

F.L. SPELLMON

F. L. “Doc” Spellmon  
The life and works of an  
African American artist

Robert H. Banks and Andrea Marshall  
Banks Fine Art, LLC.

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Dallas, TX

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# Table of Contents

Introduction by Robert H. Banks.....	7
Early Life and Education .....	8
Career and Works.....	10
“An enigma and then a dilemma”: Folk art, fine art, and "Doc".....	19
Masks and Figures.....	22
Rural Life, Community and Family.....	30
Buffalo Soldiers.....	42
Religion.....	46
Road to Freedom.....	54
Works Cited.....	66
Co-Author's Note.....	70
About the Authors.....	71

# Introduction

"Whatever you do, do it so it shines" - Booker T. Washington

What is important to understand about F.L. "Doc" Spellmon is that he was first and foremost a storyteller. He saw life as an epic tale in need of telling, which he achieved through his distinctive and lively artworks as well as his whimsical disposition.

A motto he picked up from the beloved and influential Booker T. Washington and proceeded to implement in his art was "Whatever you do, do it so it shines." And shine it does. What initially appear to be simple, "feel-good" paintings and mixed media works reveal more serious sentiments. Specific themes of everyday life – family, community, and religion – as well as broader themes of culture – African American history, the innate curiosity about the past and a sense of heritage – appear and reappear in Spellmon's works. In so doing, Spellmon's works are documentations of both the emotions and values making up the human condition and particular historical and current events. The two meld together to create a common theme of the *folk*, or the people.

In this way, Spellmon was the epitome of the "folk artist," whether he favored that title or not. His work is of the people and for the people. It is about the essence of life, the shiniest subject of all.

- Robert H. Banks  
Banks Fine Art, LLC.

## Early Life and Education



A beaming Spellmon in the 1990s. He was known for his energy and cheer.



Spellmon's portrait of his parents, James and Janie.

*Mom and Dad – Rays of Light*  
mixed media on board

African American folk artist Fronzell Lincoln “Doc” Spellmon was born on February 12, 1925 in Jefferson, Texas to working parents Reverend James W. Spellmon and Janie Spellmon, the owner of multiple businesses. By all accounts, he attended school in the Henderson Public School District before moving with his family to Shreveport, Louisiana and eventually returning to Texas and attending Henderson High School in Henderson, Texas.

His father’s occupation as a minister greatly influenced Spellmon, who recalled that he “spent a lot of...time drawing in [his] father’s study, copying pictures out of his books, especially the Bible and his religious books.” In his father’s book-filled study the young Spellmon was exposed to Biblical epics, moralizing fables and timeless lessons. They lit a fire within Spellmon, igniting his interest and cultivating his curiosity about the world around him. In rural Texas, a love of art was born, and, in Spellmon’s words he just “never outgrew it.”

On May 28, 1942 in a recruitment office in Dallas, 17-year-old Spellmon enlisted in the U.S. Navy after the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor and the United State’s entry into World War II. In 1943 he worked as a Steward’s Mate 1st Class, serving meals in the officers’ mess, on the USS Capelin.

In 1945 he was relocated to the USS LST-294, which saw action in the Europe-Africa-Middle-East theater and had previously been in the first wave of the D-Day landings at Omaha Beach in June 1944. The ship earned a battle star for its service during the war.

Following his service, he returned to Texas where his journey as an artist and a life-long student began. Spellmon graduated from Bishop College in Marshall, Texas with Bachelor of Science and Bachelor of Arts degrees before continuing his studies at the Butera School of Fine Arts in Boston, Massachusetts and in 1953 the Kansas City Art Institute, of which Jackson Pollack was an alumnus.



The USS LST-294, aboard which Spellmon served during his service in the Navy in World World II.



## Career and Works

Spellmon continued his career as a middle school teacher in the Caddo Parish School System of Shreveport for seven years before joining the United States Air Force (USAF) in 1956 for which he served as a Strategic Illustrator and traveled around the world.

