

Proposed Donation of *Builders III* by Jacob Lawrence

At today's meeting, staff will present a proposed donation to the Bellevue Art Collection by community Jerry Lee, the artwork being considered is by artist Jacob Lawrence.

Motion: A motion to recommend approving the donation of the artwork *Builders III* by the artist Jacob Lawrence and adding the artwork to the Bellevue Art Collection.

Code and bylaw support: This item is presented to the Commission because it will support the management of the public art collection. The Arts Commission is tasked with the following duties related to public art in the Bellevue Municipal Code (3.56.70):

Item F. Develop recommendations for acquiring public artwork consistent with guidelines and priorities approved by city council.

Item H. Review and make recommendations on the suitability of any work of art intended as a gift to the city.

Bellevue Art Collection Mission & Vision

Mission Statement – To be a vital platform for living artists and a source of creative inspiration for our community, excelling in representing Bellevue's unique story through art.

Vision Statement – The Bellevue Public Art Collection seeks to be a leading platform and community resource for cultural exchange and creative inspiration through art. The collection enhances the experience of Bellevue's public places, fosters community pride and belonging, raises the discourse on the defining aspects of Bellevue's civic life, and explores the diverse identities and converging cultures of our residents, creative sectors, and the interplay between nature and the urban experience.

Background

Throughout the history of the Bellevue Art Collection, the Arts Commission has voted to accept donations of artwork for various reasons, including the aesthetics of the work, relevance to the collection, availability of sites for the work, artist's resume, and others. Donated works currently in the collection include:

- Lotus by Verena Schwippert (Surrey Downs Park)
- Rock Totem by James Fitzgerald (Downtown)
- Josho #5 by Gerard Tsutakawa (City Hall), donated by Jerry and Charlene Lee
- Bridle Trails Gazebo (not an artwork but important to the Bridle Trails community)
- Simply Respect by Ashmita Gulati (Portable Works Collection)

Lee Donation

Eastside community members Jerry and Charlene Lee have proposed the donation of *Builders III*, an artwork by internationally renowned artist Jacob Lawrence. Created in 1991, this nine-color offset lithograph is an edition of 90. The last appraised value of the work was \$12,500. This would be a donation to the Bellevue Public Art Collection at no cost. If accepted, the artwork would be considered part of the portable collection, and an appropriate indoor display site would be identified.

Builders Three

Jacob Lawrence, 1991

Color Lithograph on Arches Paper AP

30" x 21 ¾" print

37" x 29" framed artwork

Estimated Value: \$12,500

About the Artist

From the Smithsonian American Art Museum:

Jacob Lawrence grew up in Harlem in the 1930s, where, despite the Depression, he found a "real vitality" among the black artists, poets, and writers in the community. He studied at the Harlem Art

Workshop and joined the "306" studio, where he met his future wife, Gwendolyn Knight. Lawrence

never completed high school but taught himself African American history, spending hours in the library researching legendary black figures and events to use in his paintings. He worked for the Works Progress Administration in the late 1930s and in 1941 was the first African American artist to be represented by a New York gallery. Lawrence created several series of paintings that documented the stories of heroes such as Harriet Tubman and John Brown. He considered his work to be celebratory and said once that his images "just deal with the social scene...They're how I feel about things." (Wheat, *Jacob Lawrence, American Painter*, 1986)

About the Artwork

From the Pennsylvania Academy of Art: This lithograph is one of several works addressing the subject of builders that Lawrence undertook from the 1970s on. "For a number of years," he related to one interviewer in 1995, "I've been working on, periodically, the theme of the builders. I like tools. It's not a series, because it's not a narrative form... To me it's a symbol of progress. It's a symbol of hope, on various levels... It's a symbol of...our capacity, the human capacity to build, to not tear down." "Builders III" shares with most of Lawrence's work a quasi-cubist, quasi-expressionist, collage-like style of presentation that simplifies its subject to dynamic essentials, that couches it in



"Builders III" by Jacob Lawrence

the most modern of idioms and yet leaves open the line of ancestry to folk traditions that for so long were the only outlet for African-American expression.

Other Details about the Artwork

Maintenance – Other than potentially reframing, this piece should require little to no maintenance for the foreseeable future.

Identified Site – Portable works, including this one, can be located in numerous locations in public areas of city facilities and do not require an identified site for donation.

Storage – This work will not require any additional paid storage. This work can be stored, if needed, on city property in secured areas while not on view.

A Note from the Donor

"I would like to formally present to Mayor Robinson and Linda Whitehead on your opening ceremony of Black History Month to encourage others to donate Art, to the City's collections. Similar to the Tsutakawa Bronze, this would be in celebration of "the employees of MG2" from Jerry & Charlene Lee. It's a great example of Jacob's work." - Jerry and Charlene Lee

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends that the commission accept the donation. The staff's review of the artwork and the artist's qualifications demonstrates that accepting this artwork into the collection would be of public benefit. This review is based on, but not limited to, the following elements:

- Aesthetic Quality: This artwork is of high quality and consistent with the level of expertise exhibited by other works in the collection.
- Relevance of the artwork to the collection's mission: This artwork explores themes relevant to current events in the region and across the nation. The underlying themes are consistent with the Council's commitment to diversity as a strength.
- Siting: The artwork will be easily sited as a 2D framed artwork.

Next Steps

If accepted, staff will work to find an appropriate indoor display location for the artwork after the current Black History exhibit concludes.

Staff Contact

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