

HARLAN JACKSON (1918-1993)



Untitled, n.d.  
Oil on canvas  
39 x 60 inches  
Signed

Provenance: the artist to Bradley Marmon of White's Pharmacy, East Hampton, NY, thence by descent to Stephen Marmon.

HARLAN JACKSON (1918-1993)



Untitled, n.d.  
Oil on canvas  
46 x 33 inches  
Signed

Provenance: the artist to Bradley Marmon of White's Pharmacy, East Hampton, NY, thence by descent to Stephen Marmon.

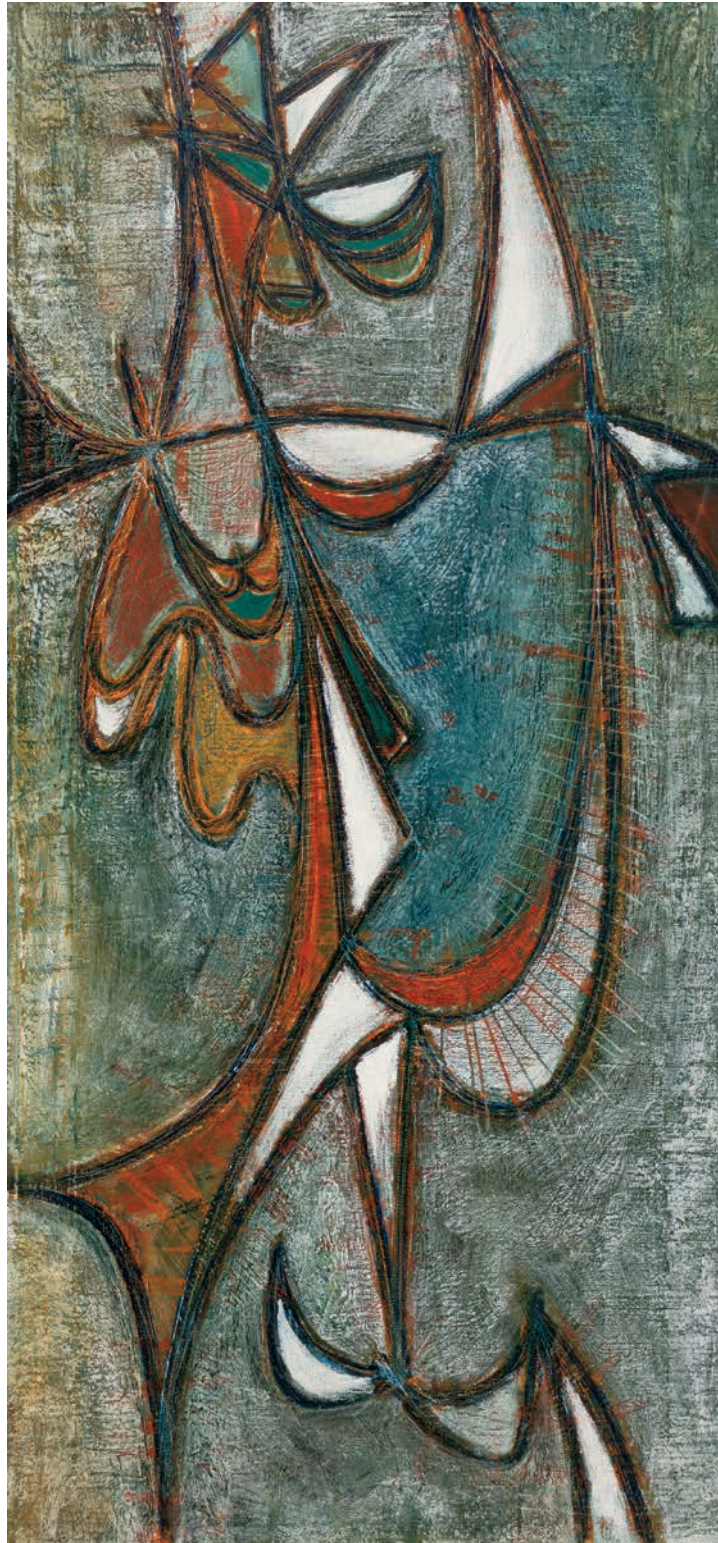
HARLAN JACKSON (1918-1993)



Untitled (Abstract), 1971  
oil on canvas with elements of string and down  
16 x 20 inches  
signed and dated  
inscribed on stretcher verso catalogue #48

Exhibited: Afro-American Images 1971: The Vision of Percy Ricks, Delaware Art Museum, Oct. 24, 2021-Jan. 23, 2022.

