

BLANTON MUSEUM OF ART

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BLANTON MUSEUM RECEIVES KEY WORKS BY CELEBRATED AMERICAN ARTIST CHARLES WHITE



Paintings, Drawings, and Prints Gifted to the Blanton
by Drs. Susan G. and Edmund W. Gordon

AUSTIN, Texas —(April 28, 2015)—Drs. Susan G. and Edmund W. Gordon of Pomona, New York have given to The University of Texas at Austin their collection of works by celebrated African American artist Charles White (1918–1979) and the papers of Dr. Edmund W. Gordon, in order to advance Black Studies’ initiatives on campus. The Gordon collection of White’s works is among the largest and most significant in the United States. The twenty artworks, including key drawings, prints, and a major painting by White, will become part of the Blanton Museum of Art’s collection. Dr. Edmund W. Gordon’s papers will be housed in UT’s Benson Latin American Collection library in its growing Black Diaspora Special Collections. Black Studies, the Blanton, and the Benson will work collaboratively to advance research and scholarship relating to these remarkable intellectual resources from the Gordons.

"It is a tremendous honor for the Blanton to be entrusted with this substantial gift of works by Charles White," says Simone Wicha, director of the Blanton Museum of Art. "White was not only one of the most renowned draftsmen of the 20th century, but also a distinguished educator and revered mentor. He profoundly influenced countless younger artists and paved the way for generations of African Americans in the field. We are deeply grateful to Drs. Gordon and the leadership of Black Studies for making this gift a reality, as it enhances the museum’s collection in indelible ways. The Gordon collection will catalyze scholarship about White and his groundbreaking work, and allow for rich collaborations with faculty and students."

University of Texas at Austin President Bill Powers adds, "Charles White is one of the most important African American artists in history. His drawings, paintings, and prints constitute an important body of work and we will treasure them. Edmund W. Gordon,

one of the architects of the Head Start early childhood education program, is a distinguished scholar whose papers are essential to understanding the effects of Great Society policy. I'm profoundly thankful to Drs. Susan and Edmund Gordon for these gifts. These collections will both educate and inspire our students for generations to come."

Cherise Smith, Director of the John L. Warfield Center for African and African American Studies, says, "The significant gift of White artworks and Gordon papers allows Black Studies to forge ahead with its goal to increase the University's collection of primary documents relating to cultures of the African Diaspora."



The Gordons' gift spans thirty years of White's career and underscores his virtuosity as a draftsman, painter, and printmaker. Revealing the artist's interest in African and African American history and culture, the collection includes one of White's most celebrated paintings, *Homage to Sterling Brown*, 1972, a powerful portrait of the poet, critic, and Howard University professor. The gift also includes the famous drawing *Awaken from the Unknowing*, 1961, White's large-scale rendering of an African American girl studying diligently, produced in the face of violence surrounding segregation and the right to education. This important work is featured in the Blanton's current exhibition, *Witness: Art and Civil Rights in the Sixties*. Also included in the gift is an etched silver plate and eighteen works on paper—among them, a 1954 charcoal drawing of Sojourner Truth and Moses. White created this early drawing for the Harriet Tubman Child Health and Guidance Clinic, a private medical clinic in Harlem that Doctors Susan G. and Edmund W. Gordon established to serve disadvantaged children. White and his wife Frances Barnett were fictive siblings to the Gordons with whom they shared much, including child rearing, family vacations, and the drive to seek social justice.

Alongside artists Augusta Savage and Palmer Hayden and writers Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston, White was a participant of the Harlem Renaissance and a keen observer of the black community. (White emerged at the end of this period, along with artists Romare Bearden and Jacob Lawrence.) Frustrated with racial injustices in the U.S., his work often aimed to affect social change. Many of his portraits highlight the strength, beauty, and dignity of African Americans and the working poor. In the 1960s, members of the Black Arts Movement discovered and championed his work, and fellow artist May Stevens has credited her passion for civil rights in part to her friendship with White. (Stevens's 1963 painting *Honor Roll* is also on view in the *Witness* exhibition.)

Beyond his work as a prolific social realist, White was a deeply influential mentor and teacher to many artists. He taught at schools such as the Hampton Institute in Virginia and the Otis Art Institute (now Otis College of Art and Design) in California, and paved the way for younger black artists including Benny Andrews, Faith Ringgold, David Hammons, and figurative painters like L.A. muralist Kent Twitchell. Artist Kerry James Marshall, whose work was featured in the Blanton's exhibition *Through the Eyes of Texas: Masterworks for Alumni Collections* (2013), was taught by White at Otis in the late 1970s, and recounts meeting White as "a life-altering experience."

"Susan and I have chosen The University of Texas at Austin as the repository for the

Gordon Collection of Graphic Art by Charles W. White in order to advance the intellectual legacy of this great American artist, to protect this collection of some of his finest works of art and to ensure public access to White's legacy and exemplars of his work in perpetuity," remarked Dr. Edmund Gordon. "To achieve these purposes while our son Dr. Edmund "Ted" Gordon leads the African and African Diaspora Studies Department, is a delightful bonus for the Gordon family. This coincidence would have been greatly appreciated by Charlie and Fran White."

The Blanton is indebted to Dr. Cherise Smith, who spearheaded the effort to bring the Gordons' gift to UT, and to Dr. Edmund T. "Ted" Gordon, Chair of the African and African Diaspora Studies Department for his tireless work for people of color on the UT campus. The university's support of his work for over two decades made UT an attractive candidate to the Gordon family for this gift. The museum also acknowledges Dr. Randy Diehl, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts, for his support towards the establishment of a research fellowship at the Blanton to further advance scholarship of Charles White and the history of African American artists. Working closely with Dr. Smith and other academics from the College of Liberal Arts, the Blanton will produce a scholarly catalogue of the collection and develop curriculum around it for students across a variety of disciplines.

