit entitled "Two Centuries of Black American Art," which was assembled by David C. Driskell who was the guest curator, and incidentally a graduate of Howard University and one of my most outstanding students. The painting is reproduced in the catalogue, and is one of the works which I expect to live on after me.

And so it was that I did a number of black subjects. The one that followed was called Jennie. One of my students from the Saturday Morning Art Class posed for it cleaning fish. It was purchased by the International Business Machines Corporation through the interest of Hale Woodruff and Alonzo Aden and was exhibited from coast to coast in all of the leading museums. From then on the majority of the paintings dealt with the black experience. My good old model posed for many of the most successful of those works and I found him to be one of the best models I have ever had. So, Alain Locke was responsible for encouraging me to do a series of works which really dealt with black life.

As you say, my style has changed. It is true. So many things have influenced my life. For example, when I married the Haitian artist, Vergniaud Pierre-Noël, in 1953, I became very much interested in Haiti. I have done a series of works which deal with the life of the Haitian

LMJ: (cont) people and the beauty of the landscape, as a result of an invitation which I received in 1953 from President Magloire. I also taught at the Centre d'Art in Haiti where I was their guest professor during the absence of Dewitt Peters, the founder of the Centre. The paintings which were resultant were exhibited at the Pan American Union in Washington, D.C., during the official visit of President and Madame Magloire at the invitation of President Eisenhower.

Some of those paintings that I did in Haiti are part of my collection of what today we call black art.

I might say that during the period after Alain Locke encouraged me to do more with the black subject, I continued to paint from feeling. I believe any artist who is really serious about their art must paint from what he feels within. I recall especially the march on Washington which affected me greatly to the extent that I did a collage which I called Challenge "America." It involved collages of Martin Luther King, Jr., and John F. Kennedy, President Johnson, and Adam Clayton Powell and the many, many others who had a part in that march on Washington. In that composition in the upper area, I went back to the heritage of the blacks and portrayed Carter Woodson, and Booker T. Washington, Harriet Tubman, W.E.B. DuBois, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth and many others, all in collaged effects, up through Josephine Baker and all other outstanding blacks.

Then there is an area in the composition which goes back to Africa and I have the collages of appropriate cuttings which deal with the peoples of Africa, and the vegetation and so on. It is one of the works which is considered outstanding as a result of using the black experience as an influence. Then still another, which I did after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, which I called Homage to Martin Luther King, Jr. It portrays in watercolor, the highlights of his career and it is one which is today on exhibition at the Martin Luther King Library, as a feature of the show which deals with Black History Week.

TBD: The collage, Challenge "America," is that on exhibit? Where is it at the present time?

MJ: At the moment, I have it in my collection, but it has recently been on exhibition from coast to coast. It is one of the outstanding works which deals with the black subject. But you know, some of the young people today, along with some of the students at Howard, seem to feel that the early artists, the artists of the '30s, avoided the black subject. They need to be reminded that there were Negro artists in the '30s who did deal with that black subject, like James Wells, Hale Woodruff, and certainly Aaron Douglas, who was really a pioneer in introducing the peoples of Africa and the beauty of the vegetation in his creative works and murals at the Harlem Branch Library at 135th Street in New York City. I also used the African influence.

I recall during my first year in Paris of working at the Académie Julian and doing a composition which I called Les Fétiches. I had always had a great love for the African mask. I think it went back to the days

LMJ: (cont) when I worked with Grace Ripley when I had to actually build masks in papier mâché. I made a study of the African masks while in Paris in that year of 1937, walking down Boulevard Raspail and, seeing an exhibition in one of the galleries of very unusual masks and fetishes, made sketches of them and went back to the studio and created the painting. I carried it down to the Académie Julian and the professors seemed surprised and remarked that "this doesn't look like a Lois Jones painting, how did you happen to do this." I mentioned that certainly after Picasso had made such fame in using the African influence in his works as well as so many of the French artists, Modigliani and Matisse and Brancusi, that certainly Lois Jones, if anyone, should have the right to use it.

But I just wanted to bring out the point that the black movement in painting is not entirely new because it does go back to the '30s when there were many of us who did use the black subject along with African imagery.

TBD: Don't you find a sort of relationship to that and the interest in the companion art of music.

LMJ: Yes ...

TBD: Certainly it went back to Africa ... Ravel and the others, went to Africa with the ...

LMJ: Well, in the New Negro Movement, for example, which emerged during the 1920s and centered first in Harlem, for the first time in American history, the black intellectuals, the artists, the writers, the poets, and the scholars, joined the musicians in documenting a positive sense of identity as related to their black heritage. And I can again certainly acclaim Dr. Alain Locke as the decided leader of the Negro Renaissance because it was through his efforts that he generated a new appreciation of Africa and ancestral arts. Even then he predicted that African art would prove as marked an influence on the contemporary work of black artists as it had on the leading modernists, whom I just mentioned, Picasso, Modigliani, Lipchitz, Epstein, and so many others. We can also consider Dr. Carter Woodson as a pioneer and a figure who should certainly be considered a great inspiration and a leader in bringing about an appreciation of the contributions of black people and especially the richness of our black heritage.

I had the good fortune to work as an illustrator for Dr. Carter Woodson, Director of the Associated Publishers, here in Washington, and I illustrated some eight or ten books that he published and also illustrated the Bulletin\* from 1931 until his death. And I think that, working with him and hearing stories that he would tell about the African history and outstanding events and the leaders, certainly influenced my work and even today plays a great part in the works that I am doing.

TBD: Wasn't he known in America as a black American rather than for his work in the African field?

LMJ: Yes, I would say so. However, if you look over the works he published

\* The Negro History Bulletin, volume 1, October 1937--



LMJ: (cont) there's much reference to Africa ...

TBD: Well, of course ...

LMJ: ... as a matter of fact I illustrated the book African Heroes and Heroines which he wrote. I had to do much of that research in Paris where I did a number of the illustrations, which I brought back to the States for publication in that book.

TBD: When did you become interested, directly, in Africa? Was it a first visit to Africa?

LMJ: As I said, I had a great interest in Africa and the masks, way back in the early thirties and it really blossomed into proving a great inspiration to my work. I received a fellowship, a Howard University Research Fellowship, to go to Africa during my sabbatical leave in 1970. I visited some 14 African countries and had interviews with the leading contemporary artists and made slides of their works which are now in the archives of Howard University. I put on file at least some 1,000 slides of the outstanding works in the museums as well as in the studios of those artists in the 14 countries. It was a marvelous experience and a grand exposure.

TBD: Right now it seems to be the in thing to do.

LMJ: Well, I hope to be going back to Africa in two or three days and even that will not be the last time, because I really feel that I gain much from going back and studying, as I do, the beauty of the designs and the richness of the art of those people. I feel it myself to the extent that I'm using it in the works that I'm doing. One of the paintings, Ubi Girl from Tai Region, which is now in the permanent collection of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts is a combination of designs from Zaire, Côte d'Ivoire, and a bringing together through my paintings sort of a union of Africa. I find that it's very challenging for me to do these creative works which really stem from the heritage and that's where I am at this particular time.

TBD: When you're in Africa, you're studying the past art work, what about the contemporary artists there ... ?

LMJ: Naturally I'm interested in seeing what they are doing and am still enlarging upon the collection of slides for Howard University by taking pictures of their works. Ofttimes I go back to the early cultures for my own work and get a great deal from the designs, such as I used in the painting which I recently presented to President Senghor when I was invited by the government of Senegal as a special guest, with several other members of the Howard University Faculty, to celebrate his 70th anniversary and to read a paper ...

TBD: Whose 70th birthday you mean?

LMJ: Of Leopold Sedar Senghor on his 70th birthday and also to participate in reading a paper entitled "The African Influence on Afro-American Art," at their colloquium, "Development and Culture," which took place

LMJ: (cont) in November of 1976. The painting I presented to President Senghor dealt with the theme of the African influence. It was rendered in acrylic on canvas and depicted his portrait, which was supported by the most outstanding cultures of Zimbabwe, Benin, Ife, and a tribute which I paid to the beautiful works of Papa Ibra Taal, who is the outstanding Senegalese artist. Then there were little inserts in the composition of The Island of Gorée and the slave house which is a symbolic reference to the torture and the tragedy which occurred there.

In another insert I creatively introduced in the composition a comparison of a Senegalese nobleman with the slaves at that time. President Senghor seemed very much impressed with it and of course understood all that I had tried to read into the painting through its composition involving the background of the cultures of Africa which are so rich, and then featuring his portrait as the father of negritude.

