

# The New York Times

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## ART IN REVIEW

FEBRUARY 23, 2001

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### Jacob Lawrence

*D.C. Moore Gallery  
724 Fifth Avenue, near 57th Street  
Through March 3*

Emotional balance, simple grace and unaffected elegance were the mainstays of Jacob Lawrence's long career, which ended last year with his death at 82. Weighed against the tumult, desperation and poverty of his early years in Harlem, Lawrence's visual daring and deftness with narrative are startling reminders of the fragile potential for healing invoked by art. He was sustained by the W.P.A. art project and by his love for the people he lived among. They are reborn here into a saturated twilight world of vivid browns, blues and reds — almost never a white — that serve as a bright womb for his tales of the American black experience.

This small retrospective exhibition, organized before a large traveling museum show arrives in New York at the Whitney in November, is rich with Lawrence's singular pleasures. He documented injustice, but he also seemed to cherish the panorama, from the red blood of slave uprisings to the plain beige of newspapers read in bed. His descriptive powers were coupled with a flair for dramatic compositions that at best convey both an inner life and an outer struggle. They are portraits of the psyche and its edgy relationship to society.

The late works have dramatic passages that take unusual risks, at times reminding one of Japanese prints, as if Lawrence were giving a nod to modernism. Skirting all the styles of his times, he made his own way and stayed true to it till the end.

KAY LARSON

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