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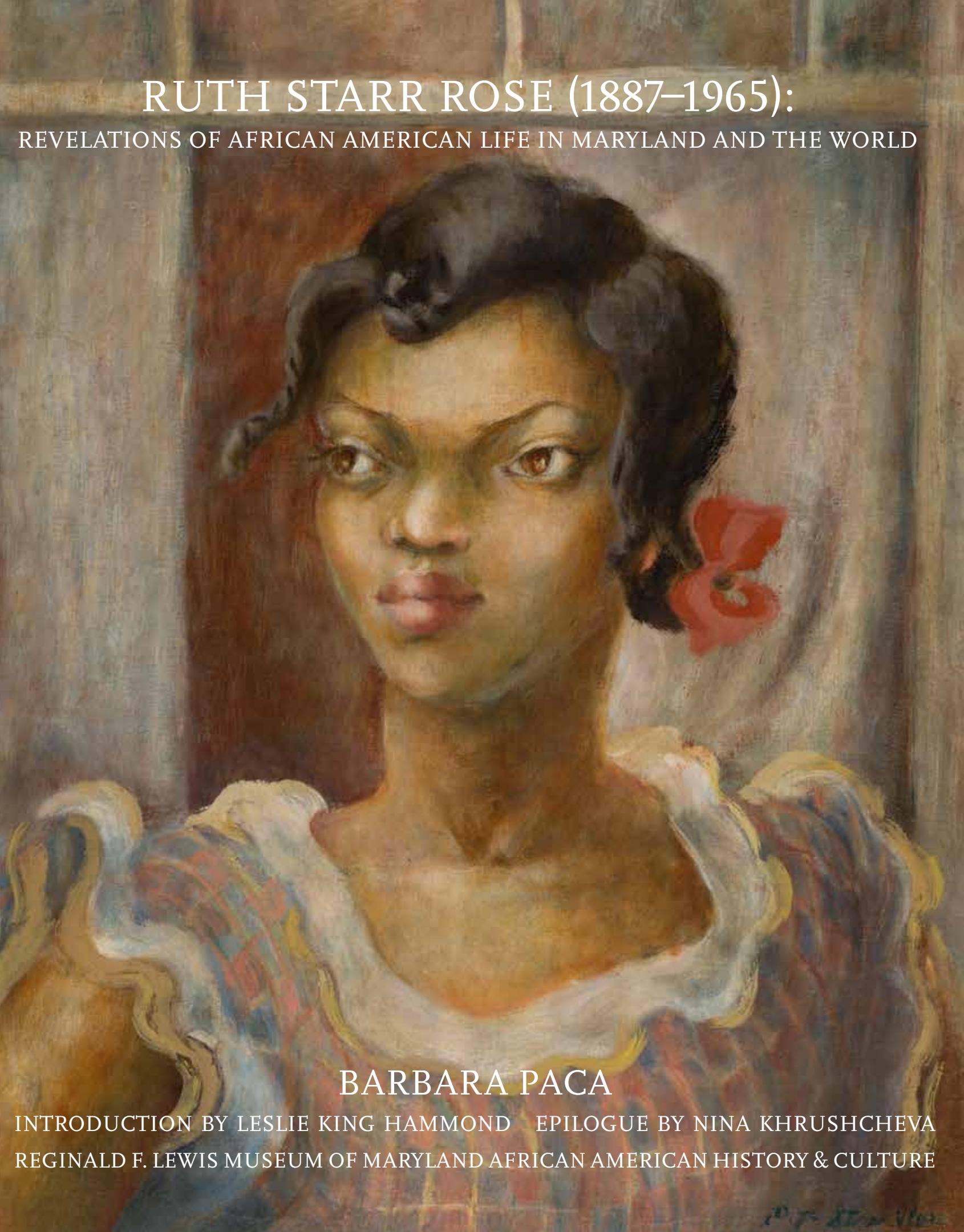
Catalog accompanies the exhibition
RUTH STARR ROSE (1887–1965):
REVELATIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN LIFE
IN MARYLAND AND THE WORLD

REGINALD F. LEWIS MUSEUM
OF MARYLAND AFRICAN AMERICAN
HISTORY & CULTURE
830 East Pratt Street, Baltimore MD 21202
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Presented by
BROWN CAPITAL MANAGEMENT



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Painter and printmaker Ruth Starr Rose's lifelong vocation was to document and celebrate the lives of her African American neighbors in the tiny, historically black towns of Copperville and Unionville, on Maryland's Eastern Shore. Rose came from a wealthy white family that was also endowed with a keen, progressive social conscience. As she grew up, she developed an abiding love and respect for the African Americans who taught her not only practical but spiritual life lessons. A talented artist, whose work has been unjustly overlooked, Rose celebrated her African American friends and teachers in thoughtful, sensitive portraits and in arresting images of the community at work and in the maritime landscape. She also hoped to embody the religious beliefs she shared with her neighbors as she worshipped alongside them in an A.M.E. church in a series of illustrations of spirituals.

The Reginald F. Lewis Museum is honored to present a collection of Rose's work, along with this exhibition catalog, beginning with the portraits of African Americans that she painted as early as the 1920s. This is the first time in nearly a century that these works, recently rediscovered, along with the artist's original notes, have been exhibited. Rose's portraits, many of them done in oil, accord their subjects a refreshing dignity that was revolutionary at the time they were painted. The exhibition and catalog also include her work in other genres, including landscape, and in other media, such as lithography. Rose's art truly expands our knowledge of the lives and histories of America's earliest black communities.

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OF MARYLAND AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY & CULTURE

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Dedicated to Mrs. Frances Curtis and her friend Tilghman Paca-Logan

Frontispiece: *Anna May Moaney*, 1930, oil on Masonite, 24" x 18"

AN EXPLANATION OF TERMS

THROUGHOUT THIS STUDY ON THE WORK OF ARTIST Ruth Starr Rose, the terms *black* and *African American* are used interchangeably in reference to Americans of African descent. The terms *Negro* and *colored* are also present as an authentic reflection of life during Rose's artistic activity in the early to mid-twentieth-century United States—a time predating the successes of the civil rights movement. These words were in widely accepted use by print media of that era as well as by Rose and her contemporaries in their letters, papers, and publications. In addition, *Negro* can be found in chapter 3 as a descriptor of African American spirituals inextricable to that period. The term is also employed in chapter 4 to articulate the early twentieth-century white man's conceptualization of blackness.

It is our responsibility to bring our contemporary perspective to bear on the past. However, Thadious M. Davis, professor of American social thought and English at the University of Pennsylvania, cautions that changing the substance of the past—i.e., updating historical terms—changes the meaning of the history we are seeking to articulate. In the preface to her book *Faulkner's "Negro": Art and the Southern Context* (1983), Davis provides a concise and thoughtful explanation of terms:

The usage . . . of the outmoded term Negro is not the result of an ideological inconsistency or an insensitivity to the positive values of "blackness"; rather, it is an attempt to reflect ... [the] proper sociohistorical context and to suggest the cultural limitations and myths of the period under consideration.

—THE AUTHORS

INTRODUCTION

NOTHING IS BETTER THAN A STORY WELL TOLD. AND THE best stories are often biographical—embedded in the social and political fabric of the past. History is full of lessons to be learned from the examples set by brave individuals who successfully navigated the challenges of their era and, in doing so, contribute a timeless understanding of what it means to be human. Such is the life of painter and printmaker Ruth Starr Rose (1887–1965).

Rose was an American woman of European ancestry caught in the complex crossfire of a nation coming to grips with its identity in the first half of the twentieth century. A privileged, well-traveled, and highly educated white woman from an accomplished family, she came of age during the relentless “maleness” of the modern period. Her bold character and clear vision enabled her to become a visual artist in an era that rarely noticed, recognized, or supported women who sought

to establish themselves in the male-dominated art world of the United States and Europe. Undaunted by the limitations of her time, Rose tirelessly forged ahead, working as a prolific painter and printmaker who exhibited both nationally and internationally.

At a young age, Rose’s family moved to the Eastern Shore of Maryland, where they purchased Hope House, in Talbot County, once the seat of a tobacco plantation. Living in rural Maryland, she developed meaningful long-term friendships with African American families in the nearby town of Copperville. Inspired by these relationships, Rose dedicated much of her art practice to depicting the unique culture and experience of the African American people at a time when, as today, race was one of the most contentious subjects on the social, political, economic, and moral agenda of the United States. She created thoughtful, sensitive por-

traits and landscapes of the people and settings of this quiet, off-the-beaten-track black community.

Rose became an active participant in Copperville society, and she developed a profound respect for and understanding of black life and culture. From the 1920s through the 1940s, Rose was a member of the DeShields United Methodist Church, where she worshipped and taught Sunday school. This was an ambitious venture for any woman in Rose’s generation, and it is noteworthy that she did not assume the role of a missionary. Instead, she was drawn deeply into the compelling intellectual and spiritual world of the black church. As its student, she came to understand the crucial role the church played as a safe haven in which the community could find spiritual support and counsel while practicing its religion. Rose saw that faith—embodied acutely in the Negro spirituals—was a sustaining force for African Americans under the hostile conditions of segregation. Her print interpretations of Negro spirituals present a positive imagery that disputed the crass representations of African Americans that were then widespread.

Rose’s creative choices were ambitious and boldly unconventional for a white woman of privilege at that time. Following her artistic intellect and imagination, she passionately embraced and explored black life in all its rich variety—participating in and witnessing the spiritual and social interactions of her neighbors. These brilliant experiences became her muse—empowering her to interpret and express the vision of a people who had only just escaped slavery some fifty years earlier.

Rose was certainly not the only European American artist to become fascinated with the culture and lifestyle of people of African descent in the Americas during the early to mid-twentieth century. Women artists working on the theme included photographer Doris Ulmann, who collaborated with Pulitzer Prize-winning author, Julia Mood Peterkin, to document the baptismal rituals of black people in the rural South in the book *Roll Jordan Roll* (1933). In 1941 experimental filmmaker Maya Deren suggested to the African American choreographer and dancer Katherine Dunham that she write a children’s book on dance. Deren worked as Dunham’s secretary, assisting her research on African dance traditions in Haiti during the 1940s. Their collaboration inspired Deren’s book about Haiti’s vodoun culture, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (1953), as well as her documentary film by the same name, which was completed in 1985 following her death. Male artists such as Prentiss Taylor and Carl Van Vechten also actively collaborated with their African American peers.

Between 1925 and 1945 numerous black artists led this widening engagement with more complex and emphatic depictions of the African American experience throughout the United States and the Caribbean. This upsurge was no doubt influenced by the leading African American intellectuals of the twentieth century. W. E. B. Du Bois’s seminal book *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903), which eloquently articulates the “double consciousness” of life as a black person and as an American, positions Negro spirituals in their rightful place as an art form and as one of the most significant cultural

contributions in the United States. Increased artistic productivity also coincided with the influential Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, which was then widely known as the New Negro Movement, after Alain Locke's definitive 1925 anthology. Literature, music, and the visual arts centered in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City developed into a movement that was hugely instrumental in defining the black identity of the "New Negro" and in establishing the idea of self-determination decades before the civil rights movement.

Visual artists such as Romare Bearden, Aaron Douglas, and Lois Mailou Jones tapped into the unique collective experience of African Americans. At the forefront of this widening engagement during this time was a shared celebration of everyday black life, often through portraiture. Jacob Lawrence painted working-class people in Harlem. His epic *Migration Series* (1940–41) depicts the mass migration of African Americans from the rural South to the urban North in sixty sequential paintings. A number of photographers operated studios where their portrait services documented the complexity and diversity of their many subjects. James Van Der Zee took portrait photographs of everyone from regular New Yorkers to national leaders during a long career that began in the early 1900s and spanned roughly eighty years. Other photographers, such as James A. Polk of Tuskegee, Alabama, and Addison Scurlock of Washington, DC, stayed in the South, taking a multitude of individual and family portraits that captured a way of life.

Acknowledging the importance of faith in African American culture, black artists focused extensive-

ly on religious themes. Painter Malvin Gray Johnson's oeuvre includes a record of the daily lives of African Americans in the South as well as visual interpretations of Negro spirituals. William H. Johnson's series of religious and spiritual paintings includes *Lamentation* (ca. 1944), which shocked critics and peers by depicting Christ as a black man. Painter, printmaker, and illustrator Allan Rohan Crite produced illustrated books on spirituals such as *Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?*, which was published in 1944 by Harvard University Press.

Rose was at the forefront of a cutting-edge movement that explored new ways of conceptualizing blackness and sought to present the American public with poignant, diverse, and meaningful representations. She was careful to approach her work under the direction, critique, and counsel of the citizens of Copperville. The historical time frame of Rose's work was particularly crucial for the small, rural community. The world wars and the Great Depression had created dire economic circumstances. Compounding this, black people were often targets of horrific racial violence. Clearly moved by her friendships with her neighbors, Rose saw a very different view than mainstream America, and she dedicated her art practice to illustrating it.

Copious notes and sketches show that Rose sought to express the essence of the black church in her artwork, tapping into what contemporary scholars Dianne Glover and Carolyn Finney have described as "environmental spirituality." This phenomenon refers to the infusion of an abundance of religious, spiritual, and

biblical references into a site or space. When applied to the black church, this concept shows that the church experience can be practiced anywhere; no matter the church's space or site, it will keep people safe from the wrath of slavery and racial discrimination. Rose—with her vast reserves of artistry and intellect—understood the nature of this sacred space. She valued it and connected to its universal significance.

Rose worked on subjects, themes, sites, and environments that celebrated the beauty of humankind. She exceeded all expectations during her lifetime, striking the core of faith, hope, meaning, purpose, redemption, empathy, and compassion. Her belief in a progressive and universal humanity took hold in her long before the rest of the United States had the capacity or vision to comprehend it.

Ruth Starr Rose's work is a profound celebration of the dignity and integrity of black life.

—LESLIE KING HAMMOND, PHD

PREFACE

ONE CAN NEVER BE PREPARED FOR THE SHOCK OF A truly beautiful discovery. And such was the case with my first encounter with the black *Mona Lisa*—a striking oil portrait of Copperville resident Anna May Moaney. During a lengthy meeting with the talented art conservator Kenneth M. Milton to inspect a restoration of eighteenth-century Irish paintings, my mind began to wander from the highly technical conversation. Restless after the four-hour drive from New York to Milton’s studio on Maryland’s Eastern Shore and feeling chilly in his artist’s digs, Nina Khrushcheva, the friend who had accompanied me that day and I began to pace around his large studio, glancing at his other restoration projects.

I combed through the racks of paintings to see which ancestors my friends and relations had finally dusted off and committed the funds to have stabilized by the great restorer. While looking, I came across linen

canvases of wealthy tobacco lords, American founding fathers clad in predictably elaborate suits and powdered wigs, wearing smug expressions as they posed alongside their well-fed families. I then pulled out something I sensed was special: an oil painting on a rectangular slab of Masonite. As I held it in the light, I heard my friend let out a long sigh—in my hands was a masterpiece.

Enthralled, I shot a question across the drafty workshop to Ken: “Who was this great early twentieth-century African American artist on Maryland’s Eastern Shore?” Ken replied, “To begin with, that was painted by a white artist, and it belongs to me—it is absolutely NOT for sale.” Ignoring the last half of his sentence, I countered without thinking. “That is just not possible—the sitter doesn’t hate me.” I knew the Eastern Shore well enough to understand that racial divides ran deep,



Figure 1-1. Map of the Wye peninsula, ca. 1930. Home of Frederick Douglass and the founding African American families Copper, Moaney, and DeShields

and it was unlikely that any white person would have portrayed an attractive black woman who had dignity, refined features, inherent strength, and a sense of self-worth, all while revealing a mutually respectful connection between the artist and the sitter. Beyond the fine brushstrokes was a segment of the population that for me was a great mystery, as they had always been invisible. Somehow, the painting rang true, and it was as exciting and subversive as the urgent, coded messages of Negro spirituals. Like the old songs, this painting contained secrets that made me curious about how a white woman could have painted Moaney as possessing a raw power that exceeded her limited status as a domestic servant.

Ken told me that the painting was by Ruth Starr Rose, a relatively unknown woman artist who was a Vassar graduate. He said that her family, the Starrs, were Midwestern timber barons and had settled on a plantation next to Wye, the home to Frederick Douglass. Providentially, the Starrs' property was called Hope. At that moment, my heart leapt, as I had just begun working there as a landscape historian. Hope, whose building and garden history spans four centuries, had been built by my forebears. While I knew much about its early history, I was only beginning to study the property in the early twentieth century. I found it confusing. The locals couldn't tell me much about the "family from off" who had saved the house from ruin. Believing that the painting held the answer to many unsolved questions, I continued to grip the canvas, studying the artist's signature, carefully preserved by the conservator un-

der a piece of wax paper. Listening to his stories about her career as an artist, I continued to haggle with him until we finally agreed on a price. Triumphant, I left his studio with the portrait tucked under my arm.

Not yet knowing the sitter's name, my friend and I dubbed the portrait *Levina*, in honor of a black collateral ancestress of mine, a woman who had been the mistress of one of Maryland's founding fathers. Levina bore a daughter named Hester, who was fully acknowledged in the patriarch's will, in spite of her mixed race. It was always whispered that Levina's daughter escaped the harsh racism of her day by smartly vanishing from Philadelphia—and all historical records. For over thirty years, I have pressed historians about Levina and Hester, and to this day they remain uncomfortable researching their story. Quite simply, genealogists and preservation societies that celebrate the male founder seem reluctant to dig into the lives of these women. Cupid Paca, another black forebear, was the illegitimate grandson of the same founder; Cupid's mother was paid handsomely to leave the plantation and resettle in another part of Maryland. Unlike Levina, Cupid is now celebrated for his life and for the achievement of being the first person of color to establish a school for free blacks in Harford County.

The same kind of awkward resistance proved an obstacle when I began to study Rose's artwork. Requesting to see her paintings and prints in museums and galleries, I always got a similarly frosty response. I remember being told: "Sure. I will comply with your

wish to see her art, but I must say, this makes me very uncomfortable." I was also asked, "Why do you want to look at the art of a rich white woman making fun of black people?" Labels like "amateur" and "saccharine" were always attached to unsolicited and scornful assessments of her work by curators and art dealers, who were, not to my surprise, middle-class white males. Perhaps it was thanks to my friend Nina Khrushcheva and our mutual respect for the artist that I was able to continue my efforts to rediscover Rose, despite the collective foot-dragging of the art world. Whenever I purchased a collection of Rose's work, I'd also request to buy any family papers or notes associated with the art. I took the time to sort through those ubiquitous boxes of "stuff"—the stray bits of paper and odd pieces of correspondence that somehow managed to survive along with the prints and paintings.

It didn't take long to disprove completely the thesis of mainstream galleries and museums. Rose's artwork and personal papers were evidence of her message of compassion. Her manuscript for a book on spirituals, with an introduction by Paul Robeson, showed her collaborative creative approach and her avant-garde politics. Rose's communication with Professor James A. Porter, Howard University's father of African American art history, revealed not only a close friendship but also Porter's respect for her work, which he called the most comprehensive and sympathetic to date. There was also a family connection to Minnie Evans (1892–1987), an extraordinarily gifted, self-taught

black artist, whose visionary, surrealistic work was ahead of its time. And Rose's guest books show friendships with Lois Mailou Jones, DuBose Heyward, Prentiss Taylor, and other diverse artist contemporaries.

By working in archives throughout the country, concentrating on local history, and slowly and respectfully interviewing the local black population on Maryland's Eastern Shore, I have been able to tell the true story of Ruth Starr Rose—and perhaps more importantly, of the members of the African American communities whom she loved and respected. This book chronicles her fascinating journey across the color line as an artist and a leader in the nascent American civil rights movement.

—B.P.



1. CHRONICLER OF AFRICAN AMERICAN LIFE ON MARYLAND'S EASTERN SHORE

As I stand here today I would like to be able to tell you a glowing success story of miracles performed against the racial prejudice on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. For fate, or perhaps more truly, the hand of God brought me to live there when I was only sixteen. Instead of a story of wonders, I can only tell you about the very insignificant struggle of one human being against a world of ignorance and hate. The very little I have been able to do is only the smallest dent in the steel wall of the caste system. To tell you this simple story of the life of an artist in Maryland, I will have to start at the beginning.

When I was sixteen years old, my father, following a dream of beauty in living, brought us all, my four brothers, my sister and my mother, from a lumber town in Wisconsin, to live in a great manor house on the eastern shore of Maryland, on the tidewater. You can imagine the effect on a sensitive girl of sixteen to be suddenly transplanted into a world of fairy tale.

Here was this great house, Hope, swarming with

colored servants, the kitchen with banjos strumming while the corn bread and fried chicken browned on the stove. Yes, it was another world, but one that has now happily gone. That fabulous life, instead of being an asset, in many ways I have found a great handicap. It automatically puts up a barrier between the landlord and the workers.

You would hardly believe how isolated and narrow-minded the Eastern Shore is, which [H. L.] Mencken described as being entirely populated with Goldsboroughts. In fact, though Hope was built by Tench Tilghman, everyone there was either a cousin or became one. The colored population is enormous, larger in many towns than the white. The schools and education are limited. You all know the sad story of how the Negro has been denied privileges. They have not been taught to trust the white man and why would they? Trust and mutual respect are the foundation of good feeling.¹

WHEN RUTH STARR ROSE COMPOSED THIS SPEECH sometime around 1930, she was at the height of her suc-

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Figure 1-2. *Little Richard* (Richard Moaney), in an elegant carved wooden high chair, 1933, black-and-white lithograph, 12" x 8" plate

cess. In her lifetime, she would create over 250 finished works of art that would be exhibited in 43 one-person shows and more than 213 group exhibitions. Despite her many awards and the fact that her work is held in the collections of some of the most prestigious museums in the world, including the Corcoran Gallery of Art, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rose remains conspicuously absent from the annals of art history.² Prominent male artists working in a comparable style or with similar subject matter have fared better. Rose's peers, such as American Regionalists Reginald Marsh and John McCrady or Harlem Renaissance artists Malvin Gray Johnson and Prentiss Taylor, are well known today.

How could Rose's artistic contributions have fallen into such obscurity? Answers to this question lie in the tenor of her speeches, as excerpted here, and in the limitations of the society in which she worked. Like many of her exceptional contemporaries, Rose defied segregation in the early twentieth-century United States. She recognized the racial injustices of her time and strongly supported the nascent civil rights movement. However, her radical politics were complicated—even obscured—by her position as a white woman from a privileged family. When Rose was active, from

the 1920s through the 1950s, the work of women artists was often approached from a perspective of gender bias, and her connection to plantation society may have led some to mistakenly dismiss her as an amateur. By the late twentieth century, the superficial reality of Rose's background further complicated art historical perceptions of her oeuvre and likely prevented many from approaching her work or seeking to understand her practice.

Fortunately, this historical oversight can be rectified by the study of Rose's recently discovered personal papers. Her preparatory sketches, print takes, correspondence, and written notes reveal much more than was heretofore known about her creative process and her struggle with the restrictions of her time. Rose's paintings, lithographs, and drawings offer a singularly extensive chronicle of the daily lives of early twentieth-century people of color from around the world. Rose's genuine manner of portraying individuals with an inherent dignity and a rich interior life eschewed racist stereotypes and exaggerated gestures. Her art practice visualized people and cultures that existed beyond America's white mainstream with a subtlety, positivity, and documentary quality unmatched by her contemporaries.



Figure 1-3. Mary Wright and Mamie Lewis at Hope, summer 1913

TO UNDERSTAND ROSE'S EXCEPTIONAL STORY, IT IS necessary, as she declared in her speech, "to start at the beginning." It was unheard of for a woman living in privilege in the early twentieth century to create a sweeping visual record of the daily life of the African American and indigenous communities she encountered. Rose's ability to be different was due to several key influences early in her life—namely, her liberal family, their Eastern Shore plantation, Hope, and the nearby African American communities.

When Rose's parents, Midwestern timber baron William J. Starr and Ida May Hill Starr, rescued

the property in 1906, Hope was worn from decades of neglect. Ida Starr wrote of her first visit to the dilapidated plantation home in her memoirs. She remembered looking at her husband with tears in her eyes, crying, "All you've bought is a view, a stair rail and a cemetery. That's all!"³ The Starrs didn't despair for long, however, as they believed that owning Hope was their destiny. The Starr family crest is intertwined with that of the original builders, the Tilghmans. The Starr motto, *Vive en espoir*, translates to "Live in hope." It is remarkably similar to the Tilghman motto, *Spes alet agricolam*, or "Hope sustains the farmer."



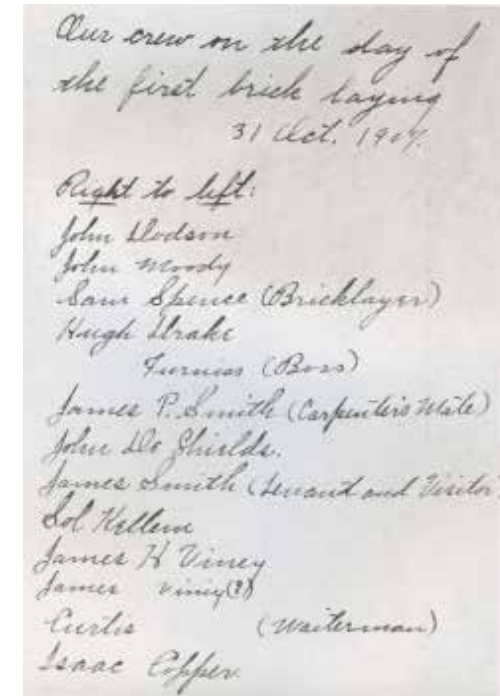
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Figure 1-4. *Girl with Zinnias*, ca. 1930, oil, 19" x 23¼"



Figure 1-5. John Moaney with a horse at Hope, from the Starr family photograph album, 1909

Figure 1-6. Opposite left: The rebuilders of Hope on the first day of construction, October 31, 1907

Figure 1-7. Opposite right: The names of the workers, October 31, 1907



THE STARRS DEDICATED THEMSELVES TO THE restoration of Hope’s house and gardens, and Rose’s life on the farm was defined by her forward-thinking parents. They forged their own unique approach to plantation ownership and sought to share their lives with their African American staff and neighbors. As enlightened artists, Rose’s family created a kind of integration that even extended out into the community. In her memoirs, Rose wrote of what Hope meant to the Starrs: “It became more than just a house to my father and mother. It was a spiritual ideal of the creative life. This powerful influence swept us with it, and the results were far reaching, even now it is still a way of life and a good way.”⁴

Surrounded by water on three sides, Hope’s massive Georgian house and terraced gardens sit on a vast

tract of land and are part of a complex history that Rose would have known well. The driveway, over two miles long, meanders through an old forest and an avenue of trees. Only one mile away on the same peninsula is Wye House, where Frederick Douglass lived as a slave. Harriet Tubman was born in the next county, and noted gospel hymn composer Charles Albert Tindley, Philadelphia’s “Prince of Preachers,” was born in a small nearby town on the Eastern Shore. As a young woman, Rose found herself immersed in the history, life, and oral traditions of the African American community. She spent time with Hope’s staff, befriended locals, and even attended the neighboring church. Rose’s influence was known far outside Hope, and in many respects, she was more at ease with the black community than with the provincial white population.

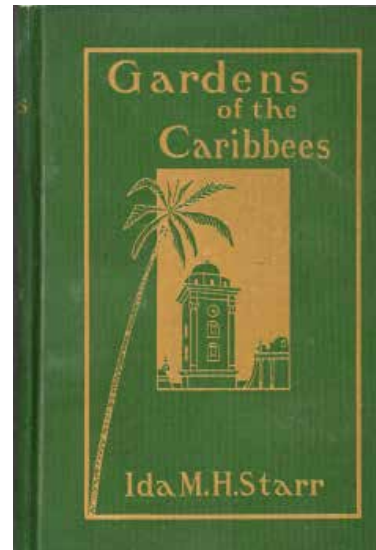


Figure 1-8. *Gardens of the Caribbees*, by Ida May Hill Starr, Volume I, 1903

THE STRONG INFLUENCE OF HER MOTHER ALLOWED Rose early exposure to different cultures and to an understanding of the strict divisions that could be created through distinctions of race and class. In 1901 Rose's parents took their two daughters on a luxury cruise to the West Indies. It also served as a working trip for Ida Starr, who took photographs of and notes about the arts and culture on each island for her two-volume book published in 1903, *Gardens of the Caribbees*. Starr made detailed observations about the women she met on her trip, praising them for their poise and dignity, particularly in their difficult struggle for equality. A sentence from her book summarizes her broad-minded outlook on cultural differences: "I have seen more immodesty on the floor of a modern ballroom than ever from the bare bodies of these black women."⁵

Starr published two more books and became a garden correspondent for fashionable publications like *Country Life* and the *Garden*, a remarkable feat for any woman of her time. Starr was never pictured in her lavishly illustrated and photographed magazine contributions. Instead, over the course of her fifteen articles, she opted to document the achievements of Hope's true builders—the African American men and women who are now celebrated as proud descendants of America's founding black families.

Starr repeatedly depicted Isaac Copper, Hope's gardener, as he skillfully plied his trade and worked with agricultural equipment on her estate. She chronicled lessons taught by this wise man, known to locals as the Royal Black because he was reputed to be a direct descendant of an African chief. Copper patiently guided



Figure 1-9. A photo of Isaac Copper published in the *Garden* magazine, November 1909

Starr away from her mistaken attempts to impose European designs onto the harsh microclimate of Maryland's Eastern Shore. She wrote in deep appreciation and wonderment of Copper's and others' wisdom culled from generations of folklore: "I was suddenly transplanted among a people who had faith in things they could not see, who sowed their seed in concord with the moon, who raised their crops by the measure of the stars."⁶

The extended Starr family had a long history of supporting black civil rights, as well as black artists, on a national level. Rose's grandfather, William Starr, was an active abolitionist who was placed under house arrest in Ripon, Wisconsin, in 1860 by US Marshals for his refusal to comply with the fugitive slave laws.⁷ Nina Howell

Starr, wife of Rose's brother Nathan Comfort Starr, recognized the exceptional talent of Henry Jackson, a self-taught Chicago artist, when she glimpsed it in the window of a storefront church in Chicago. She bought several of his works on cardboard. She also wrote to another Starr cousin of the twentieth century, "Aunt" Helen Upham, on Jackson's behalf. Upham worked with the Chicago school board to help Jackson further his education, and the Starr family later donated one of his paintings to the American Folk Art Museum.⁸ Nina Howell Starr also recognized the abilities of artist Minnie Evans, whom she represented in New York for two decades. In addition to curating a show of Evans's work at the Whitney, Nina Howell Starr also published works about Evans.⁹



Figure 1-10. The Copperville church and members of its congregation illustrated in Rose's color lithograph, *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*, 1939, 10 $\frac{1}{8}$ " x 12 $\frac{7}{8}$ " plate



Figure 1-11. Fully integrated group of children with Ruth Starr Rose on her racing yacht, the *Belle M. Crane*, 1933



Figure 1-12. George Moaney teaching Richard Rose about life on the water from the log canoe, 1933

RUTH STARR ROSE GRADUATED FROM THE NATIONAL Cathedral School in Washington, DC, in 1906 and continued her studies at Vassar College. Rose’s mother had also attended Vassar, but as a restless young woman, she dropped out in 1875, opting for a tour of Europe, where she studied piano in Germany under Clara Schumann. Rose’s tenure at Vassar lasted from 1906 through 1910, and she developed enduring friendships during her studies. Decades later, her classmate Louise Zimmerman assisted her in exhibiting her work at an international show in Pittsburgh, and Dorothy Cazenove-Lee would prove a lifelong companion and patron of her work.

In 1914 Ruth married William Searls Rose, and they honeymooned in Cuba. They settled in a suburb of New York City, spending summer and holidays in Maryland. Their two children, whom they adopted,¹⁰ befriended

the African American children nearby, sharing the amenities of their privileged lives, all the while learning essential lessons about the natural maritime world from the Copperville children. However, Rose did not allow societal convention to dissuade her from pursuing her art practice. Upon graduating from college, she immediately enrolled in classes at the Art Students League of New York. She continued them after her marriage—commuting to and from Manhattan over the next thirty-five years. As Rose wrote, “Instead of going to mediocre and unknown teachers, I studied with the best and it has paid rich dividends in helping me over the rough places.”¹¹ She worked alongside artists including Will Barnet, Edward Dufner, Mabel Dwight, Victoria Hutson Huntley, Hayley Lever, James Michael Newell, William Palmer, and Harry Sternberg. They were some of the most liberal

artists of their time, and their work tackled social issues of poverty, gender, and race.

ROSE FORMED A CLOSE CIRCLE OF PROGRESSIVE, left-leaning artist friends, including printmakers Mabel Dwight,¹² Victoria Hutson Huntley, Wanda Gag, Rockwell Kent, William Palmer, Harry Sternberg, and Prentiss Taylor.¹³ She and her friends often spent summers and holidays in rural Maryland on her family’s farm, Hope, and its adjacent dower farm, Pickbourne—Rose’s wedding present from her parents. This compound be-

came an unconventional rural salon for leading writers, musicians, artists, curators, and critics of the day. As the place where she lived the most satisfying and complete chapter of her life, Pickbourne proved the happiest home that Rose would ever know, and her ashes were scattered along its shoreline after her death.

Rose’s friends and guests were first received by the unconventional Ida Starr at Hope. They would then cross over the cove to relax at Rose’s more intimate Pickbourne. A Charlestonian friend, author DuBose Heyward, spent Easter 1935 there—the same year he and Ira

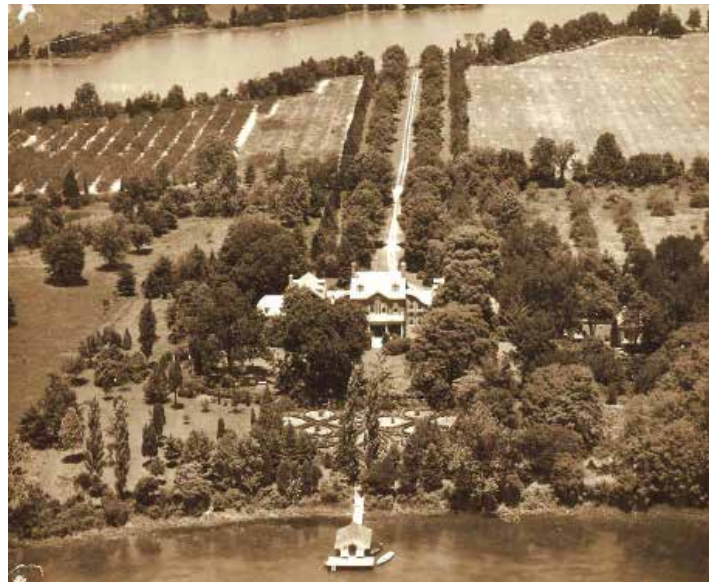


Figure 1-13. Aerial photograph of Hope showing final approach and the heart garden, ca. 1930

Figure 1-14. Opposite left: Photograph of the Starr family with guests at Talbot Country Club, September 1914. Note their African American guest who is sitting comfortably in a rocking chair (far left).

Figure 1-15. Opposite right: Ida May Hill Starr seated at Talbot Country Club, September 1914

.....

Gershwin put *Porgy and Bess*, based on Heyward's novel *Porgy*, to music by George Gershwin.¹⁴ The opera's conductor, Alexander Smallens, visited Rose's family twice in the early 1930s. These trips coincided with the period when he was directing the Philadelphia Orchestra and was also working with author Gertrude Stein on *Four Saints in Three Acts*, the avant-garde opera sung by an all-black cast.

