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### **The Lost and Found Paintings of Allan Rohan Crite: [exhibition catalog with comments by Allan Rohan Crite]**

Byron Rushing

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*Rushing, Byron*  
THE LOST AND FOUND PAINTINGS  
OF  
ALLAN ROHAN CRITE

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1982





# Museum of Afro American History African Meeting House

Smith Court, off Joy Street on Beacon Hill, Boston, Mass. 02114. Tel. (617) 723-8863

Byron Rushing, *President*

*Rushing, Byron*  
THE LOST AND FOUND PAINTINGS  
OF  
ALLAN ROHAN CRITE

Notes by  
Byron Rushing  
February, 1982

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Sometimes the act of discovery is more exciting than the object discovered; most times the discovered overshadows the process of discovery. It is rare when the discovery and the discovered are equal in significance. These lost and found paintings of Allan Rohan Crite are rare indeed. The ten oils are on permanent loan to the Museum of Afro American History and are a promised gift to the Museum from William Greenbaum and Ellen Solomon of Gloucester.

William Greenbaum recounts their discovery:

I first found these paintings fifteen years ago stacked against each other in a dark corner of a warehouse in Boston. You can imagine my amazement as I saw each of them emerge from beneath the dust of many years and realized how magnificent they are. It was like being on a ship in a dense fog and suddenly seeing a new land--the land of life in Boston's black community in the 1930's and 1940's as experienced by a black painter. Ever since seeing the paintings I have dreamed of buying them from the family who had purchased and stored them in the 1940's so I could return them to the black community from which they came. Finally, last fall this dream was realized.

Mr. Crite's work is already well represented in the Museum of Modern Art, the Smithsonian, the Phillips Collections and at Chicago, Cleveland, Atlanta, the Addison Gallery and other prominent museums. This is fitting tribute to a great painter, but it seems even more important that a black institution should have



control of such a vital part of the Afro-American heritage. Happily these paintings will not be sold to the highest bidder; and they will not go into the storage bins of wealthy white museums. The Museum of Afro-American History in Boston is a perfect institution to own these works and see that they remain permanently alive and accessible here in Boston and in black institutions and communities throughout America. In addition to the gift of being able to donate these paintings, because of this effort I have also had the great privilege of meeting Mr. Crite.

The ten paintings that are the center of this exhibit have not been seen in public since 1942. When Bill and I went with Allan to see these paintings immediately after they were cleaned and restored, it was the first time Allan had seen them in 40 years. Neither Bill nor I will ever forget that reunion: to watch Allan review his handiwork was indescribable.

This event of rediscovering history which was "lost, stolen, or strayed" was not unique. It is the norm of doing Afro-American history. It is not always this dramatic. The historian's task is to interpret the facts--to put the story of the past together in ways that make sense to our present condition and that accurately inform our future decisions. For the historian of white male America, vast amounts of those raw facts are available. However the raw data of black American history is not arranged neatly in libraries and museums. The historian of black America must search it out from various and unusual hiding places, before he can begin the job of



interpretation. The black historian, even today, is like a sculptor who must quarry his or her own marble.

The librarians and curators of black historical organizations are the quarrymasters. They unearth and cut and dress and label and arrange the stones. The Museum of Afro American History wants these paintings because it is our task to make as much as possible of our past accessible. The historian of Allan Crite, the historian of twentieth century American painters, the historian of Roxbury and the South End, all now have new data.

When these paintings were hidden they were dead, now they are alive; they were lost and are found.

Allan Rohan Crite is alive and well. Unfortunately many of his paintings, watercolors, and drawings are not. William Greenbaum and the Museum of Afro American History have already spent over \$3,000 to clean and restore the paintings in this exhibit. This exhibition is the beginning of a fundraising drive by the Museum of Afro American History to restore Mr. Crite's home/studio, to conserve many of his works (especially those on paper) and to acquire further works that become available.

If you can help, please give generously. You may send a donation in the attached envelope or contact, Byron Rushing, President, Museum of Afro American History, Dudley Station, Box 5, Roxbury, MA 02119 - (617) 445-7400

Thank You!



The catalog, with occasional comments by the artist:

1. Settling the World's Problems.

1933.

The painting is based on Madison Park as a locale. The types are based on people that I have seen. The usual procedure would be for me to remember faces which interested me and keep a sort of mental file of such faces and use them in the paintings. The view possibly is looking towards Hammond Street.

2. And the Lord Said.

1934.

The painting is based on a shoeshop which was on Shawmut Avenue and the shoemaker is a Mr. Reddick who was a good friend of my father and used to work with my father as an engineer. He developed a shoeshop and did some plumbing work as I recall and had some property.

3. Thus Saith the Lord.

1935.

Based on one of the quiet streets like Sawyer Street which branched off Lenox Street and went to Shawmut Avenue. The "Gospel Mission" possibly didn't exist on the street but the painting is based on such a mission which was typical at that time. The girl with the tennis racquet is based on one of the many girls who did play tennis as there was a tennis court in the William E. Carter Playground at the end of Dilworth Street. She is a bit "sexy" I suppose as I liked that delineation of the female form. The lights are by this time electric though the holders were used originally for gas lights. I vaguely remember the gas lamps. I recall a bearded man as a preacher and he is also the prototype in the illustration for the Swing Low Sweet Chariot series of drawings, which I was illustrating at that time.