TBD: I believe you have a photograph of that painting that you're letting us have?

LMJ: Yes, and that will be in the collection.

TBD: And also a picture of you receiving the award from him?

LMJ: Yes, that was a very important moment in my life. He is a marvelous man and a scholar whom I respect highly and who I think certainly has done much to strengthen the black movement in our country.

TBD: Did you find there was any difference in the art that you found in West Africa and East Africa?

LMJ: Oh yes. Yes, there's a lot of difference in the design. For example, I'm exhibiting now through FESTAC in Lagos in Nigeria where the festival is now going on, a painting which I call Moon Masque which was inspired by the beauty of the design of Ethiopia. It's very different from the design which I have researched in Nigeria for example. The whole movement and the color is distinctly different and characteristic of the peoples of each source of inspiration.

TBD: I'm interested in your jewelry.

LMJ: Yes, as a matter of fact this is from Oshogbo ...

TBD: The bracelet?

LMJ: The bracelet. And also the medallion that I'm wearing. Oshogbo is in Nigeria where these untrained artists do these marvelous designs in copper and in brass in the lost wax method, also used in creating this medallion which is very typical of their work.

One of the Oshogbo artists who is very very popular and is known all over the world is named Twins Seven-Seven. He is the leading one, and is a very good friend of mine. I interviewed him for the work I was doing for Howard University and I asked him how he happened to be

LMJ: (cont) called Twins Seven-Seven and he said, "Well, my mother had seven sets of twins and I'm of the seventh set so I named myself Twins Seven-Seven." And so his paintings, which are accepted world-wide, are labelled Twins Seven-Seven.

My visit to Africa was really quite an adventure in contrast to my visits and the work that I did in Paris. You know, it was always the thought of the Afro-American artist to go to Paris. It was my first thought and also Meta Fuller's. But now, the artists go to Africa. We feel that it's there where we can get a great inspiration which will prove a great strength in our work in this movement which we are now going through. But I still must be very very respectful and grateful to the experience that I had in Europe because that year in France, for example, when I was studying in Paris at the Académie Julian, I met Emile Bernard, and that's an influence in my life which cannot be overlooked.

I was painting on the banks of the Seine and this gentleman came up behind me wearing a wide-brimmed black hat and the typical artist's black bow tie ... very distinguished white bearded gentleman, and he watched me painting for some time and finally he spoke to me in French. I was a little startled because I really didn't understand what he was saying. I called my good friend and colleague, Céline Tabary, who was painting not too far from me, looking down the other direction of the Seine River, and asked her to please come and tell me what he was saying. She came and his remark was that "It's so good to see an artist who is working seriously and not wasting canvas as so many of the artists are doing today. I'm sure she is going to go very far in her work." And then he mentioned that "You both are two very serious artists to do these huge canvasses. It must be rather bothersome to have to carry them - three or four times to the same spot at the same time of day for the effect of light. And to carry them on the Metro must be very difficult. Why don't you leave your paint boxes and your canvasses right up there in my studio?" And he pointed, just above from where we were working, to his studio. He said to leave them that evening and to have tea with him.

And so it was a delightful experience because Céline and I, at seven o'clock, went to his studio. I remember walking up some four flights of steps, and going into this magnificent studio which he told us had been the studio of the famous English painter, Turner. So you can imagine the thrill that we had. But we still didn't know who he was. But anyway, we sat down at his lovely table, I can see the white embroidered table cover and the lovely blue willow tea set and the little cakes, and we had tea together. And then he said, "I want you to see some of the Japanese prints from my collection." We went into this beautiful long salon studio and looked at some marvelous Japanese prints. I had always been a lover of Oriental art as a student at the Museum School of Fine Arts where I often found myself in the Japanese garden painting and enjoying the beauties of the Oriental culture. And so to see these prints was just a grand feeling. And then he brought out three paintings and put them on the easel for us to look at. He said, "Who do you think did those paintings?" And we both screamed out, "Gauguin." And he said, "Ah, non, pas Gauguin."

- LMJ: (cont) And then he said in French that they were his. And then he told a story, how he with Gauguin and Van Gogh had worked together in forming the French school of symbolism. But that ... Gauguin took his style and went to Tahiti and got famous on it.
- TBD: Yes.
- LMJ: So that it wasn't until some years later after the war and after his death that his son exhibited his work in New York City that Emile Bernard came into his own fame. There is a book which is very interesting, entitled, The Letters from Emile Bernard to Vincent Van Gogh<sup>\*</sup>, which of course brings out all that I have tried to tell in this little reference. It was a fortunate experience to have met Emile Bernard and to return to the States and receive correspondence from him and to have had his inspiration during those days in Europe.
- TBD: It's the recognition he made of your talent, too. Because I'm sure he never would ask the ordinary artist there, on the river bank, to put their canvasses and paintings in his little studio.
- LMJ: Yes, in his beautiful studio ... So it was really a great thing to have met him and to have continued with this friendship, going to his meetings with the artists and the writers and the musicians in his studio from time to time.
- TBD: Now there's one question I have. Because of your background in Haitian art, do you see in this Haitian art any influence of Africa?
- LMJ: Not directly, because the majority of the Haitian artists seem to be interested, especially the primitives, in portraying their life, their voodoo rituals for example, their landscapes and their various personages and the life of the peasants at the marché, and the marketplaces, and you do not see a great reference to African art.
- TBD: Are they also interested in their heritage?
- LMJ: Not too much. Not to Africa.
- TBD: No, I meant their heritage as an independent country? Their history.
- LMJ: Oh yes. Oh yes. Very definitely. And their paintings sometimes reveal that.
- TBD: Are they sending many students to France or to Africa?
- LMJ: More to France, I would say, than to Africa. There's not too much of a strong feeling with Africa. I generally give an annual lecture at the Haitian American Center, through the Embassy, when I'm in Port-au-Prince, and in showing them slides as I have recently been doing, of Africa, I have mentioned that "Haiti is Africa." I find there, as I go up through the mountains of Kenskoff and Furcy that the people are living just as they're living in Zaire, the peasant people, in their thatched roofed huts, with the chickens and the animals living right with them - it's the same as in Africa, the primitive life.

<sup>\*</sup>Vincent Van Gogh. Letters to Emile Bernard, trans. and ed. Douglas Lord (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1938).

- TBD: I guess what I'm leading to is the islands of the Caribbean and South American blacks, are they looking to Africa in the same way that the American blacks are looking?
- LMJ: I don't think so. I think our movement is directly related to Africa. Our movement in art especially ...
- TBD: So I think perhaps that means that we're in the vanguard in that perhaps since so many of them look to America, the United States in particular, it's probably true that later on, maybe 10, 20 years from now, they may be also looking to Africa.
- LMJ: I think ... as I said, it is my opinion that there should be an even greater relationship and closer ties among the people of the African diaspora. I mean we should share our collective inspiration by knowing and communicating the culture ... achievements of our people internationally. But for me, Haiti, black America and Africa are one.
- TBD: I would like to move on now to your religious background. And what influence your religion has played upon your career and your work?
- LMJ: Well, I will say that as a child, I was encouraged to go to Sunday School every Sunday from childhood until I was really in my late teens to the Park Street Church in Boston. It's a Congregational Church and I am a Protestant. That was a very serious thing for me and for my brother, to attend that Sunday School. And of course that carried over into my later life to certainly have a deep feeling, a deep religious feeling which has certainly come out in my work.
- I'm a great lover of nature and I commune a great deal with nature. Especially during those days when I was doing much out-of-door painting, on-the-spot painting, landscape painting, quietly in the hills or the mountains and enjoying the beauty of the skies and the color of the mountains. I would throw my thoughts out and review things that I had done, my life at that moment, and just commune with nature and get a great satisfaction from that feeling. Then all of that came certainly into play in my work, the beauty of the portrayal of nature, the colors, the textures and the feeling that I put into those paintings, especially during the period of impressionistic expression.
- I might say that being in Europe and having the opportunity to visit Notre Dame...to walk through Notre Dame and to enjoy the beauty of the stained glass windows and the reflections of the light through the church, and to hear the organ and to hear those wonderful chimes, and the bells which I loved in all of the cathedrals and churches, especially of France and of Italy. It kept me in a very good spirit, in a very highly keyed religious feeling, a feeling of love for my work, the love for people, because I love people, people of all walks of life. And as I've gone through my career, painting, especially out-of-doors whether I'm painting in France or Italy or in Haiti or in Africa, to be close to the people, especially the peasant folk, the poor people, means so much to me and it has affected my whole being and my whole life in making me, as some say,

