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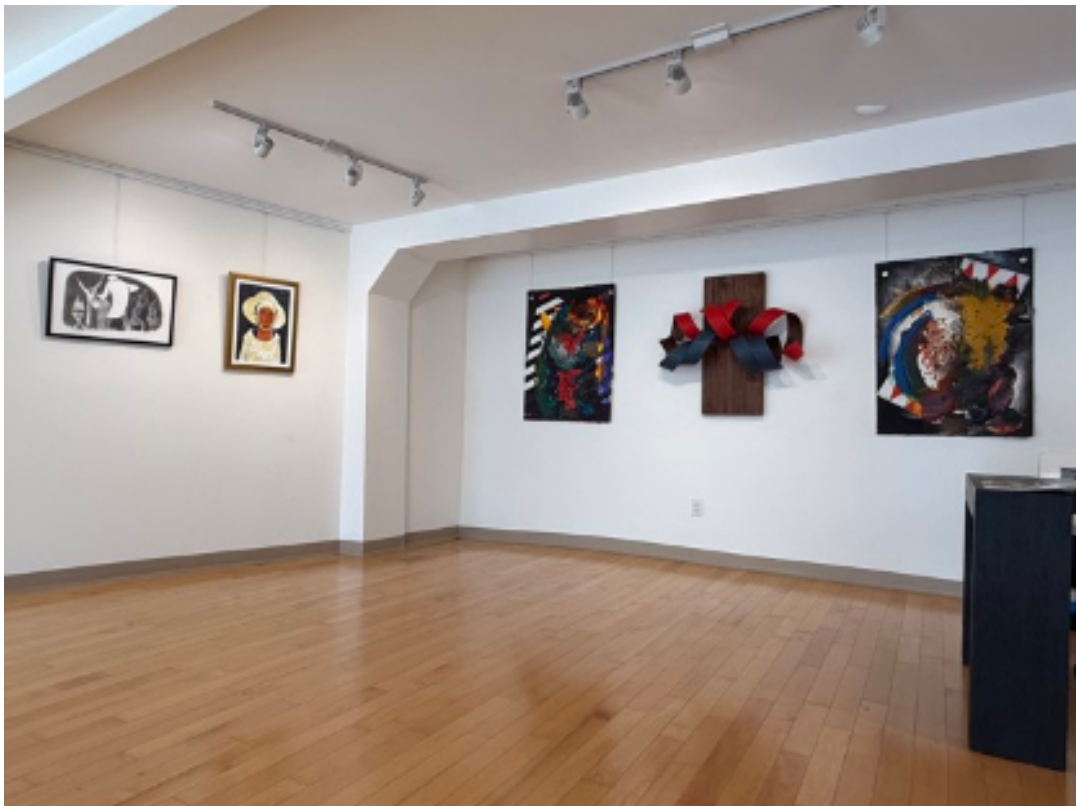
The reach of her brush

Lois Mailou Jones's Sphere of Influence at the Center of Knowhere Art Gallery.



by **Abby Remer**

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Renowned artist and educator Lois Mailou Jones (1905–98) had strong, lifelong ties to her beloved Vineyard, inspiring works such as the beautiful 1940 watercolor, "Beached" Menemsha. Jones' maternal grandmother was an early settler who owned property in Edgartown, allowing the artist to spend her summers on the Island from childhood through the end of her life. She held her first-ever solo exhibition at the age of 17 in the garden of her neighbor and lifelong friend, Harlem Renaissance novelist Dorothy West. In 1988, Jones built a home on family land in Edgartown, opening the Lois Mailou Jones Studio Gallery to exhibit her work and mentor other artists. It is fitting that Jones, who taught for decades at Howard University, is being celebrated locally during Legacy Week.