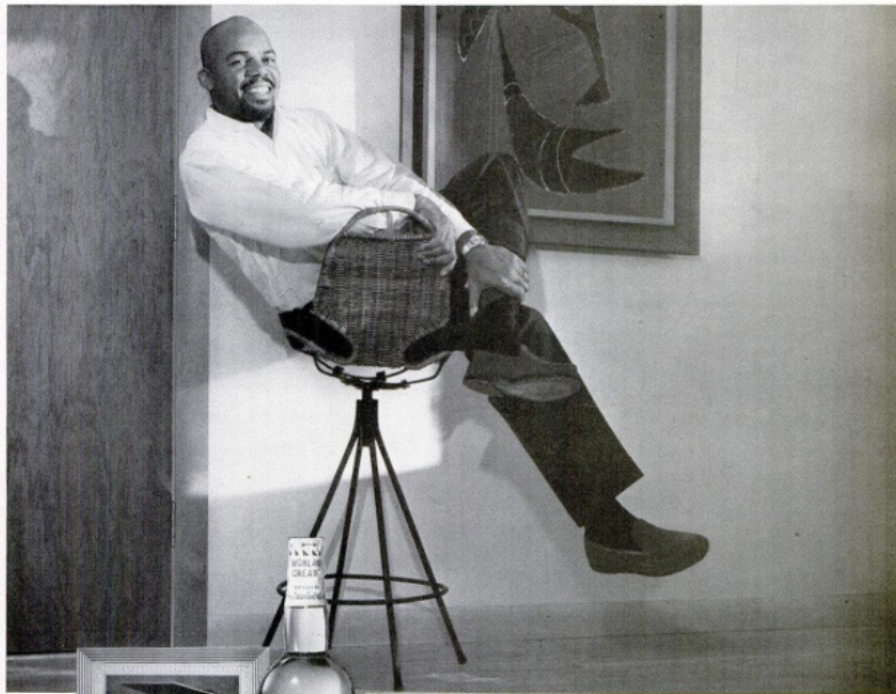
HARLAN JACKSON (1918-1993)



Piscatorial, c. 1950  
oil on canvas  
18 x 38 inches  
signed and titled

HARLAN JACKSON (1918-1993)

IN ART...  
EXPERIENCE IS THE GREAT TEACHER  
IN SCOTCH...  
**TEACHER'S**  
IS THE GREAT EXPERIENCE



Harlan Jackson, famous artist and designer.



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67

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Harlan Jackson in an advertisement for Teacher's Scotch Whiskey, EBONY, November 1960

## HARLAN JACKSON (1918-1993)

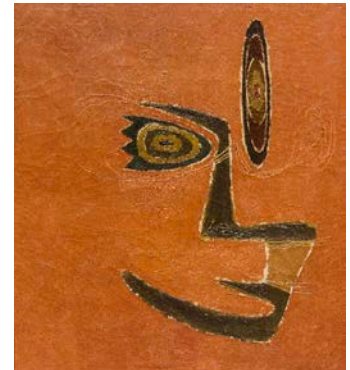
Born in Cleburne, TX in 1918. He moved to Hutchinson KS and attended Kansas State Teacher's College to major in art. Shortly before WWII, he returned to Texas and worked as a cartoonist for the Houston Informer. During the war, he served in the Navy. After the war, he briefly joined the Harlem Globetrotters as a part of their backup team. Jackson's talents in basketball were clearly less impressive than his artistic ones, so when the G.I. Bill afforded him the opportunity to continue his education, he pursued it.