- LMJ: (cont) a very sensitive person, a very sensitive painter. And to me, that's religion.
- TBD: In times of crisis, personal crisis in your life ... times of depression, for example, has that reflected in your painting?
- LMJ: Well, as I said before, a sensitive person would be sensitive to all of that and it's bound to have its influence although I seem to live above it to the extent that I'm considered a happy painter. I think when I'm painting I'm happiest. I may be painting a subject which has to do with something which is tragic, but I'm in my work to the extent that it's a sincere joy to be able to express what I feel and to achieve what I am trying to portray in it.
- TBD: You told me the story of what happened when you were painting and the physical phenomena which occurred at approximately the same time as your mother's death. Can you recall that?
- LMJ: Yes, that happened in Haiti. I was on my honeymoon and Pierre and I had gone to Cape Haitian. There it was very difficult to get any messages from Port-au-Prince because of the lack of being able to send a cable. And it seemed that my mother had passed and the word had been sent to Port-au-Prince but there was no way to get the message to us. I was doing a painting en route to Cape Haitian in a little small village called Carries on the Caribbean, and as I was doing this painting, I had a very unusual feeling as I looked up through the clouds, up to the sky, and out over that indescribable blue of the horizon and the blue of the ocean. It just seemed like the heavens opened up and there was a sort of a glow of something that just came over me. I learned later that it was at that time that my mother had passed. And all of this went into that painting because of the sensitive feeling that I had in portraying the color, a sensation that I will never forget as a truly religious experience while working, while painting.
- TBD: You just now mentioned your husband. Let's go back a bit then and talk about your marriage and your husband. You did ...
- LMJ: Well, you did say at one time, "Lois, you have such a busy life. Did you have any time for social activity or, you seem to have been such a busy person with your art career." And I did mention that I had a very, very full life but that I did have time for social activity at the right time, ...
- TBD: And romance.
- LMJ: ... and romance at the right time. While a student at Columbia University one summer, there was a young man in the class of design from Haiti, Vergniaud Pierre-Noël. He didn't speak much English but he was very much admired by all of us. He was tall, very keen featured, rich brown complexion, and a sort of crew hair cut and he wore very gorgeous white linen suits with a little black string tie and he was really a very handsome fellow. I remember him coming over to my desk looking at my designs and remarking finally that what I was doing was "very good, very good." And then he went on to say, "I am living at

LMJ: (cont) the International House here and I have been asking for someone to take me to Harlem and they have been advising me not to go and that the people are very bad and there is much sickness and that I must not go to Harlem. But I see you have a little car ..." (because I had a little T-model Ford). And he wondered if I would take him. And of course I was delighted and I said, "Why yes, we can probably plan to go this coming Sunday." I immediately went to my cousin, Hildred Moseley, the wife of the actor, Thomas Moseley and who was from Dutch Guiana and knew how to cook marvelous West Indian foods, rice and kidney beans and all those things which I knew Vergniaud Pierre-Noël would probably enjoy and so we planned the dinner.

I took him to meet my family and then we got to be very good friends because we had so much in common. We went to the art exhibits and we danced together because he loved to do the tango and he taught the tango to me and we went to the theaters and we studied together. And so we had a wonderful summer. At the end of that summer school, that was in 1934, I went back to my work at Howard University and we corresponded for quite some time and then finally, sort of broke off because I discovered that I needed an escort locally here in Washington, D.C., to carry me to the AKA parties and events. So I had a very nice gentleman who was head of the Department of Physical Education for Men to be my escort, Professor Arthur Waller. And so I didn't hear any more from Vergniaud Pierre-Noël.

However, it was always interesting, when I went to any of the Haitian Embassy receptions and would meet someone who had just come in from Haiti, I would always ask, "Do you by chance know the artist Vergniaud Pierre-Noël?" And then they would probably answer, "Oh, oui, oui, oui, yes, yes. The artist, oh very well, very well." And then I would really slyly inject the question, "Has he ever married?" I don't know why I did this, but anyway I would hold my breath until I got a response which was ... "Je ne pense pas, I don't think so, not yet." And then I would have a feeling of great relief.

At any rate the years went on and I remember my mother living with me at the time who would always encourage me in my work by saying, "Lois, don't let anything interfere with your career. You must hold to your goal. Do what you want to do, travel to Paris and work towards this goal that you wish to reach." But she finally got to the place, seeing me working so hard and having paintings all over the walls and exhibiting all over the country, to say, "I'm a little worried about you, Lois, I think it's time for you to think about getting married because you've got so many paintings now and one day, you know, you'll be alone sitting here with all the paintings around you and you'll be lonely. I think you should be thinking about marrying." And it really had a great effect on me.

Suddenly I began to realize that I guess I'd better be thinking as she suggested. And so, when I went back to Paris, that summer, I met Eric Feher, who wrote the foreword to my book, which was published in France. Eric was Hungarian and a very fine painter who had studied medicine for two years in Canada, a well-educated man. He had taken his citizenship in Paris, had a very fine studio, and was very serious as a painter. Finally he proposed, asking me to marry him. At that time the preju-

LMJ: (cont) dice in Washington was horrible. You couldn't eat at any of the restaurants, you couldn't go to any theaters, and if you did, you had to sit in the balcony, in the very back. I related to him the unhappy situation which we would have. But he said, immediately, "Well, I don't care. You'll be my wife and I know all about that, that wouldn't make any difference." But it worried me very, very much to the extent that I felt the only way we could marry was for me to give up my teaching at Howard University and to come and live in Paris. We were engaged and I returned to the States.

It just so happened that my mother called one day to tell me that we had a visitor, a young man who had an accent and seemed to speak like someone from an embassy. And so I remember coming down to the living room from my studio and seeing Vergniaud Pierre-Noël come back into my life. And there he stood, still very handsome, with outstretched arms, and taking me into his arms and calling me, as he used to when we were students together many many years past, "Mailou," my middle name. And the first question he asked was, "Have you married?" And I responded, "No, have you?" and he responded no, that he hadn't. And it just seemed that something just happened in my life, that meeting him was going to perhaps result in ideal happiness. And so it was. My mother seemed very much impressed with him and we had many happy times then during his short visit to the States from Haiti.

LMJ: He asked then, during one of our little dinner parties if there was anyone in my life, if I had a boyfriend. And I had to admit that yes, as a matter of fact I was engaged and that I would be soon going back to Paris to marry Eric Feher. And he suggested that I think about that a little bit more, that he would like to write, and for me to think a little bit more about him.

And so it turned out that I was getting ready to go back to Paris, and Pierre (I always called him Pierre rather than Vergniaud) went to New York to see me off. I promised him that I would write and so I did. When I got to Paris and I met Eric, I had to be very frank, to tell him that I couldn't go through with the marriage, that something had happened in my life and that I was making other plans. Because I immediately felt that with Pierre coming back into my life, that that was the happiness I should look forward to.

We were finally married, Pierre and I, in France that next year. I never had the joy of meeting his mother, and I remember how serious a thing it was to get her consent, because to marry a foreigner, an American girl, was something that the family hadn't had in mind. But that's the way it was to be and so we were married at Cabris, at the home of my very dear dear friend, Céline Tabary. It was there that we were married "civilly" and then at Grasse, France, "religiously" ...

TBD: That would be the Catholic religion?

LMJ: No, it wasn't. It was Methodist; we had a very, very beautiful ceremony followed by a grand dinner party with all my French friends at an auberge up at St. Cézaire. So life is something which can result in such a happening like this. You just can't explain, but some things



- LMJ: (cont) are meant to be. It is a beautiful life that we have together, because Pierre, who is now retired from his position as graphic designer for the World Health Organization in Washington, D.C., has joint studios with me and we have a most marvelous life together. I see his work as a designer and offer my comments, and he offers me his comments, vice versa, and it's just a beautiful companionship.
- TBD: It's not a feeling of competition?
- LMJ: Not at all, it's a delightful companionship and we both have our career and the careers culminate in a blending.
- TBD: I gather that your mother was quite pleased at the choice?
- LMJ: Yes.
- TBD: Did she have any feelings about your marrying outside of the race when you were engaged to Eric?
- LMJ: She wasn't too pleased about it because of the prejudice; the prejudice was so strong. And it worried her.
- TBD: Now, was she worried because of what she thought he might have to undergo, or was she worried about the fact that she might lose you as a daughter?
- LMJ: Oh, I think it was more of what we would have to undergo together. At that time, you see, we didn't have so much interracial marriage as we have now. She was very much accustomed, and I was too, to being with white people because we never really had a great feeling of difference with our friends ... white friends who would come to our house, who would come and spend weekends with us, and there was never any great feeling of difference. Just as it was with her and her customers. There was a certain looking across, a certain feeling that went on between them that didn't put too much of a barrier between us, you see.
- TBD: But I gather she was more than pleased that a certain amount of the prejudice that she thought might be there would not be there if you married someone of your own race?
- LMJ: Yes. However, there was a little feeling at one time about his being a foreigner from the West Indies ...
- TBD: That's what I was going to ask next.
- LMJ: She asked, "Are you sure that you know enough about his background to know where you're going to live and what kind of a house he's going to put you in if you go there?" And it was really so amusing, because I remember I asked him as a student when we were together at Columbia, "Pierre, do you have any pictures of your house where you are living in Haiti?", because my mother had asked me that question very seriously. He said, "Picture of my house? I think I can show you one." And when he showed me the picture of his house, it was so beautiful. It was naturally a typical Haitian house with that typical gingerbread architecture, but with the beautiful bougainvillea vines and flowers

LMJ: (cont) surrounding it. It was really a very lovely homestead. And I told my mother that he had a very nice house with beautiful gardens and palm trees around it.

