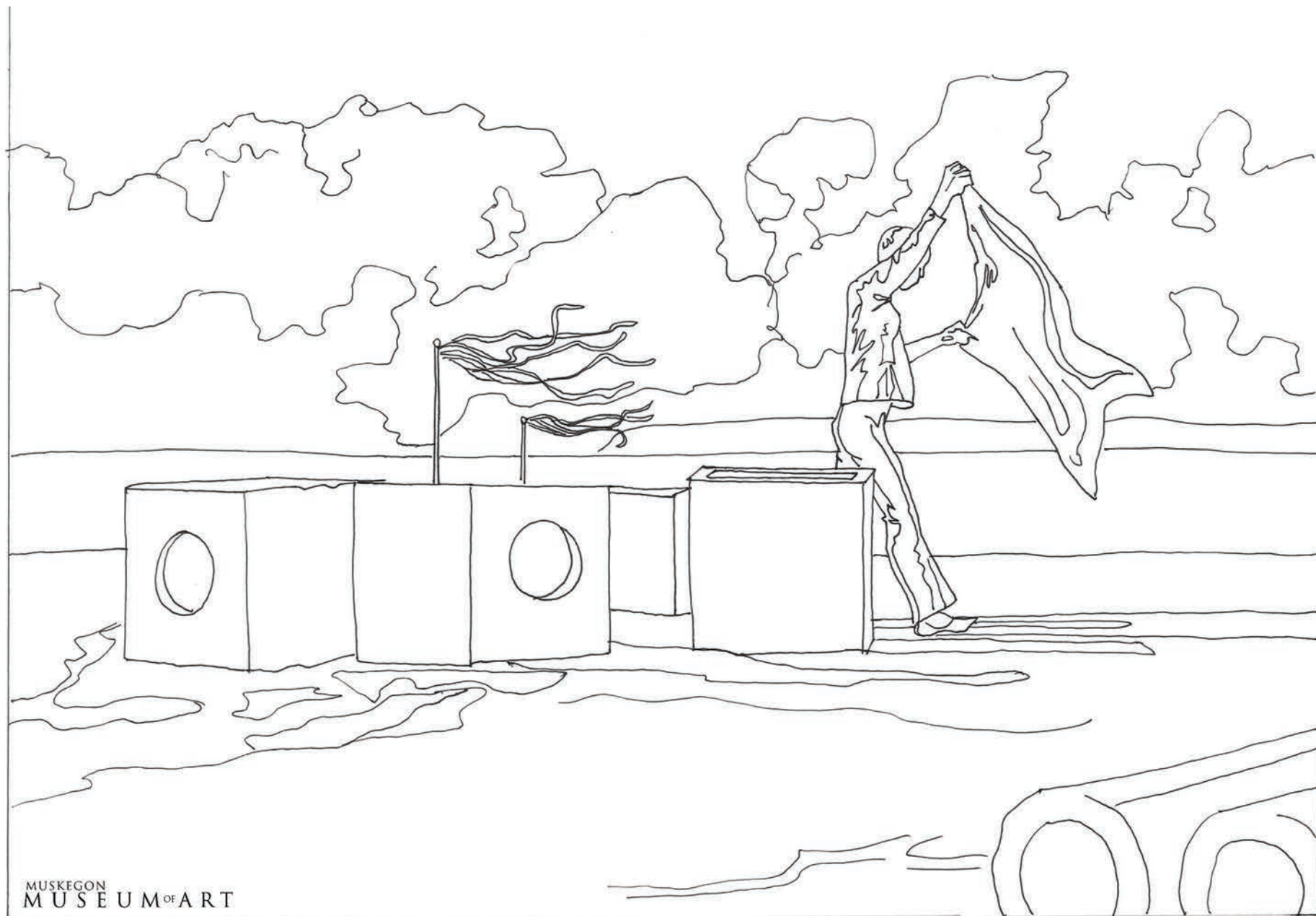


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Hughie Lee-Smith (American, 1915-1999)

Après-Midi, 1987

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Hughie Lee-Smith (American, 1915-1999)

Après-Midi

Oil on canvas, 1987

Purchased in honor of the 100th Anniversary of the Muskegon Museum of Art through the Hackley Picture Fund, the Art Acquisition Fund, a gift in honor of Margaret “Marge” Byington Potter from her friends Susy Heintz Avery, Marcie Brogan, Barbara Gattorn, Kimberly Johnson, Mary Kramer, Anne Mervenne, and Kathleen Wilbur, and a gift from Dr. Anita Herald
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Hughie Lee-Smith was one of the most important African American artists of his generation. He spent nearly two decades in Detroit in the 1940s and 1950s, and it was there that he developed his mature style—dreamlike tableaux of figures positioned within bleak landscapes, spare beach fronts, or decaying urban streets.

Lee-Smith is known for paintings depicting singular figures in stark, decaying landscapes. His work addresses feelings of isolation and seclusion, emotions he experienced as an African American as a child denied access to the neighborhood carnival and as widower in 1961. His early work focused on using realism to promote social change but as his career progressed he turned inward. “In the 1960s,” he said, “I began to lose my youthful dream of a better world — free of racism, free of the threat of instantaneous cremation of the bomb — and feed on a slow burning disillusionment. As a consequence, my work turned inward, and I began to seek the essence of it all.”

Lee-Smith studied at Wayne State University in Detroit and moved to New York in 1958. In 1963 he was elected an Associate Member of the National Academy of Design, only the second African American, after Henry Ossawa Tanner (also in the MMA’s collections), to receive the honor. His work is now held in major institutions across the U.S.

Après-Midi presents a mysterious scene. The woman raising a blanket in the spare landscape is alone and preoccupied, detached from the environment she occupies. *Après-Midi* displays the most unique characteristics that the artist established early in his career: the remote, stage-like setting; the singular figure moving out of the picture plane; the fluttering ribbons and long shadows; and the presence of incongruous objects. Lee-Smith described his vision as “a shifting back and forth between that which is patently artificial and the real.”