Rose's mentors and teachers became her closest friends and were regular visitors to Hope and Pickbourne. Occasionally they ventured into Easton, the closest town, and brought with them their insistence on

integrated relationships. Photographs reveal a remarkable "scene" at the Talbot Country Club in 1914, where an elegant-looking African American man is shown relaxing with the Starr family and friends. The list of visitors includes her strongest critic and lifelong confidant, Carl Zigrosser, a New York City print dealer and later a Philadelphia Museum of Art curator, and Metropolitan Museum of Art curator Alan Priest. They traveled to the South to relax and to pursue their own artistic endeavors. Highly cosmopolitan, they were fascinated by the culture and nurtured Rose's quest to understand and depict the lives of the local population.



It is perfectly beautiful here now the days are really golden and so still—I am very much interested in doing the moonlight lithograph of Hope. You gave me that idea. It has been very exciting to go over there and draw in the moonlight—the place is really magical. Do you remember the first time you were here and we roamed around Hope in the moonlight? The darks are very thrilling—there is mystery and drama so that the old house broods there—waiting. It almost seemed to me like a live thing that would presently unburden itself, stretch and yawn and go off about some momentous business.¹⁵

WRITING TO ZIGROSSER, ROSE DESCRIBED HOW SHE wanted to convey the mood of Hope as a retreat from re-

ality. In her lithograph *Hope in the Moonlight*, she reduces the intimidating five-part mansion by editing out its massive wings to focus solely on the courtyard, the main block, and the ogee hyphens. There is profound meaning in her scaling down "the big house," which served as a powerful authoritarian symbol of white southern patriarchy. In place of this convention, Rose creates a more intimate perspective that functions as a kind of portrait, capturing the personality contained in the architecture of Hope. In the lower left-hand corner of the composition, Rose depicts a peacock, which has historically symbolized renewal. This bird, in all its brilliant plumage, represents her mother—a woman who ruled the house and its grounds for more than three decades.

.....

Figure 1-16. Overleaf: "Because we cannot help the colored people ourselves by stooping down, we have to stand on the same level and together find the light." Ruth Starr Rose's writing, ca. 1935

Figure 1-17. Overleaf: *Portrait of Elizabeth Moaney*. On the back the artist records that this woman was the wife of Jimmy Moaney and mother of five, all of whom she abandoned for the minister of the Copperville church. Oil, 1930, 23" x 19½"

built by ~~white~~ men, ever, ~~it~~ then was either a cousin or be
came one. The colored population is enormous, larger in many town
than the white, the schools and education are limited, you all
know the sad story of how the negro has been denied privileges.

They have not been taught to trust the white men and why would
they? Trust and mutual respect are the foundation of good feeling

One day, after we had been living in Maryland a few months
my mother sent me to hire a colored woman. She came out of her
cabin barefooted, and I right away fell in love with her fine
handsome face. When some one later asked old Aunt Sally who she
worked for, she said, For Miss Ruth, They said, who is Miss Ruth
and Aunt Sally answered, Why she is a stranger from off. But she
Quality just the same. I tell you this to show what I had to live
down.

Because we cannot help the ^{colored people} ~~negroes~~ or ourselves by
stooping down, we have to stand on the same level and together fi
find the light.

Love of negroes, renaissance of American Art.

Left Hops + that idea of living

Describe reason for lithographs. Philosophy of art, work where

you are *No social content - friendship + understanding*

Swing low, worker just from the Harvest fields

Trust + mutual respect

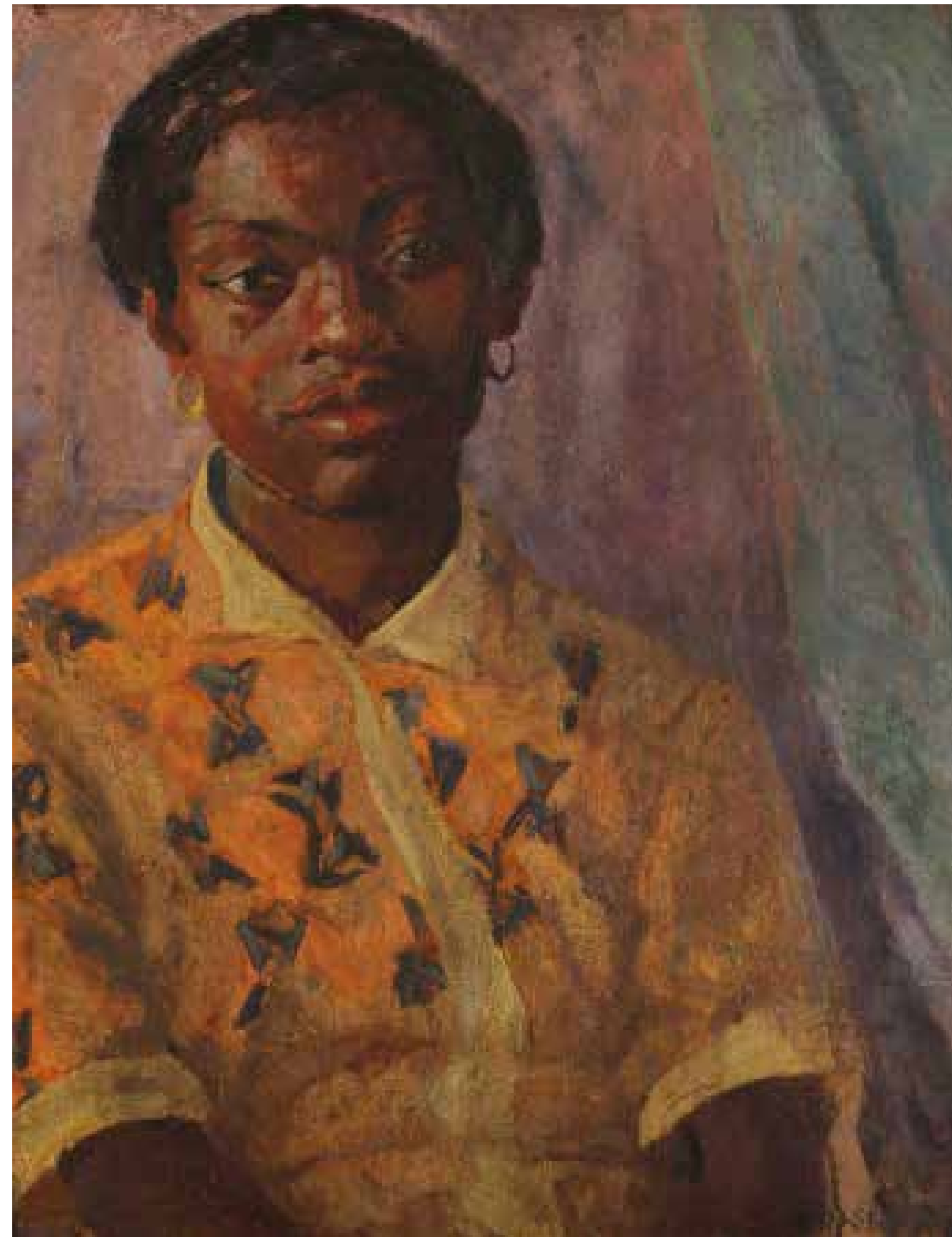
Churches

supported for this work

Sing ye praises with understanding.

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Make a joyful noise unto God all ye lands.



The black and white of the lithograph lends itself to the chiaroscuro of the moonlight and to the depiction of the spiritual world, which Ruth turns to time and again in her work. An intangible drama is present in the backdrop of swirling clouds and full moon, in addition to the open upstairs windows with curtains fluttering outside into the night air. Rose recognized Hope's centuries-old history and the pronounced specter of slavery. She recalled, "We learned all kinds of legends and folk tales from the colored people."¹⁶ Among these were vivid stories of hauntings at Hope, including cemetery sightings of the beautiful Miss Grundy, an early eighteenth-century chatelaine who would emerge from her grave clad in an old-fashioned sunbonnet.

As reflected in *Hope in the Moonlight*, Rose approached her rural Eastern Shore life with an optimistic vision of the future and a universal spirituality anchored in recognition of the past. She and other members of the Starr family used their position to establish a refuge from the atrocious racial persecution of the time—seeking out progressive staff interactions and engagement with the local African

American community at Copperville. Yet the Starrs could not erase the larger socioeconomic dichotomy that inevitably defined their way of life. For Rose and her city-dwelling visitors, the old house and its rambling garden rooms were a refreshing retreat from the overstimulation of the machine age. For the local community, Hope represented a singular way of life.

Even after falling into poverty around the time of her husband's death, in 1944, Rose lamented the social divisions of plantation life. Her reaction to this disparity became the driving force behind her art. It took courage for Rose to articulate the inequalities of life on Maryland's antiquated Eastern Shore, because, while Hope was an artistic haven, the region was rife with the white poverty that fomented racial tension. As W. E. B. Du Bois writes in the introduction to *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line."¹⁷ It is to Rose's credit that in a deeply segregated America she chose to continually position her art practice beyond societal limitations. Her work is testament to this extraordinary achievement.



Figure 1-18. *Hope in the Moonlight*, 1936, black-and-white lithograph, 11" x 14" plate



II. AFRICAN AMERICAN PORTRAITURE

From Rose's background of plantation life comes her dry understanding of the Negro, which has proved one of the major interests of her art. Her interpretations of Negro life and character are distinguished for their sympathy, understanding and vitality.¹

IN THE EXHIBITION BROCHURE QUOTED ABOVE, CARL Zigrosser praised Rose for her poignant depictions of African American people, who were typically represented, if at all, within a widely accepted framework of racial bias. Rose's thirty-five-year correspondence with Zigrosser established him as one of her dearest friends and harshest critics. She valued his philosophy and took

his advice to heart. In one letter, she thanked him, writing, "I feel that I owe to your inspiration, friendship and wise guidance a large part of whatever good I am able to contribute to the field of art."²

The racial injustice of the early twentieth century was one of the key problems Rose grappled with in her many letters to Zigrosser. In response to the problems of her time, Rose chose to live by her own personal code of ethics. She created a kind of racial equality in her art by giving honest visual presence to a largely marginalized population. One way she achieved this was through portraiture. In a letter to Zigrosser, Rose explained that her series of African American portraits attempted

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Figure 2-1. Fanny E. Copper, 1930, black-and-white lithograph, 14³/₄" x 10¹/₂" plate

to convey a sense of “the slumbering volcano of the colored people.” She added that she hoped he would gain as much from viewing the works as she did from painting them.³

Underlying Rose’s progressive outlook on race was her dissatisfaction with the restrictions of her privilege. Because Rose had the financial security to pursue art, the scale of power in her relationships with her African American neighbors was lopsided. Rose was acutely aware of this discrepancy and did her best to correct the situation by creating a balanced and respectful dynamic in her family’s home and in her life’s work. As her notes and letters show, this reality also drove Rose to constantly learn and seek self-improvement. Her lack of complacency is even evident in her struggle with the limitations of the language and the racial labels of her day.⁴ Her papers show her tendency over time to cross out one widely used term for another she believed to be more respectful.

It was remarkable that Rose applied portraiture—historically a documentary genre of the wealthy upper classes—to impoverished local acquaintances and friends working for her family or living in Copperville, the African American village near the entrance to Hope. Rose’s portraits of black people were painted with an immediacy and a refreshing dignity that separated them from the work of many of her peers. In April 1928, the *Newark Evening News* wrote a feature on Rose as a homemaker and an artist that showcased her portrait painting. Seated at her easel wearing her artist’s smock, with brushes and palette in hand, Rose was photographed with her canvas in plain sight. The author described the scene of Rose at work as she recorded a model’s striking features and gray frock.⁵ Tellingly, however, the photograph shows an empty chair where the sitter should have been—underscoring the lack of thoughtful black representation in mainstream media that Rose dedicated much of her art practice to correcting.



Figure 2-2. Photograph of Isaac Copper in the gardens of Hope, ca. 1910

*Miss Rose is a first rate craftsman, who knows how to handle her medium with a sure hand, and she has an ingratiating sense of color. As for her characterizations, these two canvases are quite the best studies of colored men shown here in recent years.*⁶

WHEN *SUITED MAN* WAS EXHIBITED AT NEW YORK'S Weyhe Gallery in 1931, it received highly favorable reviews, like the one quoted above. Rose, who began her artistic career in painting, showed a distinct aptitude for the medium. While the model's identity unfortunately remains a mystery, his portrait reveals an urban gentleman, in contrast to the pastoral figures and settings usually found in Rose's work. His countenance and his nicely tailored suit show a person of substance and in-

tegrity. He leans suavely, with one arm resting on the chair back. He looks pensive; his posture is elegant, his hands refined. The cool blues and greens of the palette form sweeping decorative curves in the background, which are echoed in his suit—creating a patterning and a flattening of the picture plane characteristic of much Modern portraiture. The overall effect of *Suited Man* points to a complex and somber interior life.

In a letter Rose wrote to Zigrosser, she indicated that this painting formed part of a series of three large portraits of African American people originally envisioned as a set.⁷ The two companion paintings included Copperville residents: a double portrait, *Ruth and Pauline Moaney*, and a portrait of Mark Copper, *Mark Asleep*.⁸

Figure 2-3. *Suited Man*, 1931, oil, 36" x 30"



ROSE'S CREATIVE PROCESS—REVEALED IN RECENTLY discovered study sketches and notes—is a significant part of her legacy. Rose left behind clues about her struggle to accurately portray Anna May Moaney, the Starr family's cook. Moaney was from an important local family. Master Sergeant John Moaney, a notable relative and contemporary of Anna May, served President Eisenhower for long periods, beginning with the war efforts in England in 1942 until Moaney's death, in 1978. In recognition of his service, the entire village of Copperville visited the White House as special guests of the president in June 1957.⁹

A close examination of *Anna May Moaney* re-

veals fine brushwork and a composition that demonstrates the artist's technical capability. Avoiding the physical objectification white culture had historically applied to the black female body, Rose expressed Moaney's innate sexual power with a decided subtlety. Among her sketches are notes about gently rotating Moaney's torso to present the subject in an appealing light, so that her "chest is floating in space." Rose contrasts her "sensuous lips opposed to starched cotton," and carefully depicts her feminine qualities by a salmon pink ribbon tied in a delicate bow, with soft sweeps of hair over her ear.¹⁰

The portrait also reveals a strikingly comfort-

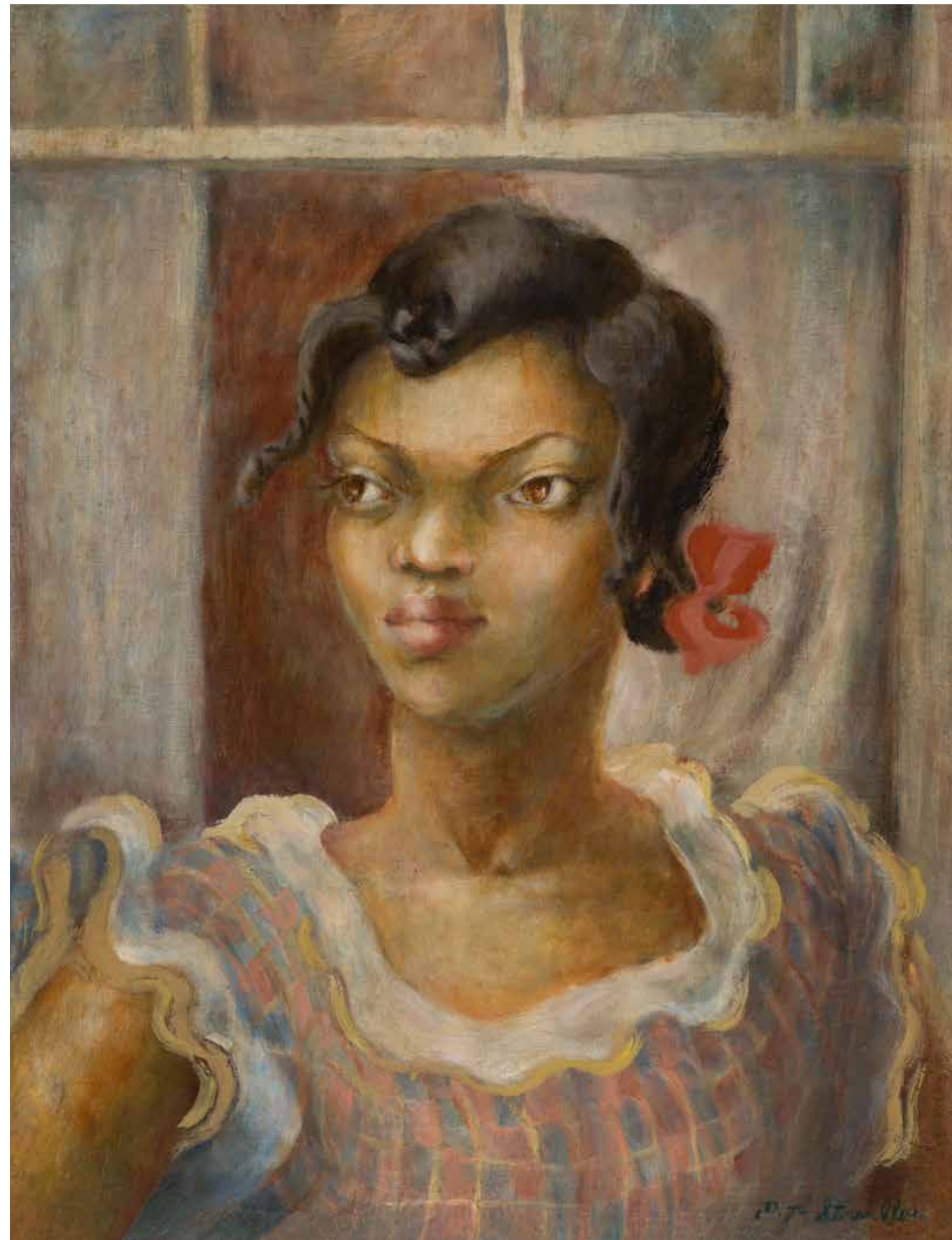


Figure 2-4. *Anna May Moaney*, 1930, oil on Masonite, 24" x 18"

able connection between viewer and model, mediated by Rose's own ease and familiarity with Moaney. Framed by a window, she rests on her front porch. Pride, self-respect, and determination are clear in her expression. The image encourages the viewer to sit with Moaney, visually absorbing her world.

An interesting comparison can be made between *Anna May Moaney* and portraits by other artists done around the same time. Rose's depiction of Moaney is different from author Josephine Pinckney's all-knowing housemaid Bekah in her novel *Three O'Clock Dinner* (1945). Moaney has an impermeable strength that contrasts with Bekah's tired resignation toward her deeply dysfunctional white Charlestonian employers. Moaney shares the sensuality and beauty of artist Reginald Marsh's urban mulatto woman in *High Yaller* (1936). But where the woman in Marsh's painting has a certain hardness as she aggressively strides across a Harlem sidewalk, Moaney sits with a contemplative and serene quality in tune with her rural surroundings at Hope.

Baltimorean Gertrude Stein, who was credited by James Weldon Johnson as being the first white au-

thor to depict black characters "as normal members of the human family," parallels Rose in her attention to the reality of everyday life.¹¹ Moaney's self-assurance and her strong outward gaze find similarity with Stein's character Melanctha Herbert in *Three Lives* (1905–6). Stein describes Herbert as being a "graceful, pale yellow, intelligent, attractive negress," with "a breakneck courage, and a tongue that could be very nasty."¹² With an acerbic wit, Stein openly mocked her prejudiced contemporaries whose comfortable lives were supported by unequal race relations. She sarcastically calls Melanctha a "better sort of negro," as she had been "half made with real white blood."¹³ Meanwhile, another of Stein's characters, Rose Johnson, was the satirical embodiment of racist misconceptions—"a real black, tall, well built, sullen, stupid, childlike good looking negress" who "laughed when she was happy and grumbled and was sullen with everything that troubled."¹⁴ In a sign that both Stein and Rose were ahead of their time, American audiences often misunderstood or looked uncomfortably upon their art.

RUTH AND PAULINE MOANEY AT BREAKFAST WAS conceived as a part of a series, along with *Suited Man* and *Mark Asleep*.¹⁵ Perhaps the most charming of the three, this large-scale double portrait gently introduces the daughters of Anna May Moaney, who, Rose noted, chose to have her children's hair plaited expressly for the occasion.

The painting shows seven-year-old Ruth sitting at the table next to her nine-year-old sister, Pauline. The viewer sees the scene from the perspective of an adult seated across from the children at the same red-and-white gingham-covered table—illustrating Rose's natural presence around the girls. The sisters are painted with similar insight, in a moment when they are politely composed yet can clearly be seen as individuals.

Ruth looks out at the viewer with expressive eyes, while Pauline looks to her right and is largely in profile. Both sisters seem to be happy and self-confident, bearing the same strong features as their mother.

In 1932 the portrait of Ruth and Pauline Moaney and *Mark Asleep* were entered into a juried show at the Albright Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York, and, in 1936, in an international exhibition at the same institution. The show, *The Art of Today*, presented cutting-edge art from a variety of Modern stylistic movements. Rose's paintings were featured alongside the work of internationally acclaimed artists such as Pablo Picasso, Marc Chagall, and Salvador Dalí, in addition to a handful of leading American artists, including Thomas Hart Benton and Georgia O'Keeffe.¹⁶

Figure 2-5. Overleaf: *Ruth and Pauline Moaney at Breakfast*, 1932, oil, 24" x 36"



ROSE'S PORTRAIT OF COPPERVILLE RESIDENT ELIZABETH Moaney represents another defiant Melanctha Herbert type. Rose paints Moaney sitting with assertive straightness in her chair. She is clearly a self-possessed, handsome woman with a fine profile and a strong physique. Although the basket of fruit and Moaney's simple dress suggest that she is a domestic worker, Rose has ennobled her with an intensity of focus that extends outside the limitations of the picture plane, allowing the viewer to see beyond her occupation.

Rose wrote to Zigrosser of the admiration she

and Elizabeth Moaney felt for each other. They were happy to be associated. As Rose wrote colloquially: "I know that Elizabeth Moaney is very proud to be living with 'the quality'—but not nearly as proud as I am to have her there."¹⁷ While the wider historical and socioeconomic context of their time might have prevented a friendship or, at the very least, defined it as wholly imbalanced, the two women were able to establish their own private dynamic based on a mutual respect made evident in Rose's portrait of Moaney.

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Figure 2-6. *Elizabeth Moaney in Profile with a Basket of Fruit*, 1930, oil, 34" x 29"





IN A LETTER TO ZIGROSSER, ROSE REFERS TO CLARENCE DeShields as a “grand type—with a streak of genius that never quite gets expressed.”¹⁸ He was considered a member of the extended Starr family, and more photographs of him are included in the Hope albums than of any other member of the plantation staff. Rose recalled that he practically raised her siblings. He was also the first person to teach her the words to and the meanings behind African American folk songs and spirituals.

Rose knew DeShields well and recorded his character and appearance in her notes: “Clarence was very tall, and walked as if he were tied together with string. He had a most engaging wide, slow smile that went with his unfailing sense of amusement about the world in general.”¹⁹ In her large-scale oil portrait of DeShields, Rose portrays this sense of amusement through his slightly upturned lips, his sparkling eyes, and his relaxed, angled pose. She noted he was the first model to bring special clothes for his portrait, and he

wears a smartly pressed white shirt and a jacket. It is an active portrait: He is shown strumming his guitar. His face—framed by his hat and highlighted below by his crisp white shirt—is the central focus and contains the descriptors of his inner being.

A 1933 *Newark Evening News* article contains a large photograph of Rose standing proudly in front of her portrait of DeShields. The article discusses Rose’s groundbreaking work as an artist and, anecdotally, her accomplishments as the sole woman to compete and win against men in log canoe races. Most significantly, she is credited as being one of the first women to make large-scale oil paintings of black people. Rose shares her intention to make studies of the black population at the Essex County Penitentiary. Although there is no surviving evidence that she undertook this penitentiary series, her determination to give visual presence to an otherwise largely invisible population is a central thread throughout her art practice.²⁰

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Figure 2-7. Clarence DeShields Playing the Guitar, 1931, oil, 44" x 36"

DUCK HUNTER IS FURTHER EVIDENCE OF ROSE'S ABILITY to portray models in a moment that is both revealing and dignified. In this imposing, large-scale oil painting, Bernard Moaney's statuesque physique fills the picture plane, his legs extending beyond the canvas edges. He is seated in self-contained repose, holding the tools of his sport. He clutches an upright Damascus twist steel double-barreled shotgun, and in his lap

sits a well-crafted redheaded drake decoy carved by the Elliott brothers. His upright posture, his arms posed on the chair's armrests, suggests someone who is in command, with a strong sense of self-worth. His serious expression and sideways glance suggest he may rather be outdoors. Attired in impeccable hunting apparel, Moaney could easily join the Starr brothers on a shoot.

.....
Figure 2-8. *Portrait of Bernard Moaney as a Duck Hunter*, 1931, oil, 48" x 31½"





ROSE PAINTED THIS YOUNGER MEMBER OF THE MOANEY family perched on the back steps of her Pickbourne Farm kitchen. In this finished oil painting, as well as in the preparatory drawings, Rose seems to be working out the relationship between herself and a child whose mother works in service for her family. The resulting trust and patience granted to the artist by the young child is a testament to their genuine relationship. His large, earnest eyes directly engage the viewer, while the full-length portrait shows his tiny frame and small booted feet resting on the step below him. He is shown in a sweater and collared shirt, contented, clean, and well fed—a stark contrast to the racist depictions of wildly unkempt black children by many of Rose’s contemporaries.

ROSE DEPICTED GEORGE, ANOTHER YOUNG MEMBER OF the Moaney family, in an intimate study in pastel, an atypical medium for the artist. Her creative choice of pastels lends the portrait an immediacy not found in her oil paintings—fitting for Moaney as a close childhood friend of Rose’s son. Rose shows Moaney wearing a large straw hat with a decorative red band and a matching red jacket. He looks contentedly at his pony while clutching his puppy in his right arm. The composition is focused on his face and the faces of his pets. This tender, innocent moment shows Moaney happily lost in a silent interchange with his animals, which were a ubiquitous part of rural Eastern Shore life.

Figure 2-9. *Moaney Boy on Stairs*, 1930, oil, 30" x 24"



Figure 2-10. *George Mooney with a Horse and a Puppy*, 1930, pastel, 33 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 39 $\frac{1}{2}$ "

FANNY E. COPPER, A FRESCO ROSE CREATED AROUND 1930, IS a portrait of a young African American girl set against a flat, neutral background. Wearing a feminine coral-pink dress with lavender-gray ribbons in her hair, Copper gazes directly into the eyes of the viewer with a quiet confidence and trust, as her left hand rests on her breast. Copper was presented earlier in this chapter, in a lithograph made around the same time, with her hair in identical ribbons and a soft curl over her forehead.

Rose's approach to Fanny's portrait in both fresco and print marks a shift in her practice, away from

more expensive techniques (such as painting and frescoes) toward the print medium. Rose explains her reasons for favoring lithography in a lecture memorialized in her notes:

Instead of using oils, which make large pictures needing frames and costly to ship, I decided to become a printmaker, and to do my work in lithography. A lithograph seemed ideal. It was larger than etching and freer in execution. It was very dramatic, very black-and-white. It should be perfect for modern subject matter.²¹

Figure 2-11. *Fanny E. Copper*, 1930, fresco, 25½" x 19½"





Figure 2-12. Previous spread: *The Circus*, 1930, oil on Masonite, 30" x 40"

ROSE AND HER MOTHER, IDA STARR, ATTENDED THE DeShields United Methodist Church in Copperville, near Hope, and became close to its congregation—a fact documented by the Starrs at Hope and in the local newspaper. In 1920 Starr published an article in the *Easton Gazette* honoring a young man named William Blake, who had been in service to her family until he died suddenly in an accident. Praising his noble character, she likely shocked readers, as black people were not even listed in local Easton obituaries until the late 1960s. She described Blake as “an all around man of much stability of character, and of such practical intelligence that few colored men, and . . . few white men of the industrial class had brighter prospects ahead than he.”²²

In 1925 Starr announced in the *Star Democrat* that she intended to invite all black members of the community to a garden party at Hope on Memorial Day. She held the party to honor Isaac Copper, William Blake, and other people who had devoted their lives to helping her realize her dream at Hope. She acknowledged her friends as extended family, stating, “So realizing as I do that Hope is beautiful because of the Black hands that have planted trees and have made the flowers sing in their glory, I wish to dedicate Memorial Day this year to the Colored Citizens of Talbot County.”²³ The event

was well attended, and there was at least one more such celebration five years later in 1930. As with the party in 1925, the 1930 event was equally successful, and the record of each visitor’s name filled three pages in Hope’s great leather-bound guest book as a testament to the equality the Starrs accorded their guests. Later, when Rose taught Sunday school, she followed this convention of record-keeping, documenting each child’s full name and age. While the outside world complied with segregation, Hope was a place where workers were honored and memorialized regardless of race.

The Circus, painted sometime around the 1930 garden party, is situated in front of the old Talbot County courthouse—notably, a site of justice. Rose’s husband is standing on a box in the center of the dynamic circular composition. He seems to be filling the role of conductor and is joined by a black man who is raising a bottle in the air. African American families stand along the left side of the frame and white families are positioned on the right. However, Rose’s son and daughter share a golden buggy with a black child. Furthermore, the roundabout, clocklike movement shows other chariots filled with people of both races, pulled by mules, ponies, and even a goat—suggesting time’s gradual progression toward integration and equality.

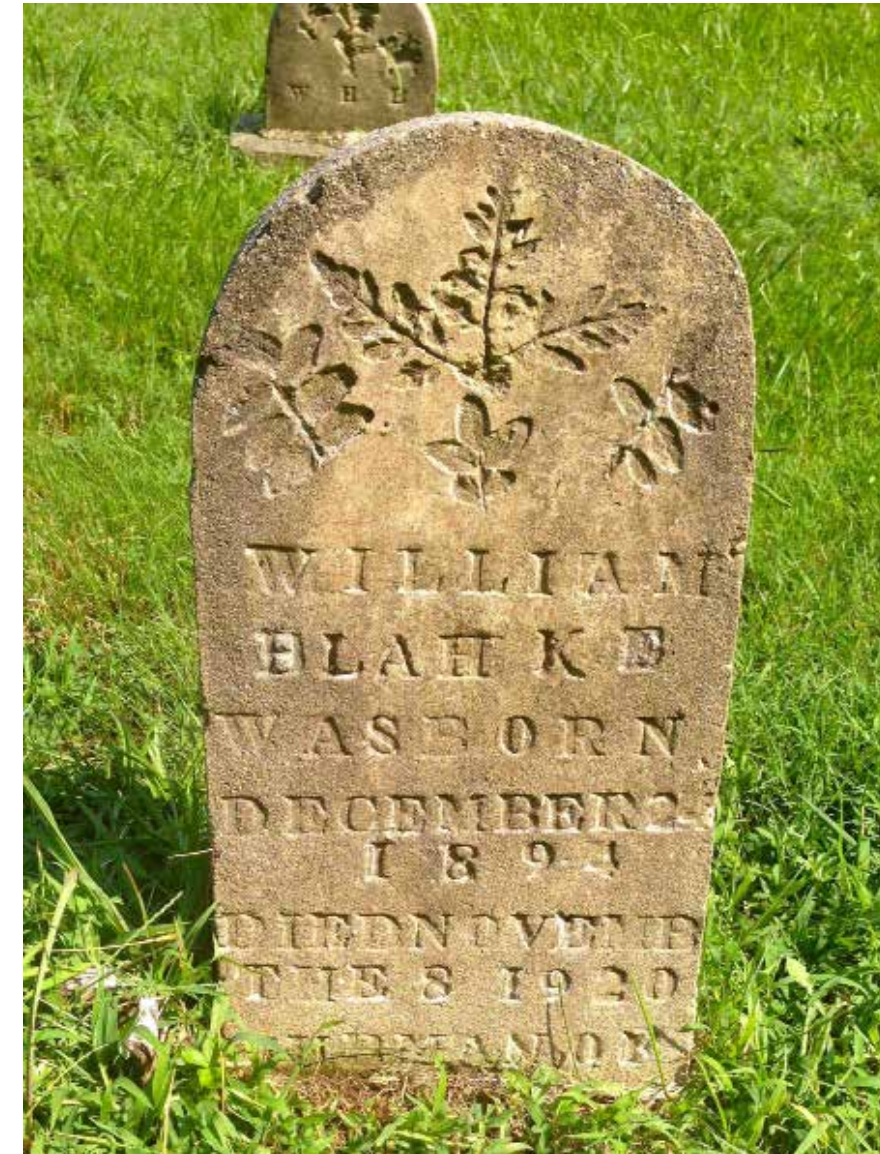


Figure 2-13. William Blake’s tombstone in Copperville, Maryland

Figures 2-14 and 2-15. Following pages: Hope guest book signatures, “Colored Citizens of Talbot,” Memorial Day, May 30, 1930

Memorial Day
 30 May 1930.
 Colored Citizens of Tullahoma

- Rev W. J. Nelson
 Boston, Ind.
- M. S. Nelson
 Foster Richards
 Freda Washfield
 Jaycee Moroney
 Elizabeth Moroney
 John Moroney
 Edward Lambie
 Thomas Edwards
 Saphira Edwards
 Lawrence Meyer
 Mary Haney
 David Haney
 Richard H. Blake Jr.
 Elizabeth Blake
 Richard H. Blake III
 John Smith
 Horace Buddha Black
 Jean Capps
 Alice Capps
 Anna McHenry
 William McHenry of Germantown near here also 3rd
 Butler for many years. Now let me think or ask for name of 2nd

- Charles Duke
 John Blain
 W. D. Kintley
 Joe Charles Thomas
 Anna Thomas
 Ed. Brown
 Harry Brown
~~Johnnie Miller~~
 Albert Taylor
 Anna Johnson
 Margaret Mason
 Elizabeth Green
 Mary Bell
 H. Letta Wilson
 George Cooper Sr.
 Mary A. Cooper
 George O. Cooper
 George H. Cooper Jr.
 Louie C. Cooper
 Richard H. Cooper
 Arthur M. Cooper
 Elizabeth & R. Lewis Lewis
 Thomas Justice
 Laura Rice
 Robert Lewis
 Elizabeth Lewis
 Robert Lewis Jr.
 Mary Lewis
 Arthur & Carl Cooper
 Helen C. Cooper

Mary Cooper
 Mattie [unclear]
 John DeShields
 Shelly DeShields
 Rev. R. S. Pollard of [unclear]

John Mooney
 Last Suffer for Mrs. Salt
 in the year of 1898



Figures 2-16. Hope guest book signatures, "Colored Citizens of Talbot," Memorial Day, May 30, 1930

Figure 2-17. Photograph of John Moaney, Clarence DeShields, and Ropey in the nursery at Hope, from the Starr family photograph album, 1911

IN THE SMALL-SCALE OIL PAINTING *EASTERN SHORE THRESHER*, Rose takes a different approach. She depicts men harvesting wheat in a palette of golden tones suggesting late summer. It is an informal group portrait *en plein air* and in this context documents the immemorial connection that man has to the land. The single individual in the forefront looking straight ahead pulls the viewer in, while the depth of perspective sug-

gests the monumental task of the communal effort. The sense of fellowship is apparent as the men work alongside their mules and machines to bring in the crop.

Rose's notes suggest this scene marks the last harvest to use a steam-powered thresher on the Eastern Shore. It was an important theme for her, and she also made a similar serigraph.