Then it was very interesting, I remember asking Pierre about the food. I said, "What sort of food do you eat in Haiti?" "Oh," he said, "the food that we eat? Well, we have chicken and rice; the main diet is that." I said, "What is your kitchen like?" And he said, "The kitchen? Why I never see my kitchen. The cooks cook out-of-doors. They have a native kitchen and they cook over charcoal. I never see my kitchen." So all of this was so funny when I was relating it to my mother, that "You know, he's never seen his kitchen!" And then of course, it all went back to, "Well you have servants in Haiti." That is, he had certainly four or five servants running around him which was something we never had.

So that it all was a great revelation when I finally went to Haiti as a guest of the government. It coincided with my honeymoon, and my marriage to Pierre. I'll never forget the reception of his family when I arrived. Of course, I was given a suite at the ... one of the major hotels, the Ibo-Lele Hotel in Petionville, a very beautiful hotel. And I had mentioned to President Magloire that I had just married and I really wished to be with my husband, and he said, "Oh, that's no problem. We'll arrange for your husband to be with you in your suite." And so it was.

But I still had to be received by the Pierre-Noël family, and I remember that first evening, when I entered the grand living room and his step-father, Monsieur Cadet Jeremie, was seated at the head of a semicircle of all the family, and I had to go in and very formally sit down in this circle and be introduced. Then Père Jeremie, as he was called, got up and made a long speech about his son marrying Lois Jones, the artist from Boston, Massachusetts. And then I was asked to make a speech, which I did in English, and then Pierre had to make a speech, after which we all had champagne and then the dinner party was announced.

It really was most formal. I had never experienced anything like that in Boston, Massachusetts, with all of our culture that we are so proud of. But that was my introduction to Haiti.

TBD: Did you get the feeling that the Haitian people would have preferred him to marry a Haitian?

LMJ: Oh yes, yes. I felt that they would have.

TBD: But the fact that you were a well-known artist sort of covered up ... your ...

LMJ: It certainly did.

TBD: ... your lack of Haitian heritage.

LMJ: ... and my love for painting in Haiti and my great love for the Haitian people. So that I think that made up for it. Yes.

- TBD: Let's give a little bit about his heritage. You said he was a, was it the grandson, of one of the Presidents of Haiti?
- LMJ: Yes, as a matter of fact, his stepfather was the great-great-grandson of DuSable. It was DuSable who discovered Chicago ...
- TBD: One of the founders of the city of Chicago ...
- LMJ: Yes, one of the founders of the city of Chicago.
- TBD: Quite famous in Chicago. There's a high school named that.
- LMJ: Yes, the DuSable High School ...
- TBD: Located on the South Side.
- LMJ: His father was even President of Haiti for several months during his career. He was the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court there and had even gone to Rome and been received by the Pope. He has several books to his credit and is very well known and loved in Haiti for his very philanthropic life, because he gave much of his land (he was very Catholic) to the priests for the building of schools and churches in Haiti.
- TBD: That brings up the religious question. Is Pierre Catholic?
- LMJ: No, he isn't. He's Methodist.
- TBD: So, therefore, there was no problem ...?
- LMJ: As far as religious background, no, no.
- TBD: The Haitian government didn't demand a Catholic marriage?
- LMJ: No.
- TBD: Let's move on now to your membership in professional groups, sororities, whichever you think is most important to you.
- LMJ: Well, I am a member of the Art Directors Club of Washington, D.C., which of course is an asset as a professor at Howard University, who is training students in advertising design. To have those contacts means a great deal to me and to them. To invite those leading art directors, most of them white, here in the City, to come and talk to students and to give them advice is excellent guidance. And then the Washington Society of Artists, a society which took me in as the first black member in the '30s. The Washington Watercolor Association. As a professor of watercolor painting at Howard University, it is very, very helpful for me to be a member of that organization, which affords the students opportunities to have lectures given by many of the members and also to go to their exhibits. All of those contacts sort of tie in with my work and my teaching at Howard. Another valuable association is the Royal Society of Arts of London, England, which elected me a member in 1963.

TBD: I believe you're also a member of the Board of Directors of a museum in Boston where you're required to attend meetings once a month?

LMJ: Yes. We're establishing a new museum, the Museum of the National Center of Afro-American Artists, and Barry Gaither is the curator. And I might say that he's also a special consultant on the staff of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. I wish to pay tribute to Barry because he organized one of my major exhibits of my career which was a retrospective of 40 years of painting which he called "Reflective Moments." That exhibit, which took place March 11 through April 15, 1973, at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, was certainly to be considered the most important show of all of my exhibitions. I showed 89 works and the Trustees of the Museum put it on record as having been one of the most popular exhibits that they've had in many years because of the educational aspect which permitted 26,900 visitors to walk through the life of an artist.

It showed the works I had done at the Museum School of Fine Arts through the days which I spent in Paris, and then on to the period which took place during the war when I couldn't go back to France and I had to work in New England, at Menemsha, and did also a number of creative works dealing with circus themes and also still life. And then the period which was inspired by Alain Locke, which is the black period, making use of the black experiences, then marrying Vergniaud Pierre-Noël, the very distinguished Haitian artist, and doing a series of works in Haiti dealing with the life of the people, the beauty of the vegetation along with the use of the voodoo symbols, the vèvè, and the study that I made of those rituals. Finally, the African period in which I am working so seriously through now and which is resultant from my years of research in Africa in 1970 through 1972, and recently '77. And so that exhibit was one of the most important shows of my career, which was realized due to the efforts of Barry Gaither.

I'm also a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority and have been since 1930. They have recently commissioned me to design the stained glass window for the Rankin Memorial Chapel at Howard University, which will commemorate the founders of the sorority. I have completed the design and it is now being carried through its craftsmanship stages for the placement and presentation which should take place in a very important ceremony in February of 1978.

TBD: Now, you have so many awards and honors which you have mentioned time and time, is there some that stand out most significantly or that you have failed to mention?

LMJ: Well, I'm very proud of the awards, the several awards that I've won, among them at Atlanta University the John Hope Award for Landscape Painting in 1949, during those days when Hale Woodruff gave exposure to the black artists for their works during those days of 1930 and 1940, when we really didn't have galleries where we could show our work. The Robert Woods Bliss Award for Landscape Painting at the Corcoran Gallery, Washington, D.C., in 1941. And then also to have received a very important award which was given to me by the Pyramid Club of Philadelphia in 1957, followed by the first Luban Watercolor Award of

LMJ: (cont) which I am very proud and which was given to me in 1958 for a painting that I did in Haiti, Barques de Pêcheurs, Haiti, a very, very striking watercolor. And then another award which I received in 1962 given by Franz Bader, a very outstanding collector and promoter of artists here in Washington, D.C., for an oil painting, Peasants on Parade. That painting was recently exhibited for two years in Dar es Salaam.

And of course there've been so many awards ... one that I feel very happy about which I received in 1966 at the Salon des Artistes Français, Paris, France, which was a first honorable mention for Mob Victim, one of the early paintings, which the director of the Galerie Soulanges, where I had a one-woman show in 1966, decided to put in that exhibit. Of course the exhibit which opened in February in 1966 at the Galerie Soulanges was quite a highlight in my career, because the very famous director of the Odéon Theatre of France, Monsieur Jean-Louis Barrault, was the guest of honor. André Malraux, who was the Minister of Culture, selected three of the paintings in that exhibit for a showing on television all over France, so that it was really quite an achievement to have that exposure and to have publicized the opening of my Paris exhibit.

