



## Megan Lewis reflects on **Loïs Mailou Jones'** *Untitled (Two Women)*

**Loïs Mailou Jones isn't depicted in Megan Lewis' 2015 mural, an homage to Black women inside the National Great Blacks in Wax Museum, but her presence can still be felt.**



Artist Megan Lewis discovered Loïs Mailou Jones' work early in her career and carried elements of the artist's style with her. "If you look at the Great Blacks in Wax mural ... you can see the inspiration because I adore her, obviously,"

Lewis said of Jones. "I used her flat shapes and geometric patterns."

Though Lewis went on to develop her own style—constructing unnamed figures by layering paint onto bright fabrics with a palette knife—her adoration for Jones reignited seven years later when she encountered the artist's 1945 painting *Untitled (Two Women)* in the BMA galleries.

The first pre-1960 work by a Black woman painter to enter the BMA's collection, *Untitled (Two Women)* hangs alongside approximately 60 other paintings, sculptures, and

decorative art objects in the American Modernism galleries. This reinstallation of two galleries in the American Wing explores a more holistic telling of the American experience from 1900 to 1950.

The arresting painting flaunts Jones' signature use of color and stops visitors as they enter the space. Two women, both unidentified, lock eyes with the viewer. They're centered, graceful, and steady; their presence is accentuated by a jewel-toned wallpaper reminiscent of the patterns seen in Henri Matisse's 1928 painting *Seated Odalisque, Left Knee Bent, Ornamental Background and Checkerboard*, also in the BMA's collection.

Jones may not be a household name, but her influence echoes across art history. She began as a textile designer before transitioning to a career in painting. After graduating from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston in 1928, she began teaching at Howard University, where she shaped the work of artists including Alma Thomas, Elizabeth Catlett, and David Driskell.

Her guidance made room for artists like Megan Lewis to stretch out and grow. Lewis has dedicated her own creative practice to honoring the image of Black men and women—on the facades of buildings (15 murals by Lewis can be found throughout Baltimore), on handmade furniture, and even on the bags of Doritos tortilla chips.

She found kinship in the way Jones captured these two mysterious yet confident women on the canvas. "The brushstrokes, the stare, the color, the composition. I think she's brilliant."

Loïs Mailou Jones. *Untitled (Two Women)*. c. 1945. Purchase with exchange funds from the Pearlstone Family Fund and partial gift of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. BMA 2020.98 © Loïs Mailou Jones Pierre-Noël Trust