Figure 2-18. Previous spread: *Eastern Shore Thresher*, 1932, oil on Masonite, 17¾" x 23⅞"

BY 1939, NOW LARGELY WORKING IN THE PRINT medium, Rose had labored for a decade to visually document the many African American trades found on the Eastern Shore. Included in her survey were farmers, sailmakers, minstrels, and crab pickers. They are rare, accurate depictions of people who, even in today's world, tend to be relegated to the caste of the invisible. In a private manifesto, Rose described her desire to chronicle the diverse laborers of Maryland's Eastern Shore:

*I plan to show in paintings and lithographs the life and industries of the Eastern Shore of Maryland with special reference to all native customs and activities of the Negroes and white tenant farmers. This plan includes a study of Negro types of pure and mixed blood (white, Negro, and Indian) and a record of all their industries [including] fishing, crabbing, oystering, farming, trapping, handicrafts, and religious customs.*²⁴

Maryland Crab Pickers, a lithograph honoring productive black female workers, directly takes up Rose's

personal challenge. In a letter to Zigrosser in 1933, Rose describes her unexpected encounter with African American women working in the crab-picking houses. She draws parallels to the work of friend and teacher Mabel Dwight:

*Today I went over to St. Michael's to see our houseboat which was hauled out on the ways being copper painted. Right next was a crab house, just swarming and screeching with black life all sizes and shapes—Mabel Dwight would make a stunning lithograph of it. I am going back to make a drawing.*²⁵

Much like her 1932 painting *Eastern Shore Thresher*, Rose emphasizes the communal effort of these laborers through a strong depth of perspective in the composition. The viewer is invited into the scene by the congenial glance of a woman in the left-most corner of the picture frame. Seated together at a long, orderly table extending in a diagonal across the composition, the group enthusiastically goes about their task.

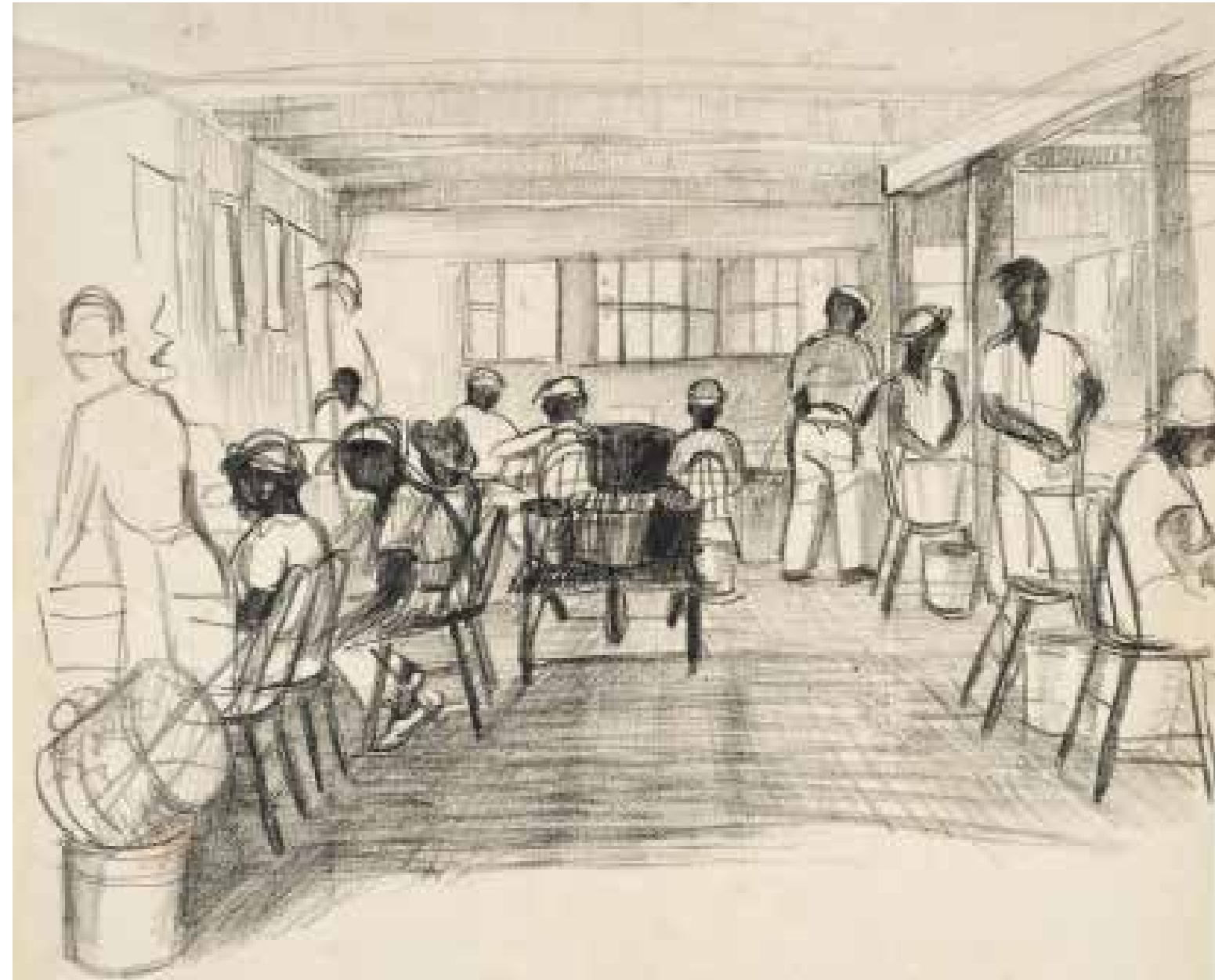


Figure 2-19. *Maryland Crab Pickers*, study, 1933, charcoal and pencil, 14" x 16½"



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Figure 2-20. *Maryland Crab Pickers*,
1933, black-and-white lithograph, 11" x 14" plate



.....
Figure 2-21. *Downes Curtis*, 1935,
black-and-white lithograph, 11⁵/₈" x 14³/₄" plate



Figure 2-22. Photograph of Downes Curtis's sail makers loft in Oxford, Maryland, ca. 1930

IN THE LITHOGRAPH PORTRAIT *DOWNES CURTIS*, Rose portrays a sailmaker in Oxford, Maryland, as he is working in his Tilghman Street loft. Rose visited Oxford often to see her many friends and to compete in her log canoe regattas. She referred to the town fondly as a “nautical paradise.”²⁶

In her studies for this lithograph, Rose used Curtis and his German immigrant colleague interchangeably as models. The final print, however, features Curtis engrossed in his work in a tightly articulated composi-

tion. He is seated centrally on his workbench, bent in active concentration to detail, surrounded by billowing, draped canvas at his feet and neatly rolled sails above him in the background. Curtis is shown as a highly skilled man devoted to his art.

Rose was pleased with the final result, which honored Curtis's fine craftsmanship. It was one of her favorite lithographs and was used by her often in her lectures on black life.



Figure 2-23. Pen-and-ink study for unknown lithograph, *The Flood*, ca. 1930, 10½" x 14"

Figure 2-24. Overleaf: *Hell's Crossing*, 1933, black-and-white lithograph, 12" x 15½" plate

IN *HELL'S CROSSING*, ROSE PROVIDES A SNAPSHOT OF A black neighborhood in the historic town of St. Michaels, Maryland. Again, the sense of community is visually anchored in a slightly elevated view, with a central dirt lane winding through the composition. Townspeople are shown in a variety of positions, alternately sitting on the front steps to their house, standing, carrying a bucket, or guiding a wheelbarrow. Her print shows how economically disadvantaged people lived closely together and coped with everyday problems such as providing basic hygiene and food for their families.

Rose describes her process of constructing the perspective of this small-town scene: “It develops logical-

ly and structurally—there seems to be something almost architectural in the way it builds up. And as I was nearly an architect once—it is one way of working out an old longing.”²⁷ The print can also be noted for its theatrical quality, much like a stage set for *Porgy and Bess*. The fact that DuBose Heyward spent Easter at Hope in 1935 adds to the sense that this lithograph sprang from admiration for other artists who were also compelled to describe a part of American society that was seldom addressed.

Hell's Crossing was shown in the Philadelphia Print Club exhibition of 1934, together with work of a similar genre by artists Prentiss Taylor and Mabel Dwight.



WASHING ON THE BACK PORCH ILLUSTRATES A SCENE OF daily life in Copperville. The print, like *Hell's Crossing*, deals directly with small-town hardship, yet, true to Rose's style, is not too severe in its depiction. While the mother and child are clearly impoverished, it is a relatively pleasant domestic scene. As the mother engages in productive work, cleaning in a basin, the child sits on the front porch in the company of her toy. The clapboard house and porch are bare, yet homey. The front door stands partly open and welcoming.

Rose described this print to Zigrosser in a letter, underlining her goals to artistically express a world largely ignored: "It gives a true and rather bizarre picture of their life and seems to me to show the dirt and grotesque drabness of their surroundings."²⁸ Although Rose and her circle of friends were ideologically progressive, they nevertheless lived in a world of stringent inequality that was often difficult for them to comprehend.

Around the time of this lithograph, artist and feminist Mabel Dwight was also making portraits in Maryland. Dwight wrote to her lover, Baltimorean architect Roderick Seidenberg, describing the hypocrisy of typical depictions of Maryland's black communi-

ty in her characteristically tongue-in-cheek fashion: "It is very 'southern' down here—Negroes galore—shanties and 'down-at-the-heel.'"²⁹ Ironically, since Dwight was keenly attuned to subject matter pertaining to social injustice, she was commissioned to make a painting of Myra Edgerly Korzybska, a close friend of Rose's mother. An intellectual and a portrait painter of the upper classes, Korzybska is described in Gertrude Stein's *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933) as an artist whose paintings "miniaturized" everyone. Stein also noted that Korzybska first introduced her to English nobility in an attempt to help her publish her work.

Artist Victoria Hutson Huntley, a frequent houseguest at Pickbourne and Rose's lifelong friend, encouraged Rose's depictions of southern life. Later in her own career, Huntley also turned to black portraiture, writing that it was not her intent to show any "inherent mysticism," but rather to portray African Americans as a downtrodden people with an emotional richness and a closeness to the earth. As Rose did in her early works, Huntley opted for the medium of paint "to reveal rather their extraordinary capacity to live fully despite the squalor of their backgrounds."³⁰



Figure 2-25. *Washing on the Back Porch*, 1933, black-and-white lithograph, 15³/₄" x 12³/₄" plate



Figure 2-26. Photograph of Stella, Sally DeShields, and Sol at Hope, Christmas 1918

AS HOUSEKEEPER AND PART-TIME COOK, SALLY DeShields was essential to Rose, especially when she entertained friends from New York. Her lithograph *Aunt Sally's House* shows an African American Eastern Shore vernacular house and farmyard set against a wooded backdrop. DeShields stands in the front doorway, caring for a child. Along the front path, a small boy approaches, carrying a bucket. The rural setting is punctuated by a roaming chicken and a dog sleeping in the yard.

Rose depicts DeShields's poverty with honesty. At the same time, the house warmly reflects its inhabitants, as smoke billows from one of the chimneys. Encompassed by a wooden fence and secured by a gate, the home also feels safe. And even though the road leading to the property is badly rutted, the landscape remains well ordered.

In Rose's account of her first meeting with DeShields, it is clear that she both acknowledged and abhorred the socioeconomic inequality between southern staff and employers. It is also apparent that Rose struggled to conceive of and actively carve out her own position within this society:

One day, after we had been living in Maryland for a few months my mother sent me to hire a colored woman. She came out of her cabin barefooted, and I right away fell in love with her fine, handsome face.

When someone later asked old Aunt Sally whom she worked for, she said, "For Miss Ruth." They said, "Who is Miss Ruth?" Aunt Sally answered, "Why she is a stranger from off. But she quality just the same." I tell you this to show what I had to live down.³¹

Figure 2-27. Overleaf: *Aunt Sally's House*, 1932, black-and-white lithograph, 11³/₈" x 15¹/₂" plate





Figure 2-28. *War Workers in Maryland*, 1942, serigraph, 13" x 15½"

WAR WORKERS IN MARYLAND IS A PATRIOTIC SERIGRAPH print that Rose completed during World War II. Realized in bright, eye-catching colors, predominately reds, yellows, and blues, the print shows smiling, well-dressed children loading provisions onto a wheelbarrow in front of a clapboard building. The composition displays the reality that black families of all ages gladly contributed time and energy to the war effort—a fact that was often overlooked by the media in a segregated America.

ROSE'S LITHOGRAPH *MERRY-GO-ROUND* ILLUSTRATES A mother and children enjoying themselves at the Fire-

men's Carnival, which was held annually at the base of the same street seen in *Hell's Crossing*. Rose typically focused on scenes of rural industry or contemplation, making this a rare depiction of carefree leisure. A surviving sketch shows how Rose sought to emphasize the familial quality of the scene by showing the mother with her arm carefully supporting her young son as he rode the carousel.

In 1935 *Merry-Go-Round* was singled out by Emily Genauer of the *New York Herald* as one of the finest pieces in New York's 45th Annual Exhibition of the National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors.³²

Figure 2-29. Overleaf: *Merry-Go-Round*, 1934, black-and-white lithograph, 10⅜" x 14⅛" plate





Figure 2-30. *Madonna*,
1934, black-and-white lithograph, 12" x 14" plate



Figure 2-31. *Madonna*, study, charcoal pencil on yellow trace, 13½" x 16⅞"

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ELIZABETH MOANEY LIVED IN COPPERVILLE AND WAS ONE of the Hope staff members who became a part of the extended Starr family. In Rose's studies and notes for the black-and-white lithograph *Madonna*, she describes her attempt to convey the nurturing desire of mothers to protect and watch over their babies. Moaney, in the titular role, sits quietly on a simple, overturned basket,

watching over her sleeping baby. Despite the otherwise modest surroundings, Moaney's infant rests in the same eighteenth-century American cradle used for members of the Starr family at Hope. The religious theme is further evident in the triangular composition of Moaney's form, a common artistic convention in depicting Jesus's mother, Mary. Mother and baby each radiate light.



Figure 2-32. Photograph of Aunt Sally holding a little girl, from the Hope family photograph album, ca. 1930

Figure 2-33. Overleaf: *Supper-time*, 1936, black-and-white lithograph, 8½" x 11½" plate

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ROSE'S LITHOGRAPH *SUPPERTIME* OFFERS A QUIET moment of private introspection. Elizabeth Moaney is seated at a bare wooden table holding an empty plate. Moaney—illuminated by a tall oil lamp—looks exhausted as she stares pensively and dejectedly into the distance. The sparsely decorated domestic interior reads like a print by artist Wanda Gag, Rose's peer. Yet *Supper-time* focuses most on the human element, and Rose emphasizes the scene's poignant realism. Moaney's interior world rings stark and very true.

In her notes relating to a lecture she once presented, Rose explains her reasons for documenting her friends and acquaintances of the local Eastern Shore community in works such as *Supper-time*:
*You love life and living quality; here is life all around you. Paint what God has given you, the life of the people who work for you, who live all unnoticed in this remote community. So, the idea came to make a record of the life of the Negroes of the Eastern Shore. It had never been done and is still unique in the annals of art.*³³





III. ROSE'S DOCUMENTATION OF NEGRO SPIRITUALS

*Ruth Starr Rose's visual interpretation of Negro Spirituals is the most comprehensive, and probably the most sympathetic work yet to appear in the United States. Although Negro Spirituals have been interpreted by numerous artists in many different media of the visual arts, no single artist has approached the extensive treatment accorded by this artist to this theme.*¹

THESE WORDS OF PRAISE, WRITTEN IN 1956, CAME FROM James Amos Porter, father of African American art history and professor at Howard University. He judged Rose's work on the theme of Negro spirituals to be unrivaled. Rose's dedication to this subject was an unlikely creative choice for an early twentieth-century Maryland artist of her background. In practice, however, her exceptional life experiences, artistic training, and close relationship with African American people in her local community made her uniquely suited to the task of

depicting this distinctively American art form. Above all, it was undoubtedly Rose's lifelong belief in a divine power that allowed her to connect to the spirituals and to give them visual expression.

That same year, Rose wrote to Raymond F. Piper, a professor at Syracuse University, to contribute research for his book tentatively titled *Cosmic Art*. In her letter, she explained that she identified with the key theme connecting all spirituals—that God is infinitely powerful and “the only reality of life”:²

*The mood of spiritual exaltation that is expressed in all my lithographs is the result of a deep intense feeling that the power of God will protect and bless his children, no matter what the color or the creed. . . . These aspects of life, which are common to us all, are used as an authentic foundation on which to build the symbolism of the spiritual allegories. Thus the sounds portray the eternal truths of God's power and protection, blessing the lives of men of good will everywhere.*³

Figure 3-1. *Boy in Church Clothes*, 1933, oil, 24" x 20"

ROSE LEARNED ABOUT SPIRITUALS FIRSTHAND AT THE Deshields United Methodist Church that she and her mother attended from the 1920s through the 1940s. This historic structure was erected as early as 1895 in Copperville, Maryland.⁴ The village in which the church stands was once part of an extensive landholding belonging to the powerful Lloyd family of Wye, which was notable for being Frederick Douglass’s childhood home. Named for the prominent African American Copper family, the village was originally settled by John Copper, Philip Moaney, and Solomon DeShields.

Over the decades, Rose developed close ties with the congregation and ministers at the church, and she is documented as having been a Sunday-school teacher around 1940. In a letter to Zigrosser in 1933, Rose mentions an oil portrait she made of Reverend Davis. Rose described how interesting it was to paint the reverend in his pulpit, noting that he had “a fine face” with “a great deal of nobility in it.”⁵ Her interpretation of the minister followed the lines of James Weldon Johnson’s conception of an “old time preacher” articulated in his 1927 book of Negro sermons, *God’s Trombones*. As Reverend Davis stands confidently, in full command of the King James Bible and in ownership of his African ancestry, he epitomizes Johnson’s ideal preacher.

Around the same time, Carl Zigrosser sent Rose a book on Negro spirituals. When she wrote him in thanks, she mentioned her gratitude for the edifying, re-

ciprocal relationships she had with members of the Copperville congregation. She marveled that, despite rarely having any formal musical training or the ability to read the church hymnals, her African American friends excelled in song. Rose felt their singing came from the soul, and was therefore a higher form of art that she was eager to engage with, both personally and creatively:

*As they worked in the fields, the colored people sang, and in their singing was magic. They would send special invitations to me to come to services in their little church in the Negro village of Copperville, our nearest settlement. In painting my Negro spiritual series, I have tried to present through creative design the symbolism gained through my life with the Negroes. These allegorical interpretations attempt, through design, color and integration of life elements, to bring about unity between the races, by means of paint.*⁶

IN LATE SPRING OF 1956, PORTER INVITED ROSE TO GIVE a solo exhibition at Howard University, and he extolled her work on Negro spirituals as the most complete and compassionate to date.⁷ Prior to the opening, there was a dedication ceremony on April 4, 1956, in which Rose presented a gift of her prints to the university. Miraculously, the notes for her speech have survived. Her brief dedication addressed equal rights as a part of religious freedom. Rose’s closing words reveal her philosophical approach to the spirituals:

These spirituals I have given to the students of Howard and

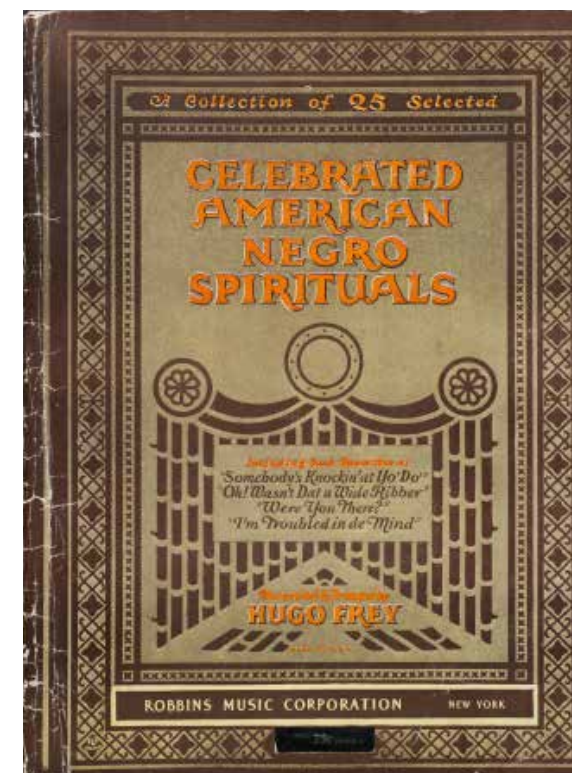


Figure 3-2. *Celebrated American Negro Spirituals*. Gift to Ruth Starr Rose from Carl Zigrosser

Figures 3-3, 3-4, 3-5, and 3-6. Overleaf: Ruth Starr Rose’s list of Sunday-school students at the Copperville Church, 1940

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*to the faculty, with the knowledge that these great uplifting truths, which guide us—will be a light and inspiration to you all, always to me and to you, together.*⁸

Agnes DeLano, Rose’s friend and a Howard University professor, wrote the foreword to the exhibition brochure. In her essay on Rose’s art practice, DeLano explains that the artist “determined to do a visual series of Negro spirituals” after being “struck by . . . their deep spiritual sense.”⁹ Embarking on this mission, as Rose explains in a 1956 letter to Piper, she found lithography

to be “a perfect medium to express the dramatic quality of the Negro songs.”¹⁰ In her notes, Rose wrote: *Long ago the slaves sang, “If the Lord delivered Jonah from the belly of the whale, He will deliver me.” And these words came true. The Negro race has been delivered from dangers and torments worse than Jonah knew. They have been given a vision of the freedom that can finally be complete. Since a troubled soul can be delivered from bondage at any time, Jonah could be cast up from the belly of the whale at Christmas time—symbolic of a new birth.*¹¹

Boys	Age
James Blackwell	14
Leroy Blackwell	7
Isaac Copper	16
Charles Copper	7
Robert Lewis	14
James McCoy	10
Glenie McCoy	6
Daniel Moaney	14
Harvey Moaney	12
Thomas Moaney	10
Sylvester Moaney	9
Ernest Moaney	8
Junior Moaney	4
John Moaney	10
Richard Moaney	7
Oliver Moaney	12
George Moaney	16
Charles Miller	12
Vanderbuilt Miller	9
William Miller	16

Norman Parker	12
William Parker	14
Norman Wilson	14
Howard Copper	10

Girls.	Age
Florence Blake	12 yrs.
Mary Copper	12
Edna Copper	10
Marion Copper	9
Fanny Copper	18
Bertha Copper	17
Betty Copper	3
Geraldine Copper	3
Bernice + Lamer	10
Elma + Lamer	8
Mamie Lewis (Virginia Lane)	18 (2)
Lethia Lewis	15
Edmonia Lewis	7
Pauline Moaney	16
Ruth Moaney	14
Margaret Moaney	12
Althia Moaney	3
Deulah Miller	11
Hilda Miller	7
Thelma McCoy	8
Jacqueline McCoy	5 (over)

Gertrude Roberts	10
Beatrice Roberts	16

24 girls

AS ROSE EXPLAINS IN HER SURVIVING WRITTEN NOTES, the story of Jonah is one of the most powerful biblical parables on deliverance from suffering. Rose made three separate printed editions on this theme, and her studies reveal her powerful imagination as she looked at a range of iconic examples, including illuminated manuscripts and a modern-day whale that disgorges not only Jonah but a helicopter too. Her final compositions prove the effectiveness of simplicity. A serene young black man

kneels within the mouth of the whale as he looks out to his audience on the shore. In one version, a Christmas wreath is suspended around his hands folded together in prayer, which, Rose explained, underscored the idea of new birth and liberation.

Jonah and the Whale was one of Rose's more popular prints, and it enjoyed immediate success when it was exhibited in the 1937 Paris International Exposition before traveling to Sweden.



Figure 3-7. *Jonah and the Whale*, 1936, black-and-white lithograph, 6" x 8 1/2" plate

Figure 3-8. Overleaf: Featured at the 1937 Paris International Exposition, *Jonah and the Whale*, 1936, color serigraph, 12" x 18"



THE COPPERVILLE CHURCH COMMUNITY DESCRIBED their interpretation of a given spiritual in words, which Rose then illustrated. “Noah’s Ark,” a song referred to by the congregation as “The Old Ark’s A’Moverin’,” is a clear example of Rose’s skill in translating a vernacular oral history of Maryland’s African American culture into a visual image evoking the community’s beliefs. Descended from enslaved people, the black population knew poverty and pain for centuries, and those of faith believed in the notion of an ark that would ferry them to safety in the afterlife. They trusted that their endless struggles in an otherwise unjust world would be compensated by final rewards in Heaven.

Rose created both black-and-white and color versions of her lithograph *The Old Ark’s A’Moverin’*, which forms a part of the collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Fortunately, many studies survive, in addition to color takes for the print. She also made a large fresco

on this topic, in which the characters on the ark are portraits of Copperville residents.

This piece was important to Rose, and she planned to feature it in her illustrated book on Negro spirituals. In her notes, Rose contemplated what she had learned about the very real relationship of this spiritual’s imagery to African American life on the Eastern Shore:

To the colored people on the tidewater Noah’s Ark is not surprising or fantastic. . . . Singing about the Ark, the Negroes are thinking of their church that provides them with a refuge for sailing steadily through life. They feel that the inevitable progress of the Ark toward the rainbow’s end typifies the long and dangerous voyage of the colored race toward freedom and good will.

Instead of home being on this earth, home is that blessed Realm of Heaven—thwarted and scorned here—in Heaven all will be equal in the sight of God.¹²



Figure 3-9. *The Old Ark’s A’Moverin’*, ca. 1938, charcoal study, 4½" x 7"

Figure 3-10. Overleaf: *The Old Ark’s A’Moverin’*, ca. 1940, fresco, 33¼" x 45"



*It is right now, in their talks and prayers in their churches, as in the spirituals of other days, that the colored people still feel that their only real home is Heaven.*¹³

ROSE'S COLOR LITHOGRAPH *SWING LOW, SWEET CHARIOT*, brings to life her assertion that in attending the small Copperville church she was able to learn Negro spirituals "not from a book, but from the hearts of a people." As she wrote in the excerpt from her notes quoted above, Rose paid close attention when she attended church. According to Rose, "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" was one of the first spirituals that she heard on the Eastern Shore. She was riveted as she listened to Jim Moaney singing the words to his mules as he plowed the fields. In her notes, she wrote:

*The sweet chariot is the old familiar buggy and the faithful mule. Albeit touched with stardust and driven properly by angels, here are friendly symbols of home to take a frightened soul to a glorious country called Heaven. As they get ready to make that journey through eternal space, protected by the nearness of those material things that are familiar, they know that they are in safe company and that they will not be alone.*¹⁴

Rose's composition brings to life the descriptions provided by the congregation. It also goes beyond

to convey the intangible emotional and spiritual content of the song—vividly evoking the experience of the Eastern Shore. Her bold use of a saturated bright pink and a swirling pattern in her color lithograph parallels the painting of the same title and similar date made by her contemporary John McCrady. Malvin Gray Johnson, a talented black artist whose life was tragically cut short, also addressed this spiritual in an early oil painting. His interpretation keenly reflects the grief expressed in the song. Johnson's composition is situated at the water's edge, where a group of slaves has managed to gather in darkness after a long day of labor to appeal to their God for release from bondage.

Made around 1940, Rose's *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot* appears in Alain Locke's seminal book, *The Negro in Art*, and again as an illustration in a *New York Times Book Review* from 1952.¹⁵ As with other spirituals that Rose worked with the Copperville congregation to understand, her interpretations of *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot* involved an ongoing creative process. Rose reworked it in the form of a black-and-white lithograph and eventually an oil painting. This piece was also listed to be included in her unpublished book on Negro spirituals.

As with many of her works depicting Negro spir-



Figure 3-II. *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*, 1951, black-and-white lithograph, 7½" x 10¾" plate

ituals, the influence of English Romantic artist William Blake (1757–1827) is evident. In 1935, thanking Zigrosser for the gift of a book on Blake, Rose wrote of her admiration for the artist: "That book of Blake has opened up whole new vistas for me."¹⁶ Notably, both Rose and Blake experienced formative divine visions in their lifetimes, and each emphasized mystical experiences in their art practices. Thematically, Rose's adaptations can be seen as organized by the Counter-Enlightenment concept of *Sturm und Drang* or Blake's individual approach to Ro-

mantic art, which valued the subjectivity of vision and emotion over rational order. Rose's treatments of the spiritual theme contain a distinct turbulence between earthly hardship and the promise of spiritual deliverance. In artistic application, Blake's bold and dynamic compositions, such as his frontispiece *The Ancient of Days* (1794), effectively depict mythic scenes and celestial atmospheres.¹⁷ His influence on Rose is evident in the swirling heavenly skies, which Rose described as "eternal space," found in *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*.¹⁸



Figure 3-12. *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*,
1951, oil on Masonite, 15½" x 20"



Figure 3-13. Opposite: *The Twilight Quartet*, 1936, oil, 78" x 54"

Figure 3-14. *Two Members of the Twilight Quartet*, 1931, oil study on Masonite, 48" x 31½"

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THIS TRAIN IS BOUND FOR GLORY IS ONE OF ROSE'S MOST powerful images for the way it effectively portrays the ascendant moment of heavenly deliverance as angels lift a train into the sky. It is also very personal. The print is directly situated in the Copperville church community that meant so much to Rose. The congregation, the church, and a vernacular-style cabin form the earthly background of the composition. In addition to vibrant charcoal studies, each color take has survived, along

with Rose's handwritten notes regarding hue and shade.

The imagery for *This Train Is Bound for Glory* was no doubt inspired by Rose's experiences with Copperville's Moaney Quartet, made up of Jim Moaney, Mark Copper, Franklin Kellum, and Edward Lewis. She depicted in her large-scale painting *Twilight Quartet*. The artist witnessed a performance in which the quartet ran from the front to the back of the church, rhythmically shouting and jumping to activate the entire congregation and



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Figure 3-15. *This Train is Bound for Glory*,
1951, color serigraph, 15" x 18"

using their voices to transform the church into a loud locomotive engine that was about to take off. Rose's *Twilight Quartet* was featured in the *New York Times* in 1937 as the winner of the Mary Hills Goodwin Prize, which carried the sizable reward of \$200.¹⁹ In the painting, four men wear fashionably tailored suits and stand tall as they convey their religious message in harmony.

Rose summarized the broad cultural relevance of *Twilight Quartet* and her versions of *This Train Is Bound for Glory*:

Negro spirituals spring from a spiritual need that was once acute and is still very real—we must not forget that they are deeply religious songs. Right now in the little remote churches all over the South, quartets are singing for the people—not for radio fame—but for the simple Christian duty of helping souls to find heaven.

Their groups of singers are in deadly earnest and full of religious zeal. They come out of the wheat fields and tomato patches, right from the threshing, the crab house, the oyster shucking, to sing for their own people. Very many of these quartets cannot read a note of music, yet so phenomenal is their musical sense that they make an orchestral harmony,

with savage, haunting undertones, out of a simple song.

*The singing of these black Americans is one of the sounders of the new world.*²⁰

In her notes, Rose references the “sounders,” whom Leslie King Hammond identifies as spiritual people within the Native American community who were able to clear the air of past offenses. For African American culture, the concept similarly involves a leader capable of connecting to and purifying the past. On the Eastern Shore, earthly life was often an arduous journey—one that would end in a heavenly destination far superior to the poverty and injustice sustained at home.

In a nearly illegible scrawl, Rose recounted a story in her notes of her own experience with a sounder. She commended the man as a black leader who bravely honored his own difficult but worthy history:

*One night at the Copperville Church the handsome brown leader of a visiting quartet made a plea to the congregation not to be ashamed to return to their old songs. He himself had just come within an hour from the threshing field, he was one of them, one of the workers, and he spoke with power and authority.*²¹

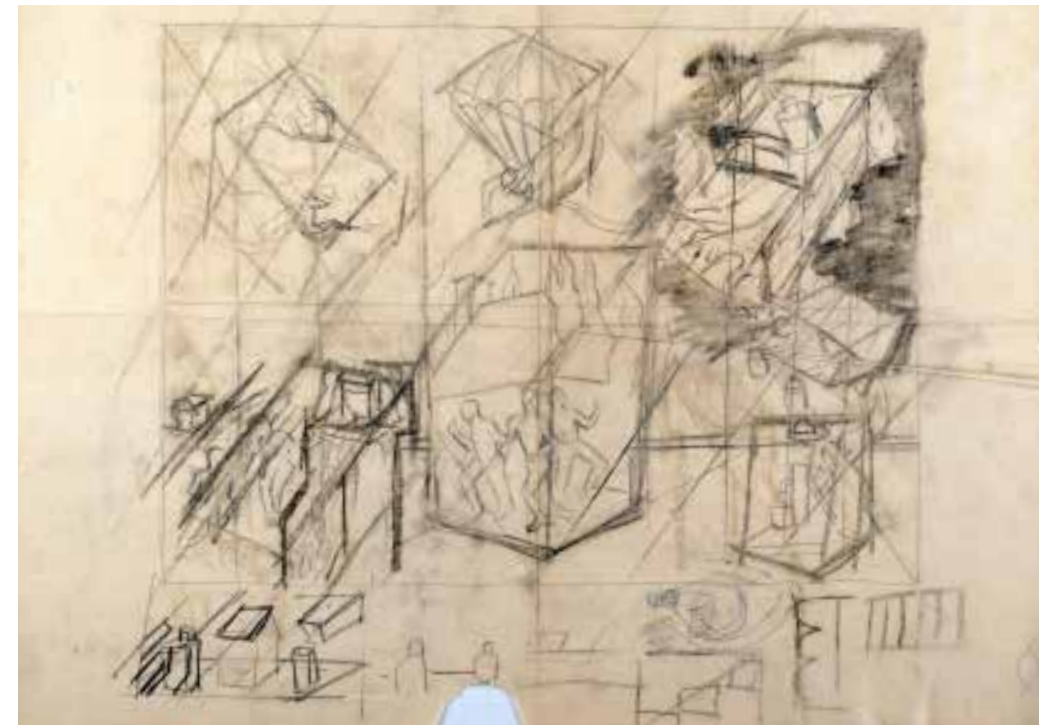


Figure 3-16. Perspective study for *Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego*, 1941, pencil on yellow trace, 18" x 24" sheet

EXHIBITED IN NEW YORK IN 1942, ROSE'S BLACK-AND-WHITE lithograph *Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego* was based on the song's original theme—the struggle to stay true to one's faith in God. Rose labored over her treatment in multiple studies and listed the lithograph for inclusion in her book.

The composition includes three singers, scaled-down versions of her earlier work *Twilight Quartet*. Positioned centrally, the singers stand together in a small, exposed cabin as they sing in joy, oblivious to the flames engulfing them. The men receive celestial assistance in the form of firemen swooping down from heaven to extinguish the flames. One is carrying a lad-

der, several have fire hoses, and there is also a horse-drawn fire wagon manned by a team of angels protected by firefighting helmets. Anchored to the unmistakable flat landscape of the Eastern Shore, the congregation points up to the miracle of angels, while King Nebuchadnezzar raises his hands in astonishment.

Described by an art critic as “surreal” and “crowded with meanings,” this work is Rose at her most innovative and imaginative.²² As was typical of her modest disposition, she wrote to Zigrosser following her success to thank him for encouraging her to express her inner visions about Christian faith and black religion.²³



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Figure 3-17. *Shadrach, Meshach and
Abednego*, 1941,
black-and-white lithograph, 10" x 13" plate



Figure 3-18. Study for *Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego*, 1941, charcoal, pencil, and white gouache on yellow trace, 18" x 24"

*Gay golden slippers go sailing through the pearly gates. Here are heavenly shoes for every one of God's children, even those who never had shoes before. On the warm sunny Eastern Shore of Maryland, shoes, to the colored people, were the highest symbol of the elegance of good living, because many were the days when they had no shoes to wear at all.*²⁴

ROSE'S COLOR LITHOGRAPHIC VERSION OF THE SPIRITUAL "Golden Slippers"—titled *All God's Chillun' Got Shoes*—is a visualization of the promise of the "gospel trail," which ultimately leads to the golden stairs of Heaven. In the composition, a large angel in the forefront bestows golden slippers upon a man ascending from a humble ladder onto vibrant golden steps and into the afterlife. Those already on the golden staircase joyfully climb upward. Heaven was a cherished reality for the black population of the Eastern Shore; it was a place where "every single one of God's children could soar with new shoes on their feet," Rose wrote in her notes (also quoted above).²⁵

Rose also recognized the earthly origins of the spiritual. When Rose presented this lithograph to her educated peers at the Serigraphy Society, she emphasized how black people have nobly climbed their own ladder of success, despite their extreme historical disadvantages. Her speech notes refer back to days of slavery on the Eastern Shore, a time when shoes were not only a rarity but also a status symbol. In other words, in the economically driven United States, wealth and success—here embodied in the luxury of shoes—were the trappings of a better and more equal life.

