

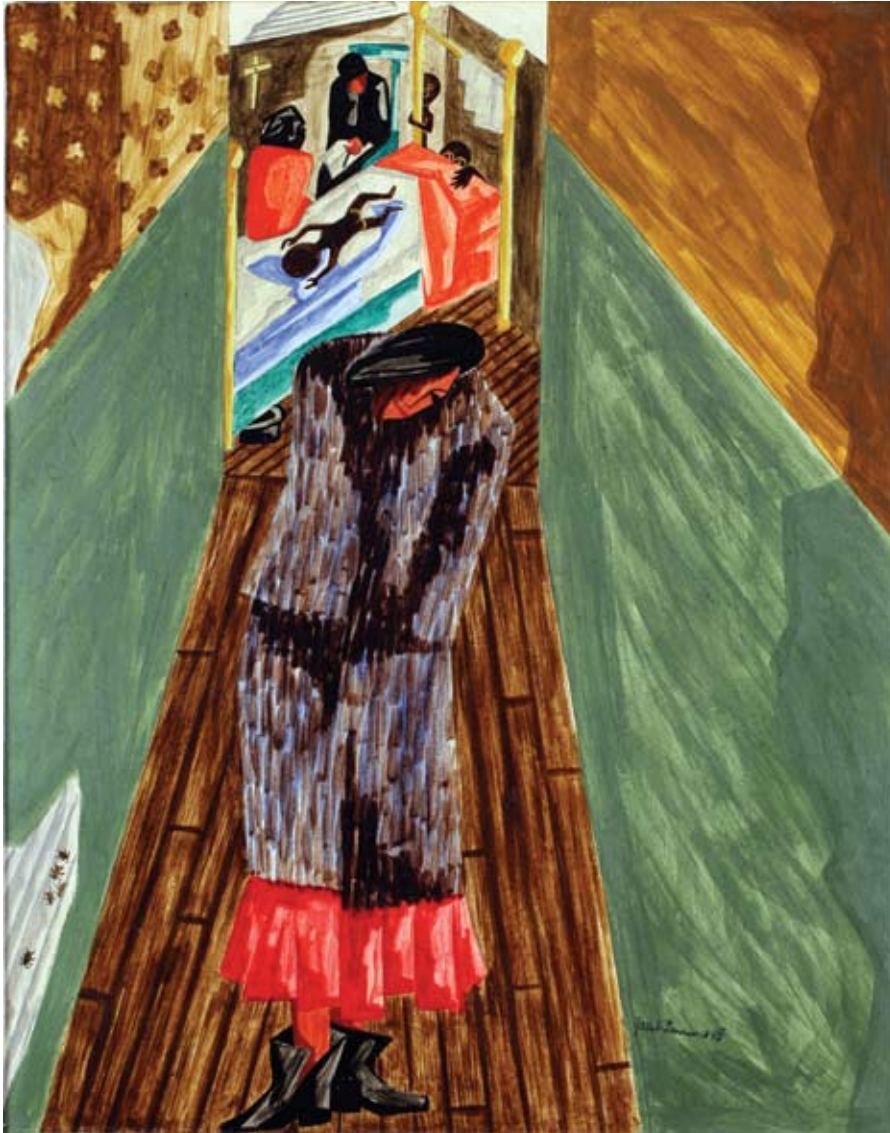
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## Jacob Lawrence, Birth, 1948

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Published version. "Jacob Lawrence, Birth, 1948," in *Perspectives on Art at the Haggerty Museum*. Milwaukee, WI: Haggerty Museum of Art, 2006: 42-43. [Publisher link](#). © 2006 Haggerty Museum of Art, Marquette University. Used with permission.



Jacob Lawrence  
American (1917-2000)  
*Birth*, 1948

Tempera on board  
20 x 16 in.

Museum Purchase, Mary B. Finnigan Art Endowment Fund, 94.18



emories and connections, that's what comes to mind for me whenever I look at *Birth* (1948) by Jacob Lawrence. For years I had known of Jacob Lawrence (1917-2000) and admired his painting. I knew he was among the FEW African American painters with national renown: he was respected and collected by major museums and private collectors. However, I did not know that one day our lives would intersect. In 1994, I had the privilege of meeting Jacob Lawrence and spending a few "quality" moments alone with him. I remember shaking Mr. Lawrence's hand, exchanging cordialities, and asking him to sign my poster. I remember his dark chocolate hand felt warm and his gaze gracious. I knew I was in the presence of artistic genius and creativity. I also had the good fortune to have met Mary Finnigan whose generous bequeath to the Haggerty Museum of Art made it possible for the Haggerty to acquire *Birth* for its permanent collection. Jacob Lawrence, Mary Finnigan, and I-three very different lives all connected by the love of art.

*Birth* is not a happy painting. It engenders many more questions than answers. It gives us a stark and complex perspective on birth. The pallet is muted the lines are sharp, and the large image of the woman in the foreground confronts us with a forlorn expression. From her attire and placement in the painting, the woman appears to be walking away from her new born and from commitment. The scene in the background is very disturbing. Is the new born dead? Are the two child-like spirits images of other children she has abandoned? Is this woman the vision of *post-partum* depression? And most significantly to me, is the question whether this woman will ever look back. What will be her memories and connections?

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