

Abraham Lincoln Walker

Abraham Lincoln Walker (1921 – 1993) was born in Henderson, Kentucky and moved to East St. Louis, Illinois at the age of seven. Through his early years and much of his adult life, the city was a thriving industrial and creative center, home to many artistic talents, among them, Josephine Baker, Tina Turner, Redd Foxx, Dick Gregory, Katherine Dunham, who founded the Performing Arts Training Center there, and Miles Davis, who lived just around the corner from the artist's house on Kansas Avenue.

A house painter by trade, Walker, like many self-taught artists, started out by imitating painting styles and making reproductions, working to understand basic palette and composition techniques. He leaned towards representational depictions of the neighborhood, his canvases bursting with odes to Black culture —bright colors and brushstrokes that moved with the syncopation and groove of jazz.

Much of Walker's work from the late 1960s through early 1970s features elongated and masked figures displaying ambiguous relationships and gestures, situated in desolate landscapes. His deeply affective dystopic visions vacillate between the world outside his studio, the biblical world deeply rooted in his upbringing, and, increasingly, a world of his own making. In many of his paintings from the 1970s onward, his figures become fragmented and distorted, overwhelmed by a visionary, celestial space in which faces, limbs, and other barely identified human forms are entangled in the fibrous tentacles of a living world, but fully capable of communicating their psychic bearing.

Well-ensconced in the creative community of East St. Louis, Walker participated in a handful of regional exhibitions, but he nevertheless remained somewhat aloof and enigmatic throughout his life.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2025

Abraham Lincoln Walker, Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York, NY

2024

Abraham Lincoln Walker, The ADAA Art Show, Park Avenue Armory, New York, NY

2013

Abraham Lincoln Walker: A Body of Work, 10th Street Gallery, St. Louis, MO

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2026

Afterlife, curated by Paul Laster, Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York, NY

Inventing Abstraction: Nonrepresentational Self-Taught Art, curated by Jay Gorney, SHRINE Gallery, New York, NY

Black Artists in America: From the Bicentennial to September 11, curated by Dr. Earnestine Lovelle Jenkins, Dixon Gallery, Memphis, TN; traveled to Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, CA

1995

The Mitchell Museum, Mt. Vernon, IL

The University Museum, Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville, IL

1977

Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville, IL

1976

New Dimension Club, St. Louis, MO

Cemrel's 59th Street Gallery, St. Louis, MO

1975

Organization of Ethnic Studies, Edwardsville, IL

1974

Batelle Institute, Washington State University, Seattle, WA

COLLECTIONS

High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA

Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO