

# JACOB LAWRENCE



In *Street to Mbari*, Jacob Lawrence captures the flurry of a busy outdoor market in Nigeria. Shops line either side of the street while a maze of vendors awaiting discovery fills the distance. The viewer becomes part of the scene amidst a crowd of people, young and old, buying and selling. One can almost hear babies crying, chickens squawking, and people chattering as they discuss fabrics and produce. A cacophony of primary colors heightens the sense of commotion. Rolls of fabric show off different patterns and color combinations. Strips of corrugated iron in varying sizes and colors form the shops' roofs and create a visual rhythm across the top of the painting.

Lawrence first studied African art as a young man in New York during the Harlem Renaissance. In 1962 he traveled to Nigeria on an invitation to exhibit his work. In describing the trip, he said, "I became so excited then by all the new visual forms I found in Nigeria—unusual color combinations, textures, shapes, and the dramatic effect of light—that I felt an overwhelming desire to come back as soon as possible to steep myself in Nigerian culture so that my paintings, if I'm fortunate, might show the influence of the great African artistic tradition." It was during a second trip there that Lawrence completed *Street to Mbari*.