Another outstanding occasion was the award I received from the Barristers' Wives of New York, Inc., in 1971, as they stated, "For your rich and indelible contribution to the world of art, we salute you." That took place at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City with Hale Woodruff, my colleague, who received also that honor. In 1953 I was awarded the "Diplome and Décoration de l'Ordre National, Honneur et Mérite au Grade de Chevalier," by the Government of Haiti.

The Alain Locke award was given to me in 1972 out at Cleveland State University and in 1973 I was awarded an honorary doctorate in philosophy by Colorado State Christian College, which is also among those several awards which I have received.

Many of my paintings are in important collections, fortunately, at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, at the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C., the International Business Machines Corporation, Howard University Gallery of Art. Palais National in Haiti has at least five of my paintings and the Barnett-Aden Gallery of Washington has three of my works. Brooklyn Museum, the Rosenwald Foundation of Chicago, the University of Panjab in Pakistan and the International Fair Gallery in Ismir, Turkey. The Walker Art Museum at Bowdoin College, Maine, has one of my watercolors which was given by Elliot O'Hara, a very close friend of mine and outstanding American watercolorist, who worked with me at Howard University by giving lectures to my classes in watercolor painting. And then also at the American Embassy, Luxembourg, and the Galerie International in New York City. And, most recently, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts which has acquired one of my major works from my series of African inspired paintings.

TBD: That is really an impressive list. You're very fortunate to have that kind of recognition throughout the world. There are not many people who can enjoy that.

- LMJ: I might say it's been really a rich career and I'm still enjoying it and I just hope that I can continue ...
- TBD: Continue ...
- LMJ: ... because, as I tell my students, a career calls for work. The greater part of it is work along with what talent you have.
- TBD: But it's one of the things that keeps you youthful.
- LMJ: Definitely so. And I might say that to retire this coming May, that is to formally retire, because I retired three years ago, I just have a fear of leaving those young people because they have kept me young and I think the spirit of working with them, the exchange of ideas has been greatly responsible for at least my well-being, as you see me today.
- TBD: I have a feeling that maybe you'll retire from Howard University, but you're not retiring from life, and that you perhaps will be more selective in the kinds of students that you accept and you can dictate your own time.
- LMJ: That's wonderful as a thought and I shall remember that. But my time will be spent chiefly painting in my studios in Haiti or in Washington along with travel to France and other countries.
- TBD: Now, anything more you want to add?
- LMJ: You may add these selected bibliographical references.

[The bibliography has been added as an Appendix.]

## INTERVIEW WITH DR. LOIS MAILOU JONES (MRS. VERGNIAUD PIERRE-NOËL)

Theresa B. Danley:

This is an interview with Lois Jones Pierre-Noël, with Theresa Danley as the interviewer. The date is August 6, 1977, on a very hot afternoon. This is more or less a continuation of the previous interview, held last January. It's amazing, six months have passed.

Dr. Lois Mailou Jones:

It has, it's true.

Theresa B. Danley:

Well, we're now interested in what happened to you in the past six months, something very exciting, another trip to Africa. In particular, we want to know about your previous trips and your relationship with the African countries. When was the first time you visited Africa and why?

Dr. Lois Mailou Jones:

It was in 1970 when I had my sabbatical leave from Howard University. I received a Howard University research grant to make a study of the contemporary art in eleven African countries. This involved the making of slides and having interviews with the artists. The resulting material was to be put on file in the archives at Howard University. I spent four months in Africa, visiting Ethiopia, Sudan, Kenya, Zaire, Nigeria, Dahomey, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Senegal. It was a marvelous opportunity to meet the artists, to see their works and to make color slides of their most important works. Certainly the documents and slides would be excellent for the Black Studies programs which we are featuring and promoting at Howard University. The first thing that I did when I entered a country was to go to the USIS center and ask them to let me see their file on contemporary African artists in order to compare their listing of artists with the research I had done in the States. When they found out, however, that I was a professor from Howard University, they immediately asked if I would give them a lecture on Afro-American artists. I was prepared, and had my slides in readiness so that the lectures were presented in all but two of the countries which I visited. In that way, the artists came out to my lectures and I was able to make the personal contact with them which resulted in visits to their studios.

Theresa B. Danley:

It was also a time-saving device too, because if you didn't have the assistance of the USIS, you would have to explore it all on your own time, and

TBD: (cont) that would have taken you twice the time.

LMJ: It would have been quite a task, so it was really time-saving and then too it was a way to bring the people in the community out to the lectures and to acquaint them with what we are doing here, in the States, especially in the Black Art movement. Among those artists, I had the grand pleasure of meeting Afewerk Tekle in Ethiopia, which was my first stop. I had met him in the States, five or six years ago, previous to my trip there. I had a very interesting visit to his studio. At that time he was living in sort of a chateau, truly a little palace. Those days were the good days in Ethiopia, when the living was peaceful and pleasant. Tekle was like a son to Haile Selassie and was treated as one. As a matter of fact he was the court artist, and was given the main assignments to do the portraits of selected people in the palace and to do the murals in the principal buildings of the country. The stained glass windows which he did in Africa Hall were beautiful. Rich in color and design, on a theme representing the past, the present and the future.

TBD: Africa Hall, where?

LMJ: In Addis Ababa. It's a very modern building where Haile Selassie had meetings with African leaders and other leaders from all over the world. I made slides of those stained glass windows in detail in order to explain to the students at Howard University the beauty of the craft of stained glass.

TBD: Had this particular artist been educated in Europe?

LMJ: Yes, he is one of the most outstanding of the African artists and has studied in Paris and in Germany and exhibited all over the world. He's very well known. I remember seeing his work in a one-man show here in Washington, D.C., at the State Department; that is where I met him.

I had to do a lot of research on Kristos Desta. Desta was in the States, but I did research on his paintings and also on the work of Skunder Boghossian who had also left Addis Ababa for the States. It so happened that Skunder Boghossian was a member of the Art Department faculty at Howard University, so I already knew quite a bit about his work. I met Ambassador and Mrs. William Hall in Addis Ababa, the Ambassador from the United States. They invited me to a very lovely cocktail party at the Embassy and gave me permission to make slides of some of their collection of Ethiopian paintings. We had a very interesting meeting together. Then there was Felaka Armide, who was a specialist in making prints. I made slides of his work at the Gallery Belvedere and found the director of the Gallery most cooperative in permitting me to make slides of the works of Gebra Kristos Desta. I met Zerihun Yetem Geta, a graduate of the Fine Arts School of Addis Ababa, and had a very interesting meeting with him at the time of his one-man show at the City Hall at Addis Ababa. He's presently exhibiting in the show of "Contemporary African Artists" at Howard University, April 30-July 31, 1977, an exhibition which I helped to organize.



LMJ: (cont) And then there were others, Ale Felege Selam, the director of the School of Fine Arts. It was interesting to talk especially to the directors of the arts schools. Invariably they expressed a wish for an exchange of students and of faculty with us in the States. They were very sincere in wanting to know more about ... especially the black artists in U.S.A. And on each occasion, I had the same request: "that when you go back to Howard University, see what you can do about arranging an interchange of students, of professors or certainly of exhibitions."

I liked very much the Sudan. I have rather an interesting story about my trip there. On the occasion of the cocktail party at the residence of Ambassador and Mrs. Hall, I mentioned that I was leaving for the Sudan within three days. One of their guests was a photographer from the National Geographic magazine who rushed over to me and said, "Don't go to the Sudan, I've just come back and I had a very unpleasant experience. As a matter of fact they wanted to take my cameras away and confiscate my films. I just did manage to get out of all that difficulty and came in from the Sudan yesterday. So I would advise you not to go, if you're planning to do any photography." Ambassador and Mrs. Hall suggested that perhaps it would be better that I change my itinerary and go to Tanzania, as it was a very strong art center and a very interesting place to visit. So I called my travel agent and asked to make that change in my plans for leaving.

Incidentally, I was staying at the magnificent Hilton Hotel there ... and I might say that as I went through Africa, staying at some of the hotels was almost like staying at any of our big hotels in New York City. I personally like to be closer to the people, and would have enjoyed being in a good native hotel in order to get closer to them. But my itinerary was so planned that I was booked at the big hotels, and in most instances the Hiltons.

So back to my story. I checked out from the Hilton and had my chauffeur take me to the airport. On arriving the attendants looked at me and said, "Where are you going, Madame?" I said, "I'm going to Tanzania." "Well, that plane left two days ago, and there will not be another plane for another day or possibly two." You can imagine my surprise after checking out of the hotel. Then the thought just came to me to ask, "Do you have a plane leaving for the Sudan?" And they said, "Yes, there's one leaving in ten minutes." I said, "Well, I've decided to take it." They asked me if I had some travelers checks. I think I had to give them \$75. And I got on that plane, taking my courage in both hands and I went to the Sudan.