In typical Rose fashion, she worked extensively with this theme and made black-and-white and color lithographs, as well as a serigraph. Her study sketches and notes support her desire to perfect the message according to the congregation's wishes. Her efforts were rewarded when *All God's Chillun' Got Shoes* was honored as the American Color Print Society's Image for 1947.

Figure 3-19. Overleaf: *All God's Chillun' Got Shoes*, 1947, color lithograph, 12¾" x 18¾" plate



*Singing of Daniel, the Colored people make of their spirituals an exciting combination of everyday wisdom, humor, and fantasy. A great spiritual truth expressed in music—this race with its deep element of tragedy, is still able to sing and laugh.*²⁶

DANIEL IN THE LION'S DEN IS A LITHOGRAPH ROSE MADE IN 1942 OF THE POPULAR SPIRITUAL BY THE SAME NAME. IN HER NOTES FOR THIS LITHOGRAPH, WHICH ARE QUOTED ABOVE, ROSE EXPLAINS THAT MESSAGES ARE EASIER TO UNDERSTAND WHEN CHARACTERS FROM THE BIBLE ARE REPACKAGED IN MODERN-DAY CLOTHES. IN THIS INSTANCE, SHE ENRICHED THE PRINT WITH A SENSE OF HOLLYWOOD FANTASY AND DRAMATIC LIGHTING. AN ANGEL SHINES A LIGHT DOWN FROM ABOVE TO ILLUSTRATE THE SCENE OF A PREACHER BEING TAUNTED BY TEMPTATIONS OF THE FLESH, SYMBOLIZED BY WINGED DEMONS WITH LION HEADS, EACH OFFERING A VICE—GAMBLING, LOOSE WOMEN, AND DRINK AMONG THEM. ON HIS KNEES, WITH HIS ARMS RAISED,

Daniel, enveloped in the strength of the light, seems to resist the enticement of sin.

The dramatic comedy inherent in this lithograph is a reflection of Rose's experiences with the Copperville community. In her notes, Rose describes humor and laughter as being like sunshine—they are free for everyone. She observed that this approach to life alleviated the burden of a people unfairly accustomed to tragedy. Her final line on this subject is made interesting by the phrase crossed out with a red pencil. The sentence begins, "This power of unlimited faith . . . may be the magic that produces the quick Negro gaiety." She then edited out her final critical thought: ". . . a heritage that all other races may well envy, and copy if they can."²⁷ These marked-out words speak to the frustrations Rose felt as a white woman whose advocacy for the truth about black life was often censored by white society. Here, Rose is even censoring herself.



Figure 3-20. *Daniel in the Lion's Den*, 1942, black-and-white lithograph, 10" x 13" plate



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Figure 3-21. *Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child*, 1943, black-and-white lithograph, 10" x 13" plate

ROSE BRINGS TO LIFE THE TRADITION OF LINKING African American spirituals to cautionary tales for black men. Following *Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel*, Rose's black-and-white lithograph *Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child* interprets the spiritual of the same name. Her print tells the story of how black men struggle to maintain a righteous path in a world full of pitfalls and obstacles set against them. The central character in the composition is shown on the road to his modest rural home. Five menacing demons have blocked his path and violently gesture toward him. One of the devils taunts him with the scales of justice, which are tipped. Another points to him, jabbing a finger in a threatening manner as he jangles chains in the other hand. The protagonist struggles on his knees to pray to God and maintain his contact with the light showering down upon him from the heavens.

IN MANY OF HER PRINTS, ROSE INTERCHANGEABLY USES black and white angels to trumpet the victory of good over evil. She also boldly and effectively pits black versus white when she uses a contemporary story to update the old spiritual "Joshua Fit de Battle ob Jericho." In the black-and-white lithograph, Joe Louis is shown having delivered the final, defeating blow against the Nazi, Max Schmeling. As a tribute to the physically powerful man's fighting abilities, she shows the victorious Louis, supported from behind by an angel, as he towers over the demon-like Schmeling.

Rose made a second attempt to perfect this theme during the winter of 1943. In this version, the boxer is more sure-footed. The audience is shown murmuring in admiration from the lower ringside elevation. Rose explained in a letter to Zigrosser that this black-and-white lithograph represented a spiritual victory for her as an artist.²⁸



Figure 3-22. *Joshua Fit de Battle ob Jericho*,
second version, 1943, black-and-white
lithograph, 10" x 13" plate

ROSE'S TRIBUTE TO WORLD WAR II BLACK SOLDIERS AND
THEIR FAMILIES THROUGH NEGRO SPIRITUALS

AFRICAN AMERICAN SOLDIERS WHO JOINED THE ARMED forces to fight overseas during World War II left families behind and made personal sacrifices all the more remarkable in the context of America's continued struggle with racial equality and the reality of a segregated military. Rose recognized their profound service to their nation and—in no fewer than eleven prints—commemorated the bravery of African American soldiers who risked or lost their lives. These prints were some of Rose's most powerful interpretations of spirituals. Done in black and white, their lack of color emphasizes the gravity of their subject matter.

Rose examines the painful sacrifices made by African American families of GIs during World War II in detailed studies and a final black-and-white lithograph *Nobody Knows de Trouble I See*. In her print, a fire has engulfed a two-story wooden-frame Eastern Shore house, and the mother has perished in the flames—underscoring the stark domestic reality faced by mothers on the home front. Amidst billowing smoke, the matriarch is shown barefoot and seated on a throne in the sky above

the flames as angels usher her into heaven. Farmyard animals scatter chaotically away from the fire across the landscape. The soldier father stands in the foreground, with his children clinging to him in their grief. He is dressed in his uniform and looks on in shocked disbelief as he shields two of his children from the heat of the flames.

W. E. B. Du Bois dedicates a chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk* to a category of spiritual music he termed the "Sorrow Songs." Rose's interpretation of a soldier grieving the loss of his wife fits well into this type. Du Bois harkens back to times of slavery, when a people tired and "weary at heart" managed to turn their emotional lamentations into a uniquely American art form. He makes a plea to honor the place of black music that had, until now, always been "half-despised" and "persistently mistaken and misunderstood."²⁹ Rose rises to this challenge, not only honoring the art form of spirituals but also the under-represented African American hero in uniform.

Figure 3-23. *Nobody Knows de Trouble I See*, 1943, black-and-white lithograph, 13" x 10" plate



*The soldier in the South Pacific is trying to contact his outfit, all around him are the noises and confusion of battle—overhead the forces of evil are coming down to battle with him from the skies. Here all alone deserted he listens desperately and “He Couldn’t Hear Nobody Pray.”*³⁰

IN *COULDN’T HEAR NOBODY PRAY*,³¹ WHICH ROSE describes above, she continues to demonstrate her keen ability to relate the unflinching faith expressed through spirituals. In this instance, we see the soldier’s dedication to his role as a radio operator, even at the moment when he knows he is destined to die alone in a South Pacific battlefield. The soldier is shown at his station, hands locked solemnly in prayer. He kneels at the radio,

abandoned, isolated, outnumbered, and without hope.

Again, Rose’s notes reveal a great deal. After lamenting the soldier’s ancestors, who were kidnapped from jungles centuries before to benefit the slave trade, this young man is returned to the jungle to die for his country. We learn that this particular spiritual is intended to express the fundamental and inevitable loneliness of war. Rose illustrates the soldier’s calm bravery in the ultimate moment of his life—its ending. Rose handles the gravity of this theme with a great deal of admiration, writing:

*If all people were really praying for the fine things that this man expects of prayer, there would be no forces of evil descending and there would be no wars anymore.*³²

Figure 3-24. *Couldn’t Hear Nobody Pray*, 1943, black-and-white lithograph, 13" x 10" plate



STANDING IN THE NEED OF PRAYER IS A WAR-RELATED print interpretation of the spiritual of the same name, which garnered Rose acclaim.³³ Drama swirls around the central figure, an African American war hero, standing on a wooden raft facing a turbulent sea. His hands are clasped over his head in prayer as he summons angels from the city of Heaven, who row down in a lifeboat to rescue him. In her accompanying notes, Rose writes of the black soldier's unwavering spiritual belief and how that bolsters him in times of challenge and despair: *Like all other spirituals, this song voices a basic truth of life that none of us can escape. White and black, yellow and red and brown, all need and ask, each in their own peculiar fashion, for the guidance of the spirit. Faith is a great power;*

on it are built religions and philosophies, and systems of education and of government. The colored man has faith that his God will take care of him.

This Negro soldier, threatened by the surge and thunder of the ocean, is using his greatest power, the prayer of faith. In the distance, angels with a lifeboat are coming miraculously to save him.³⁴

What Rose chooses to omit is telling. She clearly recognized and pointed to the superficiality of her own culture in a comment she crossed out for unknown reasons: *Carried away by the magnificent melody and rhythm of these great songs, do the white people remember the stark truth and the simplicity of their words? For who among us is not standing in the need of prayer?³⁵*



Figure 3-25. *Standing in the Need of Prayer*, 1944, black-and-white lithograph, 10" x 13" plate



Figure 3-26. *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 1945, black-and-white lithograph, 10" x 13" plate

ROLL, JORDAN, ROLL HONORS BRAVE AFRICAN AMERICAN men who suffered the ultimate consequence of war and gave their lives in battle. In this black-and-white lithograph, World War II soldiers are loaded into jeeps and propelled through the war-torn landscape in a military motorcade to face death directly. Angels salute them, and they, in turn, salute the angels as they are rewarded by a final ascension into Heaven.

Malvin Gray Johnson's interpretation of this spiritual has a similar dynamic tension in its horizontal and diagonal motion. In Johnson's canvas, a group of people huddle together in a primitive sailboat at twilight. They are clearly in flight as the central figure looks up toward the sky, while others row the boat. According to Porter, Johnson's slowly rocking boat visualizes the rhythms of the spiritual chant. Its

appropriately apocalyptic tone carries with it a barely cloaked militant message of survival.³⁶

"Roll, Jordan, Roll" has a long and influential history dating back to eighteenth-century England. The song was originally introduced to America to indoctrinate enslaved people into Christianity, only to become their song of subversion. The Jordan River, now transposed to the Mississippi or Ohio rivers, was a powerful symbol of escape. The enslaved people of America saw themselves as the Israelites, who could live as free men and women once they crossed the river. The profound imagery of the song has made it an enduring gospel favorite. It recently reemerged in the national consciousness in Steve McQueen's 2013 film adaptation of Solomon Northrup's memoir, *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853).

ROSE CREATED PHARAOH'S ARMY GOT DROWNED IN THE form of a lithograph, a serigraph, and a large-scale fresco for the Copperville Church. As another song interpretation intended for her book on Negro spirituals, the allegorical picture shows Moses parting the Red Sea as a symbol of black freedom from oppression. In all versions, an angel trumpets down to the congregation and a festive riverboat floats on the water. It incorporates the entire church congregation and was made to honor the Reverend C. T. Wilson's soldier son who died early in World War II.

In her notes, Rose stated that, in creating the work, she was merely recording the story as the congregation described it to her, while adding the following interpretation:

*This song has many variations—"Go Down Moses," "Didn't Ole Pharaoh Get Los'," "Oh! Sister Mary, Don't You Weep." Being a basic theme of the release of an oppressed people from bondage, these songs of liberation have meaning not only for other days, but look to more freedom now for the colored citizens of a democracy.*³⁷

Historically, this song was banned on plantations for its message of liberation. In light of this, it is perhaps even more significant that the Copperville fresco is credited by the *Christian Science Monitor* as the first work of art in America prepared by a white artist for a black church. Rose wrote Zigrosser to thank him for loaning a recording by Paul Robeson used during the fresco's dedication and describes the fresco as commemorating lost loved ones of both races.³⁸

In an interview with the *Christian Science Monitor*, Rose discussed her special fresco tribute to the young man who gave his life for his country, and she identified religion as having carried African Americans through centuries of inequality. Rose humbly summed up her role: she was a translator portraying the strength and integrity of her subjects' unfaltering belief:

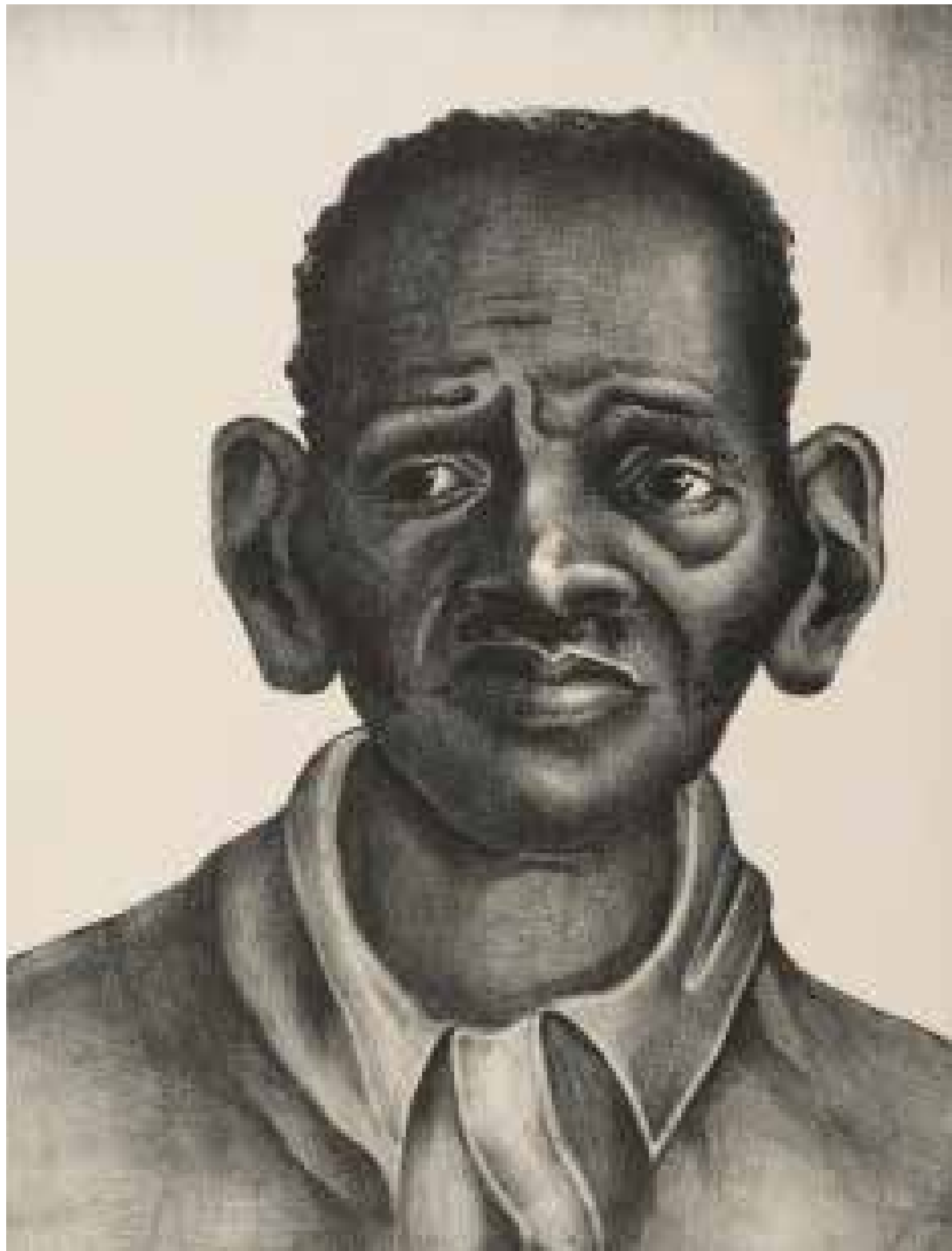
*You can't dramatize the feelings of a people that have come out of great suffering, unless you share their ideals. I believe it was religion that brought the Negroes out of suffering. . . . An artist who attempts to portray Negro feelings must be deeply understanding. His depiction must be authentic.*³⁹



Figure 3-27. Study for *Pharaoh's Army Got Drowned*, 1941, charcoal and pencil on yellow trace, 12" x 17"

Figure 3-28. Overleaf: *Pharaoh's Army Got Drowned*, fresco, 1941, 41³/₄" x 61"





IV. ROSE AS AN ART ACTIVIST

I have been very much interested to see the surprising reaction of men in the railroad shops who have acquired some of my prints. Their appreciation has been so spontaneous and genuine, coming from men who would never by any possible chance be lured inside an art gallery, it has made me wish that those people who are ignorant, but have a natural liking of good things, could have fine art more continuously and casually as a part of their lives. . . . It should be revolutionary in the finest sense of the word.¹

WRITING TO CARL ZIGROSSER IN MARCH OF 1936, Rose described her satisfaction in knowing that the “great American public” was able to purchase her lithographs. While Rose exhibited frequently by the 1930s, she recognized that the print medium allowed greater accessibility to her work, furthering her efforts to present people with a meaningful art that would counter what she referred to as the “villainous types of so-called art” often produced by her contemporaries.²

Rose’s comments came less than twenty years after cultural critic H. L. Mencken published his famous 1917 indictment of southern culture, “The Sahara of the Bozart,” in which he compared the artistic sterility of the South to the Sahara desert. Mencken found that the South had no impulse “to seek beauty and to experiment with ideas, and so to give the life of every day a certain dignity and purpose.”³ In its place, a rigid intolerance and bigotry stifled creativity. “All who presume[d] to discuss its ways realistically [were] damned.”⁴

In his own criticism of southern culture in the 1930s, William Faulkner lamented that art was reduced to “a ceremony, a spectacle” waged in “active self-defense.”⁵ The *Negro*—the key imaginary of the white South—was treated as a foil. The African American became, in Thadious Davis’s words, “a scapegoat, a personified threat to long-cherished and conflicting values of white southerners: individualism, localism,

Figure 4-1. Opposite: Clarence DeShields, 1931, black-and-white lithograph, 13¾" x 10" plate



Figure 4-2. Alfred Hutto, *Gullah Head*, ca. 1930, silhouette, 7" x 5". Hutto's portrait of an African American man is in stark contrast to Ruth Starr Rose's portrait of Clarence DeShields.

family, and clan."⁶ Common artistic approaches to depicting black life became very real manifestations of the white man's political power structure and its pervading racism.

Rose wholeheartedly rejected the notion of creating art that reinforced the status quo, which also largely excluded her as a woman. Instead, she chose to instill her work with a universal humanity and a documentary quality that moved art toward everyday life. There was an inherent activism in this choice as she sought to make visible a marginalized group and to offer an alternative to the inherited visual vocabulary of the South. Rose's approach to her art and her self-determined, atypical life choices—no doubt aided by the comforts and education of her upbringing—were fundamentally political and radical in her time.

TO UNDERSTAND THE ACTIVIST QUALITY OF ROSE'S WORK, it is useful to look to one of her contemporaries, Alfred Hutto. As one of the South's most successful artists, Hutto provided his white audiences with a portrayal of African Americans as an inferior people. His silhouette *Gullah Head* reads like a racial slur as it portrays a black man in profile, with a small sloping skull, a flat nose, and enlarged lips.⁷

Hutto's dismissive caricature offers a marked contrast to Rose's careful rendering of African American people as productive and moral individuals. Her intimate lithographic portrait of Clarence DeShields focuses on the sitter's face, providing a snapshot of his character. Everything from DeShields's furrowed brow to his oblique gaze tells the story of a sensitive and pensive individual.



Figure 4-3. *Charleston Flower Sellers*, 1930, oil on Masonite, 17½" x 23½"

COMPARISON TO CHARLESTON RENAISSANCE ARTISTS LIKE Alfred Hutto and Elizabeth O'Neill Verner places Rose ahead of contemporaries in her portrayal of black people as they worked and went about their lives. *Charleston's Flower Sellers*, a painting dating to sometime around 1930 that was recently discovered in the attic at Pickbourne Farm, matches descriptions found in Rose's typewritten notes and completes a puzzle about how she spent her time in Charleston.

This dynamic painting conveys an inherent

optimism and enterprise, elevating the women above what must have been a difficult life of socioeconomic struggle in Charleston's tourist trade. The women are focused intensely on the productive activities that support their families. Rose's appropriate use of bright red, warm orange, and magenta avoids being patronizing or flamboyant. Her work does not fall back on the condescending, formulaic racism and physical exaggerations employed by prominent artists of her time. As with Rose's other portraits, each person is uniquely



Figure 4-4. Alfred Hutty, black-and-white photographic study for *Potato Pickers of the Low Country*, ca. 1935

Figure 4-5. Alfred Hutty, *Potato Pickers of the Low Country*, ca. 1935, drypoint on paper, 13½" x 11¼" plate

depicted as having a sense of confidence and purpose.

Again, Hutty offers a useful contrast. His photographic studies for his famous etching *Potato Pickers of the Low Country* are voyeuristic snapshots of women's backsides—offering telling proof of his insulting artistic intentions. His *Charleston Market* presents slightly different subject matter but with a similar tendency toward caricature. Predictably, Hutty gives the women in his etching a stylized and anonymous treatment. The positivity and energy of Rose's *Charleston Flower Sellers* is distinctly absent.

Instead, Hutty shows the group loitering in the market with sullen expressions and with arms folded defensively. They strike hostile poses and bear sour expressions as they glare resentfully at the artist: tragically, this is the standard representation of *Negro* that Rose's work directly challenged.

In 1939 a New York art critic condemned the racism in the work of southern artists exhibiting at the World's Fair: "The most obvious revelation of this backwardness is to be found in the treatment of the Negro as a theme for art."⁸ The same article cited

Hutty's work as proof. In truth, Hutty was a pretender to the complex southern patriarchy. He was born in the Midwest and spent time at the Art Students League of New York and its satellite campus in Woodstock, New York, before moving to Charleston. As a transplant to the Old South, he became acutely obsessed with the so-called charm of plantation society and its potent racist distinctions between the classes. He applied his artistic skills to perpetuating the image of black people as existing at the bottom of a vast pit of poverty and immorality. Verner, a successful Charleston-based printmaker, approached the depiction of black life in a similar way. Her work showed people simplified to a racist type—lazy and utterly subservient to the monumental architecture and rigidly oppressive social structure of Charleston society.

ROSE'S SOLO EXHIBITION IN BALTIMORE OPENED DURING Thanksgiving 1933 and coincided with the grotesque lynching of the mentally challenged Marylander George Armwood and the aftermath of the riots that took place near Hope. In spite of the racial violence erupting around her, Rose exhibited a series of expensively made, large-scale oil portraits of black people, which would have been cutting edge in any part of America.

As countless others' experiences proved, the exhibition of Rose's paintings, which so prominently positioned black life in defiance of race and class barriers, created an inherent danger to the artist,

her family, and the participating models. Mencken's efforts to criticize southern society were met with the threat of mob violence and calls for his lynching, and he cautioned anyone against traveling to that "forlorn corner" of the South with designs to correct the problem; it would be like embarking on a suicide mission. Nevertheless, he persisted. Appalled by the rash of unpunished lynching crimes, Mencken took up a sharply pointed pen to bitterly rail against the backward, brutal racism of the Eastern Shore of Maryland in a series of articles in the early 1930s. Titles such as "The Eastern Shore Kultur," "Sound and Fury," and "Lynching Psychosis" underline his sarcastic wit. In "Revels in Transchoptankia," he labeled Maryland's Eastern Shore residents as "Trans-Choptankians," who read like characters in a William Faulkner story. Mencken believed that the current white population was "probably teachable," but that no one bothered, leaving them to the devil and "dismal isolation."⁹

In addition to threats of physical violence, Mencken was the focus of counter accusations in J. R. Barnes's pamphlet *The Spirit of the Eastern Shore*. Playing an amateur psychologist, the author pokes a finger at Mencken for interfering with his vigilante system, labeling him "The Bilious Baltimorean, the modern Messiah and self appointed censor, if not Saviour of the human race."¹⁰ Barnes writes about the virtues of his home, how he received black people—albeit from the back door only—adding, "our colored people are the most carefree



Figure 4-6. 2,000 National Guard deployed to control white mob who attempt to protect four men accused of lynching George Armwood, November 1933



Figure 4-7. H. L. Mencken, “Revels in Transchoptankia,” *Baltimore Sun*, October 23, 1933

and happy people in the world and this is as it should be.” Feeling the need to let his audience know that he is also a sophisticate, the author recounts European travels, along with many evenings spent in New York’s better bars imbibing fine champagne. However, he closes his argument by stating that he would rather stand in an open truck with two dozen “laughing, sweating honest to God canning house negroes” than travel in a streetcar with citizens of “Baltimore’s Russian frontier.”

Rose’s progressive and positive representation of black life was a direct challenge to the inequality and

bigotry of the Eastern Shore. Her portraits confronted the white art audience with dignified, complex African American individuals—a reality that society was violently rejecting at the time. The portraits of black people in oil on canvas were even more radical because this was a medium historically reserved for society’s wealthy white ancien régime. In the end, the *Baltimore Sun* politely praised Rose for her competence. It noted her “conviction of the value and importance of providing such a record as she is now developing.” However, the article cautioned that Rose ought to steer away from black por-

traiture and determined that a painting of her archaeologist brother dressed in Moorish garb was by far her best piece in the exhibition.¹¹

Rose was familiar with other artists’ graphic condemnations of violent racial inequality through a grotesque genre of lynching portraits exemplified by her instructor Harry Sternberg’s *Southern Holiday* (1935). In the lithograph, the victim is shown castrated and dying, strung up on a broken pilaster. In stark contrast, Rose chose to blot out such violent crimes completely. She offered an alternative and a more truthful image to counter the endemic culture of racism and its associated imagery. She portrayed her friends as peaceful, noble citizens conducting productive lives within their community. Whatever her reasoning for this more restrained artistic choice, it was a fact that her family lived perilously close to large communities of dangerous white bigots.

Rose’s tendency to depict positive images was more likely influenced by Hope, her family’s plantation, which the Starrs had uniquely conceived as a utopia for people of all races. Their ideal, however, contrasted sharply with the peninsula’s larger history: Extreme prejudice was embedded into the earth. In his historical account of local Joseph Sutton and the black population around Copperville, originally part of Wye House where Frederick Douglass was raised, scholar Shepard Krech noted a common apathy toward justice in life. A black person who was trying to make his or her way through Copperville’s hostile white society had to be thankful for any kindness or tolerance a white person granted, even

though that same consideration might not be extended to another black neighbor. Therefore, one had to “praise the bridge that carries you over” the injustices in life, without worrying about whether your neighbors got the chance to walk the same bridge.¹²

In his autobiographical account, Douglass wrote from his own experiences about the relentless fear of living as an enslaved person at the property next to Hope: *Where slavery, wrapt in its own congenial, midnight darkness, can and does, develop all its malign and shocking characteristics; where it can be indecent without shame, cruel without shuddering, and murderous without apprehension of fear of exposure.*¹³

In her unpublished papers, Rose described how her painting and lithography were linked to the vanguard movement to chronicle the lives of African Americans and to accurately portray their belief in the spirituals that helped them to survive centuries of slavery. *The Green Pastures*, a 1930 play by Marc Connelly and also a 1936 Hollywood film adaptation, briefly popularized African American spirituals, but civil rights activists disparaged both. Rose defended the originality of her vision, describing how her work resulted from a genuine interest in the lives of her neighbors:

*I heard the spiritual sung as the people worked on the land and on the water. There was no thought of a Green Pastures idea, my work was completely my own and right out of the heart of the Eastern Shore. In fact, I never saw Green Pastures until a revival years after some of my best spirituals were widely exhibited.*¹⁴

ROSE WAS NOT ALONE IN SEEKING TO IMPROVE THE artistic representations of African Americans. Contemporaries such as Gertrude Stein and Julia Mood Peterkin worked in a similar vein. Rose's other literary counterpart can be found in South Carolinian writer Peterkin, the first southerner to win a Pulitzer Prize, for her book *Scarlet Sister Mary* (1928). Peterkin ultimately wrote four novels based on stories about the Gullah people, using the Gullah dialect in her characters' dialogue.

Peterkin also collaborated with New York socialite and photographer Doris Ulmann to document the lives and culture of the Gullah people living on her plantation in South Carolina. As a sequel to the successful *Carolina Low-Country*, Peterkin and Ulmann's illustrated book *Roll, Jordan, Roll* identifies the Negro spiritual as the true soul of America and an original art form. The spiritual offered a narrative of empowerment and a coded tool of subversion against the racist white south-

ern aristocracy. Peterkin writes of the significance of black songs in American history:

*It must be a source of real pride to the descendants of Negro slaves that the beautiful "spirituals" of their forefathers have made such an important contribution to American art. These folk songs came from the hearts of an enslaved people with no influence of conscious art, yet are invariably marked by distinct racial peculiarities of rhythm, form and harmony.*¹⁵

Rose and Peterkin struggled with the restrictions of white, male-dominated society, and they both sought out a connection to the local African American community. Like Rose, Peterkin divided her time between cosmopolitan New York and her family's rural plantation. The detachment unique to plantation life—with long expanses of isolation and time for reflection—allowed these women to flourish as artists. Yet while Peterkin had grown up in the South, Rose had moved there only as a teenager. This gave Rose addi-

tional perspective, so she could recognize the immense cultural binary that defined her world. Rose worked sincerely to resolve the differences between the races and to depict the lives of African Americans in a manner consistent with their worldview. Like Peterkin, she regarded her staff with atypical respect, as members of her extended family, and imbued those in her artwork with a familiarity, dignity, and intimacy rarely recorded at the time.

Rose's lifelong devotion to the written and visual

documentation of Negro spirituals marks another strong tie to the Charleston area and to a group of sophisticated white people doing similar early work. Written by leading South Carolina writers such as DuBose Heyward and Josephine Pinckney, *The Carolina Low-Country* (1931) devotes three chapters to African American culture. In the preface, Charleston's Society for the Preservation of Spirituals is credited as the first group created to consciously document the words and musical scores of Negro spirituals.

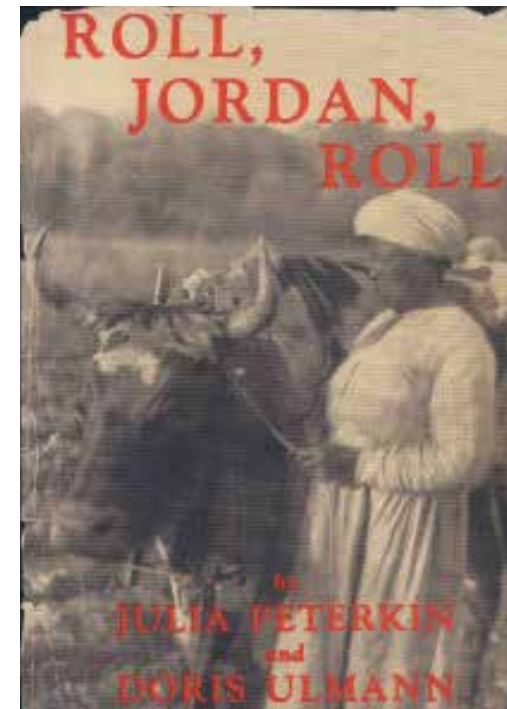


Figure 4-8. Julia Mood Peterkin, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 1933



Figure 4-9. Julia Mood Peterkin with gardener at Lang Syne Plantation, Calhoun County, South Carolina, ca. 1935



Figure 4-10. Ruth Starr Rose and Harlem Renaissance artist Prentiss Taylor at a picnic in Middleburg, Virginia, 1955

Figure 4-11. Prentiss Taylor, *Christ in Alabama*, April 1932, black-and-white lithograph, 8 4/5" x 6 1/8" plate

ANOTHER CONTEMPORARY ARTIST WHOSE WORK WAS AN exception to the standard trivialization of black people and culture was one of Rose's most loyal lifelong friends, Harlem Renaissance artist Prentiss Taylor. Like Rose, Taylor was white and grew up in a southern household with a black staff who became a part of his extended family and informed his work as an artist and activist. His 1931 lithograph *Scottsboro Limited*, made in collaboration with Langston Hughes, was a reaction to the inequalities of the legal system that unjustly prosecuted nine young men accused of rape. Taylor's 1932 *Christ in Alabama* echoed Hughes's poem on the same topic in reacting to the unequal and separate set of rules the justice system applied to African Americans.

Taylor's *Experience Meeting at Massydonny AME Church* of 1934 is the result of his visit to Charleston the previous year as a guest of author Josephine Pinckney. Taylor escorted her to country churches, where he was able to document the culture of the service, while she and her colleagues in the Poetry Society wrote down the lyrics. He draws us into his print of a black church as members of the congregation celebrate their belief in God with joyful song and dance.

Like Rose, Taylor produced work that is vibrant and respectful. In his correspondence with Langston

Hughes, Taylor lamented that most southerners were self-satisfied, apathetic, and reluctant to evolve with the rest of American society, writing, "The intelligent Southerners see the difficulties coming and pretty clearly, but it doesn't change their chemical content."¹⁶

ROSE ADOPTED THE PRECISION OF AN ANTHROPOLOGIST IN documenting and illustrating Negro spirituals and recording local African American dialects. Her efforts paralleled those of DuBose Heyward, Josephine Pinckney, and Hervey Allen of Charleston's Society for the Preservation of Spirituals, who were recording the lyrics of black spirituals as congregations sang them. However, Rose took her project further by uniting words, music, and image in collaboration with the local congregation. Rose followed this pursuit until the end of her life.

Nina Khrushcheva, associate dean of international affairs at the New School, has rightly pointed out that Rose's documentation of Negro spirituals was, from its very inception, a form of political activism. Thadious Davis argues similarly that spirituals contained "biblical archetype[s] of relief from oppression," as well as the "promise of retribution for the sin of enslavement."¹⁷ Their subversive nature was well known, and spirituals such as "Go Down, Moses" were "part of the literature

of the antislavery movement” in the nineteenth century.¹⁸ By the mid-twentieth century, activists and others acknowledged the essential messages of freedom found in spirituals by using them as a call for social justice during the civil rights movement. Mahalia Jackson, Bob Dylan, and Pete Seeger each performed adaptations of “Keep Your Hand on the Plough” in their cries for racial equality.

Around 1950 Rose worked with the song “Keep Your Hand on the Plough,” also known as “Keep Your Eyes on the Prize” and “Mary Wore Three Links of Chain.” Rose titled both her lithographic and serigraphic versions *Keep Your Hand on the Plow*. Both feature a black and a white farmer striding together side by side, guiding a plow pulled by two mules. Beneath their feet, angels work at the forge of Vulcan, the Roman god of fire. Behind the farmers, a menacing demon sits astride a large missile, swooping down from above. The farmers ignore the threat of the devil and continue their march through the fields, pointing and looking upward to the fanning rays of light emanating from above. The swirling, circular composition encompasses the sun-filled heavens and presents a decidedly positive outlook on the

future of race relations. Rose positioned the scene atop a map of the United States, situating it firmly within the context of America’s nascent struggle for civil rights.

Keep Your Hand on the Plow was widely exhibited and was possibly Rose’s favorite spiritual for its uplifting message of perseverance and overcoming. It was to be included in her second attempt at publishing her book of spirituals, this time with New York’s Bond Wheelwright Press. The serigraph won second prize in a group exhibition at the Library of Congress in 1950,¹⁹ and the black-and-white lithographic version won the Peace and Progress Prize at the New York Council of the Arts exhibition in 1951.

