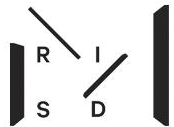


RISD MUSEUM

Virtual Visit:

Building More Stately Mansions, 1944



RISD MUSEUM

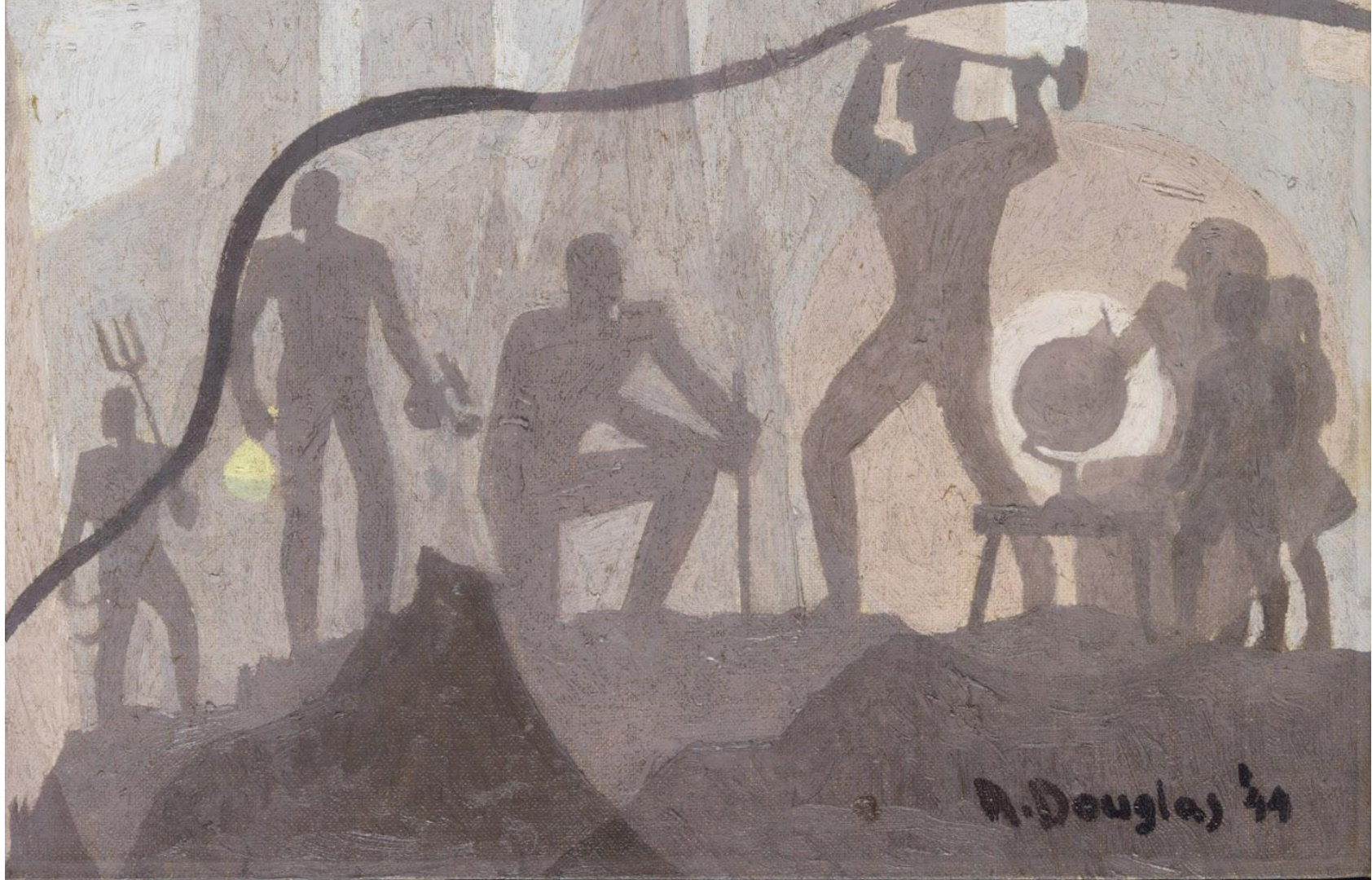




Aaron Douglas
American, 1899-1979
Building More Stately Mansions, 1944
Oil on canvas board

Who does the work of
building a great society?

