

AGAINST THE ODDS:

*African-American Artists
and the Harmon Foundation*

Gary A. Reynolds *and*
Beryl J. Wright

with essays by

David Driskell

Clement Alexander Price

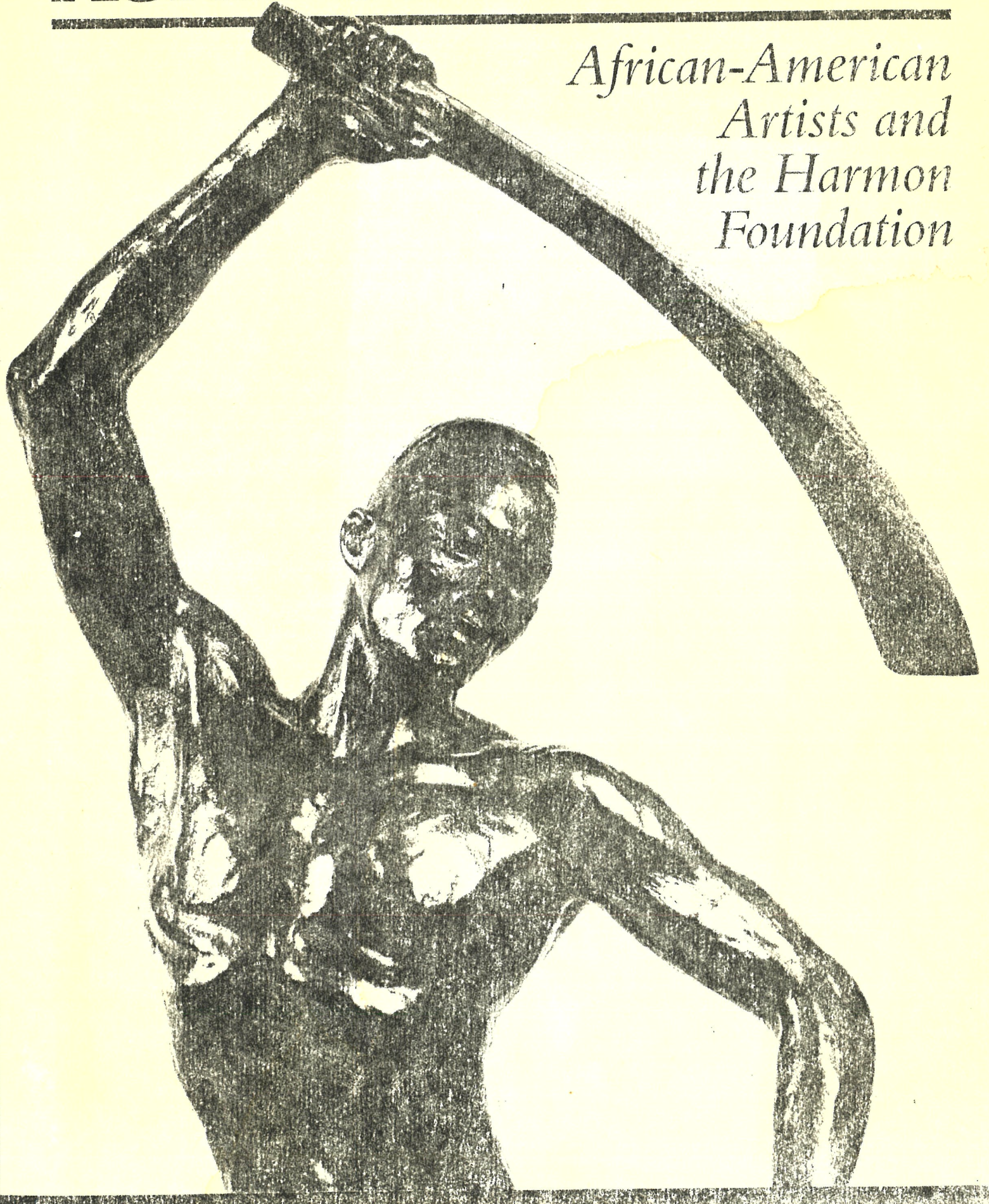
Richard J. Powell

Deborah Willis

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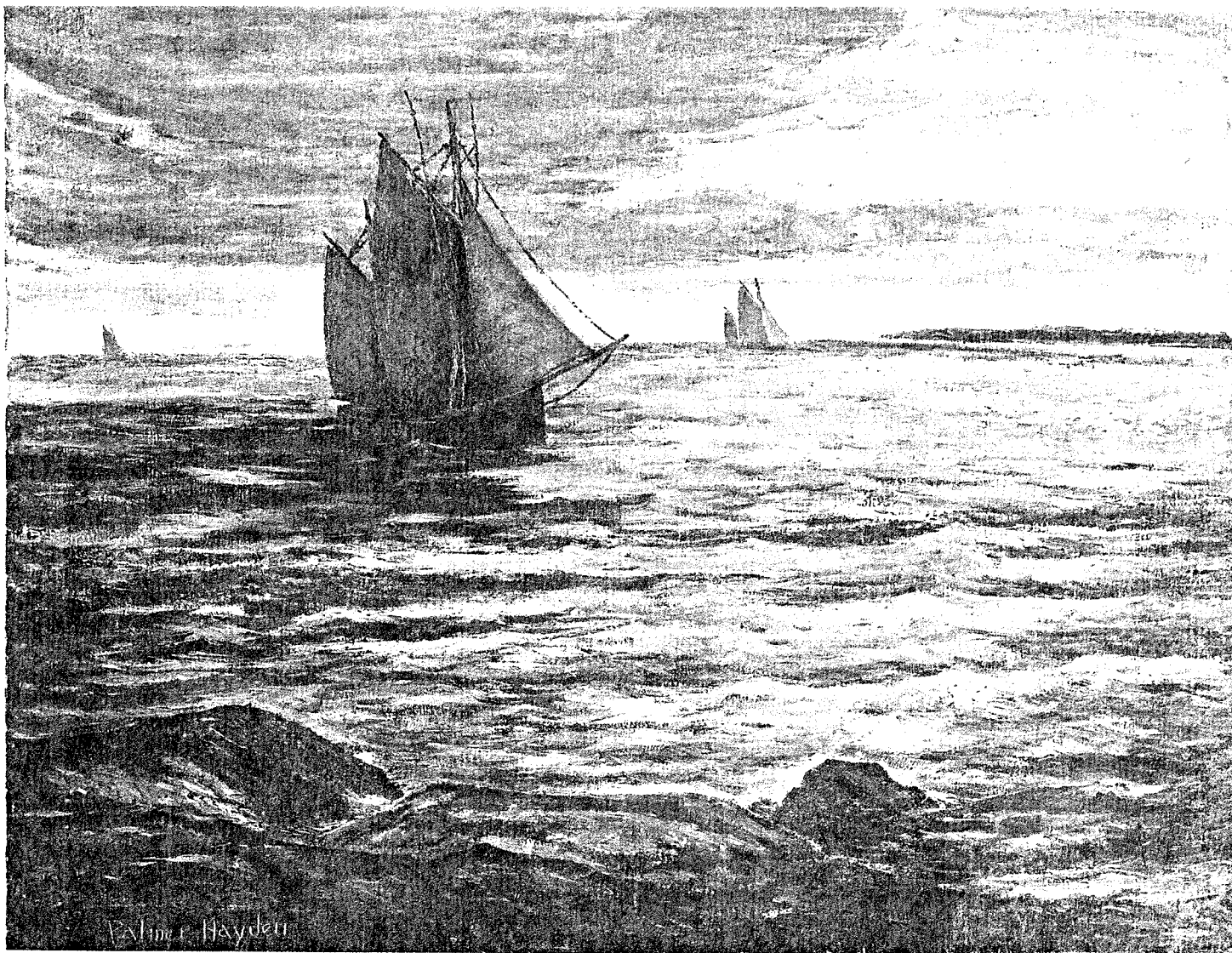


Plate XII. Palmer Hayden, *Sailing Boats*, oil on canvas, 20 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 26 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. Spelman College, Atlanta, Georgia.

PALMER HAYDEN
(PEYTON COLE HEDGEMAN)
1890–1973



Photograph courtesy of the National Archives, Washington, D.C.