The exhibition, "Lois Mailou Jones: Sphere of Influence," at the Center of Knowhere Art Gallery on Circuit Avenue in Oak Bluffs through Sept. 13, follows the artist's influence on others both during her lifetime and after her death. The diverse artists in this show reflect the breadth of Jones' reach: students she mentored, peers, colleagues who worked alongside her, and contemporary practitioners creating within traditions she helped define. The gallery's founding director and co-owner, Valerie Francis, says, "What continues to inspire me about Lois Mailou Jones is that she refused to be defined by a single medium. She embraced painting, printmaking, textile design, and illustration, allowing each discipline to inform the others. That breadth of practice, combined with her extraordinary command of color, pattern, and composition, produced a body of work that feels as relevant and visually compelling today as when it was created." We see Jones's relevance in the work by the artists in the exhibition. Francis says, "Rather than emphasizing visual likeness, Jones' legacy is one of transmission. 'Sphere of Influence' traces how her emphasis on a piece's structure, surface, and composition continues to resonate with artists today."

As a professor at Howard University for nearly five decades, Jones influenced generations of artists through her interest in form and design and her fascination with other cultures, informed by her experiences throughout the U.S., Europe, the Caribbean, and Africa. Francis explains how the broad theme of her show came about: "There has always been a light shining on Lois Mailou Jones herself. I thought to take it from a different perspective about how, as a professor, she really poured into the students she taught. Because she worked in printmaking, painting, and textile design, she was open to trying different things, and I think that's what shows up in the variety of the artists in this exhibit."

Martha Jackson Jarvis was one of Jones' students. Although Jackson's sizable, completely abstract paintings don't visually resemble any of Jones' styles, Jarvis embodies her teacher's conviction that artistic practice should be rooted equally in technical mastery and experimentation. In "Mandala Crossing II," for example, we see Jarvis' exploration of how different pigments such as oil, acrylic, watercolor, and homemade black walnut ink interact to create a varied surface that draws us in close to witness the fascinating results.

Jones' mentee, David C. Driskell, whose figurative work includes the mixed-media "Two Faces," shares a visual language with Jones' figurative art, such as her serigraph "African Dancers." Both artists use dynamic lines to animate their subjects.

We see echoes of Jones' penchant for strong lines that capture the essence of her human forms in her good friend Dr. Samella Lewis' lithograph "Diva." Although their artistic paths developed independently, both women understood that making art alone was not enough. Each dedicated her career to expanding opportunities for Black artists, preserving African American art history, and ensuring that future generations would have access to the stories, scholarship, and institutions long missing from mainstream narratives.

Mathieu Jean Baptiste fashions his touching, large double portrait, "Synchronized Souls," using acrylic, ink, and colored pencil on paper. Wrapped in swathes of designs, the two women sit, cocoon-like, blessed by the yellow sun above. Baptiste and Jones share an artistic sensibility rooted in Haiti. Jones's many visits to the island profoundly influenced her use of color, pattern, and composition. Likewise, Baptiste draws deeply on his Haitian heritage, creating paintings that celebrate memory, resilience, spirituality, and community through richly layered surfaces and a vibrant palette.

The striking Black women in LaToya Hobbs' captivating portraits, including "Untitled (Neo Green)," extend Jones' legacy through her commitment to figurative printmaking and to

elevating Black lived experience. Hobbs' woodcut combines extraordinary technical precision with varied surfaces and deeply personal narratives that celebrate the everyday beauty of Black life.

We get delightfully lost in Lisa Corinne Davis's "Voracious Tale." Although it is an oil painting, the mesmerizing, asymmetrical, crazy-quilt-like patterning recalls Jones' interest in textiles, where she incorporated traditional motifs as well as African- and Caribbean-inspired imagery. Even after shifting her focus to painting, Jones stated that her background as a designer made her highly attuned to composition and color, which is clearly true of Davis as well.

Francis notes, "Loïs Mailou Jones was far more than a remarkable artist. She was a teacher whose influence continues to shape generations of artists working today. This exhibition recognizes that her greatest masterpiece may not be a single painting, but the enduring legacy of artists, educators, and cultural leaders who continue to build upon the foundation she created."

Francis adds her ultimate hope for the show: "What is most important is for people to absorb the creativity of all these artists who reflect the direct or indirect influence of Loïs, who both paved the way and also cultivated so many different types of media. I also want to leave space for people who don't know Jones or her vast influence to seek out more information to learn more."