Who gets credited and
remembered by history?



A. Douglas, '49





Arch of Titus, Rome, ca. 81 AD

Cass Gilbert,
Woolworth Building
New York, 1912



Sphinx and Pyramid of Khafre
Giza, Egypt, ca. 2500 BCE



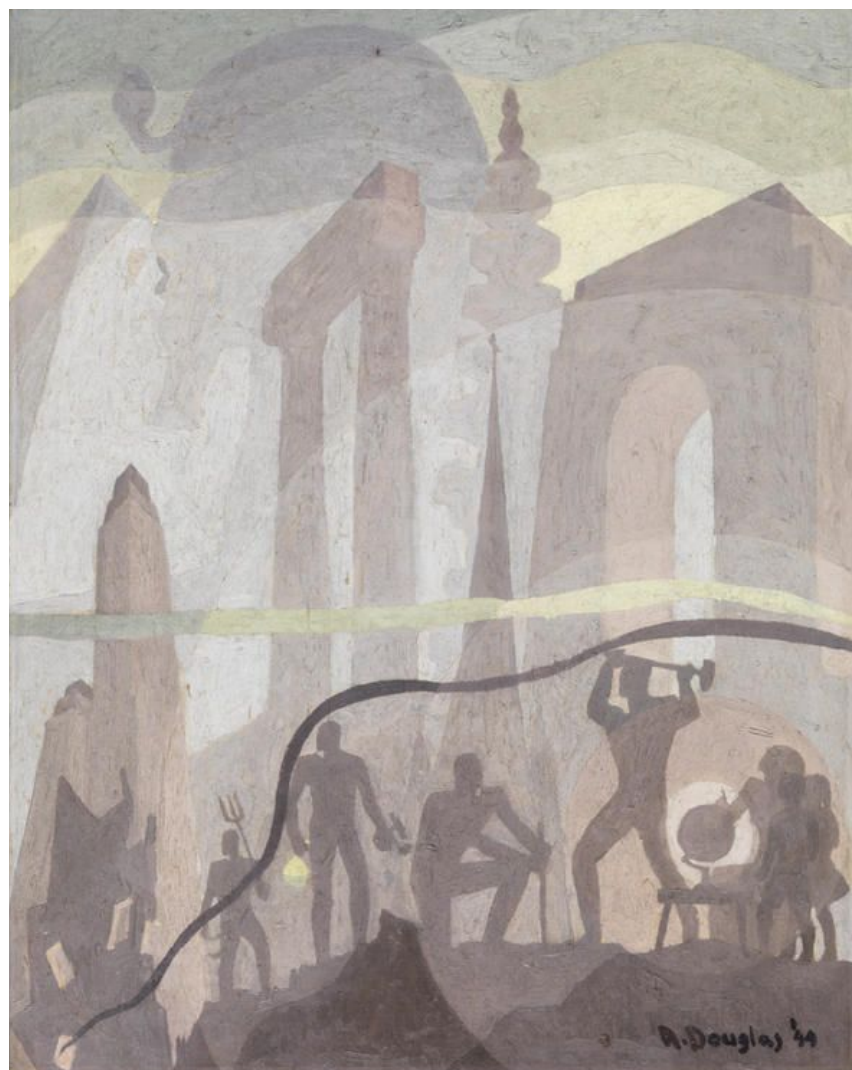


R. Douglas 44

*Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,
as the swift seasons roll!
Leave thy low-vaulted past!
Let each temple, nobler than the last,
shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,
til thou at length art free,
leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unresting sea!*

— Oliver Wendell Holmes, *The Chambered Nautilus*, 1895





A. Douglas '44



Aaron Douglas, *Dance Magic*, 1930 (detail)

