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. 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.

Walker's singular approach to painting was fueled by his lifelong spiritual beliefs—at one point he became an ordained minister in the Church of God in Christ—and by his personal experiences living in a city that was once a thriving industrial and cultural center but had become roiled by economic and racial tensions, including the 1968 race riots.

Much of Walker's work from the late 1960s through early 1970s features elongated and masked figures 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, otherworldly 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.

By the 1980s, his technique included applying paint with a variety of implements, including pieces of wood or plastic that would leave behind a specific texture. Or he would scrape paint away with a palette knife and deploy his own versions of frottage and decalcomania to heighten his colors' luminosity and the lyricism of his line. Increasingly fixated on exploring celestial spaces, he layered overlapping fields of color to convey emotional weight and tenacity.

Well-ensconced in the creative community of East St. Louis, Walker participated in a handful of local exhibitions, but he nevertheless remained somewhat aloof and enigmatic throughout his life. His work was reintroduced by Andrew Edlin Gallery in 2024 at the Art Show at the Park Avenue Armory in New York. A New York Times feature article by Hilarie Sheets was published several months later, concurrent with the artist's first solo show at Edlin. A solo exhibition at David Kordansky Gallery (Los Angeles) will take place from November 13 – December 19, 2026.

Walker's work is in the collections of the High Museum (Atlanta), the Nelson-Atkins Museum (Kansas City), and the Speed Art Museum (Louisville).

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2026
Abraham Lincoln Walker: After World, 1980–1991, David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

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
American Landscape Summer Show Extravaganza!, Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York, NY

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
Speed Art Museum, Louisville, KY