He enrolled at the California School of Fine Art, where he studied with Abstract Expressionists Clyfford Still, Mark Rothko (Rothko taught in San Francisco during the summers of 1947 and 1949 and had the use of Still's studio), Clay Spohn, and David Park. His notable classmates were John Grillo and James Keeney. In San Francisco, Jackson listened to bebop, met Maya Deren (a Ukrainian surrealist film-maker who influenced Jackson. The function of film, Deren believed, like most art forms, was to create an experience; each one of her films would evoke new conclusions, lending her focus to be dynamic and always-evolving. She combined her interests in dance, Haitian Vodou and subjective psychology in a series of surreal, perceptual, black and white short films. Jackson contributed to and acted in a short surrealist film titled *The Cage*, authored by his friend Keeney in 1947), saw Katherine Dunham perform (Dunham's modern interpretive dance influenced the art of both Jackson and Thelma Johnson Streat), and with James Budd Dixon, started the North Beach Art Gallery, an artist's cooperative. His first one-person show was at the Artist's Guild in 1947.

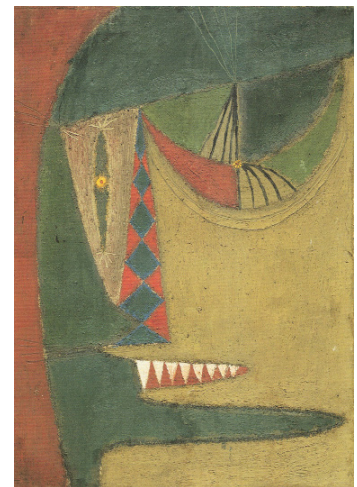
At this time the only recognized African American artist on the West Coast was Sargent Johnson. Jackson was quickly accepted and represented in shows sponsored by the San Francisco Art Association at the city art museum in 1946, 1948, and 1951.

Jackson received a Rosenberg Traveling Fellowship in 1948 which enabled him to live and work in Haiti. It was here he met and befriended the artist Eldzier Cortor. Jackson renewed his acquaintance with Maya Deren in Haiti. "His interest in the spirituality of Haitian Vodou was genuine, and this set him apart from those artists who saw it as merely an exotic object of study. Jackson believed that Haitian Vodou radiated power and evil in a sexualized form. Jackson was caught between the participant's and the outsider's view...struggling with the understanding of which Hans-Georg Gadder wrote, 'The text that is understood historically is forced to abandon its claim that it is uttering something true.' (a violence I may be doing to certain aspects of Abstract Expressionism as it is still understood by many). This was a violence that Jackson, faced with Haitian ritual and inspired by Dunham and Deren, was reluctant to perform despite the pressure of his Methodist upbringing." (**Abstract Expressionism Other Politics**, Ann Gibson).

In his book, **Black Art and Culture in the 20th Century**, Richard Powell gives a seemingly different critique of Jackson's mask paintings: "In 1949, the artist Harlan Jackson...applied this notion of a problematic black identity to his painting *Mask No 11*. Split between racial pride that was embodied in a tribal mask and a desire to assimilate that black identity within the white cultural practice of abstract painting. *Mask No 11* illustrated the contradictions that were increasingly felt by proponents of black culture. Toward the end of this period



THE MASK, c. 1951  
oil on canvas  
38 x 34 inches  
signed and titled



MASK NO. II, 1949  
oil on canvas  
46 x 31 inches

Illustrated: *The Search for Freedom: African American Abstract Painting 1945-1975*: 79

## HARLAN JACKSON (1918-1993)

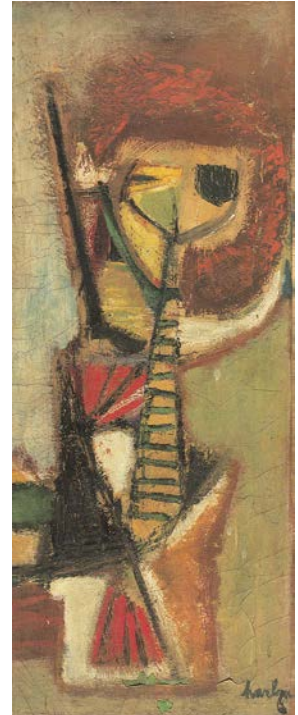
the options for black cultural expression and its reception went beyond a simple dialectic of pride versus assimilation and, instead, embraced models that were either inclusive of both, or were derived from an entirely different set of social and aesthetic values. These new options emerged just at the moment when black cultural groups became conspicuous, cosmopolitan, and candid about their universality and growing political importance in world affairs.”