Rose’s critically well received *Keep Your Hand on the Plow* foreshadows her later interpretation, *He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands*. The lithograph shows, in Rose’s words, “the hands of God holding and protecting a Negro worker, while the humble animals worship in wonder as they watch below.”²⁰ Rose believed the serigraphic version realized the central tenet of her work on the spiritual theme by “portray[ing] the power and presence of God in storm and stress, protecting his people on earth.”²¹



Figure 4-12. *Keep Your Hand on the Plow*, ca. 1950, color serigraph, 12½" x 16"



Figure 4-13. *Keep Your Hand on the Plow*, ca. 1950, black-and-white lithograph, 12½" x 16" plate

ROSE MADE A BLACK-AND-WHITE AND A COLOR lithograph of the spiritual “Judgment Day,” which she intended to feature in her second attempt to publish a book on spirituals. Rose likely knew of the song’s rich history and its significance during the Civil War. In a recorded account dating to the winter of 1863–64, Union General Henry G. Thomas describes how the Ninth Regiment U.S. Colored Troops stationed at Camp Stanton in Benedict, Maryland, gathered together during the cold nights to warm themselves over campfires. Samuel C. Armstrong—a white Union officer who established a school for black soldiers in Benedict and later founded the Hampton Institute—noted how African American troops relied on songs to get them through difficult times. He saw that they often sang together of their former antebellum lives in an extraordinary dissonant

chanting. One evening Armstrong witnessed more than a thousand voices joined together in a powerful and melodic rendition of “Judgment Day,” which he called the “Negro Battle Hymn.”²²

Although a pacifist, Rose was proud of the brave contribution of the men who chose to serve their country. In *Judgment Day*, Rose situates the narrative in a Cold War context to depict a strong message of unity and purpose, in a style influenced by Romantic artist William Blake. In the color lithographic version, Cold War-era technologies such as U-2 spy planes and rocket ships fly horizontally across the picture plane. In both, the same spacecraft flies upward out of the lower left-hand corner. The compositional narrative is anchored at the top by black and white angels calling out to the world below and producing sounds from a variety of horns. A loudspeaker assists them in projecting their message as

Figure 4-14. Overleaf: *Judgment Day, Hear the Wondrous Word of the Lord*, 1955, color lithograph, 9⅞" x 13¾" plate





Figure 4-15. *Peace*, 1944, black-and-white lithograph, 13" x 10" plate



Figure 4-16. Opposite: *My Lord, What a Morning*, 1958, black-and-white lithograph, 10" x 16" plate

they hover over the earth.

IN HER 1944 LITHOGRAPH *PEACE*, THREE ANGELS OF different races pilot an open-cockpit airplane flying on a mission. Their trumpets herald a new postwar era. Angels tumble out of the sky, some with parachutes, some with wings, carrying banners of peace and victory. A yin-yang composition flowing between the airplane and earth reflects the many books on Eastern philosophy shared by Rose and her mentor, Zigrosser. In Chinese philosophy, the yin and yang are apparent opposites that actually exist in harmony—an idea with profound meaning when applied to race relations and patriotic duty in the American South.

ANOTHER OF ROSE'S COLD WAR FAVORITES IS *MY LORD, What a Morning*, a black-and-white lithograph from 1958 that depicts members of Copperville's Deshields United Methodist Church congregation. People are grouped on the flat terrain of the Eastern

Shore as they gaze up to the heavens in a manner similar to the people in her color lithograph *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*. Although the individuals seem more vulnerable from this perspective, their unity makes them strong.

In the upper left-hand corner, the Vanguard satellite, America's reaction to the Soviet Union's Sputnik, spins down upon them. People raise their arms as they look toward the light and rejoice, feeling unthreatened by the ominous spacecraft flying above. The congregation's strength is celebrated as a connection to the natural world. Their belief in a higher force protects them from the modern technologies of oppressive governments.

Listed in the Hampton Institute songbook of 1927, "My Lord What A Morning" is categorized as a hymn of judgment. The song is a rallying cry, as the lyrics invite others to "hear the trumpet sounds, to wake the nations underground." Interestingly,

the editor writes in a footnote that the dissonance of voices, which is musically “ungrammatical,” follows along the lines of Russian liturgical music.²³

DEEP RIVER LORD, CREATED BY ROSE SOMETIME BEFORE 1948, upends the problem of the “color line” articulated by W. E. B. Du Bois, transforming it into a vision of an integrated world, a grouping of black, white, Asian, and Latino workers.²⁴ In doing so, her print defies the hypocrisy of two unequal Americas—one for people of color plagued by discrimination and another for the white and privileged.

In Rose’s treatment of the spiritual, her friend Paul Robeson, the activist and entertainer, serves as the model for the figure in the foreground who is playing the guitar and singing. He leads a long trail of diverse followers waiting patiently to board old-fashioned

double-decker riverboats bound for heaven. Propelled by large paddle wheels, the ferry steamboats fly out of the river, sprouting wings as they ascend in serpentine formation to deliver passengers to an angel waiting to receive them above. The sweeping curves of the composition, the connection to water, and the long march of people bear a strong likeness to Rose’s multiple versions of *Pharaoh’s Army Got Drowned*.

Deep River Lord was popularized by the white female lead in the film *Show Boat* (1929) and by Paul Robeson as the miner and hero David Goliath in the British film *Proud Valley* (1940). In the film, when the ability of the miner Robeson plays is questioned, a friend effectively argues, “Aren’t we all black down in that pit?” This sentiment reflects the common struggles shared by workers of all races, exemplified in Robeson’s vocal political support for Welsh miners.



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Figure 4-17. *Deep River Lord*, 1947, black-and-white lithograph, 10" x 13" plate

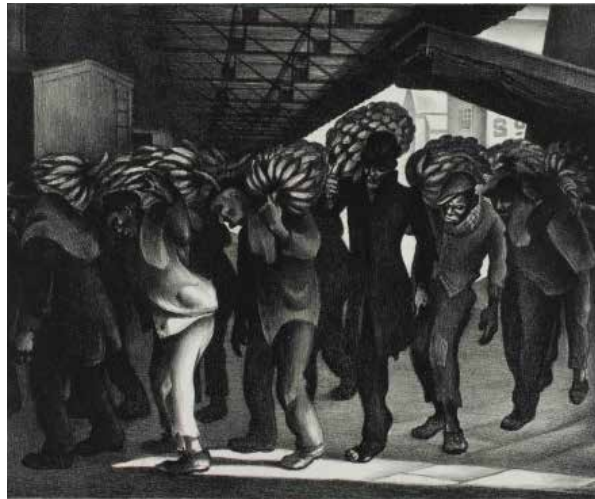


Figure 4-18. Mabel Dwight, *Banana Men*, 1929, black-and-white lithograph, 13 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 16 $\frac{1}{8}$ " plate



Figure 4-19. *Banana Boat*, ca. 1928, oil, 17 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 32 $\frac{1}{2}$ "

IN *BANANA BOAT*, HER NAUTICAL PAINTING OF A TROPICAL harbor, Rose portrays two women delivering a load of ripe bananas on a small rowboat. The impressionistic style, which is influenced by her instructor Hayley Lever, uses warm yellows and tranquil blues and greens to depict a scene of everyday industry. The women appear athletic and confident as they go contentedly about their work. This painting is another example of Rose's consistent tendency to focus on positive, bucolic scenes of black life.

Mabel Dwight took a different approach, as did many others. Dwight's lithograph *Banana Men*, which

resulted from a trip to New Orleans in 1928, delivers a message of oppression. In a Christmas letter to Roderick Seidenberg, Dwight describes the scene that held for her a "terrible fascination" as representing "mostly derelict negroes with a few decayed whites."²⁵ In the print, she shows their threadbare exhaustion as the men lug heavy loads of bananas on their shoulders, sagging under the burden of their grim urban existence. She aptly describes their faces as having expressions that "would have made even Dante shudder." Identifying them with Maxim Gorky's story *Creatures That Once Were Men* (1905), Dwight recorded the scene with a kind of urgency, because she didn't want to blur the truth of their

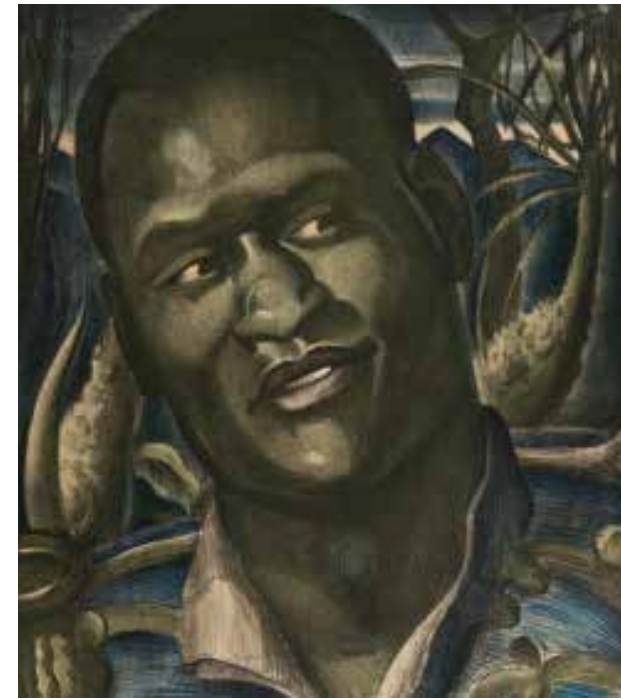


Figure 4-20. Mabel Dwight, *Paul Robeson as Emperor Jones*, inscribed, "To Ruth Starr Rose with love from Mabel Dwight, 1930." Color lithograph, 14 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 12 $\frac{7}{8}$ " plate

desolate lives.

ROSE AND HER NEW YORK CIRCLE OF FRIENDS STRONGLY supported the principles of the civil rights movement and were directly involved in it from its infancy. Clear evidence of this is found in the artist's own collection. Dwight gave Rose her color lithograph *Paul Robeson as Emperor Jones*, inscribing it, "To Ruth Starr Rose with love from Mabel Dwight, 1930."

Rose firmly believed that her best work was done on the Eastern Shore and recognized that her studies of Negro spirituals served as valuable cultural documentation of an underrepresented American art form. She envisioned a hybrid book featuring her litho-

graphs inspired by African American spirituals with a design of the words and musical notes arranged on each page. Rose entered into a long negotiation with Pascal Covici of the Viking Press to realize this vision, even writing to Zigrosser that Covici intended to engage Paul Robeson to write the introduction to her book. Unfortunately, her book was never produced. Exorbitant printing costs led to the rejection of the publication in 1944—a serious blow to Rose.²⁶

Unfazed, Rose persisted. She worked with New York's Bond Wheelwright Press from 1951 to 1959 in another attempt to publish her book on Negro spirituals. However, the expense of printing her artwork



Figure 4-21. Ruth Starr Rose's unpublished mock-up for her book on African American spirituals, second version, ca. 1951, 14½" x 17"

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continued to be a stumbling block, and the project was reluctantly abandoned. Miraculously, the mock-up of her book was recently discovered. The layout for *All God's Chillun Got Shoes* explains Rose's creative process. A collage of the congregation's vision, words, and notes reveals a unique engagement between artist and community.

PAUL ROBESON, WHO WAS THEN BEING MONITORED BY THE the Federal Bureau of Investigation as a suspected Communist, was one of Rose's personal heroes. From her front-row seat at his Newark concert on June 2, 1941, she sketched him in profile as he sang in front of the conductor, with a large American flag proudly displayed

as a backdrop.

A newspaper account of the evening features a photograph of Rose and Robeson together before the concert. Her admiration is evident in her wide smile and comfortable stance at his side. In the photograph, Rose presents Robeson with a gift of two of her lithographs. Interestingly, the two prints she gave him honored visionaries from the Copperville community. She holds her print *Ezekiel Saw the Wheel*, modeled after Hope's enlightened gardener by the same name. In his right hand, Robeson grips *Little David Play Upon Your Harp*, a lithograph based on Samuel Julius Johnson, an Eastern Shore minstrel feared by locals as a powerful conjure man.²⁷

Ezekiel saw the wheel. Way in the middle of the air the little wheel turns by faith and the big wheel turns by the grace of God. Working in the fields, in close kinship with nature—the Negro relates all the wonders of the land and sky to the kingdom of God. What is more beautiful than this—He that hath eyes to see let him see—He can look over the harvest and the sowing and in it see miracles. The colored man—expert with his mules, skillful, patient—talks to them and sings as he works—looking in awe at the pageant of the sky and salutes his Creator in song. Using the simple symbols of his life—the plough and wheel—the storm—a modern Ezekiel still hears the voices of his God in the thunder.²⁸

ROSE'S GIFT TO ROBESON OF THE BLACK-AND-WHITE lithograph *Ezekiel Saw the Wheel* prior to his concert in early June 1941 illustrates her esteem for her friend and his role as a luminary in the civil rights movement. As Rose wrote in her notes above, she sought to portray the humble Ezekiel's connection to a heavenly revelation as he set down his plow in a profound moment. He is gazing up toward the heavens as he watches a windmill

spin and the angels transform the sky. With feet firmly planted on the ground, he clasps his hands together in prayer as he witnesses a miracle.

It is not surprising that Rose planned to illustrate this song in her book on Negro spirituals. An analysis of the many studies for this piece reveals that Rose worked from a familiar model. It turns out that one of Hope's gardeners, Ezekiel Emory, was memorialized by Rose's mother, Ida Starr, in her article "Optimism in the Gardens of Hope," which appeared in the November 1909 issue of the *Garden* magazine. In the piece, Ezekiel, like Isaac Copper, is the wise horticulturist who patiently watches as Starr plants a common weed in her garden. Her self-deprecating remarks regarding her ignorance and insensitivity to plants and her adulation of Ezekiel relate an honest ability to laugh at her own shortcomings as an amateur botanist. While there are no direct connections between the gardener and Rose's final print, we do know that the windmill was on her farm and that the studies she made show a man working with an antiquated single-harrow plow in the flat fields of Maryland's Eastern Shore.



Figure 4-22. Study for *Ezekiel Saw the Wheel*, 1941, pen, sepia, and ink, 12" x 15⁷/₈"

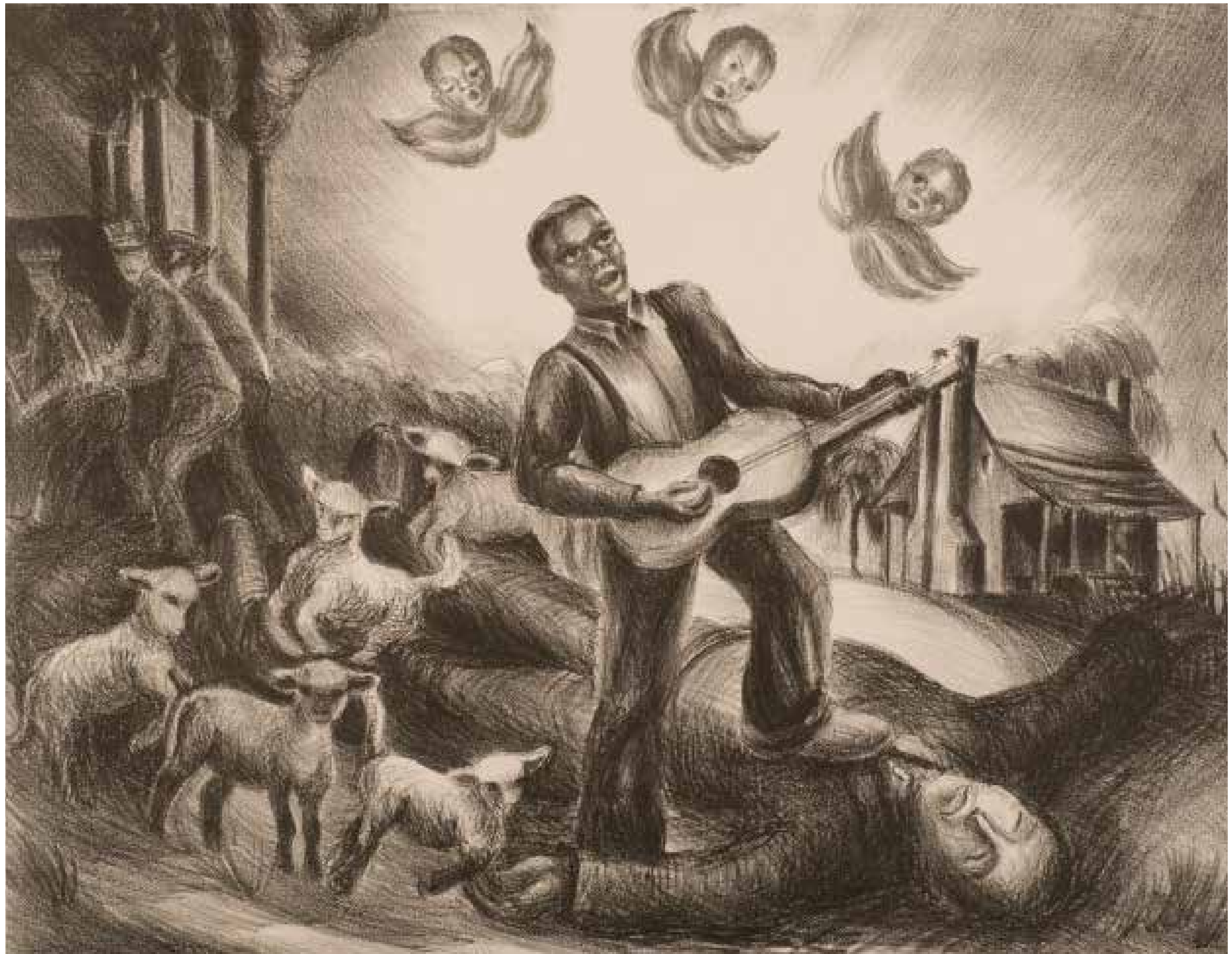


Figure 4-23.
Little David Play Upon Your Harp, 1933,
black-and-white lithograph, 10" x 13" plate

To the oppressed colored people, Goliath was the symbol of ruthless power. David, the shepherd boy, strolling through the fields making music, lives today in the countless musical marvels of the Negroes. On the Eastern Shore was Samuel Julius Johnson. He roamed the deep-ditched roads of Talbot County, dug deep by slave labor years ago to drain the flat land.

Samuel Julius Johnson was a genius of his kind. With a battered top hat and a banjo and his gift of ventriloquism he was received with mingled fear and joy into the kitchens of the manor houses. He sang and danced and made everyone laugh and frightened the Negro maids with his sudden animal noises coming out of dark corners, pantries or pies talking from inside the oven. No one knows if he is living or not—people still claim to have seen him on some sunny road. But in his songs, Samuel Julius Johnson the wandering minstrel lives forever.²⁹

IN HER NOTES ABOVE, ROSE DESCRIBED THE AFRICAN American community's conception of David as "strolling through the fields making music," defying Goliath's oppression. In her lithograph *Little David Play Upon Your Harp*, which she gave to Robeson, minstrel Samuel Julius Johnson, a local musical legend and conjure man, serves as the model for David. Johnson was himself a wandering musician, circus performer, and conjurer

who lived outside conventional society and possessed legendary musical gifts and the ability to entertain all members of society. He was also likely connected to one of the oldest free black families on Maryland's Eastern Shore. In the composition, Johnson stands with one foot firmly on Goliath's chest as he plays his guitar and sings. Police lurk in the background, seemingly turning away from the scene of David's triumph. Signs of community visually anchor him—a familiar cabin and a herd of sheep playfully encircle the song.

The significant themes and personal references in this print likely inspired Rose to select it for her unpublished book. *Little David Play Upon Your Harp* highlights her optimism that good would ultimately prevail in the racial tensions then dividing black and white America. In her handwritten notes, she stated that Goliath represented the "sinister giant of oppression, which could be overcome by the spiritual strength of David."³⁰ Her decision to portray a black man, sanctioned by a heavenly chorus of angels, standing over a white man strongly affirmed her progressive social views. Notably, Rose's husband was the model for Goliath, lying under Little David's foot.

Numerous surviving studies and notes indicate just how much Rose labored over this theme. Musicians were the embodiment of spiritual expression and faith for Rose, and she undoubtedly took inspiration from



Figure 4-24. "Sketches of Lead Belly made while he was singing for a few friends in New York, 1946." The sketch is on a fragment of a letter from Rose's son at the Todd School for Boys, Woodstock, Illinois.

Figure 4-25. Overleaf: *Little David Play Upon Your Harp*, 1946, color serigraph, 11½" x 16"





Figure 4-26. *Peace*, ca. 1944, color serigraph, 6½" x 5"



Figure 4-27. Invitation: A Sacred Outing, at the home of Mrs. Ruth Starr Rose, June 22, 1941, 8¾" x 5⅞"

a variety of performers she witnessed in her own life. Famed lyric tenor Roland Hayes would likely have been one such artist. Hayes, the first African American male concert artist to achieve international acclaim, lived at Hope for a time during the height of the Jim Crow laws.³¹

In 1946 Rose saw an intimate performance by Lead Belly along with a group of her friends, and she improvised sketches on letterhead from her son's school.³² Using a minimal and vigorous line, she depicts the movement of the famous musician's guitar in full length. She also drew Lead Belly's face in profile—clearly interpreting him in the manner of the David-like Johnson of the Eastern Shore. This experience influenced a later serigraphic treatment of *Little David Play Upon Your Harp*.

IN JUNE 1941, JUST A FEW WEEKS AFTER SHE PRESENTED Paul Robeson with her lithographs at his Newark concert, Rose triumphantly hosted an evening of Negro spirituals at her farm with over fifty singers performing. At the bottom of the invitation, she included a telling note that flouted convention: "It is the special request of Mrs. Rose that both races attend."³³

From the perspective of the twenty-first century, Rose's party could be misconstrued as a cursory domestic activity and her guest list as a generous social nicety. In the South in 1941, however, it was a distinctly political act to celebrate a black art form on

the grounds of a former plantation with "both races" in attendance as guests. Her private invitation to desegregation predated the United States Civil Rights Act by twenty-three years. For Rose, whose art always seemed to push the boundaries while avoiding outright alienation from her public, it was a fitting form of subtle protest.

Rose's own efforts to challenge the debilitating preconceptions of race in her time enabled her to defy categorization. Of the many shows organized throughout Rose's career, her ability to elude labels is most evident in her aforementioned 1956 exhibition at Howard University, organized with the director of the art department, James A. Porter. Her interpre-

tations of Negro spirituals were so thoughtfully executed that many assumed that Rose—like the student population—was black. The popularity of Rose's work forced the university to extend the dates of the exhibition.³⁴

In a 1955 *Christian Science Monitor* feature on her work, Rose mused with characteristic clarity about her activist ambitions as an artist portraying black life in America:

*What is an artist here for? Certainly not to make the world more confused. If I can only convey to white people this sense, that the power of God is really present here for us, people of all colors, then I'll feel my mission is accomplished.*³⁵



5. ROSE AND THE WORLD

*I want my prints to stand as an expression of universal brotherhood.*¹

ROSE SHARED THIS GLOBAL SENTIMENT IN A LETTER TO art historian Raymond F. Piper in 1956. Her belief in an inclusive humanity took root from an early age and guided her no matter where she was in the world. Rose's overseas adventures and passion for diverse cultures can be traced to her mother, Ida Starr, who, as a young woman, received musical tuition in Germany and exhibited her art in fashionable French salons. In adulthood, Starr published articles and a two-volume book, *Gardens of the Caribbees* (1903), which paid homage to world cultures and to the idea that beautiful gardens

were a means of bringing disparate groups of people together. Rose's brother Richard Starr was an archaeologist who conducted major excavations in China and the Middle East. Another brother, Nathan Comfort Starr, was educated at Oxford and became an expert on British poetry and literature. Even Rose's husband, William Searls Rose, had international ties, having been born in Mexico.

Rose's private and professional worlds were refreshingly rounded. She was in the privileged position of being able to travel to unusual, often challenging, destinations to study cultures well beyond Maryland's Eastern Shore. Assuming the mantle of a cultural anthropologist, Rose was able to overcome her outsider

Figure 5-1. *Seminole Woman*, 1953, color lithograph, 14" x 10" plate

status by building local relationships and unobtrusively observing religious customs. As in other areas of her art practice, Rose sought to give visual presence to groups of people unknown or marginalized by white mainstream America. Her portraits and scenes, situated in places such as Haiti, Florida, and Mexico, go beyond realism or mere representation to achieve a creative, truthful documentation evoking the dignity of these unique individuals and cultures.

ROSE'S FIRST TRIP TO HAITI COMMENCED WHEN SHE joined her sister and parents on a cruise to the West Indies in 1901. Rose's mother undertook the trip as research for her book on Caribbean gardens and recorded extensive notes during her travels. Their first stop was Port-au-Prince, where they attended local religious festivals. Later in the trip, during their visit to Santo Domingo, Starr went into a trance while staring at an ancient sundial and foresaw a life of familial bliss on a rural estate. She wrote of envisioning a kind of utopia for all members of society that would be a legacy for her daughters.²

Throughout her notes on the journey, Starr praised the island women she encountered, identifying them as strong and noble people. While watching the women of St. Thomas go through the arduous task of refueling an ocean liner by carrying heavy buckets of coal on their heads, she admired Mary in particular. This strong young woman endured the grueling work in intense heat, amusing the "plethoric" tourists by diving into the water for coins that she would catch in her mouth. Starr even saw Mary fighting off a large worker who attempted to grab her by the waist.³ The thoughtful description of Mary as fierce and defiant despite her difficult surroundings reads like a foreshadowing of Melanctha Herbert in Gertrude Stein's *Three Lives*.

As a final stop before returning to the United States, the family visited Trinidad and witnessed Hindu mystic rituals. Finally, in the spirit of Robert Louis Stevenson's journey to the Sandwich Islands, they spent their last moments on Trinidad with patients in a leprosarium, to pay respect to an isolated and forgotten group of people as they lived in quarantine awaiting their deaths. The photographs and postcard collection

from these experiences found in Starr's travel notebooks reflect her interest in black culture, religion, and substandard housing in the Caribbean. Starr's progressive perspective also helps to explain how her daughter Rose grew up to seek out experiences and connections beyond her own race and social class.

Fifty years later, in April 1956, Rose returned to Haiti, arriving in Port-au-Prince as a kind of celebrity. The local newspaper printed a story about her visit, "La Grande Artiste Ruth Starr Rose." The lengthy story covered Rose's recent trip to Europe to look at African art with her friend Mary Cabot Wheelwright and her dedication to creating a visual representation of Negro spirituals. The article also mentioned Rose's retrospective exhibition at Howard University, which would have then been under way.⁴ Haiti proved to be an ideal new setting for Rose to record the daily life and religious rituals of locals, but her high profile meant that she had to take pains to avoid being "swamped with spectators" on her painting excursions.⁵

Rose wrote to James Porter during her visit, describing Haiti as the "most beguiling flowery paradise,"

both beautiful and fascinating for an artist.⁶ She stayed in central Port-au-Prince, at the Grand Hotel Oloffson, which was known during this period as the Greenwich Village of the Tropics. Rose was in the center of artistic activity while working in Haiti. She was also able to maintain friendships born in the United States, such as those with Harlem Renaissance artist Loïs Mailou Jones and her Haitian husband, Pierre-Noël. Rose had a personal and professional relationship with Jones, who had visited her three years earlier, in January 1953, at High Design, her Alexandria, Virginia, home and studio. Jones signed Rose's guestbook, praising her as an inspiration for her life and work.⁷



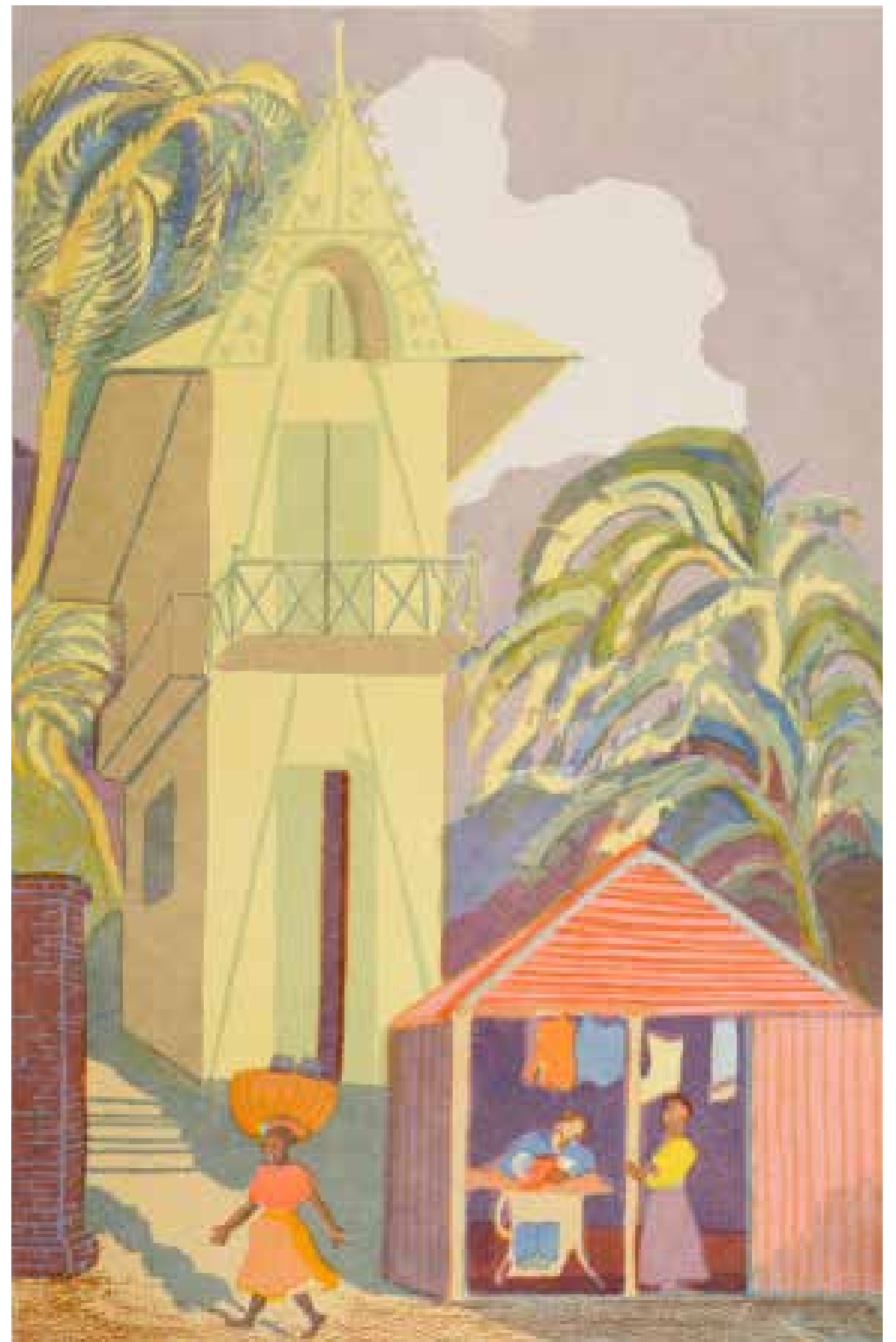
Figure 5-2. Study of a Haitian woman for *Haitian Village* serigraph, 1956, gouache and pastel, 7" x 4"

Figure 5-3. *Haitian Village*, 1956, color serigraph, 17½" x 11½"

LOÏS MAILLOU JONES'S ESTEEM FOR ROSE'S WORK IS MADE apparent by a comparison between Rose's *Haitian Village* of 1956 and Jones's *Street Vendors* of 1978. Both depict an active urban scene using a flattened composition and a bold application of color. In keeping with her tendency, Rose attempts to visualize her spiritual connection to the people of Haiti.

The surviving studies and serigraph of *Haitian Village* are both an architectural and a social examination of Port-au-Prince, which show people engaged in productive daily life. The background is a yellow, steep-

ly pitched Gothic gingerbread wooden building framed by palm trees. It sets the stage for the modest salmon-colored laundry house from which the story radiates. In the foreground, two women launder and press clothes. Another woman passes through the village with her laundry basket elegantly balanced on her head. In a study for *Haitian Village*, the woman bearing the laundry basket looks directly into the eyes of the artist and viewer. Her gaze is focused ahead and she walks with her shoulders straight, as if the weight of her burden is of no consequence.



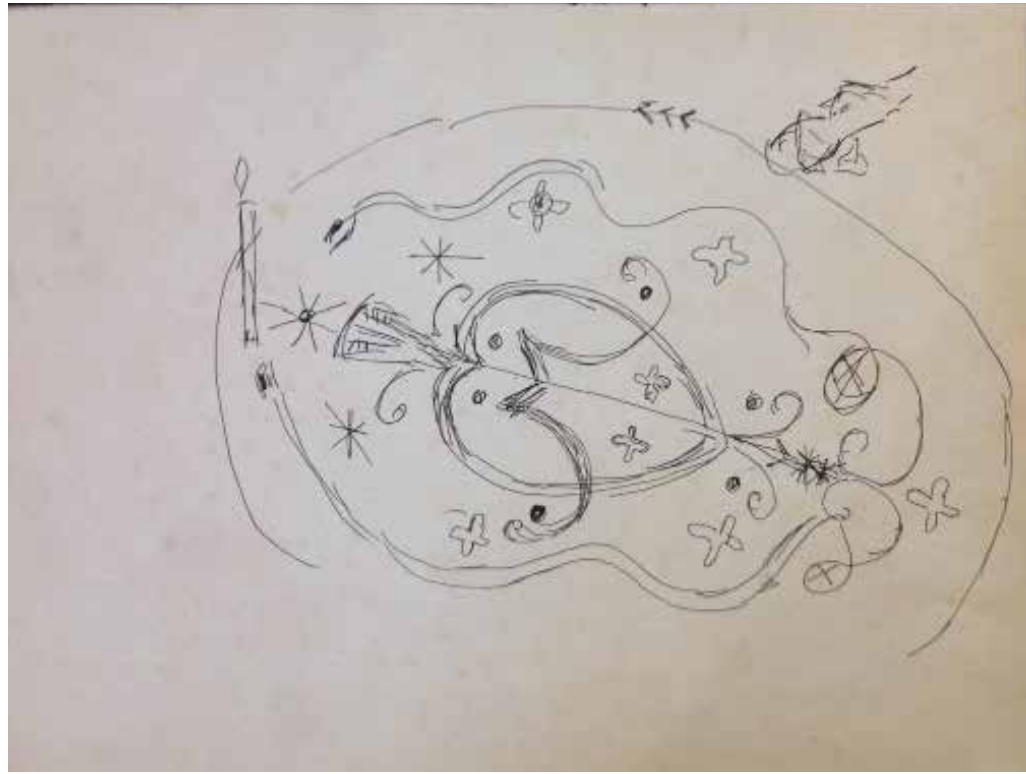


Figure 5-4. Study of a veve to Erzulie Freda Dahome, April/May 1956, pen and ink, 9⁷/₈" x 13⁷/₈" sheet

ROSE PROVED THAT SHE HAD AN INSATIABLE PASSION FOR studying the religious practices of other cultures. Her sincere desire to learn must have come across to the local Haitians, who allowed Rose to be present for otherwise private rituals. In the study on the opposite page, Rose shows a young man making a veve, summoning his ancestors by drawing on the ground. Rose would have sat nearby sketching the young man as he worked, observing the entire vodoun ceremony to create this one scene.

In another drawing, Rose depicts the veve that the young man had drawn in homage to Erzulie Freda Dahome, the Haitian African spirit of single motherhood, flowers, beauty, dancing, and luxury. Rose would have approved of Dahome because her symbol—a heart—epitomizes feminine beauty. Dahome's European counterparts include Joan of Arc and the Black Madonna of Czestochowa, who was chosen for her dark complexion.



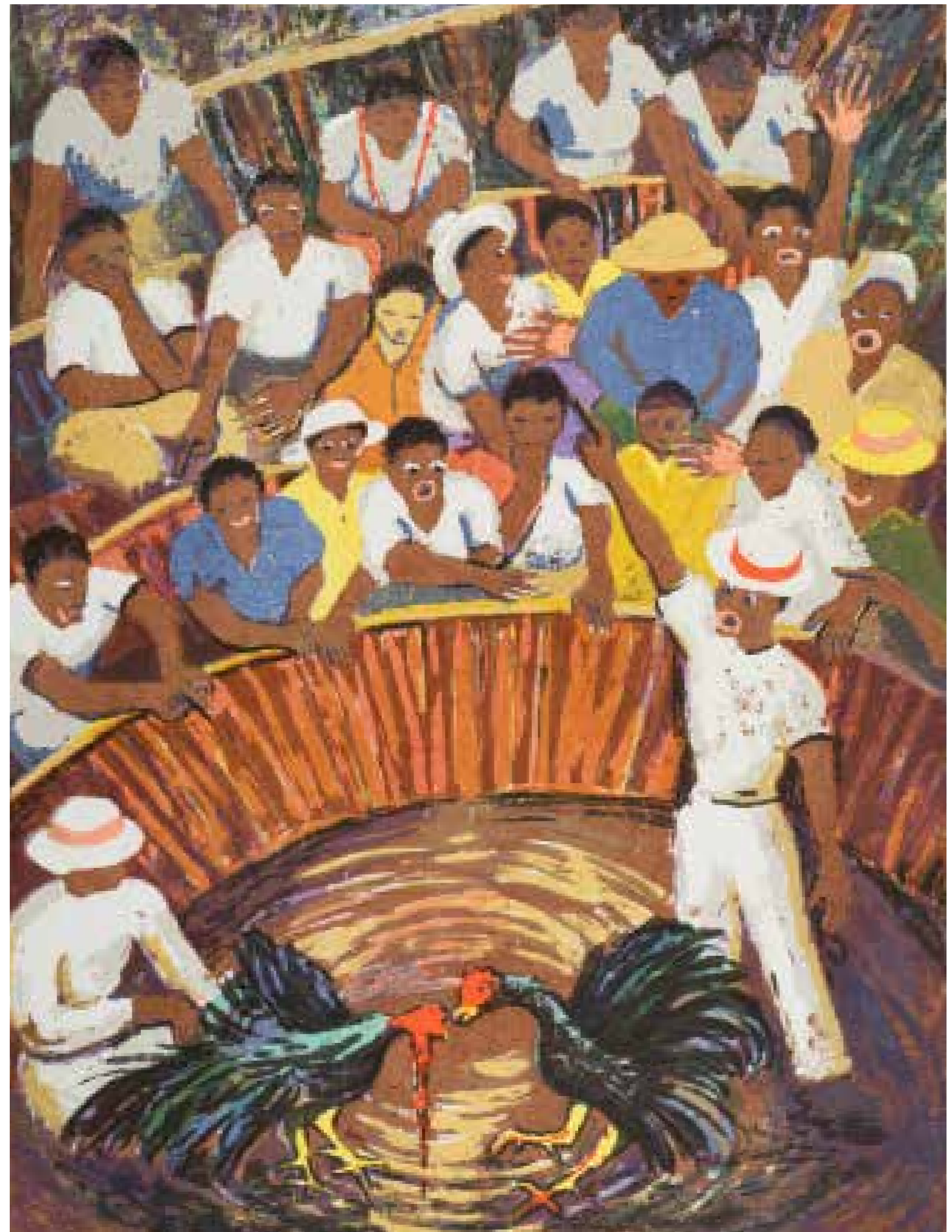
Figure 5-5. Study of a Haitian man making a Dahome veve, April/May 1956, pen and ink, 9⁷/₈" x 13⁷/₈" sheet

IN *COCKFIGHT IN HAITI*, ROSE REPRESENTS AN activity deeply embedded in the Haitian religion as an important part of a vodou ritual. This serigraph demonstrates yet another way that, without trepidation, Rose entered into an arena and a sport that traditionally excluded all women.

The composition features men tightly packed in narrow bleachers to watch a cockfight. The leader has

removed the hoods from the roosters, and they have just begun to spar. The picture expresses the explosive chaos of the moment. Many arms wave as men call out bets and shout encouragement to their chosen victor. The rooster on the right postures for attack, while the head of the other rooster appears to melt into a saturated, dripping red—clearly foreshadowing its fate.

Figure 5-6. *Cockfight in Haiti*, 1956, color serigraph, 19" x 14"



ROSE'S INTEREST IN DIVERSE CULTURES WAS NOT LIMITED to a Haitian bookend; it was punctuated by travel and rigorous exploration throughout her career. *Navajo Fire Dance* resulted from a tour of New Mexico taken with former Vassar classmate Dorothy Cazenove-Lee in November 1951. This black-and-white lithograph shows a Navajo ceremony Rose witnessed near Gallup. The artist depicts men wearing cowboy hats, pants, and boots forming a uniform, tight circle around a massive bonfire. The flames are fueled by a burning totemic effigy and extend far beyond the height of the picture plane. Women and village elders gather behind the men in a concentric circle. Three people dressed as ghosts lead the ceremony

as they dance, moving their bodies dangerously close to the fire. The billowing smoke, the blaze, and the clouds in this scene of religious ritual have an energy of movement that is reminiscent of Rose's work in spirituals.

During the trip that produced *Navajo Fire Dance*, both Rose and Cazenove-Lee were guests of their mutual friend Mary Cabot Wheelwright. Although not formally educated, Wheelwright was a serious writer and patron of Native American spirituality in New Mexico. Navajo religious leader and medicine man Hastiin Klah was her collaborator, and he traveled with her to fashionable resorts and private estates around New England. In 1937 Wheelwright used a portion of her East Coast fortune to



Figure 5-7. *Navajo Fire Dance*, 1951, black-and-white lithograph, 10¹/₈" x 13⁷/₈" plate

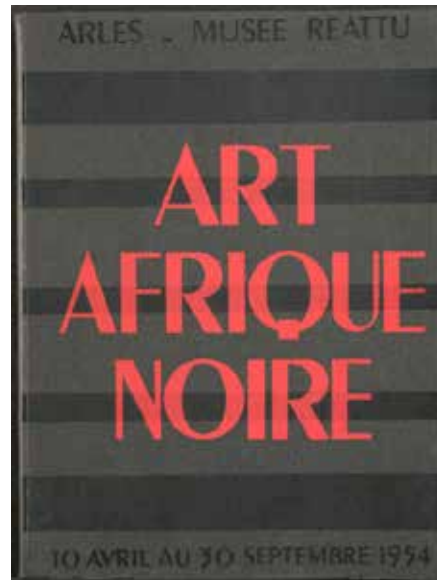


Figure 5-8. Catalogue from the exhibition *Art Afrique Noire*, Arles, 1954



Figure 5-9. Mary Cabot Wheelwright, goat, and friend in Paris, in a photo taken by Ruth Starr Rose, 1954

fund the Navajo House of Prayer and Navajo Religion (later renamed the Museum of the American Indian), where she made it her mission to record ceremonial prayers as well as Navajo art and its complex symbolism.

Wheelwright introduced Maria Chabot to her home and to artistic, well-heeled society in Los Luceros, New Mexico, and, eventually, to Georgia O’Keeffe. Wheelwright, Chabot’s patron and probable lover, kept a constant companionship with Rose. In her papers around this time, Chabot dismissively begrudged Rose her gregarious character and indefatigable stamina as an artist. She was jealous of Rose and Wheelwright’s close friendship and their shared interests, which included the rural landscape where Wheelwright enjoyed

bird watching while Rose sketched.⁸ Rose was staying with Wheelwright in 1958, when Wheelwright passed away at her home on Sutton Island, Maine. Rose wrote of her death as triumphant confirmation of their shared religious beliefs.⁹

Wheelwright and Rose traveled together through the American Southwest, Florida, Great Britain, and Europe. Sharing a keen interest in art, spirituality, and symbolism, they took these trips as an opportunity to visit with scholars and curators of renowned museums. While on a nearly yearlong journey to Britain and the Continent, they met C. S. Lewis, who was an old friend of Rose’s brother. They also saw a spectacular exhibit of African sculpture in Arles as early as 1954. In a let-

ter to LaVerne Madigan, the director of the Association on American Indian Affairs, Rose elaborated on their journey abroad, informing her that their purpose was to study prehistoric African design in order to compare it to the ancient Navajo symbols in Wheelwright’s museum in Santa Fe. Rose was not unique in researching art forms beyond Western European traditions; it was a common practice of artists such as Pablo Picasso during the Modern period. However, Rose did not appropriate these forms as her own in her work. Instead, she was driven by a genuine interest in the visual heritage of other cultures and sought to study and to understand African and Native American imagery in its cultural and historic context.

SEMINOLE WOMAN WAS MADE SOMETIME AROUND 1953 and depicts a woman, in a close-up view, with expressive eyes and a strong, steady gaze that calmly meets the viewer’s. She has noble features, accented by yellow earrings and multiple strands of yellow- and red-beaded necklaces stacked to her jawline. Her jewelry, in addition to her brightly colored ceremonial dress and dramatically styled hair, suggests that she is someone of importance. The palm trees and native Floridian grasses in the background beyond the thatched roof geographically anchor her to the landscape of the Seminole nation.

This lithograph enjoyed positive reviews from

art critics and was accepted at the 3rd International Biennial of Contemporary Color Lithography in 1954. In 1960 Rose donated a color print to the Association on American Indian Affairs. She attached a heartfelt letter to LaVerne Madigan in which she described her motivation for giving the organization “the portrait of a proud and beautiful person.” She also described a trip she and Wheelwright made to Florida, likely in winter 1952, to meet the Seminole tribe at Lake Okeechobee. Rose explained that she always had “great sympathy for the Indians and enormous interest in their progress.” She revealed that in her youth she played with children from the Winnebago tribe of northern Wisconsin. Their old chief had fought alongside her grandfather on the frontier.¹⁰

Madigan’s response to Rose’s generous gift thoughtfully articulates the artist’s success in conveying the character of this Native woman. She wrote her letter while looking at the print:

Built right into the bones of those Florida Indians is stateliness. Their dignified esteem for themselves as human beings and Seminoles has so far remained impervious to the historical forces that made Indians of so many other tribes doubt their own worth. Their utter lack of fear and illusion shows in their calm, direct glance. But why do I go on? What I am trying to say in words you have already said in line and color.¹¹

AFTER HER HUSBAND'S DEATH AND FOLLOWING A DOWN-
turn in her fortunes, Rose reluctantly sold Pickbourne
Farm sometime around 1945. In September 1946 she
made an extended trip to Mexico. Uninhibited by social
pretensions, she traveled in a jeep on dusty back roads,
ending up in Ajijic, a small fishing village on the north-
ern edge of Lake Chapala, near Guadalajara. There she
followed the artistic approach that she had established at
Hope—creating some of her best serigraphic portraits
of Latino people while also making visual records of
their religious ceremonies.

In *Rosendo of Mexico*, Rose shows a young boy
whose face and large hat stand out from the print's flat-
tened, decorative background. A palm tree, as well as
the predominating palette of greens and sandy browns,
situates the sitter in Ajijic. He is wearing a fine collared
green shirt and clean overalls. His modest appearance is

elevated by the lighthearted confidence of his reserved
smile and tilted head.

Rose's own ties to the region may have aided
her apparent comfort with the people of Ajijic. Rose's
husband, Searls Rose, was born to American parents
in Chihuahua. Although he considered himself Amer-
ican, having studied, lived, and worked in the United
States, he never formally obtained American citizen-
ship. Through a bureaucratic entanglement, Rose's as-
sociation with her husband also led the US government
to classify her as Mexican. Despite having been born in
the US, Rose had to be fingerprinted and sworn in as
an alien in order to obtain her passport. Wheelwright
wrote, clearly exhausted about the discrimination suf-
fered by her friend, "Everything is full of suspicion at
home, it is not the America I've known."¹²

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Figure 5-10. *Rosendo of Mexico*, ca. 1946, color serigraph, 18" x 13"



UPON ARRIVING IN THE SMALL VILLAGE OF AJIJIC, ROSE WAS the guest of American pianist Tula Meyer. She also eventually stayed with German refugee Paul Heuer and his sister Lisa in a small inn, picturesquely set in a banana and coconut grove overlooking the lake.

Writing from Mexico, Rose described her artistic “headquarters” to Zigrosser, adding that her biggest challenge was fending off curious and bored tourists. She accepted the infinitely slow pace. The native agave plant and its unrelenting upward growth toward the sky became a symbol for Rose of how one had to work patiently and persistently to attain a goal. In spite of many

interruptions, she told him she had been productive. Her task was a challenge, as she was trying to visualize what Mexico meant to her as an artist.¹³

In Ajijic Rose dedicated herself to local cultural studies. Her black-and-white lithograph *Religious Festival in Ajijic* and her related pencil drawings make a fascinating documentation of San Andres Cathedral, the town’s central Catholic church. Men are bundled warmly for late November in full-length ponchos and sombrero-style hats. The print marks their religious observance during one of the nights of the nine-day religious celebration dedicated to their patron Saint Andrew.

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Figure 5-11. *Religious Festival in Ajijic*, ca. 1946, black-and-white lithograph, 14¾" x 11½" plate



MADE AROUND THE SAME TIME AS *ROSENDO OF MEXICO*, *First Communion* depicts two young girls as they receive the third sacrament, a rite of passage for those of the Catholic faith. The girls are seated side by side and seem to share a solemn and tranquil understanding of the gravity of this ceremony. Both wear the traditional flowing white veil and crisp white dress trimmed with lace. The smaller girl holds a parchment and the chain of a golden cross, which falls across her lap. In her left hand

she clutches a bouquet of white calla lilies, symbolizing the girls' purity as they enter into womanhood. The red and yellow of the bench on which they are seated and the swirling yellow of the atmosphere creates a sense of warmth around the two girls, who glow in their white communion dresses. The yellow atmosphere is also similar to those Rose employed in her spiritual prints, imbuing the scene with a godly presence.

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Figure 5-12. *First Communion*, ca. 1946, color serigraph, 15 1/2" x 12"



BLACK CHRIST OF MEXICO WAS ANOTHER MORE COMPLEX religious scene that established Rose's ability and desire to delve deeply into cultural and religious practices. In a 1955 letter to Raymond Piper, Rose identified this print as the culmination of her two years spent living in the village of Ajijic. She explained that her ability to speak Spanish enabled her to gain the "confident friendship" of the Tarascan Indians, who escorted her to many "half-Pagan, half-Christian" ceremonies in remote mountain villages.¹⁴

In addition to her preparatory studies of this scene, Rose made both a black-and-white lithograph and, later, a serigraph. They each reflect a sincere documentation of the beliefs of her friends in the Tarascan tribe, or Purhepechas, of west central Mexico. In the 1948 lithograph, Rose positions a figure of a black Christ on the cross at the center of her composition. Women mourn at his feet. To the left, Mexican men congregate along a road winding up through the pastoral scene. On the right, the priests of the Quetzalcóatl deity are shown dressed as jaguars to instill fear in those who would challenge them. As with her work on Negro spirituals, Rose employs atmospheric effects—in this instance, heavenly beams of light—to denote the presence of God in "eternal space."¹⁵

Rose's interest in the local population was not superficial. She respectfully observed their customs. She also spoke their language and understood that they considered their Spanish name, Tarasco, to be derogatory because it references a traumatic history in which Spanish colonizers violently suppressed their people and altered the genetic makeup of the population through widespread rape and degradation of the women. The stepped pyramids found in *Black Christ of Mexico* are a direct reference to the rich history of the Purhepechas. Rose also illustrates their ancient myth of the deity Quetzalcóatl, who was the God of the Aztec priesthood, symbolizing death and resurrection.

Rose's own words provide valuable insight into her artistic motivation:

*The figure of Christ on the cross, a black man from the giant crucifix in the cathedral of Mexico City, symbolized for me the sufferings of all the dark skinned races of humanity, for which I have such a deep feeling. The old Aztec gods, lurking in the background, show how the Mexican Indians still believe that these ancient deities have power over their lives. I have represented Christianity as bringing light, music, and happiness into pagan darkness.*¹⁶

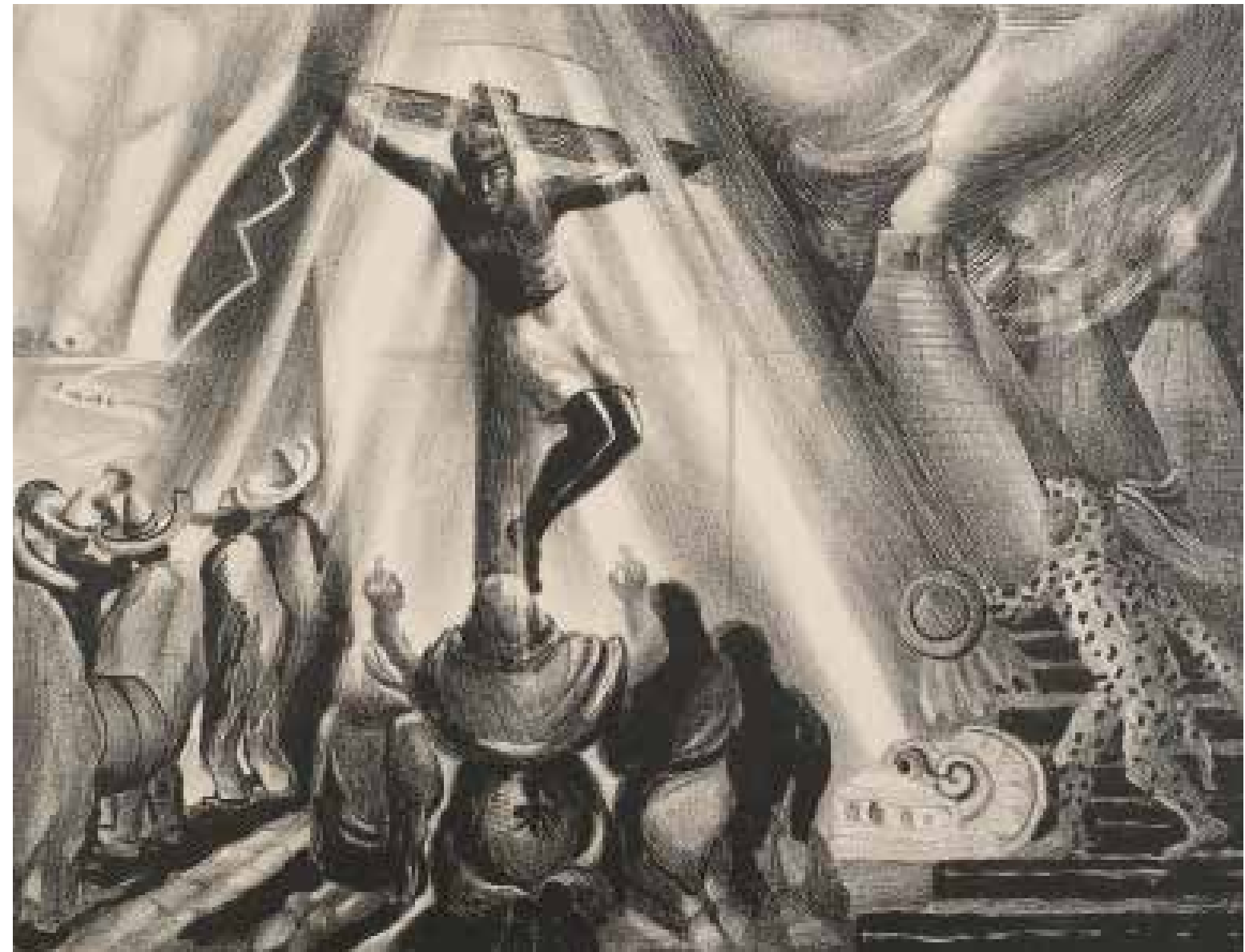


Figure 5-13. *Black Christ of Mexico*, 1948, black-and-white lithograph, 12" x 15½" plate



ROSE'S ART BORE WITNESS TO A DIVERSITY OF PEOPLE AND religious practices around the world. She presented people of color in a radically positive and realistic way through the lens of a private spirituality that transcended the prejudice of her time. Although born into a socially established, wealthy family, she chose to look beyond the comforts of her own privilege. Backed by a Vassar education and nurtured by a supportive community of artists at the center of New York's liberal creative community, Rose established a rigorous intellectual framework for her work, while remaining guided by her innate talent and sensitivity.

When Rose quietly passed away at her home in Alexandria, Virginia, on October 25, 1965, close friends and family memorialized her in a Christian Science funeral and scattered her ashes off the waters at Pickbourne.¹⁷ Her obituaries, printed, among other places,

in her local *Alexandria Gazette* and the *New York Times*, recounted a distinguished and award-winning career.¹⁸ While Rose achieved some recognition in her lifetime, it eluded her after her death because she defied the strict categories of race, class, and gender that seem to populate widely accepted narratives. However, the importance of Rose's decades of work during a key moment of American history—spanning the Jim Crow laws to the Civil Rights Act of 1964—is now being fully realized.

The unique vision of Ruth Starr Rose holds a timeless relevance for us today. The *Star Democrat*, published near Hope in Easton, Maryland, captured the stamina of Rose's personal vision, which she pursued until her last moments: "Up to the very end she was actively occupied in various art projects, lecturing and teaching. Even in death her youthful concepts of art and life will remain eternal."¹⁹



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 Figure 5-14. Photograph of Ruth Starr Rose on the porch at Pickbourne, ca. 1930

Figure 5-15. Photograph of Ruth Starr Rose at Pickbourne, ca. 1933

EPILOGUE: A VISIONARY FROM HOPE

*A prophet is not without honor, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house.*¹

KNOWN ONLY TO A HANDFUL OF PROGRESSIVES nationally and internationally, Rose was not a hero on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. Her primary artistic subject matter—the everyday life of African American people—was largely misunderstood, and her efforts made her an outsider in her own community. Her oil portraits of black neighbors and servants and her lithographs depicting Negro spirituals and scenes of black life were unusual themes in the early to mid-twentieth century, particularly for a white woman.

That Rose’s work was not wholeheartedly embraced is not surprising considering the national race divide and Maryland’s Confederate sympathies, which persist even today. After all, the state’s current song, adopted in 1939 and written by James Ryder Randall

in 1861, “spurns the Northern scum” while praising wealthy planters by name. In this context, it is noteworthy that Rose managed to defy the racial and political boundaries of her time, as did her family, who owned the magnificent Hope House—an eighteenth-century Georgian mansion that once served as a powerful symbol of white male patriarchy.

Indeed, privileged Rose was using her good fortune, talent, and education to overcome the limitations of gender and race relations as early as the 1920s—decades before the civil rights movement emerged as a staple of American politics. Her depictions of the different faces beyond racism’s stereotypes were particularly unusual for the era. At the time, images of African Americans tended to be uniformly exaggerated, with the stylized features epitomized in the work of Charleston Renaissance artist Alfred Hutter. Rose invented her own distinctive style, showing the human and the spir-



Figure 6-1. Study for *My Lord What a Morning*, 1958, pen and ink on yellow trace, 10" x 16"

itual side of “Negroes”—their individual souls shining through in the vivid expressions on their faces and the unique contours of their eyes. The portrait of Anna May Moaney (1930)—mischievous, defiant, and full of life—is one such example.

Rose’s art practice was also exceptional for being deeply rooted in the international issues of the day. The 1950s and ’60s were consumed by the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. The outcome of the races for nuclear armaments and space exploration was thought to determine whether capitalism or socialism would reign globally. Rose made this conflict between two competing ways of life the narrative backdrop of her depictions of Negro spirituals. Her conscious creative choice naturally aligned with an-

other harsh binary even closer to home—black versus white in America’s long-standing struggle with racial inequality.

Rose’s lithograph *My Lord, What a Morning* (1958) contains a very strong anti-Cold War message. Local Eastern Shore congregants are depicted united and protected by their faith as the US *Vanguard* satellite tellingly threatens to crush them. Another print, *Keep Your Hand on the Plow* (1950), shows a black and a white farmer walking side by side in harmony and is a powerful call for civil rights. Rose used the Cold War theme to illustrate humanity’s common defenselessness against missiles and to show that togetherness is more sensible than separation.

Rose was never a Communist, not even a left-



Figure 6-2. Ruth Starr Rose presenting two lithographs to Paul Robeson, the *Montclair Times*, June 6, 1941

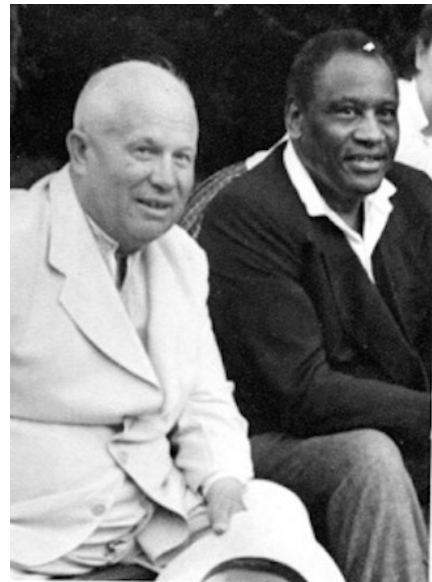


Figure 6-3. Photograph of Nikita Khrushchev with Paul Robeson, Crimea, 1958. Courtesy, the archives of Julia Khrushcheva

ist, yet her art exhibited a social conscience then only attributed to progressives and revolutionaries. She undoubtedly would have been surprised to be compared to nineteenth-century Russian artists of aristocratic origins, yet they show a similar trajectory in their compassionate recognition of the miserable plight of serfs in czarist Russia. Before the egalitarian calls of the 1917 Russian Bolshevik Revolution, poets like Nikolai Nekrasov and painters such as Grigory Myasodov opposed the inhumane treatment of peasants by the Russian nobility, and intensely admired the serfs' humanity and perseverance. Neither Nekrasov nor Myasodov was a classic liberal, but their art made them heroes of the liberal Russian intelligentsia.

By painting the spirit of a people who served and surrounded her in her own neighborhood at Hope, Rose was performing a distinct act of bravery in segregationist United States. It earned her the respect of well-known progressives of her era, including Orson Welles and Paul Robeson. Yet when the outspoken Welles found America's intolerance too oppressive, he looked elsewhere, choosing to think of himself as European. Robeson traveled even further in the Eurasian continent in search of racial justice. He was the darling of the atheist and egalitarian Soviet Union, first under its leader Joseph Stalin in the 1930s and '40s and then, in the 1950s, under Nikita Khrushchev, my great-grandfather.

Robeson famously sang the anthem of the USSR during one of his visits in 1944. My mother, Julia, Khrushchev's granddaughter, recalls a more intimate performance during Robeson's visit to their government estate in Crimea in August 1958. The Soviet premier and the singer, both in light summer suits, were deeply engrossed in a serious conversation about the bright future of hard-working people—black or white—around the world. Then Robeson stood up and performed the famous Soviet "Vast Is My Motherland." The song was one of his favorites. He first sang it in 1936 for the patriotic Soviet movie *Circus*, and he told Khrushchev he had loved it ever since, "because just like the Black songs, it celebrates the soaring human spirit, capable of bringing change." Later, the locals told my mother that they, too, could hear his captivating and rousing performance, his velvet baritone rolling off the hills down to the Black Sea.

Not hampered by any ideological affiliations, Rose never worried whether she might not appear liberal, as Welles did, or might be considered Communist like Robeson. She was a courageous visionary—a humanitarian, an artist, and an idealist. She was always consistent in her message that black people are

equals of rather than slaves to the rich. She was part of a small minority of crusaders against racism who lived in the South and openly challenged white society. One of Rose's contemporaries, *Baltimore Sun* columnist H. L. Mencken, was, like Rose, a person of privilege, and he was popularly condemned for his outspoken social views. Following the civil rights movement, however, Mencken has been praised for his good sense to be on the right side of history.²

For Ruth Starr Rose, fame has been slow in coming. She has been consistently pigeonholed as just a local woman painter. Her revolutionary approach to race and her inspired contribution to universal human rights have been repeatedly dismissed as an insignificant rich person's pastime. Despite such inaccurate generalizations, made both during her life and after her death, the fact remains that Rose was an artist so prophetic, so forward-thinking that she was not only breaking color barriers long before it became common practice, she also daringly tackled gender restrictions as well. Rose is finally getting the recognition she deserves.

—NINA KHRUSHCHEVA

APPENDIX

LIFE AT HOPE HOUSE

RUTH STARR ROSE

WRITTEN IN AUGUST 1924, *LIFE AT HOPE* IS ROSE'S RECORD OF THE LIVES OF HER FAMILY
AND FRIENDS AT HOPE, AND IN UNIONVILLE AND COPPERVILLE, MARYLAND.

A Note About the Text: Rose occasionally crossed out portions of her memoir; in the interests of giving a complete historical record, her excisions have been reinstated here; the restored passages are enclosed in brackets. Rose's punctuation and spelling have been corrected. All the photographs included here are from the Starr family photo album and archives.



PART I: THE DISCOVERY OF HOPE



Figure 1. Watercolor plan of Hope showing the various buildings, land, and proximity to Copperville
 Figure 2. *Mrs. Peregrine Tilghman*, the builder of Hope, by John Hesselius, ca. 1775, oil on canvas, 30" x 25"
 Figure 3. Opposite: Earliest known photograph of Hope, ca. 1880

HOPE HOUSE STOOD GAUNT AND RUINOUS IN THE BLISTERING JULY sun. In the distance, the Chesapeake Bay shimmered pale blue, we seemed entirely surrounded by water. My brothers and sister and I, with my father and mother leading the way, walked up the rickety steps through the great doorway and into the most storybook kind of a hall that a bewildered bunch of children from the far northwest had ever dreamed of.

Our loud knockings echoed cavernously up the great winding stairway and finally produced a wizened little woman in a very rustling black skirt, who was with dignity shooing a hen and her chickens out through what had once been a drawing room. She asked us to come in, and we trooped through the high-ceilinged rooms, noticing fabulous Adam mantels painted barn red and hung with lambrequins. Since I, a gangling sixteen, had never before met a lambrequin, my one desire was to pull them off and quickly. It was my job as the oldest, to herd on the children, for they wanted to scatter in all directions. We saw, as we came out on the porch that faced the tidewater, where once had been the bowling green, now ploughed up and planted in ripening wheat. "Thank Heaven," my Mother said, "They have left the old English box bushes," dramatically solid dark green against the golden wheat.

Beyond the box hedge, there was the beautiful salt water, a small harbor all our own, water deep and clear for good swimming, plenty of room for sailing, and out through the swift deep tide run, there was the Eastern Bay and the wide Chesapeake.

After scrambling through the wheat field down to the water we found two old gate posts, with carved urns on top, right at the water's edge. These we learned were part of the first water gate, where the ships as they came from England with cargoes of materials for the building of Hope had landed their long boats, and celebrated by rolling many a keg of West India rum up the bowling green to the great house.

Hope was a name to fire the imagination, this old ruinous house with its hants and spooks, could turn again into a thing of beauty. The strange old man who came down to join us at the water gate had owned Hope for a long time. For many years, the place had fallen on evil days, passing from one careless tenant to the next, each time losing some of its proud heritage. The story of the place fascinated us; the ancient man with the long scraggly grey beard was just scary enough to the children to give delicious shivers of excitement as he told of the ghost that wandered around in a tall silk hat, and of the little girl who rolled down the great stairway in a ball of fire.



We fought our way back to the house through a jungle of shoulder-high weeds and honeysuckle skirting the wheat field to find that it was time to drive back to the county seat in our livery stable hack. This vehicle was new and wonderful to us children, as was everything else in this magic southern land. Our carriage was called a Dayton. This was a two-seated affair with an iron supported top, to which curtains could be fastened, and the varnished wooden sides, very much like the sides of the older station wagons that we see so often. Even now on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, it is not at all surprising to see a family of happy colored people jogging along behind a mule or trotter, in a decrepit Dayton.

Reluctantly we turned to go, having gathered my brothers together with the greatest difficulty. They were having the time of their lives exploring Hope. "Oh Mother," they shrieked in chorus, "we think we have found a secret passage in the cellar." They had indeed, but it was walled up, though it was supposed to lead out to an old building on the shores of the Chesapeake.

Even mysterious ghosts and their eerie hants could not console my mother, who burst into tears as she turned to go and sobbed to my father, "Oh, Will, you have bought nothing but a view, a stair rail, and a cemetery. That's all."

Then began a magical life for the six of us, boys and girls growing up, as if a wand had been waved, suddenly on a plantation full of wonders. All kinds of exciting animals, horses and ponies to ride, mules to try to ride, Chesapeake Bay retrievers to slyly retrieve

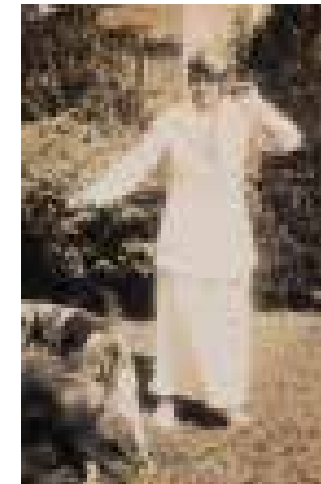
hams from the open pantry door, peacocks that scared our friends with their unearthly screams, part of our turkeys and mallard ducks and wild geese—all these and many more we grew to know and love.

The very name Hope, was inspiring. It became for all of us a spiritual ideal; a new way of life where all our creative energies were directed in one channel. The idea that Hope should be a work of art, as perfect as my father's great architectural knowledge and his unerring good taste could make it.

THE NAME HOPE, WE FOUND, CAME FROM THE TILGHMAN FAMILY crest—*Spes alet agricolam*—Hope sustains the farmer. Built by Tench Tilghman, when he married one of the daughters of Colonel Lloyd of Wye House, only three miles away, and established his home at Hope, making the whole area one vast plantation. As my father said that the Starr family motto "*Vive en espoir*," our ancestors would rise up and "hant" us if we did not live in Hope.

[This became more than just a house to my father and mother, it was a spiritual ideal of the creative life. This powerful influence swept us with it, and the results were far reaching, even now it is still a way of life, and a good way.]

To sensitive children, transplanted at an impressionable age and fired by the enthusiasm of their parents, the inspiration of re-creating a pitiful ruin into a thing of beauty gave an impetus that some of those children have carried on to many fields of high endeavor.



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Figure 4. Opposite: Ruth Starr Rose playing the harp at Hope, ca. 1920
 This page, clockwise from upper left: Figure 5. Photograph of Ruth Starr Rose at Hope, June 1915
 Figure 6. Members of the Starr family jumping off the dock at Hope, ca. 1920
 Figure 7. Starr brothers standing on the gate piers at Hope, June 1912
 Figure 8. Watching the tennis match and relaxing at Hope, August 1913
 Figure 9. Doc Wrightson, Ruth Starr, and her future husband, Searls, with a boat on the beach at Hope, summer 1913

PART II: THE COMMUNITY THAT REBUILT HOPE



Figure 10. Clarence working in the garden at Hope, 1909

FIRST OF ALL WAS THE HIRING OF NEGRO LABOR TO DIG DOWN AND trace authentically the old foundations of the wings. On the side of the house was still standing what they call on the Eastern Shore an arcade, which joins the center part of the house to the wings. Here we saw for the first time one of the outstanding features of Hope, one that puzzles architects, but in spite of their puzzlement it is authentic—an ogee curve of heavy molding that sweeps down from the edge of the roof down to the top of the windows to form a handsome sweeping design exactly alike on both sides.

Getting the labor was easy in those days, no begging or bargaining, the people of that little colored village were eager to work. And their work and their songs and their fine loyalty helped me to build a firm foundation for the interpretation of Negro spirituals. Their names are those of good men and true, leaders of their small community. Copperville was the name of the village of whitewashed cabins and flowery yards that was hidden away from stores and towns. So first on our list was Isaac Copper, black, blue black and very proud of it, he called himself the Royal Black, because his grandfather was a chief in Africa. His enormous hands he would cross in front when my mother would ask him a question, and flap them together in embarrassment like the flippers of a seal.

Next came Uncle Henry Thomas, with the harelip and perpetually bent-over back, he looked exactly as old after twenty years as the first day he came trudging up the long lane to Hope. Next was Willis Hinton, tall, gangling, a splendid worker, slightly inclined it was said to the sin of “uppityness” his greatest distinction a mysterious disease called the “win-puff” which attacked him at times when he felt he had worked long enough.