Words will not permit me to tell you about the marvelous reception I received. Of course, everything was planned for me there anyway, so that the gentleman who was to serve as my guide was waiting for me, and he immediately pointed to my hand and expressed the interest in me as a black person, and the red carpet was stretched out. I was taken immediately to the tourist bureau headquarters, where the director of tourism took at least an hour and a half giving me advice as to where

LMJ: (cont) to go to find the artists and the stories of the different tribes. He showed slides and gave me booklets and materials for research and I had a most profitable visit. At the hotel I was treated most royally and the whole stay of nearly two weeks was most fulfilling.

TBD: Do you recall any of the names of the individuals that you met?

LMJ: Yes, Kamala Ishag, who's considered the leading woman artist and who today is one of my closest friends. She was here for the opening of the "Contemporary African Artists" exhibit at Howard University as one of the invited guests. Her sister, who is married to the Sudanese Ambassador to the United States, planned some very lovely times for us during her visit here, and I had opportunity to return the courtesies she had afforded me in Khartoum. I must say the Sudanese people are very warm and very hospitable. My memory goes back to several occasions of visiting the artists, among them Abdel Ahmed and another Ahmed, Babiker, who's a graphic designer who received me so graciously. I had dinner at their homes and met their families and I have a very warm feeling towards all of those people. Their School of Fine Arts is one of the finest schools I visited throughout the eleven countries. Their training stems from England and they are especially strong in advertising design. That is one of the courses which I teach at Howard University, along with watercolor painting, so that I was naturally very much interested to see what those young students were doing in design. The work was most professional. I would have compared it to Pratt Institute in New York City. Their exhibit for their final grades was on view, which gave me an excellent opportunity to make slides of some of the most outstanding pieces of work.

I had a most interesting visit with Ahmed El Arabi, who felt that I should see something of the life on the desert. On our way we met a woman, a mother of some nine or ten children, who expressed the desire for me to go out to her home in the desert. We took her in our car and drove to her home, a little mud hut, where some of her children were around, but there was no husband; it was one of those situations. She insisted that I have a cold drink of Coca-Cola, which one of the little children had to go a mile or so to get. I felt very guilty to have her go to that trouble, but that's just one of the examples of how hospitable they are. As poor as she was, she wanted me to have that cold drink of Coca-Cola.

TBD: Can you account for this report that you heard in Addis Ababa that the people there in the Sudan were not friendly, not hospitable at all? Can you account for why that rumor should be circulated and why you were discouraged from going to the Sudan?

LMJ: Well, the relations with the U.S.A. were not too good at that time.

TBD: In...

LMJ: In the Sudan. And I think that was really the reason for the treatment of whites, white Americans.

TBD: I think perhaps that may be. I personally have had some experience with Sudanese, and I find them very warm people and beautiful. Of all of the Africans I would say that they are my favorites.

LMJ: Yes, I am ready to go back to the Sudan anytime. As a matter of fact, I just received a letter from Kamala Ishag telling me that I am to be invited to teach watercolor painting for two or three months sometime during the coming year.

TBD: In their upper class, you cannot distinguish them in looks from American Negroes.

LMJ: No, no.

TBD: They look more or less the same.

LMJ: They are a very fine race of people, and as I reminisce and go back over my visit to the Sudan, I really have some very happy memories. A country which I found beautiful was Kenya, in East Africa, Nairobi ... There is something about the climate, which is magnificent. Again I met some fine artists and visited their fine galleries and the University Art Department. I went back to Africa, I liked it so well, I really fell in love with it. I went back the summer of 1972 and took with me a group of Howard University art students and some members of the alumni. There were some twenty-eight of us who went and visited fourteen countries. It was a beautiful tour which I arranged with my husband. I felt that I had to share some of the experiences I had had with the artists with my art students.

I had made at least the liaison with the African artists to the extent that when I arrived the second time, they were recipient to receiving my friends, which made it most fortunate for them, to meet them personally. It isn't the easiest thing, as you already mentioned, to locate them and to visit them. So that it was again a grand experience. That second year we went on a safari. That was something that I had heard about, read about for many many years, but to participate in one is something else. There's one camp called the Ark and part of the group went there. We had twenty-eight people and we couldn't all stay at the same lodge, so that the other half of us went to another safari camp. I recall first of all the wonderful food. They had an elaborate buffet service of food at the hotel before you left to take the footpath out to the thick, into the jungle. The Ark was more or less a rustic building on high stilts, with very thick glass windows. At about midnight or after midnight when you'd hear a little bell ring in your cabin room, it meant that the animals had come down to the pool of water to drink. You jumped up, put on your negligee, your robe, and went out to the large glass window areas where you could take pictures. You could see the animals, but they couldn't see you.

TBD: This was a picture taking safari, rather than ...

LMJ: Yes, not really getting out and ...

TBD: ... shooting them.

- LMJ: So that the limit was really picture taking. But to see the variety of animals coming down to that pool to drink was something I shall never forget. The lions coming and then the antelopes, the tigers, and the elephants. I remember the fight that occurred between two of the animals, a horrible fight, and all of this we were able to see from the Ark.
- TBD: Was it two animals of the same species?
- LMJ: Yes. Two antelopes having a battle between themselves. From Kenya I went to Kinshasa, in Zaire, and visited the Fine Arts School which is excellent. One of their leading artists there is n'Damvu who was also in Washington, D.C., for the opening of the big Contemporary Art Show at Howard University. He's a painter and at the time of my first visit to Kinshasa was doing a portrait, an over life-size work, a full-bodied view of the President. I took pictures of him at work and pictures of that portrait. I met other artists whose works I have shown in the slide lectures which I've been giving around the country since my visit in 1970. Nigeria was the next stop and at Lagos I received a very excellent welcome. I lectured and had a chance to go up to Oshogbo, where I met the famous artist, Twins Seven-Seven.
- TBD: Oh, you spoke of him the last time we had the interview.
- LMJ: Yes, and how he got his name and so on. The story was that his mother had seven sets of twins. He was the last of the twins so that he named himself "Twins Seven-Seven." The Oshogbo artists paint chiefly from imagination, using nature, and dreams along with folklore as a source. Their paintings are very different from any of the works that I had studied throughout Africa. My next stop was at Ghana, Accra, a very strong center like Nigeria. Art was everywhere. One important thing that I did, after my contacts with USIS, was to visit the marketplace. I think anyone who visits a foreign country should go first to the marketplace. It's there where you really see the people and get a true picture of the country. To visit a market in Ghana was really a thrill. Everything, you name it, was sold in that huge marketplace.
- TBD: It's largely an enterprise conducted by women too. Because I understand that's how Nkrumah got elected.
- LMJ: Well, that's true, I took some very excellent slides of the works of Kobena Bucknor. Unfortunately, he died a year ago. That was a great loss to the country as he was really their leading artist. On leaving Ghana I went to Dahomey, to Cotonou. I was very happy to stay in a little hotel which was right on the edge of the sea. You remember at the beginning of my interview I told you that Martha's Vineyard Island had been a great inspiration to me because of the ocean. I love the sea even to this day. The reason I love Haiti is because my home there is near the sea. So I stayed at the hotel in Cotonou on the edge of the sea, and had the view from my window of that magnificent ocean where I could see the peasant women carrying things on their heads standing so erect; they were beautiful as they walked along the beach with their little children. It was really a pageant as I looked from my hotel win-

LMJ: (cont) dow out on the plage of that hotel. I made many sketches, and that is something that I did everywhere, to build up my research for the paintings that I would carry out in my studio in Washington, D.C. The whole experience was most enriching, to go to their museums and to see the antiquity, and the background of the various paintings that many of the African artists were doing was really a study in itself.

TBD: Do you believe that many of these or how many of these artists have had the opportunity to visit in the United States?

LMJ: Not too many to the United States. As a matter of fact, they haven't done a lot of extensive visiting anyway. But they're doing more now than in previous years. Many of the artists from Zaire go to Belgium rather than to the U.S.A., and some go to France or to Germany. I just met an artist, El Loko, a young artist, a print maker from Togo who told me that he had been living in Germany for the past seven years, studying there.

