



HIRSCHL & ADLER GALLERIES

JOSEPH "JOE" JONES (American, 1909–1963)

Demonstration, 1934

Oil on Masonite, 48 1/8 x 72 1/8 in.

Signed and dated: (at center right):

Joe Jones / x24 [illeg.] Ano / 1934



RECORDED: Edward Alden Jewell, "EX-HOUSE PAINTER IN ART SHOW HERE: Canvasses by Joe Jones of St. Louis Reveal Genuineness of His Esthetic Response: 'The New Deal' A Subject: A Refreshing originality Marks Self-Taught Artist's Work at the A. C. A. Gallery", *New York Times*, May 22, 1935, p. 17 // Stephen Alexander, "Art: Joe Jones" *New Masses*, May 28, 1935, p. 9 // Lewis Mumford, "The Art Galleries: In Capitulation," *New Yorker*, June 1, 1935, p. 74 // "Housepainter," *Time Magazine* June 3, 1935, p. 33 // Archibald MacLeish, "U.S. Art: 1935," *Fortune* XII, December 1935, p. 69 // Andrew Walker, ed., *Joe Jones: Radical Painter of the American Scene*, exhib. cat., (St. Louis: St. Louis Art Museum, 2011), p. 47 // Francis Booth, *Comrades in Art: Revolutionary Art in America 1926–1939* (self-published, 2012), p. 125 illus. as "We Demand" [sic]

EXHIBITED: A.C.A Gallery, New York, May 19–June 1, 1935, *Joe Jones* // (possibly) A.C.A. Gallery, New York, July 14–August 31, 1935, *Joe Jones*

EX COLL.: the artist; private collection, until the present

It is always exciting when an important and seminal work, previously cited in the literature as "location unknown," resurfaces. That is the case with the present work by Joe Jones, *Demonstration*. Jones, who began his working life as a house painter in Saint Louis, Missouri, burst upon the New York art world in the spring of 1935 with an attention-getting one-man show at the A.C.A Galleries in Greenwich Village. (The American Contemporary Art Gallery was founded in 1932 by Herman Baron, Stuart Davis, and Yasuo Kuniyoshi. Still in existence today, it has long been known by its initials A.C.A.) Edward Alden Jewell reviewed the show for *The New York Times*, praising the "deftness, the refreshing originality of ... [Jones's] work" (quoted in Herman Baron, "History of the ACA Gallery,"

typescript copy, p. 31, Archives of American Art, reel D304, frame 597). Later in the year, Archibald MacLeish, writing in *Fortune*, summed up the critical reaction:

With his first New York show, at the end of last spring, Joe Jones, aged twenty-six, pretty much stole the season. And he stole it not by any sets of flukes or startling specialties but because he generally impressed critics ... as having fully digested a lot of good people, and as having more scope, more vitality, more fecundity and more promise as well as more mastery than most artists a decade his senior (p. 69).

Herman Baron, the A.C.A Gallery's owner, who also supported such socially aware artists as William Gropper and Philip Evergood, was emphatic about the importance of the show: "As a result of the exhibition, social content definitely was established as a dominant factor in art.... Social art finally had won its battle" (Baron, Reel D304 frames 600–01).

Demonstration is major work from that 1935 début show. It reveals Jones at the peak of his early style, a self-taught Midwesterner strongly influenced in construction and palette by his study of the old masters. He was also a newly minted Communist, dedicated to portraying in his art the reality of America as he saw it. In the turbulent years of the Great Depression, Jones, a bona-fide son of the American working class, produced a body of angry, impassioned, political canvases and murals, interspersed with straightforward views of southern and midwestern agricultural life. Jones was quoted as saying: "I'm not interested in painting pretty pictures to match pink and blue walls. I want to paint things that will knock holes in walls" (quoted in William F. Woo, "Softening of a Hard-Boiled Artist," in *Everyday Magazine*, *Saint Louis Post-Dispatch*, May 5, 1933, p. L3).

The early facts of Jones' career are sketchy, and deliberately so. The artist was a self-mythologizing young man in the process of reinventing himself. In 1933, when he sent a picture, *Landscape*, to the Sixteen Cities Exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, he described himself tersely: "Born Saint Louis, 1909, self-taught." Herman Baron filled in the outline of Jones's early years in his catalogue essay for the 1937 A.C.A. show (Archives of American Art, reel D56). Jones deliberately presented himself to the art world as a genuine working-class hero. He had the credentials to prove it. He was born the youngest of five children born to a one-armed Saint Louis house painter, a Welsh immigrant, and his German American wife. When Jones was ten years old, he spent time in a Missouri reformatory, the result of official



displeasure with his early work as a graffiti artist. He finished his elementary school education and hopped a freight car to California and back, arrested once for vagrancy in Pueblo, Colorado. Home in Saint Louis, he appeared to settle down, joining his father on the job. But Jones was restless and found himself pulled, in late adolescence, toward a more exalted use of brush and pigment. Seeking out a local group of struggling artists who constituted Saint Louis's "Little Bohemia," he shared studio space and mutual encouragement until he was able to finance his own modest studio in a vacant garage.

Jones's first works were still lifes, landscapes, and evocative portraits of family and friends. These subjects all shared the virtue of being inexpensive and available on demand. He certainly could not afford to hire models. He painted himself, his father, his mother, and later, his wife (see Andrew Walker, *Joe Jones: Radical Painter of the American Scene*, respectively: *Self Portrait of the Artist at Age Nineteen* [1928–29], p. 124 plate 1; *My Father* [1932], p. 142 plate 27; *My Mother* [1932], p. 143 plate 28; and *Freda* [1931], p. 133 plate 14). In December 1930, when he was twenty-one years old, Jones married Freda Sies, a modern dancer and political activist four years his senior. Early marriage does not seem to have inhibited Jones's social life, if there is any veracity to this gossipy anecdote referencing an early Saint Louis patron:

Jones ... was fond of a young lady from a wealthy family. The girl's parents, however, disapproved of him. For one thing, he was married; for another, he was an artist. One day Jones called the girl's mother and invited her to one of his exhibitions. The mother coldly refused. Jones then told her rather emphatically that it would be to her best interest to attend. The woman consented, and when she arrived at the show, she found nearly every painting was of her daughter—nude. She bought them all.



By 1933, Jones began to attract serious local attention with a one-man show at the Artists' Guild of Saint Louis. Among the twenty-five paintings exhibited, one *River Front* (private collection, formerly Hirschl and Adler Galleries) was chosen to illustrate the feature notice of Jones's show in *The Art Digest* (February 15, 1933, p. 9). Shortly before the Artists' Guild show, Jones's work had caught the eye of a young surgeon, Dr. Robert Elman, who purchased some pictures and organized a group of would-be patrons who pledged to provide the young artist with a monthly retainer in return for works on hand. Elman's group was officially named the "Co-operative Art Society." Unofficially it was the "Joe Jones Club." Jones was an active member of the St. Louis artists' community, most especially its bohemian precinct. He was a proud modernist, a founding member, in 1931, of the "New Hat" group, in cheeky opposition to the "old hat" art of the conservative mainstream art establishment.

The summer of 1933 proved a turning point in Jones's life. Funded by a loyal supporter, Mrs. Elizabeth Green, Jones, Freda, and Green set off on a road trip east. In Washington, D.C., they visited the Corcoran Gallery of Art, the Freer Gallery (Smithsonian Institution), the Library of Congress, and Mount Vernon. After this whirlwind tour of art history and Americana, they proceeded to New York where they toured museums and galleries, including a stop at The New School for Social Research with its important contemporary murals by fellow Missourian Thomas Hart Benton and the politically engaged Mexican artist, José Clemente Orozco. Jones and Freda spent June, July, and August in the artist's colony at Provincetown, Massachusetts, returning home via Detroit and Diego Rivera's *Detroit Industry* mural at the Detroit Institute of Fine Arts.

While Elizabeth Green is said to have hoped that in Provincetown Jones would hone his technical skills under the tutelage of Charles Hawthorne or Richard Miller, and produce canvasses showing "boats, fishing smacks, and other subjects" (Janeen Turk, "Joseph Jones: A Conservative Modern in St. Louis: St. Louis Artists' Show Opens," *St. Louis Globe Democrat*, October 30, 1938 [as quoted in Walker, p. 53 n. 79]), Jones departed from the script. Instead of seeking out conservative teachers, he found a vibrant circle of left-wing intellectuals, writers, and artists who spent their time reading Marx and applying his writings to the situation in America. Jones's reaction to the tradition-bound culture of New England was, as he told an interviewer for the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, "Class consciousness ... that's what I got of my trip to New England. Those people [New Englanders] are like the Chinese—ancestor worshipers. They made me realize where I belong" (September 21, 1933). Jones's visceral response to the social stratification he observed in New England was to double down on his working-class identity. He returned to St. Louis a loudly self-proclaimed Communist. His newly explicit politics spelled trouble with some of his local supporters. Jones's middle-class backers withdrew their support, partly doubtless because of Jones's politics, but also, in his case, inextricably bound to his flamboyantly provocative, and confrontational personal style.

In December 1933, Jones established a free art class for unemployed students in the same Old Courthouse in St. Louis where the Dred Scott case had been argued and whose plaza had been the site

of slave auctions. At the same time as Jones's free school, the St. Louis Art League was held with paid classes. Focusing on the art of social protest, with a studio decorated with Soviet posters, Jones's school lasted for a little over a year before local authorities evicted it from the Court House. In addition to its politics and unorthodox teaching methods, it certainly did not help that the school welcomed a large contingent of African American students in a time of rigid racial segregation. Under Jones tutelage, the class produced a 16 by 37-foot chalk pastel on board mural, *Social Unrest in St. Louis* (now destroyed; see M. Melissa Wolfe, "Joe Jones, Worker-Artist," in Walker, p. 35 fig. 3 illus.). Mural painting held no terror for the former housepainter, comfortable with large expanses of wall. His breakthrough commission in St. Louis, at the end of 1931 had been a mural celebrating the industrial and commercial strength of St. Louis for a local radio station, KMOX. That mural, determinedly optimistic in the face of crushing economic depression, celebrated St. Louis's industrial and commercial strength in a modernist style (now destroyed; see Bryna R. Campbell, "Chronology," in Walker, p. 181 fig. 4 illus.). When Jones returned to mural painting in late 1933, his understanding of the world was quite different. The school's Courthouse mural, composed by Jones, contained vignettes of contemporary St. Louis chosen to illustrate political points. Jones had seen the use of self-contained episodes juxtaposed to create a visual narrative in the murals he visited in the East. Closer to home, it was a favored compositional device used by Thomas Hart Benton (1889–1975), Missouri's famous native-son artist (see, for example, *Deep South* [1930], in Walker, p. 39 fig. 5 illus.). As early as October 1933, returning from Provincetown to find that his Communist affiliation didn't sit well with local supporters, Jones had written to Elizabeth Green, "I sincerely believe that I am as far as I can go in St. Louis" (as quoted by Janeen Turk, "Joseph Jones: A Conservative Modern in St. Louis,"



in Walker, pp. 29, 31 n. 86). At the end of 1934, seeking wider horizons, he placed three oil paintings in high profile East Coast group shows: *American Justice*, a searing anti-lynching picture, at the Worcester Art Museum in Massachusetts (Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio; see Walker, p. 146 no. 31 illus. in color); *Road to the Beach*, a Provincetown landscape (Museum of Modern Art, New York; see Warner, p. 145 plate 30); and *Wheat* at the Whitney Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting (see Walker, p. 57 fig. 2 illus.). These paintings advertised both his technical skill and his facility with a variety of subject matter.

Jones's domestic life had also reached a breaking point. In December 1934 Freda Jones was arrested for "disturbing the peace" at a political demonstration in front of St. Louis City Hall. But shared politics couldn't save the marriage. The couple separated and soon divorced. Jones moved back to his parents' house. It was clearly time for a change. He returned to New York, where he immersed himself

in museums and galleries while he looked for New York representation. His painting, by this time, was strongly political. Edith Halpert's Downtown Gallery and The Rehn Gallery both turned him down. He contributed a work to an anti-lynching exhibition at the A.C.A. Gallery and that led to a full-scale affiliation and the groundbreaking 1935 show. Herman Baron appreciated Jones's talent but understood both where he came from and where he wanted to go. Looking back, Baron wrote that the artist "as a young boy ... dreamed of riches when he grew up; success to him meant acceptance into the upper classes" (Herman Baron, Archives of American Art, reel D304, frame 602). Jones did not remain in New York. He returned to St. Louis in April and never saw his show at A.C.A. He spent August and September 1935 documenting the hard life of Arkansas rural laborers for a mural at Commonwealth College in Mena, Arkansas. Commonwealth College was a socialist school that served as a training hub for organizers for the Southern Tenant Farmers Union. It closed in 1940, but the mural, *The Struggle in the South*, 9 x 44 ft., was, improbably, saved, and has recently been restored. It now occupies pride of place at the [University of Arkansas Little Rock Downtown](#) campus in the River Market District.

In the latter part of the 1930s, Jones's subjects changed, becoming less explicitly political and more concerned with workers and African Americans, mostly rural. In 1936, he executed a commercial commission for a mural in a downtown St. Louis taproom. The five-panel work titled (appropriately for its location) *The Story of the Grain* was a success and part of the emphasis on Midwest rural-themed works that characterized the year 1936. In January 1936, Jones had another exhibit in New York, "Paintings of Wheat Fields," this time at the Walker Gallery. Although Herman Baron cooperated with this show, it was a notable move for Jones. Maynard Walker founded his gallery in 1935, capitalizing on his relationships with Thomas Hart Benton, John Steuart Curry, and Grant Wood. Clearly, Jones wanted to be seen in the same company. In late 1936, Jones sent [Our American Farms](#) (see Walker, p. 156 plate 42 illus. in color) to the Whitney Museum's Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting. An apocalyptic vision of the ecological disaster of drought, the picture was the result of Jones's six-week employment as a Special Skills Artist in July and August 1936 by the Resettlement Agency, a New Deal initiative to move farmers from dust bowl holdings to areas with better soil. *Our American Farms* was one of eight works the Whitney Museum purchased from the show for its permanent collection.

In 1936, Jones applied for a Guggenheim Fellowship for art, which he was awarded for 1937. During this time his political activities included speaking, writing, and demonstrating. He was, however, critical of artists who allowed their political work to interfere with their commitment to producing art. He was also involved in a serious relationship with Jane Kauffman Wood (1907–2004), a St. Louis socialite and a committed socialist who was still organizing tenants in Manhattan's Chelsea neighborhood when she died at the age of ninety-seven. From 1937 through 1941, Jones executed five federally-sponsored post office murals in Magnolia, Arkansas (1937–38); Charleston, Missouri (1938–39); Anthony, Kansas (1939); Seneca, Kansas (1939–40); and Dexter, Missouri (1940–41) (see

Andrew Walker and Janeen Turk, “Joe Jones’s Treasury Department Murals,” in Walker, pp. 117–21). According to Walker and Turk, “The murals he produced satisfied his personal and political perspectives through his choice of subject that promoted the nobility of workers and their labor” (p. 117). Four represented wheat harvests, while the fifth showed a corn harvest. Throughout this period, he exhibited widely, including one man shows at the A.C.A. Gallery in 1937, 1938, 1939, and 1940.

The 1940s presented a stark contrast to the preceding decade, politically, economically, and, for Jones, personally. A war economy replaced a decade of financial depression. After the disastrous Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939, Soviet Russia and the American Communist Party were firm allies of America during World War II. Jones had a history of close relationships, both professional and personal, with women from the highest echelons of St. Louis society. In 1940, his relationship with Grace Adams Mallinckrodt (1918–2002) burst into headlines in St. Louis when a private investigator discovered the two in Jones’s cottage in Croton-on-Hudson, New York. Mallinckrodt was the young wife of Henry E. Mallinckrodt, son of the president of the Mallinckrodt Chemical Company. The Mallinckrodt family was among the wealthiest and most socially prominent families in St. Louis. Grace Adams, an Albany, New York, debutante met Henry Mallinckrodt when he was a student at Harvard and the two married in 1937. Jones met Mrs. Mallinckrodt in 1939 when “she posed for him” (“Joe Jones Named in Mallinckrodt Divorce Charge: St. Louis Artist at Bungalow, Woman Detective Says at Hearing,” *The St. Louis Star and Times*, June 14, 1940). The sensational divorce trial named Jones as co-respondent. The scandal marked the end of Jones’s career as an *enfant terrible* and certainly the end of Jones’s residence in St. Louis. The couple married, and eventually moved to Morristown, New Jersey where they lived quietly, raising a family of four children. Jones served as a combat artist for *Life* Magazine during World War II. His art lost its anger and its political edge, as he moved away from the broad handling associated with American Scene and Social Realism and toward a spare, delicate, and linear style influenced by Japanese art, as well as an Impressionist-inspired landscape style. In the postwar period, he painted coastal landscapes of New Jersey and Bermuda and established a commercial career producing advertising images, magazine illustrations, and murals for corporate clients. He died of a heart attack in 1963 in Morristown, New Jersey, the prosperous and genteel community where he lived and supplemented his free-lance income with steady work teaching art in local private boys’ schools. It was a long way from his rough-and-tumble beginnings.