That same year, Spellmon married Mercedes Phytalion, a Johnson Elementary School teacher. Together they had three children, Mercedes (called “Terri”), Tonya, and Terence. Terri was a Miss Black San Antonio and Tonya became an interior designer and later the Reverend Dr. Spellmon after completing seminary. Terence was a spelling champion at Holy



Spellmon in uniform with the Air Force.

Cross High School. In 1963 Spellmon retired from the Air Force and the family moved to San Antonio where he worked at St. Gerard Catholic High School as an Art Teacher in the Graphic Arts Department and a club sponsor.

From 1979 to 1984 Spellmon returned to service with the USAF, this time stationed in San Antonio at the Lackland Air Force Base, the only base for all non-prior-service Airmen enlisted for basic training. The training at Lackland AFB includes instruction for developing professional and technical skills as well as leisure activities such as pottery, painting, printmaking, and instrument lessons. Spellmon found his niche as an Arts and Crafts Instructor in the Hobby Shop.

Even while working in the USAF Art Program, Spellmon found time to firmly establish himself in the San Antonio

and Austin art scenes by reaching out to the southern Texas community. In 1969 Spellmon founded and directed the Black Art Studio Ltd. and the Black Art Studio Gallery in San Antonio; in 1983, he founded the Southwest Ethnic Art Society, now named the San Antonio Ethnic Art Society. He simultaneously continued his studies at St. Mary's University in San Antonio, enrolling in August 1978 and receiving a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy in May 1982.



*Panorama of a Baptism on Cane River,*  
Clementine Hunter

In 1984, Spellmon retired for a second time from the USAF and devoted himself entirely to his art. Reviewers and collectors of his works likened him to Jackson Pollack, Clementine Hunter and Grandma Moses, among other well-known artists. In a 1986 San Antonio Express News article, Spellmon said “If I had to pick out the artists I really admire it would be that baldheaded cat, Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), and that Frenchman, Edgar Degas (1834-1917).”



*Bauern, Plaudernd,* Ernst Ludwig  
Kirchner

While many wanted to label Spellmon's works as simply “folk art,” others, including himself, rejected the term and the categorization that came with it. San Antonio Express News writer Dan R. Goddard concluded that Spellmon's work “[preserved] the urgency and integrity of folk art” but that “his ability to draw the human figure distinguishes his work from that of a naïve folk artist.” The flattened background planes so often present in Spellmon's work

may appear to simplify the form but his figures, “well modeled and rounded, alive with details and nuances of character,” reveal a skillful control of the brush, a mastery of the materials, and a profound intellect guiding the artist's hand.



*Landscape near Chateau,*  
Maurice Vlaminck



*Going to Church,* William H. Johnson

Spellmon's bright palette and loose brush strokes recall the Fauvism art of Maurice Vlaminck. His scenes of community, family, and religion also bear similarities to William H. Johnson's works.

Spellmon's bold outlining, rapid brushstrokes, and brilliant colors recall the works of Fauvism artists, such as Maurice Vlaminck. “Jazzy, yet sentimental,” as a bulletin for the Baltimore-based art consulting, curating, and collecting firm Cognoscenti Inc. aptly noted, Spellmon's art also evokes elements of William H. Johnson's works. Thematically, both artists sought to depict the lives of black Americans and, as Spellmon stated, to “[document] the hidden heritage of Blacks in the rural South.” According to Spellmon, a friend of his told him “You missed slavery by an inch, so you better be independent. Paint your own life. Paint like a black man.”

The late 1980s were incredibly busy and fruitful years for Spellmon, who exhibited works in at least 19 shows between 1986 and 1989. With great rapidity he produced work after work, experimenting with technique, media, and motifs. Friend and local patron Aaronetta Hamilton Pierce wrote “He covered his canvases with vibrant color and design and used buttons, gemstones, glitter and other found objects to enliven his compositions,” echoing his “lively

personality.” These bold colors and his figures’ sweeping gestures characterized much of his work, making his scenes buzz with energy and motion. Intrigued by traditional African art, particularly masks, Spellmon painted his own variations, playing with strong outlines, geometric forms, and never losing his signature bright reds and greens. He also depicted tribal dances, with sinuous dancers’ limbs conveying the fluid movements of the rhythmic rites.