Relative to the art movement in Africa there are three schools of thought. There are those Africans who feel that African art has a character which needs to be developed in a more or less indigenous manner, contemporary but traditionally basic in concept, that is with no influence by the outer world of art. And then there's a second group, those African artists who feel that basic instruction is necessary in order to absorb modern techniques and trends of thought. And in this group I discovered that there are those artists who have received some sort of training, academic or the like, and they believe that nothing specific will result from an untutored artist. And then there is a third group, which is most liberal because they believe that so long as the training is basic, and not an imposition of foreign values, that it cannot influence African art, that is adversely. In fact, they believe that no artist creates anything out of nothing and that an artist is always indebted to many things from tradition, but that his creative aspects, and whatever he can gather from tradition, will help him at least to move forward and that was something which I discovered in my travels throughout those countries.

TBD: Is that philosophy any too different from what we have here in the United States. Can't we divide the philosophy ...

LMJ: ...break it down?

TBD: ... in also similar categories?

LMJ: Well, first, our background is very different. You will recall that here in our country, the early artists, for the most part, were craftsmen, they worked as cabinetmakers, goldsmiths, silversmiths, and as artisans. In the early 1800s, there were a few blacks who worked as portrait painters. And from the mid-1800s into the twentieth century I would say the more significant contributions of black painters and sculptors were made by those who were forced to go overseas to gain a recognition that this society, in our country, was not willing to give them. Among those early artists were Henry O. Tanner, Edmonia Lewis, who was one of the most vibrant personalities of her time, and Meta

LMJ: (cont) Warrick Fuller from Framingham who was a great inspiration to me. She went to Europe, to Paris, to study and was even received and inspired by Rodin. It wasn't until the artists began to realize that they had a heritage, a rich background of Zimbabwe, Nok, Ife and Benin, the Ashanti Empire, all of which should determine something of the direction of our work.

All this was evident in the new Negro movement, which really emerged in the 1920s, when we had such singers and poets as Bessie Smith, Fats Waller, Louis Armstrong, James Weldon Johnson, Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, and Langston Hughes. Among the painters and the sculptors we had May Howard Jackson and, as I've already mentioned, Meta Warrick Fuller. Then to go on into the 1930s, we had such outstanding artists as Richmond Barthé and later Jacob Lawrence and Charles White from California, who was in New York at the time of that great movement. And then there was Elizabeth Catlett, a graduate of Howard University, who was one of my first students when I came to Howard University in 1930, and who majored with me for four years in design. She married Charles White later, but finally made a change in her life and married a Mexican artist, Mora, a print maker and is now living in Mexico. So the Negro Renaissance, which centered first in Harlem, spread to Chicago and Cleveland and Philadelphia and eventually throughout the whole country and made a great change in the direction of painting.

After the assassination of Martin Luther King, we had what we call the Black Art movement. A few years ago it would have been unthinkable to segregate the work of black artists and exhibit them out of the context with contemporary works of art. But now these black art shows are presented nationwide in an effort to rectify what has long been a grave social injustice, because the black artists have really been grossly overlooked. These shows which are being put on in the various museums, for example, the show which was organized by David Driskell (another one of my students), a graduate of Howard University, who was head of the Department of Art at Fisk, served as curator for the exhibition "Two Centuries of Black American Art" which opened September 30th, 1977, at the Los Angeles County Museum in California. It is a most comprehensive show which traveled to Texas and to Atlanta and finally to the Brooklyn Museum where it's now on view through August 21st. Two centuries of Afro-American art, black American art, on view to many people who had no idea that there were black painters who possessed such talent, and who were capable of doing paintings and prints and sculpture comparable to the best in the world.

It is interesting to compare our direction of art as a movement to that of the movement in Africa. But to go on with my study, I went also to the Ivory Coast, to Abidjan, where they have a very excellent École des Beaux Arts. I met Christian Lattier, a sculptor who works in rope; we call it cord sculpture. He had studied at the Beaux Arts in Paris, and was on the faculty of the Ecole des Beaux Arts there in Abidjan. The sculpture that he does with rope involves some thousand yards of rope which he winds and twists around an armature. The one that he has on view at the airport at Abidjan, a nativity Madonna and child, is an unusual piece of work, which serves as a great decoration in the airport,

LMJ: (cont) which you see as you enter. It is a huge work of maybe some twenty feet or more in scale. Among the other artists was Dogo Celestin, a ceramist who was head of the Department of Art at the Institute. There were many others, too numerous to name. The next trip was to Liberia, Monrovia where Vanjah Richards received me. He had studied at Ohio State. I think many Liberians have come to the States for their study.

TBD: That's right.

LMJ: There is no language barrier and there's a very close relation between Liberia and the U.S.A.

TBD: Currency too.

LMJ: Yes, it's very convenient for them to come to us. I then went to Sierra Leone, to Freetown. I had a wonderful reception there and gave a lecture on Afro-American artists. I saw their group of folkloric dancers, who were excellent and interviewed three artists: Hassan Bangurah, Miranda Burney-Nicol, Louise Metzger, all very talented. Senegal was most impressive. I've recently been back there, as a guest of the Senegalese government, to read a paper on "The African Influence on Afro-American Art" during the celebration of the 70th anniversary of President Senghor, and I also presented a painting, which I think I described to you in the earlier interview. The theme of the colloquium was "Culture and Development," which took place in October of '76. The paper clearly indicated that the influence of African art on Afro-American art was not entirely new, because it really became evident in the Negro Renaissance, when W.E.B. DuBois and Alain Locke, along with Marcus Garvey, introduced blacks to the realization that "black is beautiful." That was the philosophy that permeated the new Negro movement, which goes back to around 1920.

TBD: That's right.

LMJ: At that time we had the emergence of Aaron Douglas, who resides at Fisk. He had been head of the Art Department there for many years, but is now in his eighties and is not in too good health. Aaron really introduced African imagery in his murals at the 135th Street Library. The two murals, The African Background and Lynching, which so definitely bring out the beauty of the African vegetation, the beauty of the African physique, and the black body. He was a great inspiration to me. One painting which I exhibited as an early work in the Harmon Foundation Show was called The Ascent of Ethiopia. I was definitely influenced by Aaron Douglas in that work. In the style of the painting and in the coloring of the painting. Not only do we find that Aaron was one of the first, but also Hale Woodruff along with James Wells who used African imagery in their work. The painting that I did in Paris in 1937, Les Fétiches, featured African masks in the design and composition, in keeping with the artists of the thirties who made use of the African influence. The paper proved very interesting to the Africans and I received many many compliments on it.

LMJ: (cont) My last stop was Senegal, which proved the most exciting. It was there that I had the experience of visiting the Tapisserie, where the tapestries were made under the direction of Papa Ibra Taal, who's the director of the school. To see the work of those artists in tapestry at the Manufacture Nationale de Tapisserie at Thies was thrilling, for indeed they ranked with the tapestries done at Aubusson in France. They were excellent in color and in design. Unfortunately Papa Ibra Taal was not there. He was in north Africa. They were told at the school that nobody was to take any pictures of anything. I finally met Madame Samb who was the professor of technique, a Frenchwoman, who was there to teach the technique of tapestry weaving. I told her of the importance of taking those slides for Howard University, and with her consent I was finally able to make the color slides and to take the notes on the careers of the artists.

I would say that my two trips to Africa, in 1970 and in the following year, proved to be a revelation, because of the privilege to see the actual examples of the ancestral arts in their original settings, and in the museums and the galleries, along with the visits which I made to the studios of the leading artists. All was really an experience which I would consider one of the richest in my entire career. I feel that the union with Africa is definitely essential and will tend to bring about a strengthening in our creative efforts in the arts. As I look over the works of those artists who are influenced by the heritage, I feel that there is something that is strong in their color, their design, as well as inner feeling. We know that Picasso, Braque, Modigliani, Brancusi and other European artists were influenced by African art, but it is we who really stem from Africa who can make the greatest contribution. I'm not an African, but frankly when I went to Africa I felt something so warm between myself and those people. I was completely relaxed with them. I enjoyed the exotic design and the color, I felt akin to it. And as a result I'm very sincere in my usage of the influence, which at the present time is outstanding in my paintings, which draw not only on Africa but on Haiti for inspiration. For me, Haiti is Africa. When I went to visit the museums in Dahomey, I was amazed on going into one of the salles of the Musée d'Abomey and seeing the vèvè painted on the walls throughout the room. The identical vèvès that I had seen in Haiti, those used in the voodoo ceremonies. And then they had also documents in photography as an exhibit in that room, for example, a photograph of a voodoo in Haiti and then just beside it a voodoo ceremony in Dahomey, and they were identical. You could not tell the difference between the way the people were gathered for the ceremony, with the Houn'gan, the priest, drawing the vèvè on the ground of the temple, running cornmeal through his fingers in the most artistic drawing or presentation of a symbol. Truly their talent is a great inspiration for any artist. To see all of that made me realize that there was a definite relation between Dahomey and Haiti, for many Haitians did originate in Dahomey.