Demonstration is a product of a brilliant but limited period in Jones’s early career: between the time he found Communism in the summer of 1933 and his turn to more regionalist subjects in mid-1935. These were the pictures exhibited in the first A.C.A. show, politically engaged and reflecting the positions of the American Communist Party. The closer look at the iconography of *Demonstration* reveals some of these. In the left foreground a poster with the familiar logo of the blue eagle, the



symbol of the National Recovery Act (the original NRA) is posted to the front of a roofless abandoned worker's home. Inside is a crude table and chair abandoned together with the remnant of a simple meal. The poster carries the slogan, bitterly ironic under the circumstances, "we do our part." In 1934, the Communist Party opposed New Deal programs, regarding them as band-aid attempts to shore up capitalism while giving government overreaching power over people tending toward fascism. (If that seems counter-intuitive now, it is worth remembering that the Nazi Party in Germany was officially named the National Socialist German Workers Party.) The NRA had the strong support of St. Louis's municipal government, which had sponsored, in August of 1933, a massive parade through downtown St. Louis in support of the program, with the mayor leading on a chestnut horse and participation by business, civic, and military organizations. The streets were lined with spectators. Jones's demonstration is different. The marchers carry banners urging "Workers of the World Unite," "Fascism Means Hunger," "Don't Starve. Fight, and "Smash the War Makers." This last, in 1934, also seems curious. The explanation lies in the fact that from 1929 until 1935, the Communist Party line reflected the Soviet Union fears that capitalist and fascist governments were arming to invade Russia and undo the Revolution. Given the foreign policy of the major powers in the 1920s, this was not an unreasonable fear. By 1935, however, the Russians realized that the enemy was more precisely German fascism and not the social democrats in Europe and America. As Melissa Wolfe describes it:

In August 1935, the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern initiated the phase commonly known as the Popular Front (it would later be called the Democratic Front). The rhetoric of proletarianism and revolution—the call for art as a weapon—was abandoned, and a generalized focus on "the people" replaced class consciousness. The party also turned away from the combative, polemical position it had maintain in relation to other leftist systems such as the Socialist Party and New Deal programs. Like the *New Masses* editors who now asked illustrators to "play down any signs of aggressive radicalism," Jones's art changed in accord with his party (in Walker, pp. 47–80).

The pitiful group of hungry garbage foragers in the right foreground were also revisited in another Jones painting, also in the 1935 A.C.A. show called *Garbage Eaters* (now lost). At the center left, workers lean out of what appears to be factory windows, raising their fists in solidarity with the demonstrators. The moral is clear. Foraging through trash for food scraps is the alternative to seizing the initiative and demonstrating. A water tower just visible at the top right shows the letters "STEN." This is a reference to the successful communist-led strike at the Funsten Nut Company in May 1933. That strike resulted in a stirring victory for the workers, largely African American women. The background landscape of *Demonstration* sketches in the chief characteristics of countryside beyond

St. Louis. Corn and wheat fields and forest stretch into the distance, punctuated by farm buildings and a lone factory.



Demonstration is a picture that could only have been painted in a brief window of historical time. Although Joe Jones left Herman Baron's A.C.A. Gallery for Associated American Artists (AAA) around 1942, Baron continued to consider him a friend and protégé. As with many artists, writers, and intellectuals of the 1930s who traveled in the Communist sphere, Jones gradually moved away from its ideology. By 1938, he told Joe Selby of the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, "My active political life is almost negligible" ("Joe Jones, Who Began as House Painter, Hailed as Promising Artist," September 11, 1938). If there is a sharp edge to Herman Baron's observation about Jones's aspirations for social acceptance, there is also more than a dollop of truth. Jones enjoyed early renown and success both for his social art and for his regionalist images. He embraced his Midwest identity and, like Thomas Hart Benton, enjoyed a successful career as a muralist, painting post office walls, and later, American Export Line cruise ship dining rooms. If Freda was the rabble-rousing wife of Jones's youth, his second wife, Grace Adams Mallinckrodt, was very much the companion of his maturity. When Jones's later career moved in the direction of magazine illustration, his work became a mainstay of conservative Luce publications like *Time* and *Life*. This was a world away from Jones's use of fine art as polemic in paintings like *Demonstration* and others, which catapulted him to the forefront of the New York art scene in 1935.