Jacob Lawrence's paintings, like *Confrontation on the Bridge*, above, depict the struggles facing African Americans from slavery to the Civil Rights Movement and beyond.

With his strong sense of curiosity piqued, Spellmon took on the role of researcher as he sought to learn more about his own background and heritage. In Goddard’s 1986 San Antonio Express-News article, Spellmon noted he did “a lot of research on black history,” focusing especially on “how a people’s art reflects their philosophy.” Like Jacob Lawrence, he often depicted revolutionary figures in black history, such as Frederick Douglass and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Both also drew inspiration from the bravery and strength of everyday African Americans. Their art educates future generations and reminds Americans of a turbulent past which cannot be forgotten.



*Confronted*, F.L. Spellmon

Not only did his work, both on and off of the canvas, satisfy his own curiosity, they satisfied the wishes of a society which had raised demand on African American art and art focusing on black history. One of his greatest achievements was his inclusion in the Regional Black



*The Banjo Lesson*, Henry O. Tanner

Artists Exhibition commemorating Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday and Black History Month in 1986. The show was hosted at the Texas State Treasury Office in Austin and officially opened by Texas State Treasurer Ann Richards.

In 1987 alone he had five shows, three of which were sponsored by the Black Arts Alliance (BAA), which he actively participated in. He showed in Austin at the Texas Black Artists Exhibit, the Southwestern Bell-BAA "Black History Month" Exhibit, and the First Annual Excellence in the Arts Awards show. Also presented in Austin was Spellmon's work in the Austin Visual Arts Association's Tenth Anniversary Exhibition. His work also found its way to Philadelphia where he exhibited in the Seventh International Exhibition of Artists with Physical Disabilities.



*Grandfather was Tall*, F. L. Spellmon

Henry O. Tanner and Spellmon capture the innocence of youth and the joy of being taught or guided by a seemingly infallible "grown up."

From 1986 to 1988 he exhibited in BAA Annual Regional Exhibits and presented a one-man show entitled "Reflections" at the BAA Gallery in August 1988. Spellmon himself curated the January 1988 show "Honoring Black Artists" at the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center. This was followed by a June group exhibition of Black San Antonio based artists' works in the Southwestern Ethnic Arts Society's show, "Diversity of Visions." The show was hosted by and held at the Carver

Community Center, the leading community and cultural services center in San Antonio.

Lauded by reviewers as a “triumphant one-man show,” Spellmon’s self-titled exhibition at the Carver Art Gallery brilliantly showcased his abilities and cemented his position as “one of San Antonio’s best known artists.” An announcement for the exhibition stated the works, primarily oil, collage, and mixed media creations, “[captured] scenes from African and Afro-American life, including colorful paintings of juke joint dancers, preachers, cotton pickers and ordinary folk.” Always eager to share his work, Spellmon mingled with opening night guests at a reception in his honor, which, along with the exhibit, was notably free and open to the public. Over wine and cheese, visitors and the community discussed works such as *Uncle Tom – The First Non-Violence Teacher*. This open and friendly style of presentation was typical of Spellmon, who thrived on community energy and sharing his art.

As the 1990s approached, Spellmon was chosen to present works at San Antonio Selects at the University of Texas at San Antonio College of Fine Arts in January 1989. In 1990 he exhibited at St. Mary’s University, by which time he had numerous awards and recognitions under his belt. These included Artist of the Year at the International Hall of Fame in San Antonio in 1985; First Place in the Collage category at a competition at the George Washington Carver Museum in Austin in 1986; the prestigious Grumbacher Art Award from the Austin Visual Art Association for his portrait *Mrs. Pierce – Texas’ Black Art Pioneer* honoring Aaronetta Pierce; Top Ten Black Artists award from the Ann Taylor Gallery in Dallas in 1988; semifinalist in the Austin Visual Arts Association Billboard Competition; and Black Arts Alliance Excellence in Graphic Arts award in 1989. Additionally, he was the 1986 recipient of the Black Art Study Studio Grant from the Commonwealth of Virginia and a Purchase Award recipient from the Dallas Museum of African-American Art in 1987.