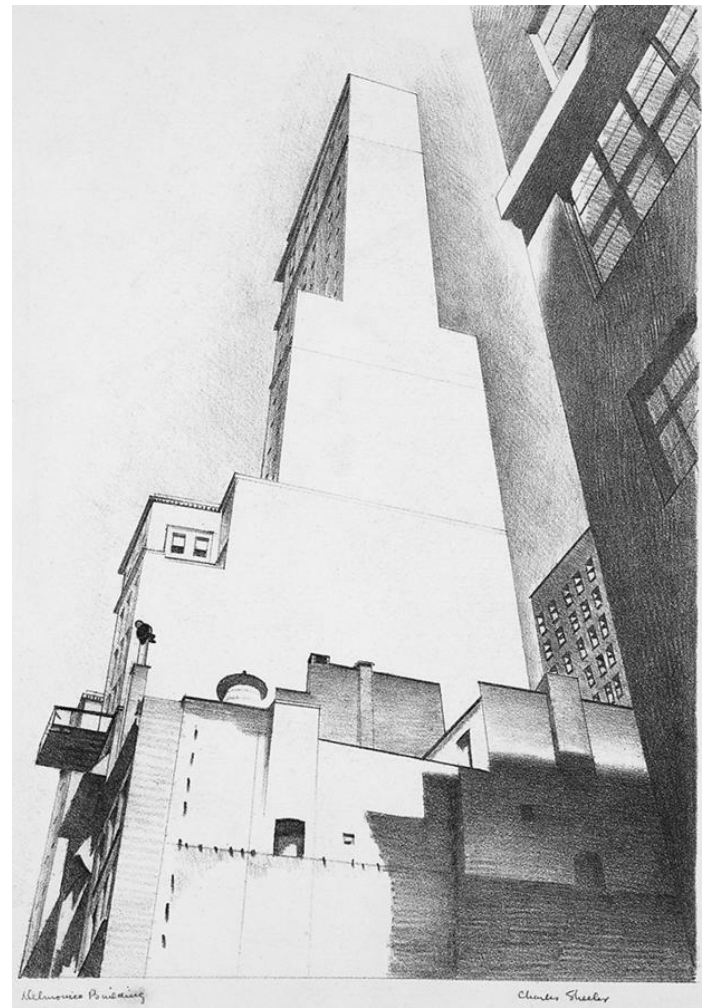


Betsy Graves Reyneau, *Portrait of Aaron Douglas*, 1953



Copy of Egyptian Wall, Mastaba of Pthath-Sekhem-Ankh

Charles Sheeler,
Delmonico Building, 1927



The Harlem Renaissance

A flowering of Black artistic and intellectual innovation centered in Harlem, New York in the 1920s.

James Van der Zee, *Dancer, Harlem*, 1925



The visual art of Douglas and the poetry of Langston Hughes



Aaron Douglas, Illustration for Langston Hughes' *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*, 1941

*I've known rivers:
I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow
of human blood in human veins.*