4. Lot on Shawmut Avenue, Bordered by Northfield and Camden Streets.

1935.

View of the side of People's Baptist Church looms up over the alleyway. There is a similar painting which is called Leon and Harriet which I did a few years later.



5. Columbus Avenue.

1937.

The corner of Massachusetts and Columbus Avenues, "Mass. and Columbus." The Harriet Tubman House now stands on the site of the Hi Hat--a famous jazz club.

6. Ice.

May, 1939.

In this painting I was interested in the technique of very smooth brush strokes and a high degree of finish.

7. Faith of Our Fathers.

Mission Church, Parker Hill

1940.

The painting shows the side altar at the church of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. The shrine was a popular one and the trees of crutches testify to the miraculous cures which apparently took place there. The church had a reputation of being the New England "Lourdes" and was the object of pilgrimages. At the time of this painting the mass was said in Latin. In this case possibly a votive mass was being said. In regards to the congregation it was mostly white for there were and still are relatively few black Roman Catholics in the City.

8. Off Tremont Street, Near Ruggles.

1940.

The conical tower belongs to Ruggles Street Baptist Church.

9. Summertime.

1940.

Shawmut Avenue near Camden Street. The Shawmut Avenue Stables are just visible to the right of the painting. View looking towards Washington Street with Boston Elevated train visible.

10. Untitled.

1940.

In addition to the lost and found paintings we have borrowed six oils from the same period--two from St. Bartholomew's Church in Cambridge, two from St. Augustine's in Boston, and two from the artist's home.

11. Weary.

March, 1936.

A portrait of my father; my mother is lying in the bed. The painting on the wall is "Thus Saith the Lord."

12. Children's Stations of the Cross. .

1936.

St. Augustine's and St. Martin's Episcopal Church, Boston.

At St. Augustine's and St. Martin's Episcopal Church the Stations were conducted after school every Wednesday in Lent. The priest in the painting is the Rev. Frank Fitz, associate of the Society of St. John the Evangelist (Cowley Fathers). The church was staffed by the Cowley Fathers and the Sisters of Saint Margaret, one of whom is shown in the painting and is possibly Sister Hope.

The stations for children were quite popular and crowds came as the painting testifies. The view is looking towards the high altar which can be seen to the right of the painting. The altar directly ahead is the children's altar at which on Saturdays Mass was celebrated for the children.

13. The Rector's Greeting.

1938.

St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church, Cambridge.

The priest is Father Mitchell. He's holding his daughter's hand. She is Mrs. Jean MacGuire, now the first black woman member of the Boston School Committee.

14. Looking Out the Window.

1939.

The Artist.



Portrait of my mother. The view is looking up Northampton Street from Dilworth towards Columbus AMEZ Church which is at the corner of Columbus Avenue and Northampton Street. We lived at this house for 46 years. It was torn down by "Urban renewal."

15. The Baptismal Font.

1940.

St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church, Cambridge

16. The Choir Singer.

October, 1941.

St. Augustine's and St. Martin's Episcopal Church, Boston.

View is from the choir loft of the Church of St. Augustine and St. Martin. The choir singer is posed by Mr. Kirton who was the organist. The incident is the offertory of a sung mass. The altar to the extreme left just below the singer is the "Blessed Sacrament Altar" where in those days daily mass was said. The altar towards the front of the church is Our Lady's Altar which had brass panels which I did showing the 4 of the 5 joyful mysteries.

17. Allan Rohan Crite, 1981.

20 x 24 format Polaroid

Photograph by Rogier A. Gregoire

The artist.

Born in Plainfield, New Jersey, in 1910, Allan Rohan Crite came with his parents to Boston the same year and was given his first drawing lessons by his mother. His talents developed in art classes at the Children's Art Centre in the South End, and during his years at the School of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, where he was one of the first black artists to study and from which he was graduated in 1936.

Crite, acknowledged as a dean of Boston area black artists, enjoyed an active Boston and national public exhibition career in the 1930s and 40s, but between 1945 and 1975 he showed his work primarily within the Episcopal Church. His oil paintings of Boston street life and his brush and ink drawings of Biblical subjects are held in such collections as the Museum of Modern Art, the Smithsonian Institution's National Collection of Fine Arts, and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.



His secular art exhibition career included national notice for his work through the WPA, Boston and New York appearances with the Boston Society of Independent Artists, and several well-received one-man shows at Boston's Grace Horne Galleries between 1937 and 1943.

His religious art has included a large number of church commissions and was highlighted by the exhibition of two of his works at the First International Exhibition of Religious Art in Trieste, Italy, in 1961.

We thank the following persons for aiding us in making this exhibit possible:

The rector and vestry of St. Bartholomew's Church,  
Cambridge

The rector and vestry of St. Augustine's and St. Martin's  
Church, Boston

Harriet Kennedy of the Museum of the National Center of  
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Morton Bradley, Jr.

Rudolph Robinson

George Stephen

Robert C. Vose, Jr.

The staff of the Boston African American National Historic  
Site

The staff of the Boston National Historical Park

Susan Thompson, who designed and fabricated the exhibit banner