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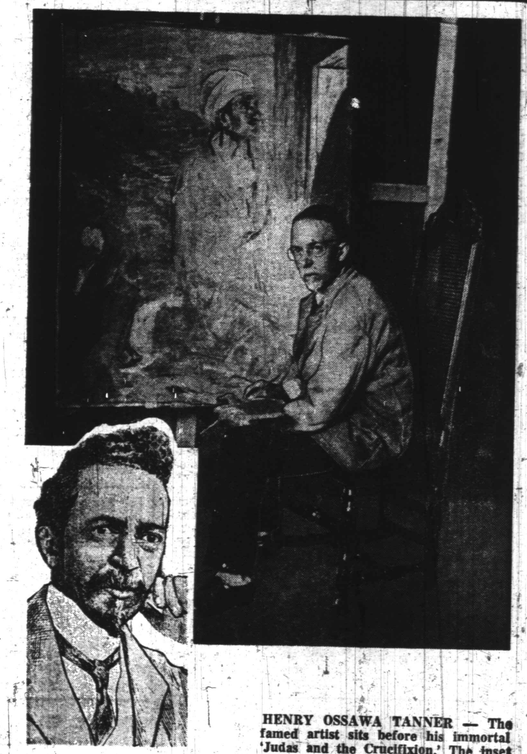
DEAN *of painters*



HENRY OSSAWA TANNER — The famed artist sits before his immortal 'Judas and the Crucifixion.' The inset shows the artist in his youth.

Mr. Lewis is the chairman of the Art Department at Morgan State College. He is primarily responsible for the exhibition of the three Henry O. Tanner paintings held here last October. They were 'Still Life Study Of Fruit' 'War Hospital In Church, France, and 'The Good Shepherd.' Mr. Lewis himself is an artist of some distinction. He has been commissioned to do several oil portraits, portrait sculptures and bronze plaques. Among them are an eight foot bronze of Frederick Douglass which stands on the campus of Morgan College.

JAMES E. LEWIS

By AL RUTLEDGE

The history of the arts is abundant with sad tales of artist who were never recognized during their lifetimes for their mastery of the pen or brush. If an artist is to succeed the world has to be prepared to view his work in proper perspective. In the 19th century there was no proper perspective for the black artist in America.

In America, the land of his birth, Henry Ossawa Tanner would have been another sad tale. Mr. Tanner was born in 1859. It was a time when art was thought to be exclusively European and black Americans definitely the nongenius type.

Discouraged

At the age of 21 Mr. Tanner entered the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts where he studied painting undeer the famous Thomas Eakins.

Raised in a strongly religious home (his father was pastor of Bethel AME Church of Philadelphia) the young artist was acutely conscious of the humble position of his people in this country.

Inferior

His earliest works depict the realities of black people in white 19th century America. After graduating from the academy he tried to sell his paintings to finance a trip to Europe for study with the masters.

He never made the money. Discouraged by his failure to capture the indifferent public Mr. Tanner turned to photography as a means of subsistence.

He opened a studio in Atlanta, Ga. and sold out as a complete failure within a year.

A Methodist Bishop who admired Mr. Tanner's paintings used his influence to help him get a job as art instructor at Clark University in Atlanta.

While still as the university he did one of his finest paintings, 'The Banjo Lesson.' It now hangs in the Hampton Institute in Virginia.

Exhibition

Few of his other works attracted much attention. Then in 1890 the Methodist Bishop, Joseph C. Hartzell and his wife bought an entire exhibition of Tanner paintings for $300.

In a matter of weeks he was on his way to Paris, where he enrolled in Julien's Academy. There he studied under Laruens and Constant and in 1894 his 'Music Master' won him recognition as a promising student.

Many of his works drew acclaim then suddenly, in 1896, he erhibited 'Daniel In The Lions' Den' his first major work. The theme was strongly religious and this is the area in which he did much of his most famous paintings.

Luxembourge

In 1897 he exhibited 'The Raising of Lazarus' a painting that drew rave notices even before it was completed. The French government purchased the painting, hung it in the Luxembourg Gallery and awarded Mr. Tanner the gold medal.

So impressed was an American art connoisseur by this painting that he sponsored Tanner's first trip to Africa.

The artist's reputation was made. European critics likened him to Rembrandt.

His 'Annunciation' of 1898 and 'Christ and Nicodemus', 1899, 'Two Disciples at the Tomb' and 'Disciples at Emmaus' both of 1906 are considered among the world's fine paintings.

Americanized

The First World War brought Tanner's work to a stand still. He and his wife and child escaped the Prussian armies and went to England. He did not return to the U.S.

After the war they returned to France where Tanner lived a quiet, distinguished life. His paintings brought handsome sums on the Americanized markets of post-war France, but Tanner was no longer in the mainstream of Parisienne life.

The death of his wife in 1925 tempered Tanner's production greatly but he still retained his feeling for color and his work reflected the lyrical beauty of his early style.

The works of Henry O. Tanner now hang in such distinguished galleries as the Metropolitan Museum in New York, Chicago Art Institute, the Louvre, the Luxembourg and the famous Wannamaker collection.

In France two of Tanner's paintings graced the famed walls of the Luxembourg Galleries within his own lifetime. An honor few men of any race have ever enjoyed.

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'THE RAISING OF LAZARUS'—the most honored of Mr. Tanner's paintings. The French government awarded the painting the gold medal and hung it in the Luxembourg Gallery In America Tanner is unknown.

INSIDE

- Pen Pals 2
- Mr. Bumble's new contest 3
- Cartoons, Riddles .. 4
- For Us, The Living .. 5
- History, Health, Top 10 7
- Stacey, Jan, Albertine 8