The two analyses, while claiming different intent and context, are similar in that Jackson is working out an internal struggle throughout the process of his painting—in an attempt of self-discovery, and using abstraction to create an objective distance from his conscious state in order to self-reflect.

During this period his works were notable for their deconstruction and reconstruction of Haitian masks and motifs using cubist elements. Upon his return, he studied at the Hans Hoffman School of Fine Art (1950-1), and shared a studio in NYC with Lilly Fenichel, another Abstract expressionist artist from California. Jackson and Fenichel frequented the Cedar Tavern in Greenwich Village, well-known as a hang out of painters Rothko, Kline, Pollock and Resnick.

Eventually, Jackson and his wife, Jaki, moved to the Hamptons, across the street from painter Willem de Kooning, and among a community of Ab-ex artists: Motherwell, Pollock, Krasner, and Rothko. He continued to focus on works of experimental abstraction until the mid-1970's. At this time his religious convictions began to preclude his artistic inclinations. Harlan Jackson died in relative obscurity in 1993.

Roberta Smith wrote a review for the *NY Times* regarding the exhibition, **The Search For Freedom: African American Abstract Painting 1945-1975**; Kenkeleba House, NY (1991), and mentioned Jackson's work: “Stronger still in touch and composition are the semi-abstract mask images, also from the late 40's, by Harlan Jackson, a painter born in 1918 who studied with Mark Rothko. In these highly tactile works, Picasso's dissections of the human face, themselves inspired by African masks, are turned into attenuated abstractions whose facial features announce themselves slowly.”



MAYA DEREN, 1949  
oil on canvas  
31 x 12 inches  
signed and titled  
Illustrated: The Search for  
Freedom: African American  
Abstract Painting 1945-1975:  
78

## HARLAN JACKSON (1918-1993)

### INDIVIDUAL

- 1947 Artist Guild Gallery, San Francisco
- 1949 Centre D'Art, Port au Prince, Haiti
- 1950 International Exposition, Palais des Beaux Arts, Haiti  
Barnett Aden Gallery, Washington D.C.
- 1955 Panoramas Gallery, NY
- 1962 Gallery East, Downtown, NY
- 1964 Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, NY
- 1965 African Trader Gallery, NY
- 1969 Guild Hall Museum, East Hampton, NY
- 1970 Howard University College of Art, Washington D.C.  
Nassau County Black History Museum, Hempstead, NY
- 1971 Southampton College, New York
- 1975 Acts of Art Gallery, NY  
Nassau County Black History Museum, Hempstead, New York

### GROUP

Cincinnati Art Museum, Ohio; California Palace Legion of Honor; Oakland Museum, CA; Riverside Museum, NY; San Francisco Art Institute

- 1947 Exhibition of Graphic Arts and Drawings by Negro Artists; Howard University Gallery of Art
- 1961 New Vistas in American Art; Howard University Gallery of Art;
- 1991 The Search For Freedom: African American Abstract Painting 1945-1975; Kenkeleba House, NY
- 1999 Black New York Artists of the 20th Century: Selections from the Schomburg Center Collections;  
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, NY
- 2006 Driven to Abstraction: Works by Contemporary American Artists; New York State Museum, Albany, NY
- 2010 Abstraction + Abstraction; Kenkeleba House

His work is found in the collections of Guild Hall, East Hampton, NY; Howard University, Washington D.C.; and Southampton College, New York.