Then John Moody of the stern Indian profile, and Will Blake, the yellow boy that we children adored, and the Ockimey brothers, Jake, Will, and Clarence [DeShields], the sweet singer. We owe a debt of gratitude for those early days with the never-forgotten Clarence; in fact if he had not played his guitar out on the back kitchen steps in the honeysuckle-scented air and sung his songs of the Chesapeake, “Oh, Baby Where You Been So Long,” “Pup and Trail,” and “Pretty Peach Tree,” my Negro spiritual lithographs might never have been born. By the hour we would listen to the famous fox hunting song “Pup and Trail,” with the hounds baying, the shouts of the hunters, the clop-clopping of the horses’ feet, working up faster and faster to a terrific climax, all this done with Clarence’s high soft Negro tenor and his clever huge hands on the guitar.

Clarence was very tall, and walked as if he were tied together

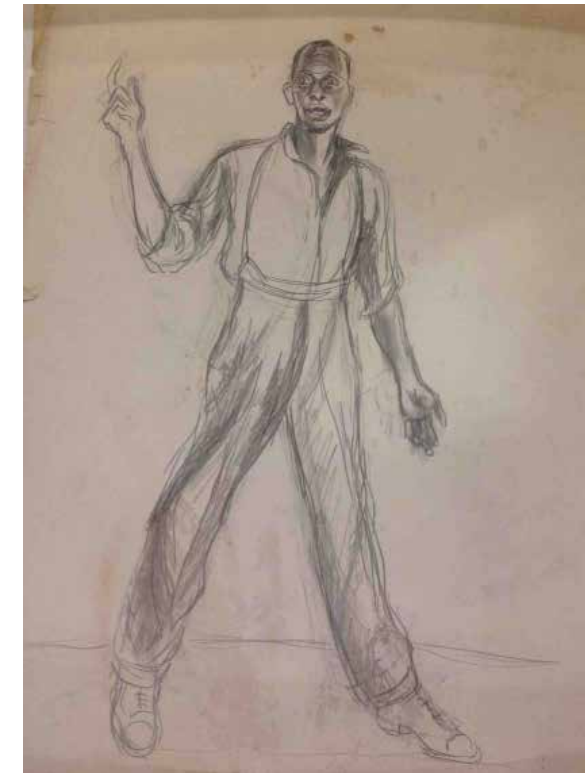


Figure 11. Ruth Starr Rose’s study of the noble Isaac Copper, ca. 1910, pencil and charcoal, 23½" x 20"

Figure 12. African American men planting the boxwood at Hope, ca. 1908



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 Clockwise from upper left: Figure 13. *Holly Boughs*, 1935, black-and-white lithograph, 7 1/8" x 8 1/2" plate

Figure 14. The Native American and African American Horace McKeever at Hope, 1910

Figure 15. Woman tending the garden at the laundry house, Hope, ca. 1920

Figure 16. The African American cook from Hope standing proudly in front of the kitchen wing, ca. 1920

er with string. He had a most engaging wide slow smile that went with his unfailing sense of amusement about the world in general. He was rhythm personified, and when my father and mother were not looking, he would suddenly burst into a small explosion of buck and wing dancing, to our great and never-ending joy. His job was to take care of the horses, for automobiles were still a very expensive and rare luxury. Cla-ence, as they called him, took over after old Isaac Copper of the tremulous hands had shown that he was a garden man and definitely not a horse trainer. This change came automatically after a mule and cart and Copper with it, had distributed itself at high speed all over the plantation.

The horses from Kentucky were part of the family: Bud and Lee, carriage horses, efficient and rather mean; Paris, my mother's gentle, aristocratic five-gaited saddle horse, who could do the Spanish Walk in an embarrassed kind of way, and who minced along pulling the phaeton down to the mail box and back. This pretty vehicle, which always made me think that a queen should be in it, was exactly like the little carriages that now take you for a drive around Central Park. It was low and graceful, so that if a couple of children having a tussle should roll out, the ground was near and Paris would stop amiably until they got in again. Then we had a strange assortment of larger rolling stock. The gigantic buckboard, sent from the northwest, which would seat nine people, three on each seat, with its bright blue and yellow trim, the red wheels flashing in the sunlight and Bud and Lee tearing along, at a breakneck speed into the courthouse square, gave us as much of a thrill as a Rolls Royce. For less elegant moments we had the old Dayton that my father had found in the livery stable when we first came out to Hope. It was a kind of a work-a-day surrey without the fringe on top. It could take a terrible beating and did—full of ice and chicken feed and hog wire and all the vast amount of supplies that a big plantation needs. We had a runabout too, and a buggy and a couple of pony carts, the cutest pony buckboard that children ever piled into.

Of course there were farm wagons for the mules, Pigeon and Dove. Why the colored people of the Eastern Shore seemed to love those names for mules is a mystery, except perhaps because they were rarely as gentle as doves. The mule cart, with its two bright red wheels and bright blue body, was as gay to see on the farms of the

Chesapeake as it was on the gleaming white roads. Last of all, our carriage was a handsome coachlike affair, with plate-glass windows and broadcloth upholstery. In this my sister and I would journey through the crisp winter nights to the Christmas cotillions, feeling strange and rather scared in this Cinderella coach. Sometimes the mules had to be hitched to it and pull us through the deep Maryland mud when we came south from Philadelphia by train, or over the Chesapeake on the friendly night boat from Baltimore.

Every day there was some excitement; it is always a state of emergency when you live so far off in the country. We learned all kinds of legends and folk tales from the colored people. There were, it seems, conjure men about, who could "bury a bottle on you," with the direst consequences. In our laundry house, a newly built cottage of colonial design, a forerunner of Williamsburg, there presided a small wild-looking very black woman named Mary Wright. Her hair was done up in tiny pigtales that stood out in every direction, and she was in a state of constant terror over the burying of bottles. These bottles were black magic, said to contain pieces of your hair and fingernails, dried toads and other sinister objects which would spoil your love life, make you shrivel up, and even die. This particular time was one of astronomical wonders.

There had been an eclipse of the sun, and also a comet. These fearsome acts of God were too much for Mary Wright. One morning my mother was wakened by a beating on her door and Clarence's soft voice, now shrill terror, called, "Miz Sta Miz Sta, come quick to the laundry house—Mary Wright's done took with a misery, she say she's gittin' ready fo' Heaven, she's gwine die."

Running out with my mother, we found Mary rolling and kicking on the floor in a kind of fit, screaming, "De comets a comin' and Ah'm a sinnah. There is a basket tied on the tail of dat comet and when they let it down, they never let me in to go to Heaven. Oh Lawd, Oh Lawd." She knew there was going to be a basket to take the saved to the golden stairs, and she might never get aboard. From the suffering of a pathetic little black Mary came my first inkling of the power of the spirituals and a desire some day to put them into a visual form. These songs that I heard every day welled from the hearts of a people, sung with a religious fervor that made me feel humble. They had never been on radios, because there were no radios—they had never been on Broadway, they were right out of the soil.



Figure 17. Study of a woman for *Nobody Knows De Trouble I See*, ca. 1940, charcoal and crayon, 24" x 20"

PART III: MAMIE'S RECOLLECTIONS OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS AND WYE

AS THE BUILDING OF HOPE WENT ON, WE FOUND THAT THE MEN WHO dug up the foundations and carried bricks were also well trained by the wise owners of the nearest plantations, Wye, Fairview, and Gross Coate, to many different skills. They could cook and serve a meal with quiet distinction, they could cut up a hog, they could skin rabbits and eels and coons and possums. They knew how to set a muskrat trap, but it was not a trap on the Eastern Shore, it was a muskrat *gum*. As we grew up fascinated in this gentle land, we moved excitedly through a magic world of new words, new climate, new animals and people. When Jimmy [Moaney], the expert fisherman and hunter, went poling out in his narrow skiff, he took with him the cleverly made eel gums, so that the eels he caught could be cut up and used for bait on the crab lines. He showed us where the baby partridges were hiding motionless under the box bushes. Even if my father told us that these tiny things were really quail, their new name made them all the more fascinating, because everything was different.

As our first month of May burst on us with beauty, Jimmy came up to me one morning from across the cove in his crab boat, holding a large bunch of seaweed in his hand. "Miss Ruth," he called over the water, "I've got something for you." And paddling skillfully up to the dock he opened the seaweed package and there mysteriously inert, mustard green and blue against the emerald seaweed, were 3 soft crabs, my very first. "You see Miss Ruth, jes' you look over yonder in the branch, the honey locuses is blooming, its sof' crab time. And after I'm through work this evenin' and the feedin's done, I'll take you out with me and show you where the sof' crabs hide."

Poling around the edge of the seaweed beds, using most skillfully the handle of his crab net to push the boat against the swift tide, Jimmy would, with a lightning flash, run his net through the weeds and come up miraculously with a soft crab. Then strange heads would be appear to be swimming. "Oh Jimmy what is that," we would scream. "Chillun set right still," Jimmy would whisper, and

he would quickly make a lighting dip with his net, bringing up a large turtle. "But no Miss Ruth, that ain't no turtle, tha's an ole terrapin." Sure enough there were the diamond marks on his back, and he was the king of seafood. When we took the diamond back up to the house, all excitement to put him in the cool cellar till he could be eaten, to Mamie [Lewis], large and fat and jolly, our first cook. Mamie said she was sho' tickled to see that terrapin. "They'se good eatin', ain't they, Jimmy?" "But you never wants to eat too much of them terrapins. My mammy in the ole time days when us people weren't free liken we is now, done tole me that the slaves at Hope got fed so much diamondback terrapin that they all quit work and say to the Bossman that they weren't gonna work no mo' till and when they gits real vittles to eat."

With us as an audience, and the handsome Jimmy leaning on his crab net in the doorway, Mamie became lyrical over the old-time cooking. "Right in that cabin out yonder, my mother used to make hoe cake, ash cake and corn pone, baked in the open fire. She would jes rake some hot coals over the pan, and let it set till it riz and was nice and brown, then her brother Willie would put on his waiterman's coat, put the corn pone on a silver platter, cover it with a nice white napkin, and jes like a ole grasshopper Willie would be in the big house dining room in two jumps."

Mamie would give us cookies, and a hand out for Jimmy, then she would settle her vast bulk in an old rocker, rolling her eyes and patting one foot rhythmically on the floor. "Miss Ruth, ain't you never seen a hant in that blue room upstairs?" "Not yet, Mamie, but I am really dying to see one. Do you believe in hants?" "No Miss (with great emphasis) with twelve chillun' you think I got time for such foolishness? But if you all really wants to see some spooks, I tell you jes what to do. You all waits till the dark of the moon, then when your granpappy's clock strikes twelve, you all go out to the graveyard behind the old Quarter." "Mamie," we asked breathless, grouped close

around her, “Were those the slave quarters and is that the graveyard there under the two big sycamore trees near the ice pond?” It was so full of honeysuckle and bull briar that we could hardly push our way in. “Yes indeed honey, it’s growed up, but some time you all git Cla-ence to go in there with the corn knife and cut a place so you all can see the stone of that old-time woman they call Miz. Grundy. It her sho’ nuff, and she been there a long time.” “Why yes Mamie,” we said in a chorus, “She is the one mother tells us about. Mrs. Grundy said children were to be seen and not heard. She really did used to live at Hope long ago and she told people all about what kind of manners they should have.”

“But Mamie, tell us about Wye, where you were born.” “Go long, Miss, I was raised up right in the kitchen at Wye, and my mammy and my granmammy befo me. I learned to cook befo I could scribe my name and ole Colonel Lloyd useter say that I was gwine be the best cook in Talbot County iffen I did as good as my mammy. [You ever heard of a colored name Frederick Douglass. He done some big things for our race. Well he was borned in the cabin right next to my pa’s at Wye.] And that kitchen at Wye, my Lawd, chillun, the spooks and the hants useter to come by that kitchen doo so fast that we jes never paid them no mind. They was powerful lots of a hants there all the time. And them Allacoochie [Agricultural Society] dinners—uh-huh.” Mamie burst into a cascade of ecstatic grunts. “Plenty of peanut-fed hams, all the Marylan’ fried chicken the Quality could eat, and guinea hen and sof’ crabs iffen it was sof’ crab time, and oysters in the winter and terrapin and sof’ pone an light bread an hominy an yams an artichokes out-ten the garden, an homemade wine, an corn likker. Great day in the mornin’, Miss Ruth, it took us in the kitchen near bout all night to eat up what was lef. And what we couldn’t eat we jes rolled up in our aprons and tuk it home.” Mamie rolled her eyes and sighed rapturously as she thought of the glory of the Allacoochie dinners. This outburst explained Mamie’s increased size at Night as she waddled home from Hope, carrying jes a teeny bit for each one of her twelve children. The darkies were always talking about the Allacoochie dinners. It had more than a faint sound of the sideshows about it. But it turned out to be the old and very exclusive Agricultural Society, made up of all the big plantation owners. My father was

very much pleased when he was asked to be a member, showing that now he was no longer a “stranger from off,” as old Uncle Henry would say.

The restoration of the wings of Hope was going on at a pace and very exciting it was. The authentic creative atmosphere that we all felt so strongly was due to one powerful fact—It was the fact that my father, a brilliant architect as well as yacht designer, had decided to dare to do the unorthodox thing—He was going to re-create the wings on his own drawing board, using his remarkable knowledge of Georgian Architecture. Not only the designing, but to assemble the men and the materials was a staggering feat, because the distances were great, transportation was poor; lots of the supplies for building came to Hope by water. It was like living on an island and is still so on the Eastern Shore to a lesser degree.

After studying all the great manor houses of Maryland and Virginia, and using the beautiful details of the big houses, he started the plans, the whole family sharing in the wonder of what was going on. Sometimes my father let me hold the tracing paper or occasionally asked my opinion. No one would have been prouder than I was. This wise and kind gesture had far-reaching effects. It gave me a vision that stretched into the future of the Eastern Shore. When I grew up I would be an artist.

The life at Hope became a pageant intertwined with history. The bricks for the new wings had to be specially designed by my father and took over a whole brickyard in the county seat. Large bricks they were, of a special color, like those of Hope, which had been brought from England as ballast for the ships in early colonial days. Bricklayers who knew the old ways of the Flemish bond had to be hunted out, there was one in Pocomoke City and that was a long journey by horse and carriage to get a master mason. Pocomoke City was thrilling because there my father pointed out to me the northernmost point of the cypress swamps. We brought home from there strange twisted cypress knees to use in building the boats of which he dreamed. From Accomac Court House, from Princess Anne, from the Eastern Shore of Virginia, way down to Chincoteague, and from the little nautical paradise of Oxford, racing to be first at the oyster grounds, then drop anchor, unstop their tall masts with the leg-o’-mutton sails, and tong oysters where “the tide ebbs and flows.”



Figure 18. Jimmy Moaney



Figure 19. Portrait of Miss Anne Grundy, painted posthumously, by John Hesselius, ca. 1750, oil on canvas, 30" x 25"

Like the whooping cranes and the trumpeter swans, the Chesapeake Log canoes have long ago made their last far winged flight. As the gasoline engine came into use, the oystermen, always slow to change, finally decided to try the noisy, smelly new contraption, so the graceful lines of the old southern yellow pine logs were cut and hacked to compete with a new era. One day seeing a beautiful log canoe that was about to be cut up, the *Belle M. Crane* became mine. We sailed her, and she behaved gallantly, in many races with the oystermen all over the bay. Our adventures with the *Belle M.* were hair-raising, especially our first race. To learn about managing the strange craft, Captain Jim Shockley, a weather-beaten oysterman, said he would take the tillers. He would show me just how it was done. We got under way, with a stiff breeze blowing and our hiking planks out to windward to keep the *Belle M.* from capsizing, and went charging down through the fleet of bug-eyes, skipjacks, schooners and assorted yachts which had come to St. Michaels to see the wonderful log canoes. But I soon saw to my dismay that all was not well with the usually jaunty Captain Jim. This jockeying for position in a turmoil of boats that were in everybody's way was not

like the good plain sailing out to the oyster grounds, with "Nothing to leeward but the Western Shore." As we careened wildly through the harbor, I could see that Captain Jim's hand was trembling on the tiller and when we carried away, festooned on our jib boom, the yacht ensign from the stern of the second yacht that we had grazed in passing, Captain Jim grabbed my hand and said in a shaking voice, "Miss Ruth Honey, don't you fret."

Always the colored people were laughing and singing and we laughed and sang with them. Life was leisurely and rhythmic, as Clarence would say when you asked him to do something right away, "Why, Miss, to-morrow ain't hurt." Gradually we evolved from sawhorse washstands and sturdy slop jars to real plumbing and showers that rivaled the Chesapeake in luxury. We were continually amused by the Eastern Shore dialect (lingo), where almost all words were new to us. Our washstands were made of trussle-benches and not sawhorses. After 12 o'clock it was evening and not afternoon. A burlap bag was a croker sack, we know now what Aunt Sally meant when she said, "Amongst you all goin' to town?" We learned how to shuck oysters, though with many a cut doing it. September was an

eventful month, on the first day early in the morning I would run to my mother's bedroom to see the oyster fleet under full sail racing out from St. Michaels to the oyster grounds in Eastern Bay.

That was only the beginning of high adventure, as the rakish and piratical looking *Belle M.* took us to Oxford, where the Tred Avon and the Choptank meet, up the Tred Avon to spend a weekend at Ratcliffe Manor [with its secret room of giant box bushes, up the back Wye to Wye House, sailing even up to Chestertown through Kent Narrow drawbridge, no mean feat.] exploring the back Wye River, past Paca House with its grisly ghost stories, even up to Chestertown.

LIFE AT WYE

"Go long, Miss," with a flourish of her fat arm, Mamie was now exulting in the glories of her past, "I was riz right up in the kitchen at Wye. Didn't I help my Mammy cook the weddin' supper for Old Colonel, when he come home to Wye with his bride on his arm. My Lawd Miss Ruth what a night. They was dancing on the bowling green in the moonlight, the Orangerie was all shining bright with candles, and all the quality was in there, just a sippin of those good mint juleps." "We had plenty of tastes in the kitchen too," only Mamie said "tasses" and smacked her lips. "Ole Colonel say, when he come in the pantry to look after the drinks," 'Mamie tell you Ma, these mint juleps sure is shrinking, we gotta have plenty for the weddin' guests. Tell her to stand right here and watch this liquor, if she don't, old Willis will finish them all up.' Willis was a lovable great Negro, who was a famous sipper. His son, young Willis, was now working at Hope, very proud of the position my father had given him, of tenant of one of the farms. So from him too as well as Mamie, we heard stories of Wye, told as he brought in loads of wood for all the fireplaces, stories told in the half light of the sunset coming over the Chesapeake, about Lovers Lane, and the pale ghost of the girl that lost her lover and ever since has hunted for him in the box garden at Wye.

Often my father would ride over to Wye House on horseback and I would go with him, feeling very adventurous as we rode up the mile-long avenue of gigantic trees. Before we came to the house we came upon the ha-ha, an inheritance from the great estates of England. We urged our horses down into the deep brick-sided ditch which kept cattle, sheep, and horses from coming up on to the manor

house lawn and yet being flush with the ground never disturbed the beauty of the long vista from the entrance gates, sweeping up to Wye. The idea of the animal's surprise when they found they could not get up on the luscious green lawn and exclaimed ha-ha as they galloped away, appealed to my sense of humor. I also galloped away on the fleet *Melissa*, tearing around the kitchen end of the big house to the Orangerie, and scattering a whole covey of little darkies hiding in the box bushes, watching us come up the avenue.

Harrison, the grey-haired man in long years of honorable service at Wye, welcomed us with a sweeping gesture. The Orangerie, then in ruins, was an artist's dream of a romantic and beautiful ancient building. There it was before me, in all its perfection of design, a lovely place where orange trees and lemons should grow, and through its great arched windows I could picture the hoop skirts and Confederate uniforms of Ole Colonel's wedding day. They would come laughing down the bowling green from the big house, down the allée of clipped giant rose of Sharon bushes, to the Orangerie, facing the manor.

The Orangerie was the most exciting building, after Hope, that I had ever seen. To a teenager catapulted into wonder it was sheer enchantment. It seemed to me then, and still does, quite French in feeling, with overtones of Versailles. The story goes that the Lloyds of Wye, with several other plantation owners, sent to France for the best landscape architect they had, and he laid out the gardens of Wye, with the Orangerie, as well as the gardens of Perry Hall, the home of the Coxes. Probably the same brilliant designer came over to Mt. Airy in Virginia on the Rappahannock to lay out their gardens, since the Tayloes of Mt. Airy were kinfolk of the Lloyds, they too have an Orangerie, but ruined almost beyond repair.

[Every time we came to Wye this little courtly custom delighted my father, and I loved to watch them at the huge hunting sideboard, with its candles and decanters and knife boxes, speaking of hospitality and good living. My eyes went with astonishment the first time to the center fan in the ceiling above the dining room table, pulled during meals by a little darky boy in a white coat much too big for him. Also I could hardly believe it when I noticed that there were no screens at the windows. As one old mammy said to me, "Miss Ruth, them flies is right sociable."]

PART IV: CHOCOLATE CAKE AND CHURCH CHILDREN

ACROSS THE COVE FROM HOPE FLOATED AN UNMISTAKABLE VOICE, IT WAS Clarence. “Miss Roo-uf, Miss Roo-oof, Miz Sta’ say come right quick, she goin’ to the Children’s day service in Coppersville.” Clarence’s loose-jointed form disappeared through the water gate and into the winding paths of the heart garden of box, on his way to the big house. There were two plantations now, and miraculously, Pickbourne was mine. Just on the other side of the mirror cove from Hope, only a quick paddle and we were there, dressed in our best to do honor to Children’s Day in the little colored chapel, actually, to give it the dignity of its full name, the DeShields Chapel of the Ebenezer African Methodist Church of Copperville.

Of course, we knew all about the great preparations for this important day. Hearing strange singsong noises in my kitchen separate from the house, in true old-time style, I found little Pauline, whose mother was at that moment browning deviled crabs in the oven. Pauline was standing, stiff as a ramrod, singing in a high piping treble,

I shall not be, I shall not be moved,
I shall not be, I shall not be moved
Like a tree that’s planted by the waters,
I shall not be moved.

“Pauline, that’s beautiful.” “Yes’m” said Pauline, hiding behind her mother’s apron. “Miss Ruth, m’am, Reveren tole me to ask you all effen I could bring a chocolate cake for a prize in the singin’ at the Chillun’s day service.” Anna Moaney, now the cook at Pickbourne, was Cindy’s cousin, she had the same stiff elegance of manner. She took her position as boss of the kitchen with great dignity and infinite leisure. Little black Richard, named after my youngest brother, whimpered in his crib by the kitchen stove and Anna picked him up to nurse him as I answered, “Certainly Anna, bake the cake as soon as you can leave the baby.” I will take it over to Hope in the boat when I go.”

Getting across the water in the leaky rowboat, dressed in

“city” clothes, besides balancing the cake on the seat in the stern, was a nautical feat. My mother met me at the dock, laughing at the cake, helping me get safely to shore. This life between Hope and Pickbourne, with the magic of the water to give it infinite variety, was a life even more wonderful than before. There were many questions about how the painting was going, about children and crops, and gardens and my mother’s music, always a joy to me. It came across the cove in subtle harmonies or crashing chords, and I would call my appreciation from Pickbourne over the tide water, to Hope.

“We must hurry down the lane to be in time for the service, but don’t worry, after all, it always takes them a long time to get started.” “I spoke to them at the church last year, when you were away,” said my mother. She was a brilliant speaker and I was filled with a strange elation, it was my first time to hear the singing of all our colored people together.

The chocolate cake was packed on the back seat of the Model T Ford, a new car, to take the place of the vanishing carriages. With my mother clutching my arm over the bumps, we slam-banged down the lane to Copperville. There was the little church, light streaming out of its paper stained-glass windows, the preacher in the doorway to welcome us. With a courtly bow, he ushered us in, the tails of my father’s old dress suit, which he was wearing, flying out on each side, his whole figure seeming like a tall avenging black angel as he corralled his flock.

[Up to the very front he led us, in a blaze of light from the coal oil lamps that. . .]

In the large golden chandelier. We were put in the very front pew, but then the “Revern” asked my mother to come up and sit next to the Bible, since she was going to speak.

There was the choir, in stiff starched white, I was thrilled to see large fat Mamie at the organ, standing primly next to her, Cindy and her bouncing daughters. Suddenly the whole church burst into an explosion of song that made the shivers go down my spine. Weird,



Figure 21. Anna May Moaney and son in the kitchen at Hope, ca. 1930, charcoal and pencil on yellow trace, 16¾" x 19¼"

dissonant and yet rich harmonies of deep bass voices, it was a song of welcome to my mother.

How-de-do, Miz’ Sta’, how de-do, do-do-do,
How-de-do Miz’ Sta’, how de-do, do-do-do,
How-de-do Miz Sta’, we are glad to see you,
How-de-do, how-de-do, how-de-do, do-do-do.

Like a great cascade of sound, it filled the little church to its whitewashed rafters. Only a simple song from a childlike people, made up on the spot out of love for my mother, yet it had in its amazing beauty, the elements of greatness. In this very way, out of the deep emotions of suffering and joy, the Negro spirituals were born.

PART V: SHIPS, HORSES, AND CARS



Figure 22. Ruth on Melissa, June 1909



Figure 23. Learning to run the Cadillac, 1910



Figure 24. The Starr family's African American racing team, dubbed "Our Noble Crew" in a family photograph album, Oxford regatta, July 25, 1912

LIFE ON THE EASTERN SHORE PLANTATION WAS BASED ON SHIPS IN the beginning. Without the water and the deep, safe harbors, there would not have been any settlements at all. The water was a highway and sustenance and the great world beckoning—it was everywhere around us and we grew to watch its every mood. Like a brood of ducks that has been hatched out by a hen, we took to the water, leaving our talented mother distracted on the shore. Happily for her peace of mind, she did not see me capsize in an open sailing dory in the middle of the Tred Avon River, with my tennis racquet floating gaily off with the tide. To us, things like this were all in the day's work and great fun, especially as I was brought ashore by a handsome young man and taken to the great kitchen at Ratcliffe Manor to be dried off and plied with luscious food and drink by Airy, their angel of a cook.

Though we did not know it, we were being taught in a hundred ways by the colored people. We learned about the winds and the tides, those mysterious forces that changed the face of our world twice a day. Our plans were all upset by our first "Nip" tide, till Jimmy explained it to us, "That the ole Northwest wind had blowed all the water outten the bay down to Norfolk, and it had to take its own time

to come back." Then there were the terrible sudden storms of the Chesapeake, the Negroes called them "gusses," that come with the tide and against the wind. There was the dreaded "dry drought," with the world shriveling for want of water—West India hurricanes that blew up the bay from Florida. We had to learn to adjust to all these acts of God, and to be able to meet them without fear.

Clarence taught us about the animals. He it was who took my littlest brother on his knee. "Now Richit, set right still," and Clarence would begin his stories of Brer Rabbit, Brer Possum and the tar baby. They seemed like real people to us, for we saw the possums and the foxes and the rabbits as we rode through the sun-dappled forests of Hope. It was Clarence, too, who, with my father, gave me lessons in horse training and riding. My five-gaited Kentucky mare Melissa was my dearest possession. Melissa was beautiful and neurotic, she wanted to get rid of all her inhibitions and she began by trying to get rid of me. I can still hear Clarence's soft voice in a scolding whine, "Miss Ruth, that Hoss ain't fitten for you to ride, she gwine kill you one of these days. I wouldn't ride her down to the mill, no Ma'm, not for sumpin' pretty."

Melissa and I learned together. I fancied myself quite a noble figure on her back, during the times when I was in command of her quarterdeck, and not sitting in a ditch with Melissa galloping off turning her head with surprised and it seemed to me, sneering glances in my direction. But alas for delusions of grandeur, the county seat was too far away for an everyday ride, unless it was an emergency dash to call a doctor, as we once had to do. My only audience was crowds of little black children and a forest of waving snaky thin arms with the shout in unison. "Miss Ruth." Never Hello, Good Morning, or Goodbye, just the sweet shouting of my name.

Time was moving on at Hope, even on the lazy Eastern Shore changes were in the air. We now had a Cadillac automobile, to the wonder of all, both black and white. It seemed to me a most magnificent affair, about the size of a Pullman. Actually it was quite small, an open touring car with no top at all, and a queer rubber poncho with holes for several heads, to use when it rained. This was one of the first automobiles in Talbot County, and we drove to town in a perfect vortex of runaway horses. My father, driving me to a party one day, with some alarm found himself about to pass a lady in a horse

and buggy. "Well, this will never do," said my father, with a worried look, "we will have to slow down. That is Mrs. Shirley Goldsborough and we could never be so rude as to give her our dust." We had been whizzing along at the dizzy speed of 25 miles an hour, but when we cut the Cadillac down to horse and buggy speed, the wretched thing stalled, and my father, cursing politely under his breath, had to get out and crank the car. I think it cranked on the side, but here all exact details are hazy, as we saw Mrs. Shirley Goldsborough vanishing at a smart trot in the distance.

Clarence had a terrible time learning to drive a car. He was strictly a horseman. It seems there were various little efforts made by Clarence, which consisted mostly of wrapping the car around the big linden tree, the giant that came from England with the early settlers. The next in line for running the Cadillac was Will Blake, the jolly and dependable yellow boy that my brothers trailed around after. Will loved machinery and drove the car most carefully and well, but machinery turned on him cruelly, because he was far from doctors, when he went underneath his Model T Ford with a lighted candle.

PART VI: SAMUEL JULIUS JOHNSON

IT WAS NOT LONG AFTER THE AUTOMOBILE CAME THAT CLARENCE WAS driving me into town in the buckboard. Far down the road I saw a man, he seemed to have a tall silk hat on his head, and he was carrying something. "Well Clarence, look at that, that man is carrying a banjo." "Yes, Miss, he belongs carrying a banjo, that is Samuel Julius Johnson," said Clarence proudly. "Who on earth is that?" I answered idly, not realizing that great events were toward in this unexpected meeting. "Why Miss Ruth, that man is one of the most famous of the colored race, they calls him the human pump." This was too much for me, and asking Clarence to stop the horses, Samuel Julius Johnson, with the dignity befitting a famous man, climbed up beside onto the driver's seat.

I had stumbled on a wandering minstrel, as he swaggered along the white oyster-shell roads. He was happy, he was free, and he had his banjo, singing he wandered all over the world; perhaps the Eastern Shore was really his home, but he was almost legendary, he came and he disappeared. This was only natural since of course he was a powerful conjure man. From that time on Samuel Julius Johnson was a devoted follower of "Miz Ruth." I was perfectly enchanted with his antics; he was one of those natural born entertainers who was as much at home in the big dining room at Hope, singing there, as he was in the most humble cabin. My mother was very much annoyed when I produced Samuel Julius Johnson to sing for us, because we were not yet through dinner, and dinner was a great function in those days. As Cindy and Sol were solemnly serving dessert, Cindy, with the whites of her eyes showing, whispered to me that that banjo-playing man was in the pantry. Sam came in, he bowed low, turning in all directions, then settled himself on a chair, threw back his head, shut his eyes and began to sing. They were strange songs that we had never heard before; songs of the oystermen, songs of the salt rivers, songs of the jails and the open road:

Shoes an stockings in my hand,
Looking for the girl ain't got no man,
Ah've been drinking

Cherry wine.
Police, police, don't res' me
Res' that niggah behin' that tree,
He got money, an I got none
He got money, an I got none
Put him in the jail house jes' for fun
He been drinking
Cherry wine.

He was a sweet singer, and could buck dance like Bill Robinson. From that time on Samuel Julius Johnson and I were bosom friends. I was perfectly enchanted with his antics.

I noticed that Cindy and Sol who were serving never came back after Sam was through singing. But from below the stairs where he had gone to get the ice cream we had promised him, came disturbing shrieks and loud guffaws. Finally my distracted mother went to find out what had happened and found Cindy taking off her apron in high dudgeon, muttering "she want going to stay roun' no conjure man she might be tuk with a spell. And them rats squeaking all roun' her." At that Clarence silently doubled up with a spasm of laughter, and Mamie came out with "Miz Sta, Mam, dat man ain't human, he can throw his voice mos' anywhere, and he had rat squeaking comin out from all over this kitchen, an it comed right outten his mouf." Sam had with devilish glee been practicing ventriloquism on Cindy and to her it was no joke.

Never was there so much fun at Hope as when Samuel came strolling in. Of course all work stopped. Gradually the men from the garden drifted in, and the field hands, leaving their mess; Jimmy appeared casually with his crab net, all the laundry was left in a heap on the cottage floor while Mary Wright timidly eased into sight. Clarence was there as a welcoming committee, Aunt Sally, now helping the cook, was offering the distinguished visitor a piece of freshly browned chine bone, with some crisp shortenin'. The news filtered through into the big house that Samuel Julius Johnson was in the kitchen. My sister and I were supposed to be elegantly arrang-



Figure 25. Study of Samuel Julius Johnson for *Little David Play Upon Your Harp*, 1933, charcoal and pencil on yellow trace, 20" x 24 1/2"

ing flowers, but, inelegantly, we fled. The boys were also doing a job. They were trying to mow the grass on the bowling green with the Shetland pony and his own special pony mower. But Ropie, old and respected, preferred to eat grass and when he got tired would firmly stop, so it took a brother at each end to start him off. The pony was left to eat where the grass was greenest, and the boys with happy giggles joined the growing crowd in the cavernous basement kitchen.

“Oh, Sam,” I called, “We’re so glad you came, how are you feeling?”

“Po’ly, young ladies and gentlemen, po’ly,” with a sparkling wink toward Cindy, who sniffed as he put away an enormous bit of luscious chine bone. Here was our golden opportunity. We had the great Samuel Julius Johnson all to ourselves. It was a June day, beautiful as only the Eastern Shore can be; the linden tree was in bloom outside the kitchen door, the sweetness of the perfume filled the whole garden. “Let’s go out under the linden tree,” and the whole laughing crowd followed Sam out into the green coolness. It was like a great room, where forty or fifty people could gather in lovely shade. With the odor of the blossoms, the South Sea Island could not have given a more enchanted spot. “We want to see the human pump,” my smallest brother called. “Boy you don’ want to see nothin’ like that,” parried Sam. “Yes we do so want to see it; Clarence says that you’ve don’t it before kings and queens.” “That niggah better heush his mouf; kings and queens aint nothing but people. But if you all wants, I dunno hicum I cain’t do it, git me a bucket, fill it with good watter outten the well and bring it hyah right quick.” Aunt Sallie’s two largest boys, in from the woodpile, sprang to do his bidding.

As Samuel Julius Johnson grabbed the heavy bucket in both hands, he surely would have preferred a roll of drums. But our breathless silence was a dramatic tribute as he tilted the bucket up to his mouth and without a stop drank the whole thing right down. Then everyone gasped as Clarence, knowing what to do, took hold of the human pump’s right arm, and working it up and down like a handle, the water came gushing in a steady stream, out of Sam’s mouth and filled the bucket up again to the top. At that Sam bowed with a sweeping old-time gesture, a touching of the forelock, and we all broke into shouts of applause.

Now the heights had been reached, Samuel could have the

whole plantation as far as we were concerned. But our triumph was short lived, for with a quick rustling of skirts, my mother appeared under the linden tree, her face worried and amazed. “Children, Aunt Sally and Clarence, what in the world is this?” “Oh, Mother, this is the most wonderful thing that we have ever seen. Don’t you remember Samuel Julius Johnson, he is the human pump, the only one in the world. He will do it again for you, right now, won’t you Sam?” “No indeed he won’t, don’t talk to me about pumps.” My Mother was set. “The gasoline engine in the pump house has stopped running, your grandmother is in the bathtub right now and she can’t get a drop of water; Clarence get right down to the well as fast as you can fly and start the engine.” My brothers had been trying to escape in the confusion, but my mother’s clarion call, “Frederick, Nathan, Richard, Boys,” dispelled a disaster. “You know you can’t leave the pony alone, the pony has run away with the lawn mower into the box bushes and heaven only knows what is left. Get him untangled if you can, before I call your father and get Will Blake to mend the lawn mower. Everybody get back to work. Uncle Henry, I saw your mules going off down the lane.” “Oh Lawdy, Lawdy,” wailed Uncle Henry. “And you,” pointing to Samuel Julius Johnson, “Get right on down the lane.” “Oh Mother,” I pleaded desperately, “He hasn’t any home, and I asked Aunt Sally to give him some dinner, and she said she would.” At that my mother, loving fun as well as any of us, relented, he could stay, but after dinner he must go and not come back.