EDMUND W. GORDON ARCHIVE

Dr. Edmund W. Gordon is the John M. Musser Professor of Psychology, Emeritus at Yale University, and the Richard March Hoe Professor, Emeritus of Psychology and Education, at Teachers College, Columbia University. He is one of the leading African American educators in the United States, and has been named one of America's most prolific and thoughtful scholars. In addition to the Charles White artworks, the university will receive Dr. Edmund W. Gordon's papers, which will be housed in the Benson Latin American Collection as part of its Black Diaspora Special Collections. In celebration of both gifts, the university has renamed its Black and Latino Studies Building as the Susan G. and Edmund W. Gordon & Charles W. and Frances B. White Building, which will be referred to as the Gordon-White Building.

ABOUT CHARLES WHITE

Charles White was born 1918 in Chicago. In 1936, while in high school, he received a scholarship to attend the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC), where he first attended Saturday classes as a 7th grade scholarship student. At SAIC, White studied with George E. Neal, and his Chicago circle of friends included Richard Wright, Gwendolyn Brooks, Horace Cayton and others who exposed him to Alain Locke's philosophy of the "New Negro"—ideas that would greatly influence his life's work. He married artist Elizabeth Catlett, and the pair moved to New York in 1942 where White studied with Harry Sternberg at the Art Students League, forming relationships with social activists, writers, and intellectuals. He continued to produce murals, as he had in Chicago, studying and working briefly with David Alfaro Siqueiros and other Mexican muralists of the time. In his travels through the South, and his trips to see family in Mississippi, White experienced the violence and racism that emboldened his commitment to addressing social injustice in his work.

White developed tuberculosis while serving in the US Army in 1944 forcing him to recuperate and limit his exposure to oil paints, which yielded a renewed focus on drawing. In 1950 White married Frances Barnett, a social worker, and moved to California. Through the 1960s and early 1970s, he resumed painting and his art was

exhibited in a number of important museum exhibitions, including the first all-black exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1976, *Two Centuries of Black American Art*. White began teaching at the Otis Art Institute in 1965, mentoring a number of influential contemporary artists, until his death from congestive heart failure in 1979. He is survived by his son, Ian, and daughter, Jessica.

ABOUT SUSAN G. AND EDMUND W. GORDON

Susan G. Gordon is a prominent pediatrician, a Licentiate of The American Board of Pediatrics and a Fellow of the Academy of Pediatrics. She has held teaching positions at New York Medical College and Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons. She was a longtime member of the East Ramapo Central School District Board of Education, serving as its President for three years. **Edmund W. Gordon** has served as a minister, clinical psychologist, scientist, author and professor. Among other academic positions, he holds the John. M Musser Professorship of Psychology, Emeritus at Yale University, and Director Emeritus of the Institute for Urban and Minority Education at Teachers College, Columbia University.

Together, Drs. Susan G. and Edmund W. Gordon are co-founders of the CEJJES Institute—an organization dedicated to improving the educational and social conditions for disenfranchised people, especially children of color.

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ABOUT THE BLANTON MUSEUM OF ART

Founded in 1963, the Blanton Museum of Art is one of the foremost university art museums in the country and holds the largest public collection in Central Texas. Recognized for its modern and contemporary American and Latin American art, Italian Renaissance and baroque paintings, and encyclopedic collection of prints and drawings, the Blanton offers thought-provoking, visually arresting, and personally moving encounters with art. The museum is located at the intersection of Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard and Congress Avenue and is open Tuesday through Friday from 10-5, Saturday from 11-5, and Sunday from 1-5. Thursdays are free admission days and every third Thursday the museum is open until 9. Admission Prices: Adults \$9, Kids 12 and under FREE, Seniors (65+) \$7, Youth/College Students (13-21) \$5. Admission is free to members, all current UT ID-holders. For additional information call (512) 471-7324 or visit www.blantonmuseum.org

ABOUT BLACK STUDIES

Black Studies at UT encompasses the African and African Diaspora Studies Department (AADS), the Institute for Urban Policy Research and Analysis (IUPRA), and the John L. Warfield Center for African and African American Studies (WCAAAS). The three branches research black populations around the world, create cutting-edge policy and analysis, provide rigorous academic training, and undertake innovative programming.

ABOUT THE BENSON LIBRARY

The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection is one of the premier libraries in the world focused on Latin America and Latina Studies. In partnership with the [Teresa Lozano Long Institute for Latin American Studies \(LLILAS\)](http://www.llilas.org), the Benson Collection is a regular destination for visitors from throughout the world. Founded in 1926 and named, in 1975, to honor its director of three decades, the library excels in humanities and social

sciences disciplines, in addition to an array of scientific and professional literature published in Latin America.

The library's holdings include nearly a million books, magazines, newspapers, journals and other materials. This collection is complemented by a world-class archival collection containing manuscripts, art, maps, letters and other one-of-a-kind materials. The collection is continually enriched by a vigorous acquisitions program and by a growing collection of original digital resources available online.

Image captions:

Charles White

Homage to Sterling Brown, 1972

Oil on canvas, 40.15 x 60 in.

Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin

Gift of Susan G. and Edmund W. Gordon to the units of Black Studies and the Blanton Museum of Art and the University of Texas at Austin

Charles White

Awaken from the Unknowing, 1961

Charcoal on paper, 30.7 x 55.5 in.

Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin

Gift of Susan G. and Edmund W. Gordon to the units of Black Studies and the Blanton Museum of Art and the University of Texas at Austin

Charles White

General Moses and Sojourner Truth, 1954

Charcoal on paper, 21 x 36 in.

Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin

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