

Gwendolyn Knight and Jacob Lawrence Gallery Created for Downtown Expansion Opening May 5

First installation co-curated by Lowery Stokes Sims past President, The Studio Museum in Harlem, and Sandra Jackson-Dumont, the Kayla Skinner Deputy Director of Education and Public Programs at SAM

SEATTLE, April 26, 2007—In honor of acclaimed artists Jacob Lawrence (1917-2000) and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence (1913-2005), the Seattle Art Museum (SAM) created the *Gwendolyn Knight and Jacob Lawrence Gallery* in the newly expanded downtown museum funded by an anonymous donor. Upon her death, Gwen bequeathed to the museum a portrait bust of Gwen by Augusta Savage and other items from their Seattle home and funded a fellowship for African-American art and artists.

“Jacob and Gwen were significant figures in the world of 20th century American art, as well as in the Seattle community,” says Mimi Gates, director of the Seattle Art Museum. “We are delighted to honor their important legacy.”

The first installation entitled *Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence and Jacob Lawrence: Forget Me Not*, celebrates the life and careers of the artistic pair. The installation, which will highlight their artistic practice while living in Seattle, includes approximately 26 works from SAM’s collection, loans from public and private collections, and a sampling of Jacob Lawrence’s tools. The exhibition is co-curated by Lowery Stokes Sims, PhD, and Sandra Jackson-Dumont, Kayla Skinner Deputy Director of Education and Public Programs at SAM. Sims has more than 30 years of experience in world-class art institutions, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Studio Museum in Harlem where she was president until 2006.

Gwendolyn and Jacob met in 1941 in Harlem, New York. The two quickly fell in love and inspired each other artistically for the next six decades. “In our life together we share our opinions but reserve them until one or the other of us is ready to discuss the work,” Lawrence explained. “Once we’ve commented on each other’s work we were free to choose whether or not we make changes based on those comments.”

Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence especially enjoyed creating intimate portraits of loved ones and strangers, exploring their personalities through colors and materials. For Jacob Lawrence, people were reflections of their cultural heritage, so his subjects became the ordinary or heroic lives of African-Americans and historical events. The epic story of a people’s oppression and liberation, which he expressed memorably in bold, graphic compositions, was told through a series of powerful, interconnected images. “If at times my artworks do not express the

conventionally beautiful, there is always an effort to express the universal beauty of man's continuous struggle to lift his social position and to add dimension to his spiritual being," Lawrence once said.

In 1971 the couple moved to Seattle, where Lawrence became a professor at the University of Washington. By that time Lawrence had been a working and exhibiting his art for more than 30 years, often focusing on themes of urban life, human rights and freedom, and events from world and U.S. history. This was also a time when he received an increasing number of commissions and joined the board of the Seattle Art Museum. Since the 1940s, Lawrence also had periodically explored images of builders, and this theme reached new heights in Seattle in 1998 when he created a series of gouaches with unique interpretations of figure and background.

After moving to Seattle, Knight Lawrence continued to develop her skills as a portraitist and figure painter, as well as experimenting with graphic media such as mono-printing, lithography and serigraphy (silk-screening). Her first solo exhibition was on the west coast in 1976, and she participated in a number of group exhibitions that earned her a broad audience and recognition in Seattle and nationwide.

The *Gwendolyn Knight and Jacob Lawrence Gallery* honors the legacy of these two renowned artists and what they contributed to the artistic landscape and their support of the Seattle Art Museum.

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About the Seattle Art Museum

For more than seven decades, the Seattle Art Museum has been one of the Pacific Northwest's leading visual art institutions. When SAM opened its doors at Volunteer Park in 1933, the museum's collection focused primarily on Asian art. Today, SAM has matured into an institution with a global perspective, representing 140 cultures. SAM's collections currently number approximately 24,000 objects, and the range and depth of these collections are unmatched in the region. SAM comprises three venues: the Olympic Sculpture Park, SAM downtown and the Seattle Asian Art Museum in Volunteer Park.

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