This, however, was far from being the last of the famous Samuel. Unfortunately the whole county, white and colored, was talking about his latest escapade. This really sealed his fate with my mother. There was a funeral of one of the deacons of the African Methodist church in Unionville. This quaint little village, with its row of old cabins and their flower yards lining both sides of the county road, had been settled by the slaves of the great plantations after the Civil War, who had no homes, since they had been freed. So they named it Unionville and it always had a certain shabbily important air. Since Samuel Julius Johnson was a person of distinction, a man of travel as well as one possessing occult powers, he was asked to be one of the pallbearers. This, however, was too great an opportunity for a man of the minstrel shows to miss. The church service went nicely, with Clarence at the organ, and the sisters of the church in purest

white, with perfect point fanning the mourners with fans from the American store in town. The preacher gave a rousing sermon and sat down, mopping his brow and still calling on the Lord. Then the whole congregation filed out after the pallbearers to the grave, decked with sprays of rambler roses and whatever flowers the colored people could bring from the plantation gardens. The casket was in place over the grave, the ropes were set for the lowering, the handful of soil had been thrown, into the deep opening, and the pallbearers started to ease their burden down. At that a loud voice from the coffin chilled their very marrow, it said, “Lower me down easy, boys, lower me down easy.” The casket dropped with a crash, the pallbearers flew, running as if the very devil was after them. The little churchyard was deserted, except for the poor preacher who was wringing his hands in the doorway. But leaning over the fence nonchalantly across the road, was Samuel Julius Johnson.

This nonchalance was too much for the man of God, and hitching up his horse and buggy, coattails flying, he tore into town to talk to the sheriff. The sheriff, an understanding man, thought this was a chance for a little show of authority. So he came out and got Samuel Julius Johnson, and put him in the stone hotel in town. This was the name the colored people rather fondly called the jailhouse, because it was the only building in the whole town built of stone. I am sure that Sam did not stay there long, and that he had the whole place in a happy uproar while he was there.

Some days later we heard by the Copperville grapevine, pretty light yellow Lena called to Sarah DeShields down at the mailboxes when we were waiting on horseback for Mrs. Dill, the faithful lady mailman to come by, that Samuel Julius Johnson had scared Cindy nigh about to death. “Yes indeedy Miz Shields, that conjure man tole Cindy that she was gwine spang to hell. He say them rats was the devil and hisimps afre her till she marry that no account Bill Moaney and give all them po’ woodpile chillun some kin of a name.”

So Samuel Julius Johnson had done good after all, and Cindy was radiant the day after her ’nouncement party, she actually unbent enough to smile.



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 Figure 26. Ruth Starr and Searls Rose on a boat, summer 1913

Figure 27. Mr. Knox and Mr. Brice, “chief decorators” for Ruth Starr Rose’s wedding, June 1914

Figure 28. Opposite: The front hall at Hope, decorated with lilies, where Ruth and Searls were married, June 1914

PART VII: RUTH STARR’S WEDDING



IT HAD BEEN MONTHS NOW SINCE WE HAD SEEN SAM. WINTER HAD blown itself down the bay and June was here again. This was the month of weddings, and Hope was in a state of cheerful confusion, but no one as confused as I was, it was my wedding. The big house was being polished and scoured, old Copper had croker sacks tied on his feet and he was skating around the dining floor, working the wax in as he shuffled. Uncle Henry came to help him and judging by the muffled Yawhaas, they were having the times of their lives as they careened from room to room. Cindy came mincing up to me, her broad bosom heaving, “Miss Roof,” they never could say my name, “where is your mothah at?” “Why, I think she is upstairs asleep—what do you want?” “Well, I jes wanted to ask her if I could have Friday evening off instead of Thursday, like I always has. I’ gwine to have a party.” “Yes Cindy,” I answered absentmindedly. “What kind of a party?” “Miss Ruth, it’s a ‘gagement party.” “Why Cindy how wonderful, is your biggest girl old enough to get married?” “No, Miss,” emphatically, “I has cided to nounce my engagemen’ to the children’s father.” Cindy’s dignity would have equaled that of Queen Elizabeth at a coronation ceremony.

“Mawnin’ Miss Roof, I hearded you all was fixin’ to have a weddin’ here at Hope, an I kinda thought you would like to have me make some music out under linden tree.” “Why Sam, that was wonderful of you. If you come I will see that you get all the fried chicken and ice cream you can eat, and I’ll wave at you as I drive off from Hope on my wedding journey.” “Yes, Mam, Miss Roof, Ah’ there is jes one thing Ah been studyin’ about, settin’ heah, awaitin’ fo you,

when you goes far off, don you all forget to come back, remember, we is your people.” “No, Sam, I’ll never forget.”

So the question of Sam at the wedding was left to the mercy of the Lord. I only hoped that he did not try bringing rats and hoot owls out of the wedding cake, as it was borne high into the dining room.

On the great day, the house was a bower of flowers, and aflutter with people. Aunt Sally passed with a bevy of maids, mops and brooms in hand. “Miss Roof, don tell Miz Sta’, two of the young genelmans has had a fight and busted two feather pillows, they’s feathers jes a flyin’ all over yonder.”

The wedding went happily on, and finally we all trooped into the big dining room, to cut the wedding cake. As I, nobly supported by the groom, lifted my hand to cut the cake, the guests silent and waiting, suddenly an ear-piercing scream seemed to come from our very feet. Samuel Julius Johnson had come to the wedding. Like an avenging angel my mother swept through the pantry door, and it was not long before a line of elegant dusky ‘waitermen’ came oozing back with the loaded trays held high.

Now the Cadillac was at the door, brass lamps polished like gold, Will Blake at the driver’s seat, proud as a peacock, at the wheel, through the great front door we came, the bride and groom, happy and exhausted, sent off with cheering and with tears, as we started down the avenue of oaks and cypress. As I turned for a last goodbye, a jaunty figure raised a banjo in salute, it was Samuel Julius Johnson, and he was on his way.

TIME LINE

1887 July 12: Ruth Starr is born in Eau Claire, Wisconsin (she is the eldest of six).

1901 Travels to the West Indies with her parents and sister while her mother takes notes for her two-volume book *Gardens of the Caribbees*.

1905 Summers in Europe with her family.

1906 Graduates from the National Cathedral School in Washington, DC.

1909–1914 Rose's mother writes a series of articles in *Country Life in America* and *Garden* magazine about the rebuilding of Hope and the folklore of the African American gardeners working there.

1910 Graduates from Vassar College.

1911–12 Studies art in France.

1913 Enrolls in courses at the Art Students League of New York. She continues to study there for over 30 years.

1914 June 18: Marries William Searls Rose in a lavish wedding at Hope (the Philadelphia Orchestra performs in the gardens for over three hundred guests).

1916 Adopts daughter, Virginia Anne Rose.

1924 August: Writes an unpublished essay about Hope and its inhabitants.

Appointed a member of the Royal Society for the Arts in London.

1925 Memorial Day: The Starr family hosts a party for the black citizens of Talbot County at Hope.

1928 Adopts Richard Searls Starr Rose.

Resides in Montclair, NJ, and spends holidays and summers at Hope. Acknowledged in newspaper stories for exhibitions of black portraiture throughout New Jersey.

1930 Mabel Dwight presents Rose with Dwight's lithograph of Paul Robeson as Emperor Jones.

Memorial Day: The Starr family hosts another party for the black citizens of Talbot County at Hope.

August: Rose skips her log canoe, the *Belle M. Crane*, and wins the third annual Chester River Yacht Club regatta.

1931 Press acclaims her African American portraits exhibited in New York City's Weyhe Gallery.

Befriends Carl Zigrosser and his circle of progressive artists at the

Art Students League of New York. Rose's friends and teachers spend summers and holidays with her at Pickbourne and Hope for over a decade.

Officially begins a series of lithographs and oil paintings to document Maryland's Eastern Shore, focusing on black life.

December 4: Lynching of Matthew Williams on the Eastern Shore.

1933 October 18: Lynching of George Armwood on the Eastern Shore.

November 28: Two thousand National Guard troops are deployed to control the white mob of 1,000 who try to protect the four men accused of lynching Armwood.

November 29: Solo exhibition of lithographs and paintings, primarily large oil portraits of African American people, at the Municipal Art Society in Baltimore.

1937 Wins Mary Hills Goodwin Award in New York City for *Twilight Quartet*, her oil portrait of the Moaney Quartet of gospel singers from Copperville.

1940 The Metropolitan Museum of Art adds Rose's color lithograph *Gospel Train* to its collection.

November: Alain Locke includes two of Rose's lithographs, *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot* and *Gospel Train*, in *The Negro in Art*.

1941 February: Unveils fresco, *Pharaoh's Army Got Drowned*, in the Copperville church.

June 3: Presents Paul Robeson with lithographs *Little David Play Upon Your Harp* and *Ezekiel Saw the Wheel* at a concert in Newark. Rose is invited to sketch him during the performance.

June 22: Hosts an evening of spirituals at Pickbourne for African American and white guests.

1942 Early May: Negotiates with the Viking Press to publish her book on Negro spirituals. Paul Robeson is engaged to write the introduction.

May 17: Donates *Twilight Quartet* to Howard University.

1944 January: Wins Artists for Victory Award for her lithograph *Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray*.

May: Book on Negro spirituals is officially rejected by the Viking Press.

September 29: Husband Searls unexpectedly dies of a gastric hemorrhage.

1945 November 20: Rose sells her ranch in Montana.

1946 September 21–mid December: Travels to Mexico and works as an artist in Ajijic, Jalisco.

1948 Sells Pickbourne Farm.

Another extended trip to Ajijic, Mexico, accompanied by her serigraphic equipment.

1949 January 8: Begins monthlong art studies in Los Angeles

Summer: Purchases a home, High Design, in Alexandria, Virginia, in order to be closer to her brother Richard and his family.

October 18: Dorothy Cazenove-Lee, a Vassar classmate and longtime friend, has a private showing of Rose's prints at her house.

1950 February: Lois Mailou Jones visits Rose at High Design on two occasions.

August: The Starr family sells Hope.

1951 November: Rose travels to Santa Fe, New Mexico, visiting Mary Cabot Wheelwright. Attends Navajo dance ceremony in Gallup with Wheelwright and Dorothy Casenove-Lee.

Tries again to publish her book on Negro spirituals, this time with the Bond Wheelwright Press. Although she works on the book until 1959, it is never published.

1952 January–February: Prentiss Taylor organizes a solo show of Rose's Negro spirituals at the Playhouse Art Gallery in Washington, DC, where one critic compares her to Alan Rohan Crite and Malvin Gray Johnson and mentions that Rose's book on Negro spirituals is going to be published.

March 9: *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot* is published to accompany a *New York Times* book review.

1953 January 4: Lois Mailou Jones and her husband, Pierre-Noël, again visit Rose.

1954 March 8: Has problems obtaining travel visa to Europe when US officials classify her as a Mexican citizen.

April–June: Rose and Mary Cabot Wheelwright travel throughout Europe to study connections between African and Native American art. Beginning in Barcelona, they visit France, where they see an exhibit on African art in Arles. They visit Paris, Copenhagen, Brussels, Antwerp, the Hague, Amsterdam, Bremen, and then go to Great Britain.

July–November: Rose continues her travels in the UK, from England to Scotland, visiting her brother's friend C. S. Lewis in Oxford.

1955 January 24: Feature article on Rose in the *Christian Science Monitor*, "Artist Dramatizes Negro Spirituals."

January 28: Ed Clayton, the first editor of *Jet* magazine, sends Rose a telegram requesting photographs of her prints *He's Got the Whole World in His Hands* and *Gospel Train* for publication.

1956 April 4 (extended to May 11): Rose has a landmark solo exhibition at Howard University in Washington, DC.

April: Travels to Haiti on a two-week sketching trip. An April 23 article in the Haitian newspaper *Le Nouvelliste* announces Rose's imminent arrival.

April 27: The Voice of America interviews Rose.

1957 January 1–31: Rose has another well-publicized extensive solo show, this time at George Washington University.

April 26–28: Rose returns to Maryland's Eastern Shore for the arts festival at the Armory in Easton.

December: Solo exhibition at the National Cathedral School, Washington, DC. Rose presents the school with a large mural.

1958 January 23: Donates collection of lithographs to the Talbot County Historical Society and delivers a speech about her life at Hope.

July 29: Mary Cabot Wheelwright dies while Rose is vacationing with her at her home on Sutton Island, Maine.

1959 May 10: Prentiss Taylor thanks Rose for her thoughtful comments regarding his article on Gertrude Stein.

June: Solo exhibition for Beta Sigma Phi, of which Rose is made an honorary international member.

1960 Donates a selection of her work to Vassar College.

1961 March 31–April 30: Rose is included in a group exhibition at Howard University, along with Lois Mailou Jones, Prentiss Taylor, Hughie Lee-Smith, James A. Porter, and Elizabeth Catlett.

1965 October 25: Ruth Starr Rose dies in Alexandria, Virginia, where her funeral is held at a Christian Science church. Her ashes are scattered off the coast of Pickbourne Farm.

1983 June–July: Kenneth M. Milton organizes the first retrospective exhibition of Ruth Starr Rose's work on African American spirituals and black life on Maryland's Eastern Shore at the Veerhoff Galleries in Washington, DC.

NOTES

CHAPTER 1

¹ Ruth Starr Rose, speech transcript, ca. 1930, Ruth Starr Rose Papers, private collection (hereafter cited as Rose MSS).

² Little information is available on Ruth Starr Rose. Printed sources include Elizabeth G. Seaton, ed., *Paths to the Press: Printmaking and Women Artists, 1910–1960* (Manhattan, KS: Kansas State University, 2006), 216–17, and J. R. Hoge, “The Artistic Legacy of Ruth Starr Rose,” *The Weather Gauge: The Magazine of the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum* 33, no. 2 (Fall 1997): 12–19.

³ Ida May Hill Starr, “Notes About Hope,” vol. 1, undated, Ida May Hill Starr Papers, private collection.

⁴ Ruth Starr Rose, “Life at Hope House,” undated essay, Rose MSS. See appendix.

⁵ Ida M. H. Starr, *Gardens of the Caribbees: Sketches of a Cruise to the West Indies and the Spanish Main*, vol. 2 (Boston: LC Page, 1903), 56–57.

⁶ Ida M. H. Starr, “In the Dark O’ the Moon,” *Country Life in America*, 13, no. 5 (March 1913): 39.

⁷ William Starr, Rose’s grandfather, was a member of the Fourierist Wisconsin Phalanx, an early socialist community in Ripon, Wisconsin. He led a famous civil disobedience case in 1860 on behalf of runaway slave Joshua Glover and the man who harbored him, Sherman M. Booth Margo. Starr and other community members showed their support by signing a document outlining their refusal to follow the fugitive slave laws. US Marshals placed Starr under house arrest. See Starr Kernan, *Secret Passage* (privately printed, 2008), 117. Also see *History of Fond Du Lac County, Wisconsin* (Chicago, 1880).

⁸ Nathan Kernan, e-mail message to author, January 30, 2014.

⁹ Nathan Kernan has graciously provided information his grandmother, Nina Howell Starr, and the Starr family.

¹⁰ Rose’s adopted son, Richard Rose (b. 1925), attended Todd Seminary in Woodstock, Illinois, sometime between 1938 and 1948. Todd Seminary was also the alma mater of acclaimed actor, filmmaker, and political progressive Orson Welles. After Rose’s financial circumstances took a downturn following her husband’s death in 1944, she wrote friend Carl Zigrosser that Richard was lucky to be able to stay

in school thanks to an Orson Welles scholarship. Ruth Starr Rose to Carl Zigrosser, 1944, Carl Zigrosser Papers, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania (hereafter cited as Zigrosser MSS).

A recording, discovered in Ruth’s papers, of Orson Welles in *Julius Caesar* at the Mercury Theater in 1938—famously set in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany—confirms the Welles connection. Inside, the following note was inscribed to Ruth’s son, Richard: “To a dear and talented friend the Montana Cowboy: May his ballads, his gee-tar and his knowledge of Shakespeare give his friends many hours of happiness.” Orson Welles signed his name, along with the postscript, “Thanks for helping with Chris.” Richard must have befriended Welles’s daughter Chris Feder Welles (b. 1938), after her parents’ divorce, while she was staying in Montana. Rose owned a small ranch there from 1940 through 1945. Rose MSS.

¹¹ Ruth Starr Rose, undated notes, Rose MSS.

¹² Mabel Dwight (1876–1955) was a contemporary of Rose and gave her a color lithograph of Paul Robeson as he appeared in Eugene O’Neill’s play *Emperor Jones*. The print is inscribed, “To Ruth Starr Rose with Love from Mabel Dwight, 1930.”

¹³ Will Barnet, discussion with the author, June 2007.

¹⁴ DuBose Heyward signed the guest book at Hope on April 21, 1935. He spent Easter there and was accompanied by conductor Alexander Smallens, who had visited Hope two years earlier, on May 2, 1933. Heyward had also traveled to the Eastern Shore as Hervey Allen’s guest. In January 1934, Heyward wrote to Allen describing his interest in learning about Negro spirituals, which may explain his reason for a pilgrimage to Maryland: “Dear Hervey: I am off on a new course—an operatic version of Porgy with George Gershwin. Very exciting and great (if somewhat remote) probabilities for a little money again and another deep notch on the pistol butt. Exploring old trails again for spirituals and Negro material.” DuBose Heyward to Hervey Allen, January 1934, DuBose Heyward Papers (ca. 1935), South Carolina Historical Society.

¹⁵ Ruth Starr Rose to Carl Zigrosser, undated, Rose MSS.

¹⁶ Ruth Starr Rose, “Life at Hope House,” August 1924, Rose MSS. See appendix.

¹⁷ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1907), vii.

CHAPTER 2

¹ Carl Zigrosser, *Ruth Starr Rose* (Washington, DC: George Washington University, 1957), exhibition brochure. The Ruth Starr Rose solo exhibition from January 1 through January 31, 1957, at the George Washington University library was put on following Rose’s show at Howard University, and it featured over fifty works covering a cross section of Rose’s art practice. It was so popular that the dates were extended. To learn more about this exhibition, see Florence S. Berryman, “Rose Retrospective,” *Sunday Star*, January 27, 1957. Also, Babs van Swearingen, “Artist Showing in Washington,” *Alexandria Gazette*, April 13, 1956.

² Throughout their relationship, Zigrosser supplied Rose with books on philosophy and art. Sharing a similar worldview, Rose wrote of her dependence on Zigrosser: “I have thought, since coming to Pickbourne, what wonderful richness your friendship has brought me—not only these beautiful works of art that I love so much, but even more, what your philosophy has done for me. Finding life not quite as easy—but fully as interesting—as I like to pretend it is—I am continually finding out things about myself. These discoveries are not always pure gold—by any means—If it is true, as the proverb says, Seven who lean—to one who lifts, then I wish I could be more of a lifter and not so much of a leaner.” Ruth Starr Rose to Carl Zigrosser, ca. 1946, Zigrosser MSS.

³ Ruth Starr Rose to Carl Zigrosser, undated, Zigrosser MSS.

⁴ Thadious M. Davis offers an insightful discussion of historic racial terms. See Davis, preface to *Faulkner’s “Negro”: Art and the Southern Context* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983).

⁵ “Artist, Wife and Mother, Is Also Builder of Boat Models,” *Newark Evening News*, April 4, 1928.

⁶ W. B. McCormick, “Here Are Ladies!” *New York American*, 1931. McCormick mentions Zigrosser and eight women artists, including Ruth Starr Rose; Caroline Durieux of New Orleans; Helen Woods Rous; Amelie Pumpelly; and Dorothy Brett.

⁷ Ruth Starr Rose wrote to Carl Zigrosser: “We have stayed here longer this year than we usually do—because I am finishing up some paintings and expect to bring back some interesting work to show you. I have three big canvases 30 x 36—and several smaller ones, I can’t wait to show them to you. There is so much material here that it makes my head swim—I haven’t even scratched the surface.” Ruth Starr Rose to Carl Zigrosser, undated, Zigrosser MSS.

⁸ The Moaneys and Coppers were among the founding black American families of Copperville, Maryland.

⁹ Master Sergeant John Moaney was from Copperville, as was his wife and childhood sweetheart, Dolores, who was President Eisenhower’s cook. The Eisenhower family owned a farm in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Eisenhower’s son, John Eisenhower, referred to the Moaneys as “the soul of the farm.” Just down the hall from the Eisenhower’s rooms are the Moaney Quarters, and they can be seen as a part of a tour of the National Historic site.

¹⁰ Ruth Starr Rose, undated notes, Rose MSS.

¹¹ James Weldon Johnson quoted by Carl Van Vechten in a letter to Gertrude Stein on October 23, 1933. See *The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten, 1913–1946* (New York City: Columbia University Press, 2013), 1:281.

¹² Gertrude Stein, *Three Lives* (Charleston, SC: BiblioBazaar, 2008), 71–76. *Three Lives* includes *The Good Anna*, *Melantha*, and *The Gentle Lena*.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ruth Starr Rose to Carl Zigrosser, undated, Zigrosser MSS.

¹⁶ *The Art of Today: An Exhibition of Contemporary Pictures and Sculpture Arranged and Sponsored by the Women’s Advisory Committee of the Albright Art Gallery, January 3–31* (Buffalo, New York: Albright Art Gallery, 1936), exhibition catalog. Working with the Women’s Advisory Committee, director Gordon Bailey Washburn assembled a large exhibition. Ruth Starr Rose presented the oil *Two Girls at Breakfast*. Other artists included Peggy Bacon, Thomas Hart Benton, Vincent Canade, John Steuart Curry, Salvador Dalí, Otto Dix, Raoul Dufy, Max Ernst, Anne Goldthwaite, George Grosz, Edward Hopper, Wassily Kandisky, Henry Matisse, Joan Miró, Piet Mondrian, Georgia O’Keeffe, William Palmer, Picasso, and Georges Rouault, among others. A review of the show was featured in *Gallery Notes* 3, no. 3 (Buffalo, New York: Albright Art Gallery, January 1936).

¹⁷ Ruth Starr Rose to Carl Zigrosser, March 2, 1934, Zigrosser MSS.

¹⁸ Ruth Starr Rose to Carl Zigrosser, ca. 1933, Rose MSS.

¹⁹ Ruth Starr Rose, undated notes, Rose MSS.

²⁰ “Duties as Mother No Check to Painting, Boat Racing of North Caldwell Woman,” *Newark Evening News*, 1933.

²¹ Ruth Starr Rose, undated notes, Rose MSS.

²² Ida M. H. Starr, “A Worthy Tribute to a Colored Youth,” *The Easton Gazette*, November 11, 1920.

²³ Ida M. H. Starr announced a garden party in the newspaper: “Mrs. Ida M. Starr Invites the Colored Citizens of Talbot County to Visit her Garden on Memorial Day from 3 P.M. until 5 P.M. In thus inviting the Colored Citizens of Talbot County to visit my garden on Memorial Day I am doing so with a sense of deep gratitude to those whose faithful Black hands have made Hope a spot of Beauty renowned throughout the length and breadth of our land.” See “Memorial Day,” *Star Democrat*, May 23, 1925.

²⁴ Ruth Starr Rose, notes, 1939, Rose MSS.

²⁵ Ruth Starr Rose to Carl Zigrosser, 1933, Zigrosser MSS.

²⁶ Ruth Starr Rose, “Life at Hope House,” August 1924 essay, Rose MSS. See appendix.

²⁷ Ruth Starr Rose to Carl Zigrosser, ca. 1936, Zigrosser MSS.

²⁸ Ruth Starr Rose to Carl Zigrosser, undated, Zigrosser MSS.

²⁹ Mabel Dwight to Roderick Seidenberg, October 20, 1924, Roderick Seidenberg/Mabel Dwight Papers (1917–1974), University of Baltimore Special Collections.

³⁰ Victoria Hutson Huntley to Carl Zigrosser, November 21, 1951, Zigrosser MSS.

³¹ Ruth Starr Rose, undated lecture notes, Rose MSS.

³² Emily Genauer, “Galleries Offer: New Exhibitions Crowd Halls throughout City,” *New York Herald*, 1935.

CHAPTER 3

¹ James A. Porter, quoted in *A Retrospective Exhibition of Paintings and Prints by Ruth Starr Rose* (Washington, DC: Howard University Gallery of Art, 1956), exhibition pamphlet.

² Ruth Starr Rose to Raymond F. Piper, February 23, 1956, Rose MSS.

³ Ibid.

⁴ The communities of Copperville and Unionville were founded on land grants given by sympathetic neighbors to black troops fighting for the Union in the Civil War. According to early maps, an even earlier church, dating to 1877, appears on this site.

⁵ Ruth Starr Rose to Carl Zigrosser, June 1933, Zigrosser MSS.

⁶ Ruth Starr Rose, undated notes, Rose MSS.

⁷ Porter, in *A Retrospective Exhibition of Paintings and Prints by Ruth Starr Rose*.

⁸ Ruth Starr Rose, speech transcript, April 1956, Rose MSS.

⁹ Agnes DeLano, introduction to *A Retrospective Exhibition of Paintings and Prints by Ruth Starr Rose*.

¹⁰ Ruth Starr Rose to Raymond F. Piper, February 23, 1956, Rose MSS.

¹¹ Ruth Starr Rose, undated notes, Rose MSS.

¹² Ruth Starr Rose, notes, ca. 1938, Rose MSS.

¹³ Ruth Starr Rose, undated notes, Rose MSS.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ *New York Times Book Review*, March 9, 1952.

¹⁶ Ruth Starr Rose to Carl Zigrosser, September 1935, Zigrosser MSS.

¹⁷ William Blake’s *The Ancient of Days* was a hand-colored print that served as the frontispiece for his book *Europe, A Prophecy* (1794).

¹⁸ Ruth Starr Rose, undated notes, Rose MSS.

¹⁹ “13 Prizes Awarded at Women’s Art Show,” *New York Times*, January 26, 1937.

²⁰ Ruth Starr Rose, undated notes, Rose MSS.

²¹ Ruth Starr Rose, undated notes, Rose MSS.

²² “Others Figuring in the Limelight: Notes on Various Art Shows of the Week,” *New York Sun*, January 16, 1942. The reference to Rose reads: “And there is plenty of variety, not only in subject matter but also in styles. There is even a surrealist composition—‘Shadrach and the Fiery Furnace’ by Ruth Starr Rose. This, of course, is crowded with meanings.”

²³ Ruth Starr Rose to Carl Zigrosser, March 19, 1941, Zigrosser MSS.

²⁴ Ruth Starr Rose, undated notes, Rose MSS.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ruth Starr Rose, undated notes, Rose MSS.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ “Just today I have finished the stone *Joshua Fit de Battle ob Jericho*—having done it over again to my great happiness. It represents not only a victory for Joshua but also a spiritual victory for me. . . . The discipline of doing a stone over is worth its weight in more than lithographic stones. I do my designs over 15 or 20 times, discarding poor designs and working toward perfection.” Ruth Starr Rose to Carl Zigrosser, January 13, 1943, Zigrosser MSS.

²⁹ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1907), 251.

³⁰ Ruth Starr Rose, undated notes, Rose MSS.

³¹ *Couldn’t Hear Nobody Pray* won the Artists for Victory Award in 1943.

³² Ruth Starr Rose, undated notes, Rose MSS.

³³ *Standing in the Need of Prayer* won first prize at the Women’s National Exhibition in New York in 1944.

³⁴ Ruth Starr Rose, undated notes, Rose MSS.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ James A. Porter, *Modern Negro Art* (New York: Dryden Press, 1943), 122.

³⁷ Ruth Starr Rose, undated notes, Rose MSS.

³⁸ Ruth Starr Rose to Carl Zigrosser, undated, Zigrosser MSS.

³⁹ Harriet B. Blackburn, “The Red Sea Murals: Artist Dramatizes Negro Spirituals,” *Christian Science Monitor*, January 24, 1955.

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¹ Ruth Starr Rose to Carl Zigrosser, March 1936, Zigrosser MSS.

² Ibid.

³ H. L. Mencken, “The Sahara of the Bozart” in *Prejudices*, Second Series (New York: Knopf, 1920), 142. Originally printed in the *New York Evening Mail*, November 13, 1917.

⁴ Ibid., 151.

⁵ William Faulkner, “An Introduction to The Sound and the Fury,”

Mississippi Quarterly 26 (Summer 1973): 411. This passage is also cited by Thadious M. Davis in *Faulkner’s “Negro”: Art and the Southern Context* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 11.

⁶ Davis, *Faulkner’s “Negro,”* 23.

⁷ Hutter’s wife wrote on the bottom of this signed piece, “Only silhouette ever made by Alfred Hutter.”

⁸ Elizabeth McCausland, “Living American Art,” *Parnassus* 11, no. 5 (May 1939): 24–25.

⁹ H. L. Mencken, “The Eastern Shore Kultur,” *The Evening Sun*, December 7, 1931.

¹⁰ J. R. Barnes, *The Spirit of the Eastern Shore*, 1933.

¹¹ “In Baltimore with Billy Bachelor,” *Baltimore Sun*, December 1933.

¹² Shepard Krech III, *Praise the Bridge that Carries You Over* (Rochester, VT: Schenkman Books, 1981), xxi.

¹³ Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (New York and Auburn, 1855), 62.

¹⁴ Ruth Starr Rose, transcript of speech to the Historical Society of Talbot County, January 1958, Rose MSS.

¹⁵ Julia Mood Peterkin and Doris Ulmann, *Roll, Jordan, Roll* (New York: Robert O. Ballou, 1933), 116.

¹⁶ Prentiss Taylor to Langston Hughes, 11 September 1933, Langston Hughes Papers (1862–1980), Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

¹⁷ Thadious M. Davis, *Games of Property: Law, Race, Gender, and Faulkner’s Go Down, Moses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 21.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Florence S. Berryman, “News of Art and Artists: Pennell Show Attracts 1,410 Entries, with 129 Prints Displayed,” *The Sunday Star*, April 30, 1950. Other exhibitors at the 8th National Exhibition of Prints (Pennell Show, April through August 1950) at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, included J. J. Lankes and Benton Spruance. Rose was one of three Washington artists selected.

²⁰ Ruth Starr Rose to Raymond F. Piper, February 23, 1956, Rose MSS.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Francis Trevelyan Miller and Robert Sampson Lanier, eds., *The Photographic History of the Civil War in Ten Volumes: Poetry and Eloquence of Blue and Gray* (New York: The Review of Reviews Co., 1911), 9:352.

²³ R. Nathaniel Dett, ed., *Religious Folk-Songs of the Negro* (Hampton, VA: Hampton Institute Press, 1927), 157.

²⁴ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, vii.

²⁵ Mabel Dwight to Roderick Seidenberg, December 25, 1928, Roderick Seidenberg and Mabel Dwight Collection (1917-74), Special Collections, University of Baltimore.

²⁶ “The Viking Press wrote me a few days ago—after my last interview that they will not publish my book of Negro spirituals. This is a serious disappointment and it is quite a strain on my philosophy to adjust to it.” See Ruth Starr Rose to Carl Zigrosser, May 13, 1944, Zigrosser MSS.

²⁷ *Montclair Times*, June 6, 1941.

²⁸ Ruth Starr Rose, undated notes, Rose MSS.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Margot Starr Kernan, *Secret Passage* (privately printed, 2008), 45.

³² Rose’s sketch of Lead Belly was created on letterhead from the Todd School for Boys, where her son matriculated. She inscribed it, “Sketches of Lead Belly made while he was singing for a few friends in New York, 1946.” (Rose MSS).

³³ Ruth Starr Rose, Invitation, June 1941, Rose MSS.

³⁴ Ruth Starr Rose to Carl Zigrosser, undated, Zigrosser MSS.

³⁵ Harriet B. Blackburn, “Artist Dramatizes Negro Spirituals,” *Christian Science Monitor*, January 24, 1955.

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¹ Ruth Starr Rose to Raymond F. Piper, February 23, 1956, Rose MSS.

² Ida M. H. Starr, *Gardens of the Caribbees: Sketches of a Cruise to the West Indies and the Spanish Main*, vol. 1 (Boston: LC Page, 1903), 115–16.

³ Ibid., 195–96.

⁴ “La Grande Artiste Ruth Starr Rose,” *Le Nouvelliste*, April 23, 1956.

⁵ Ruth Starr Rose to James A. Porter, April 1956, James A. Porter Papers 1914–70, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Lois Mailou Jones left Rose a thoughtful note in her guest book on January 4, 1953, thanking her in French for being an constant inspiration in her life and work: “Bien chère amie: — C’est un plaisir de visiter votre atelier dont le charme et l’atmosphère créent une source constant d’inspiration pour moi et pour mon travail.” Rose MSS.

⁸ Lea Armstrong, interview with the author, February 22, 2013. Armstrong is assistant director of the Wheelwright Museum and a biographer of Mary Cabot Wheelwright.

⁹ Ruth Starr Rose to Kenneth Foster, August 4 and 19, 1958, Rose MSS.

¹⁰ Ruth Starr Rose to LaVerne Madigan, August 26, 1960 (box 157, folder 13), Association on American Indian Affairs Records, Seeley Mudd Library, Princeton University.

¹¹ LaVerne Madigan to Ruth Starr Rose, September 14, 1960, Rose MSS.

¹² Mary Cabot Wheelwright wrote of Ruth Starr Rose’s designation as an alien: “Ruth’s passport is a problem as she was married to a man born in Mexico, and though he had various Federal Posts and thought he was a citizen, they classified Ruth as a Mexican so she had to be fingerprinted.” (Mary Cabot Wheelwright to Maria Chabot, March 8, 1954, Georgia O’Keeffe Research Center, NM). In a later letter, Wheelwright wrote, “Everything is full of suspicion at home, it’s not the America I’ve known anymore. Ruth Rose finally got hers after fingerprinting and swearing in as an alien because her deceased husband was born in Mexico!!” (Mary Cabot Wheelwright to Maria Chabot, April 4, 1954, Georgia O’Keeffe Research Center, NM).

¹³ Ruth Starr Rose to Carl Zigrosser, March 18, 1948, Zigrosser MSS.

¹⁴ Ruth Starr Rose to Raymond F. Piper, August 3, 1955, Rose MSS.

¹⁵ Ruth Starr Rose, undated notes, Rose MSS.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Richard F. S. Starr to Carl Zigrosser, November 4, 1965, Zigrosser MSS.

¹⁸ “Ruth S. Rose Dies Following Heart Attack,” *Alexandria Gazette*; “Ruth Starr Rose Is Dead; Artist and Lithographer,” *New York Times*, October 27, 1965.

¹⁹ “Mrs. Ruth S. Rose, Talbot Artist,” *Star Democrat*, November 4, 1965.

EPILOGUE

¹ Mark 6:4. See also Matthew 13:57.

² Marion Elizabeth Rodgers, “H. L. Mencken: Courage in a Time of Lynching,” *Nieman Reports* (Summer 2006): 74–76.

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Saturday field trips to every corner of Maryland's Underground Railroad with Frances Curtis and my son Tilghman helped me to visualize the greater context of Rose's work. Sundays at the Waters United Methodist Church with Miss Frances, Tilghman, and their church family also helped to shed light on the magic that is African American spirituality; and to a people, who, every day and without knowing it, conduct their lives in the spirit of Ruth Starr Rose. Finally, I would like to honor those whom Ruth Starr Rose so majestically portrayed: their mighty ancestors and justifiably proud descendants—who are finally given their due, and recognized as being among the founding black families of America.

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