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

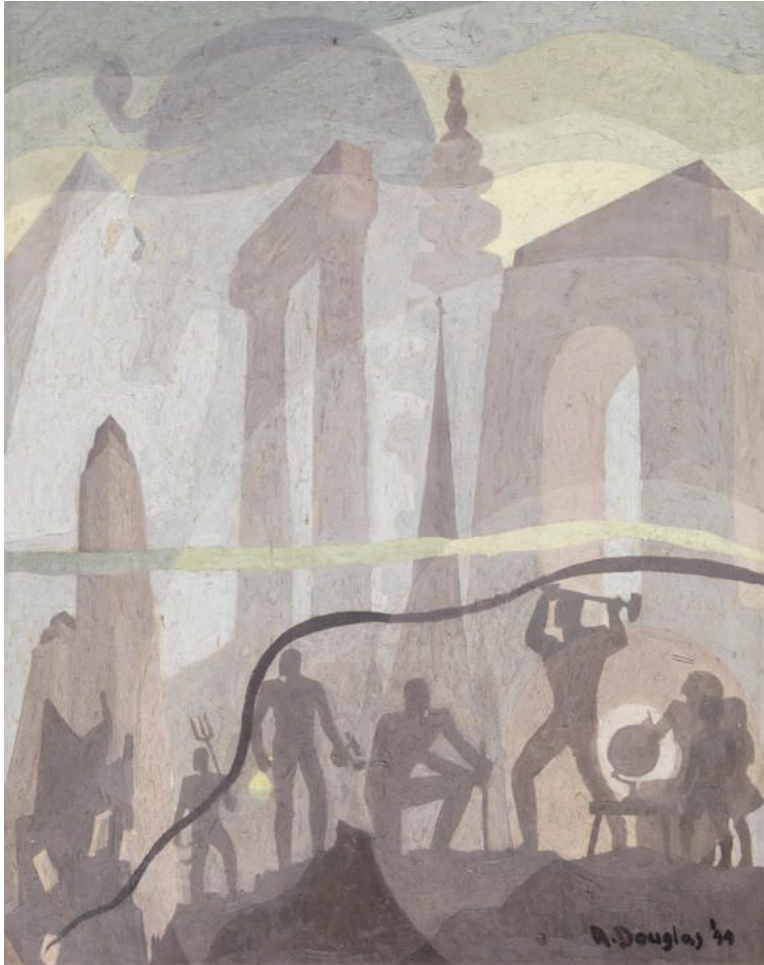
*I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went
down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy bosom turn all
golden in the sunset.*

*I've known rivers:
Ancient, dusky rivers.*

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

— Langston Hughes, *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*, 1921





Who does the work of
building a great society?

Who gets credited and
remembered by history?

What are some essential types of work that go unnoticed in our society?

1.

2.

3.

4.

➤ **Write a proposal and/or sketch a plan**
for an artwork that would celebrate the people
who perform these essential kinds of work.

Your artwork can take any form—a mural,
monument, poem, or another artwork of your choice.

Aaron Douglas,
Dance Magic, 1930 (detail)



We would love to hear from you!

Your teacher or you can share your work with us at teachers@risd.edu.

Tag us in your art & design-inspired projects with:

#RISDMuseum #museumfromhome #TeachingwithArt

More activities + resources on risdmuseum.org
including this lesson on Aaron Douglas's
Building More Stately Mansions:

—Teaching Notes: [Imagining the Americas, page 18](#)



Credits

Installation view of the Paula and Leonard Granoff Galleries at the RISD Museum, 2008.

Aaron Douglas, *Building More Stately Mansions*, 1944.
Purchased with the Frederick Lippitt Bequest.

Roman, *Arch of Titus*, ca. 81 AD.

Cass Gilbert, Architect, Woolworth Building, New York City. Photograph by Aude.

Egyptian, Sphinx and Pyramid of Khafre, Giza, Egypt, ca. 2500.

Aaron Douglas, *Dance Magic*, 1930. Gift of Mrs. Leonard Granoff.

Betsy Graves Reyneau, *Aaron Douglas*, 1953.
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution;
Gift of the Harmon Foundation. © Peter Edward Fayard

Charles M. Muskavitch, Copy of Egyptian wall, Mastaba of Pthah-Sekhem-Ankh, 1936.
Gift of Charles M. Muskavitch.

Charles Sheeler, *Delmonico Building*, 1927. Museum Works of Art Fund.

James Van Der Zee, *Dancer, Harlem*, 1925.
Museum purchase with the aid of funds from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Aaron Douglas, *The Negro Speaks of Rivers (For Langston Hughes)*, 1941.
Gift of Dr. Walter O. Evans and Mrs. Linda J. Evans. The SCAD Museum of Art.

Poetry

Oliver Wendell Holmes, *The Chambered Nautilus*, 1895

Langston Hughes, *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*, 1921