TBD: I believe that African slaves retreated into the jungles in South America and maintained their culture that they brought from Africa and they have voodoo ceremonies down there.

LMJ: Yes, so you get that relation for example in Brazil. My most recent



LMJ: (cont) visit to Africa was to FESTAC, the second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture, which took place in Lagos. The opening was January 15th, and it ran through February 12 in 1977. I was an invited artist guest of the Nigerian Government and also went as an official representative of the U.S.A. My husband, a well-known artist from Haiti, accompanied me and we had a most fruitful visit. As an artist-exhibitor I showed one of my paintings entitled Moon Mask in the U.S.A. zone at the National Arts Theater.

To give an overall picture of FESTAC, there were ten groups invited and about sixty-three events ranging from exhibitions, music, dances and literature, and the Durbar and the Regatta and even fashion shows. The Durbar was held at Kaduna, and all of the other events took place in Lagos. The National Arts Theater, a very massive, imposing structure, was the headquarters for most of the events. It was beautifully decorated by one of the leading Nigerian artists, Erharbor Emokpae, who designed the frieze around the entire theater, and also designed the banners and festoons that were exhibited all over the city in gorgeous designs and colors by the hundreds. The beautiful relief panels, decorations in bronze and in copper, which decorated the lighting on the bridges and the central areas in the city, hotels, courts and the gardens, proved a magnificent project in design, totally under the direction of Emokpae. There was also a very interesting exhibit: the Nigerian National Exhibition which took place at the Lagos State Cultural Center on Victoria Island. I was very fortunate to have been given permission to make slides of works by many of the outstanding artists: Bruce Onobrakpeya, who's known all over the world for his prints; Ben Enwonwu, the sculptor and painter, who is also well known, all over the world; and Yusuf Grillo, the chairman of the visual arts sub-committee, who arranged the exhibition, with Uche Okeke who was the director of the exhibit. On the whole, I would say that it was a very impressive show. The slides which I made are fortunately excellent in color to the extent that I have already been using them in lectures which I have been giving back here in the States. It was very fortunate that a number of the artists from the States and from Africa were at Lagos for the exhibition because we got together and had a very important meeting at the National Arts Theater. We organized a society headed by Grillo, which will tend to keep us together, all over the world.

TBD: Is this society just for American artists?

LMJ: No, it's really for all of the African artists and all of the black artists from the States, so that ...

TBD: It's international ...

LMJ: International, so that we can keep in touch with each other and have an exchange of exhibits and a newsletter which will keep us informed as to what's going on in all the areas.

TBD: Is this newsletter published in Africa or in the United States?

LMJ: It's just now in the stage of being organized and I'm supposed to be working on that now. Evangeline Montgomery from California was at the

- LMJ: (cont) initial meeting in February. She is a representative of the National Conference of Artists. We really hope this movement will prove to be beneficial to all of us. At the meeting I read my paper, "The Influence of Africa on Afro-American Art" and the African artists seemed very very much interested to know how seriously we are taking the art of Africa. And they asked many questions and I was happy to show them slides. I think the visual presentation is the most important thing, to let them see how the Afro-American artist, in many instances, is using the background, the heritage.
- TBD: I assume that they are taking it as a compliment.
- LMJ: Yes ...
- TBD: They don't consider it as an imitation of something.
- LMJ: Not at all, and they really seem to feel that we are brothers and sisters working in a similar direction. The National Arts Theater, which is the center, and I understand is being used to great advantage today. It had three aims: first, to promote the arts, secondly to strengthen African brotherhood, and three, to foster international cooperation. The U.S.A. zone was under the chairmanship of Dr. Jeff Donaldson, who was the former chairman of the Art Department at Howard University and, in his words, the festival was the largest and the most comprehensive of its kind in memory and involved well over 500,000 participants and observers from nearly 60 African nations and world black communities. The National Arts Theater, of course, served as the headquarters for the various events, and has a seating capacity for 5,000 people. Other events were held at the Tafawa Balewa Square, the adjoining National Hall, King George V Park, at the museum, at the national museum, the national stadium, and the City Hall, so that 482 black American artists, scholars and technicians coordinated by the U.S. zonal committee participated triumphantly at these various places. Then of course, there were the performers who came from the many countries that are included in that large number of participants from Cuba, from the African countries all over the world; it was an international event of mammoth scope. Among our outstanding performers was Stevie Wonder who was certainly received magnificently by the Africans. He performed as a singer and then he did some drumming and really entertained most graciously at Tafawa Balewa Square which is an immense stadium. Makeba who is known all over the world for her singing performed at the National Theater. I remember the difficulty that my husband and I had on getting in. We were absolutely unable to get in due to the immense crowd.
- TBD: This was in Africa.
- LMJ: Yes, I think one of the reasons we were not fortunate to be seated was because of the big reception which was given at the residence of our U.S. Ambassador Donald Easen, at the same hour of the Makeba concert. It was a magnificent party for the participants of FESTAC from U.S.A. and Ambassador Andrew Young, who was the special guest of honor.
- TBD: Ambassador Andrew Young.

LMJ: Andrew Young, and also Queen Mother Moore, who is known all over Africa for her great interest in the movement of bringing us together and establishing, she hopes, a school somewhere in Africa. The performances in drama, in dance, the colloquiums, the discussions on poetry and literature, the whole exchange was certainly rich and certainly scholarly. I should say a word about FESTAC village. FESTAC village was quite an interesting project for the Nigerian Government in that they built hundreds of modern houses which had already been allocated to the winners of the contest. At the end of FESTAC those people who gained the winning ballots were able to move into those modern homes. It is there where the performers stayed. There were sections for the U.S.A., sections for the groups from Zaire, sections for the groups from Ghana, and each country had its area in a very modern housing arrangement.

TBD: It was something like the Olympics do for the housing of their athletes.

LMJ: They also build, and then those houses are ...

TBD: ... converted for local use.

LMJ: The project really improved the situation of housing in the suburbs of Nigeria. One of the events which my husband and I enjoyed immensely was the Durbar which took place at Kaduna, in north Nigeria. An all-day pageantry of horsemen, attired in their colorful regalia, with their tribes, presented the most exciting dances and acrobatic feats with drumming and singing. It lasted as a grand pageant parade for certainly some six or seven hours. The costumes were simply gorgeous. The beautiful designs of the robes of the chiefs, Hausa chiefs with decorated horses and their tribes, was a spectacle long to be remembered. It was an event which happens probably every fifty years, so that my husband and I felt very fortunate to have been there to have witnessed such a rare occasion.

In closing I should mention the exhibit which was presented by Ethiopia. Ethiopia was the star country of FESTAC and the exhibit which was organized by Mamo Tessema, the director of the National Museum at Addis Ababa, was something that I would compare to an exhibition organized by the Metropolitan Museum, or at any large museum in the world. It was perfection to the last degree and beautifully presented. The historical information was very carefully organized. The exhibition of paintings showed unusual production on the part of Ethiopian artists and on the whole, was one of the most striking exhibits that I have seen anywhere in the world and I have traveled extensively. Plans are now under way for the continuation of the efforts of FESTAC, and we expect the black Americans to again make a strong offering to FESTAC on the scheduled date, which will be 1981 when it is presented in Ethiopia.

TBD: Then we can end it by saying, until Addis Ababa.

LMJ: Addis Ababa ... and the continuation of the strong relationship of black Americans to Africa. Thanks, Theresa Danley, for this interview. I think we both have enjoyed it. And I'm also grateful to Dr. Merze Tate for submitting my name to be included in this survey of the Black Women Oral History Project.

TBD: The pleasure is all mine.

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LOIS MAILLOU JONES (MRS. VERGNIAUD PIERRE-NOËL)

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Theresa Danley earned her undergraduate degree at the University of California, Berkeley, and attended the Graduate School of Social Service Administration at the University of Chicago. Her employment as a social worker and as an economist included positions with the Cook County Department of Public Welfare; the Illinois Department of Labor; the War Labor Board in the Territory of Hawaii; the Honolulu Chapter of the American Red Cross; the U.S. Wage Stabilization Board; and the National Office of the American Red Cross. Since retirement, Mrs. Danley has continued to be active in civic organizations and in the Episcopal Church, becoming the first woman lay reader with a license to administer the chalice in the Washington, D.C. diocese.

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