The late 1980s and early 1990s saw Spellmon dedicating an increasing amount of time to local



*Two Iron Men: Black Seminole Indian Collection*, from Spellmon's collection of works for the Black Seminole Indian Introduction Exhibit hosted by the Black Seminole Indian Scout Association.



The three-dimensionality of Spellmon's mixed media work *The Looking Glass* (below) creates depth similar to that created by Augusta Savage in her sculpture *The Harp* (above).



charities and actively working alongside community members as much as ever. He donated works in 1989 to the Art to Heart Benefit Exhibit for the Bexar County Hospital District in the Read Stremmel Gallery and in 1990 to the Art for AIDs Benefit Exhibit at the Blue Star Gallery, both in San Antonio.

Other contributions to the community include the logo he designed for “Citizen Advocacy,” the newsletter for the San Antonio Association for Retarded Citizens and portraits he painted for the Bexar County Opera Workshop. Spellmon collaborated with children to paint the 20 feet by seven feet mural “Children of San Antonio” and was commissioned by the city of San Antonio to paint the 40 feet by seven feet “From Africa to Texas” mural on the outside of the Multi Service Center. In 1993, Spellmon presented a collage to the city during the opening ceremony of the Alamodome, where it is on permanent display.

Despite his enormous successes, Spellmon stayed true to his spirit, one of charm and playful enthusiasm, throughout the course of his career. Even after winning the top prize at the Carver Community Cultural Center’s Texas Black Artists Alliance of Austin for the seventh year in a row in 1991, a competition which was only in its eighth year of existence, he never got “too big for his shoes.” He arrived at the exhibit appearing less the man of the hour and “more

like a tourist than an artist...with a camera strapped around his neck and a Panama hat on his head,” as journalist Kitty Prevost described in a San Antonio Express-News article reviewing the show.



*The Train*, Romare Bearden



*A Statement*, F.L. Spellmon

Emulating the style of the onlooker rather than the winner, Spellmon expressed a heartfelt hope in the future of San Antonio art, saying “There are more living, working, competing, and selling artists in the San Antonio area than anywhere else in the state.”

Spellmon continued to expand on his knowledge of cultures near and far and the varying heritages which make up the fabric of the American people. In 1990 he presented works in the Black Seminole Indian Introduction Exhibit, hosted by the Black Seminole Indian Scout Association in Bracketville, Texas. He painted a 50 piece series documenting the history of the Black Seminole Indians, natives of Central Texas. His attention to detail and implementation of research established himself nationally as he explored more deeply the history of other cultures.

By 1991, his work had earned Spellmon national recognition. He was invited by the director of Cognoscenti Inc. in Baltimore to participate in the “Michael Creese and Doc Spellmon Exhibition” at the Cognescenti Gallery. The bulletin announcing this collaboration noted that Spellmon





*Freedom Dance*, F. L. Spellmon

“records the images of a lifetime...[He] is a hero to his generation.” His works are at times displayed on or made out of rudimentary objects, but “there is substance to these rural motifs, for he is ‘documenting the hidden heritage of Blacks in the rural South.’”

Today he may be found in the listings for both the American Artists of Renown and the Afro-American Art Institute Directory and in the permanent collections of the Carver Museum in Austin and the San Antonio Museum.

F. L. “Doc” Spellmon died in San Antonio on August 24, 2008. For his eulogy, Aaronetta Pierce wrote, “Doc was a prolific artist whose [works] celebrated events from African American history” and recalled him saying, “My art helps Blacks find flowers in our Black Heritage.”