HAYDEN WAS RAISED IN WIDEWATER, Virginia, and showed an early interest in sketching. He worked at a variety of odd jobs before entering the army in 1912. While there he enrolled in a correspondence course in drawing. After being discharged in 1920, Hayden settled in New York City. He worked first as a letter carrier and later as a janitor. During the 1920s, Hayden took art courses at Columbia University summer school and with Victor Perard in New York and Asa Randall at the Commonwealth Art Colony in Boothbay Harbor, Maine. After winning the Harmon Foundation's gold medal for fine arts in 1926, Hayden left for study in France, where he remained until 1932. The artist may have studied with Clivette Lefèvre in Paris. Most of his paintings from this trip are marine subjects and scenes of Paris, in addition to some depictions of African-American subjects. While in Paris, Hayden had a solo exhibition at the Bernheim-Jeune gallery and exhibited at the Salon des Tuileries. After returning to New York, the artist won the Painting Prize at the Harmon exhibition of 1933 for *Fétiche et Fleurs*. The next year he joined the easel painting division of the Public Works of Art Project, later the Works Progress Administration. After leaving the Project in 1940, Hayden devoted his art increasingly to black subjects, such as "The Ballad of John Henry" series. In later years the artist became equally well-known for scenes drawn from the streets of Harlem and the rural South. Hayden participated in numerous group exhibitions, including the annual Greenwich Village Outdoor Art Shows.

Ref: *The Many Facets of Palmer Hayden (1890–1973)*, exhibition catalogue (New York: Just Above Midtown, 1977); *Harlem Renaissance: Art of Black America* (New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem, 1987); *Echoes of Our Past: The Narrative Artistry of Palmer C. Hayden*, exhibition catalogue (Los Angeles: The Museum of African American Art, 1988).

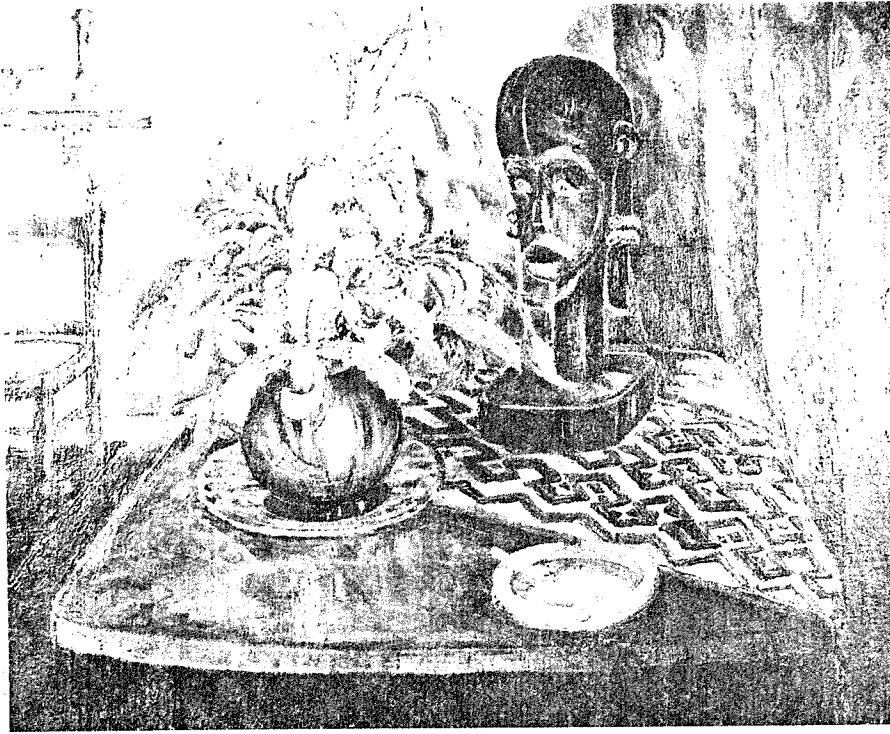


Fig. 19 Palmer Hayden, *Femme et Fleurs*, oil on canvas, Museum of Afro-American Art, Los Angeles, California. Photograph courtesy of the National Archives, Washington, D.C.

but instead used the time to re-evaluate its programs and to plan for the future. The following year it again mounted a large show at the Art Center of 107 works selected by a jury of artists and critics that included William Auerbach-Levy, Frederick V. Baker, Alon Bement, Erick Berry, Arnold Genthe, Howard Giles, James V. Herring and Theodore L. Howell. This jury was composed of many artist-educators and reflected Miss Brady's interest in directing the Foundation toward arts education projects. The etcher William Auerbach-Levy was a popular instructor of printmaking at the National Academy of Design and frequently wrote on art. Although James V. Herring began his career as a painter, he is remembered primarily as an art historian and the founder of the Howard University Gallery of Art in 1930. Alon Bement had been the Director of the Maryland Institute in Baltimore and an author of art instruction books—*Figure Construction* (1920) and *Creative Design* (1925)—before moving to New York in 1925 to direct the Art Center. (Herring and Bement also had served as judges for the Harmon Awards of 1930.) Giles was a painter and illustrator who also frequently taught. Erick Berry (Mrs. Allena C. Best) wrote and illustrated children's books, including *Black Folk Tales* and *Girls in Africa*. Arnold Genthe became the only photographer to serve as juror for the Foundation. Howard Giles wrote of the selection process:

The jury's action in judging the works . . . was influenced mainly by the interest and respect now held by all artists for the rhythm and color sense which the negro artists of past and present possess congenitally. The occasional examples in the present showing which displayed these essential qualities prompted unanimous acceptance.²⁹

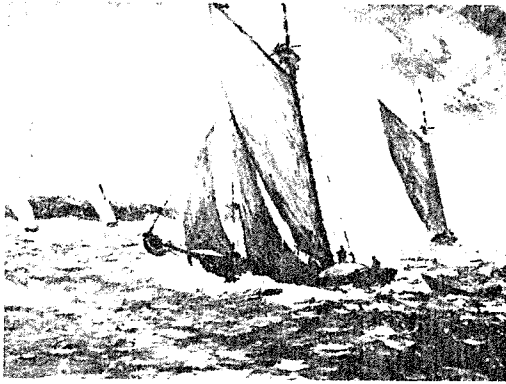


Fig. 35. Palmer Hayden, *The Schooners*, ca. 1926, oil on canvas. Location unknown. Photograph courtesy of the National Archives, Washington, D.C.

were without winners either because the judges could not find a work entered that met their requirements or because there were no works entered in a specific field. But Brady insisted on honoring a number of blacks of distinguished achievement. Countee Cullen, a writer and the son of a Harlem Baptist minister, was awarded the first prize for excellence in literature. James Weldon Johnson, another writer and a principal officer of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, received the second prize in literature. Arthur Schomburg, the Puerto Rican born bibliophile who had worked hard to help black Americans research their African past, was awarded a prize for educational excellence. C.C. Spaulding, a businessman in Durham, North Carolina, received first prize for establishing a life insurance plan for blacks. Spaulding used the award to found an educational foundation for black men and women attending North Carolina College for Negroes, now North Carolina Central University in Durham.⁹ Of all these recipients, none received the praise that Brady heaped on Spaulding.

In the fine arts category, Palmer Hayden was awarded first prize in art for his painting *The Schooners* [fig. 35]. The painting was much admired by Brady who convinced Albert A. Harvey of Boston to purchase the work for \$125. Hayden used his prize money, along with a \$3,000 grant from a patron, to pursue his studies in Paris, where he became the private pupil of Clivette Lefèvre at the École des Beaux-Arts. Hayden remained in Paris for the next six years. Upon his return to New York in 1932, he was invited by Brady to become an employee of the Harmon Foundation, a position he retained until it ceased operations.¹⁰

The second prize went to Hale A. Woodruff. The award from the Foundation combined with the money received from another patron also allowed Woodruff to travel to Europe. He resigned his job with the Y.M.C.A. in New York and sailed for Paris in 1927. He enrolled at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière and studied painting. It was there that he developed his impressionist style. Both Hayden and Woodruff exchanged letters with Brady during their stay in Paris, each giving detailed accounts of their progress in art and occasionally asking for additional funds.

In 1928, the Harmon Foundation presented its first juried exhibition in conjunction with the awards for visual artists. During the two weeks that the exhibition was on view, over 2,500 people attended. The Foundation informed visitors to the exhibition of its purposes in assembling the works.

The Harmon Foundation and the Commission on the Church and Race Relations of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America placed this exhibit before the public in the hope of accomplishing three things: creating a wider interest in the work of the Negro artist as a contribution to American culture; stimulating him to aim for the highest standards of achievement; and encouraging the general public in the purchase of his work, with the eventual purpose in view of helping the American Negro to a sounder and more satisfactory economic position in art.¹¹

For seven months following the close of the 1929 exhibition at the International House, a traveling exhibition of sixty-four works visited

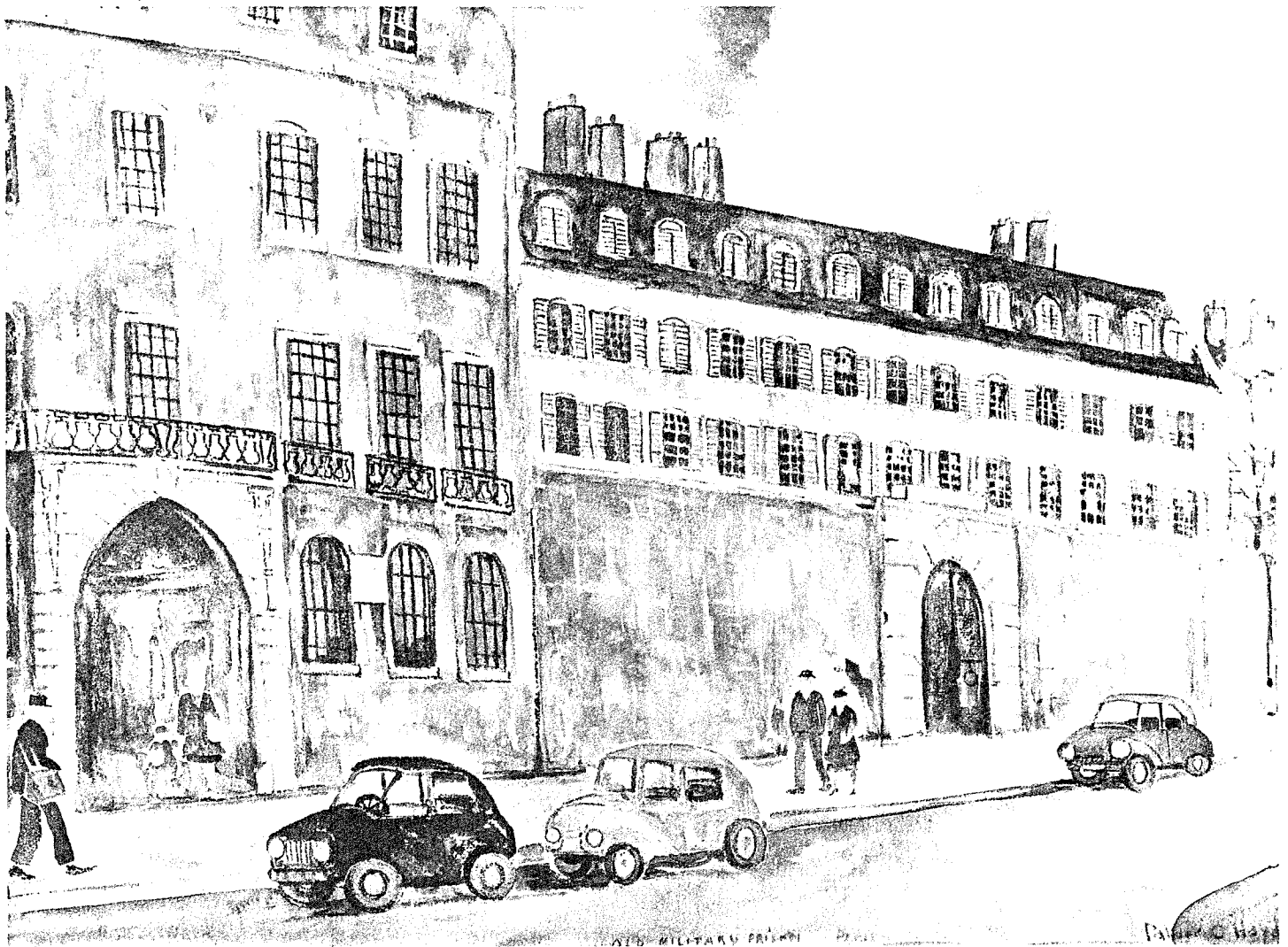


Plate 42. Palmer Hayden, *Old Military Prison - Paris*, ca. 1927-1932, watercolor on paper, 25¼ x 30 in. Clark Atlanta University Collection of Afro-American Art.

This is Payton Hedge man
painting on the street in N.Y.C.
He is painting a picture of
St. Patrick's Cathedral
on Fifth Avenue

