Phoenix Art Museum

NEWS RELEASE

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Smithsonian Traveling Exhibition Featuring Major American Artist William H. Johnson to Open at Phoenix Art Museum

Final venue of a multi-city tour

PHOENIX (March 6, 2014) — An exhibition from the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES) arrives at Phoenix Art Museum and will feature rare paintings by William H. Johnson, from the collection of the James E. Lewis Museum at Morgan State University. An essential figure in modern American art, William H. Johnson (1901-1970) was a virtuoso skilled in various media and techniques, and produced thousands of works over a career that spanned decades, continents, and genres.

William H. Johnson: An American Modern will be on view April 19 to July 13, 2014, and Phoenix Art Museum is the final venue of a multi-city tour. The pivotal stages of Johnson's career as a modernist painter are assembled in this group of rarely seen paintings. Every step of his artistic development is conveyed—from his post-impressionist and expressionist works of the 1920s, to vibrant vernacular paintings from the end of his career in the 1940s, in which Johnson articulated his distinctive, unforgettable vision as an American modern artist.

The paintings boast a remarkable history. In 1956 the Harmon Foundation, a nonprofit that helped foster awareness of African American art from 1922 until it closed in 1967, took ownership of Johnson's own collection of art—saving it all from being destroyed. When the foundation had to shut its doors, they donated more than 1,000 works to the Smithsonian's National Collections of Fine Arts (now the Smithsonian American Art Museum). The terms of the agreement called for the Smithsonian to donate artworks to several black colleges and universities, including Morgan State University. The founding chair of Morgan's art department, James E. Lewis, was first to carefully select these works for his museum's permanent collection.

Developed by Morgan State University and SITES, *William H. Johnson: An American Modern* is made possible through the generous support of the National Endowment for the Arts, the Henry Luce Foundation, Morgan State University Foundation Inc, and the Ford Motor Company Fund. This exhibition is complemented by an illustrated companion book *William H. Johnson: An American Modern* (University of Washington Press, 2011) with essays by Richard J. Powell, Leslie King Hammond, and others. The book features some of the world's premier scholars of Johnson and African American art history, re-examining the artist and presenting him in new, fresh ways.

About Phoenix Art Museum

Phoenix Art Museum has provided access to visual arts and educational programs in Arizona for more than 50 years and is the largest art museum in the Southwestern United States. Critically acclaimed national and international exhibitions are shown

alongside the Museum's collection of more than 17,000 works of American, Asian, European, Latin American, Western American, modern and contemporary art, and fashion design. Visitors also enjoy vibrant photography exhibitions through the Museum's landmark partnership with the Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona. To learn more about Phoenix Art Museum, visit PhxArt.org, or call the 24-hour recorded information line at (602) 257-1222.

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