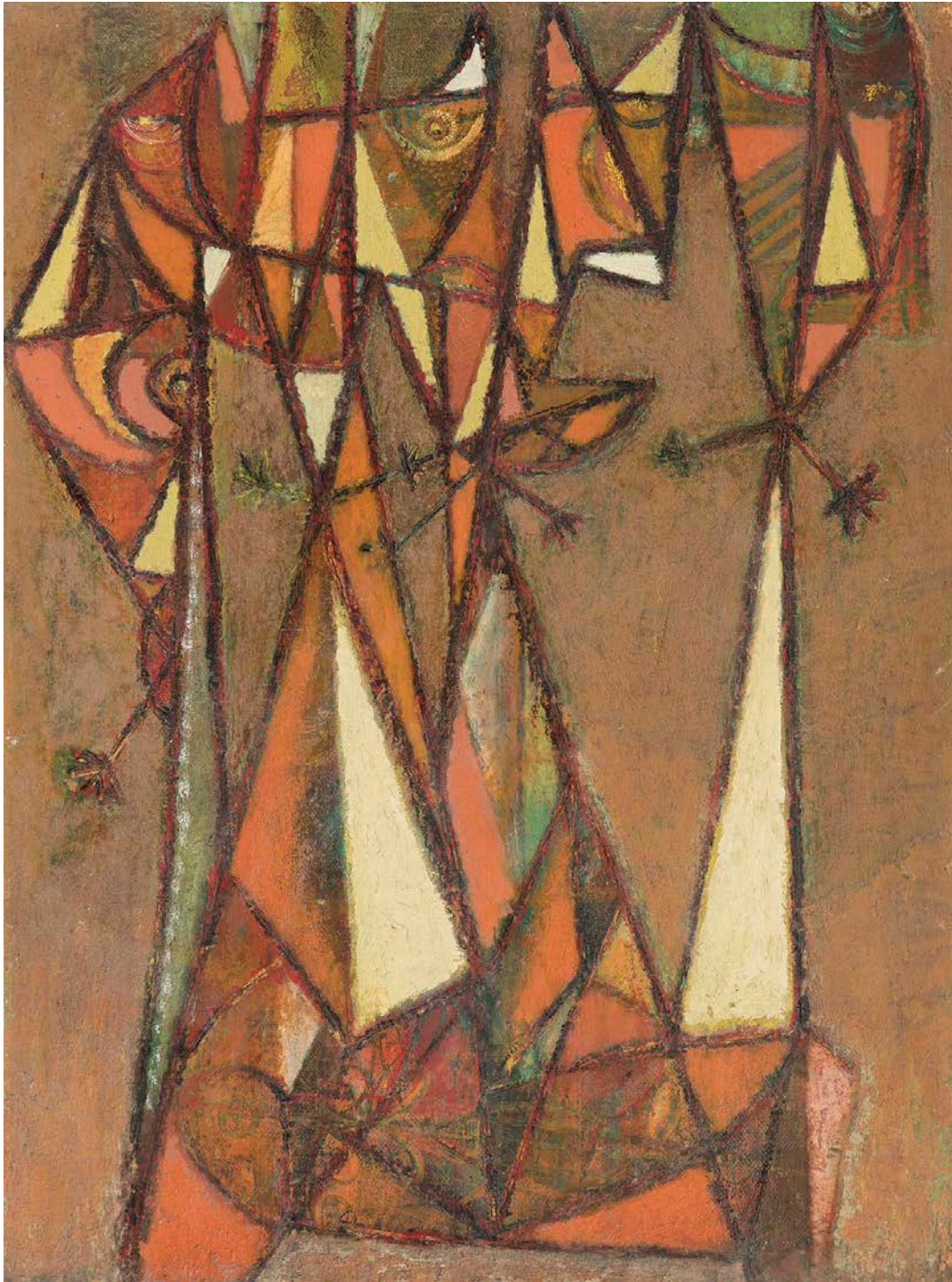
HARLAN JACKSON (1918-1993)



Untitled (Mask), c. 1950  
oil on canvas  
27 x 21-1/2 inches  
signed

Private Collection

HARLAN JACKSON (1918-1993)



Haitian Composition, 1955  
oil and sand on masonite  
32 x 24 inches  
inscribed and signed verso

Private Collection