## “An enigma and then a dilemma”: Folk art, fine art, and “Doc”

James Sellman wrote when the museum world first accepted folk artist Thornton Dial’s works, it was presented first with “an enigma and then a dilemma.” Sellman noted at the time, “Art like Dial’s didn’t fit any existing paradigm.” This story is repeated each time unique works which don’t follow accepted styles are presented. “What is this, and where did it come from?” people asked of Dial’s work. “Then came the bigger question: What should we do with it?”

The same predicament may be seen with “Doc” Spellmon’s art. His massive body of work simply cannot be classified and generalized under stylistic genres. He was unique, a style unto himself. This may confuse the public, yet this same enigma, paired with Spellmon’s masterful skill and meaningful subjects, draws in his supporters.

Even so, throughout his career and even in his legacy Spellmon was and is often called a folk or Outsider artist. Scholars are divided on whether or not it is fair and accurate to categorize art as folk or Outsider art, since this suggests a difference between these types and the rest of art. Furthermore, “folk art” typically defines any art that is not “mainstream” and that is created by untrained artists. As David Maclagan states in his book *Outsider Art: From the Margins to the Marketplace*, “what began as a radical antithesis to accepted forms of art cannot go on forever being ‘outside’ the culture from which it once claimed to be independent.” In this way, “Outsider Art is gradually being assimilated.”

Herein lies the next challenge – Spellmon’s art may not have been mainstream, but he was formally trained. According to the accepted definition of folk art, Spellmon only half fits the description. Maclagan’s analysis of Outsider art implies that it is only a transitory stage through which art moves on its way to becoming mainstream. By nature it is short-lived, yet Spellmon’s work remained “outside” of traditional styles for the whole of his career.

Defining Spellmon’s work is made even more debatable by the fact that Spellmon, like most

artists, did not care much about categorizing his works. He painted life as he viewed and saw fit to depict it. He told stories he found meaningful. He had no singular style. He rejected being classified as a “folk artist,” saying “Dern it, I’m just too educated to be a folk artist.” As an educated, artistically trained, and world travelling artist, “Doc” hardly fits all the requirements of being a folk artist.

Spellmon was a storyteller who created pieces which compelled viewership and praise. This, his primary role, therefore, remains the most important concept to bear in mind when studying his works, more important than whether or not he can be compartmentalized into particular styles.

He captured the beauty of what makes art just that – art. In its most basic form it is a means of expression. Spellmon expressed himself and conveyed messages, the goals of every artist, while avoiding the jumble which often accompanies association with a particular artistic style or manner.

Style denotes a pattern set by a precedence and continued by following elements from this template. Spellmon followed no pattern, not because he wasn’t aware of them but because he actively chose not to conform to prevailing trends. Spellmon’s art is profound and meaningful because it reflects the past, shines a light on rural and minority communities which often were overlooked by artists, reveals an intuitive understanding of the human spirit, and is pure expression – art that glitters and shines on its own.

# Masks and Figures

While mask and masquerading traditions have long existed within African tribal cultures, Western interest in masks is a twentieth century development. As the European "Race for Africa" spurred travel to the continent, colonies and missions were established and satisfied the Western desire for the "exotic."

The masks these missionaries and colonists encountered piqued a curiosity and appealed to artists who "were seeking new modes of representation that challenged conventions of mainstream art." Inspired, European artists began incorporating geometric elements of African masks into their works, starting with Pablo Picasso's 1907 piece *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)*.

The artists who tried to emulate the style of the masks typically did not contest the widespread theories of "primitivism" cultivated by Darwinism and racist pseudo-science. However, these artists, including Fauvist and Cubist artists Picasso and Georges Braque and *Die Brücke* leader Ernst Kirchner, "radically recognized the creative dimensions in African artifacts and pioneered an attention to their aesthetic and visual capabilities."

African American artists during the Harlem Renaissance also took great interest in these works, influencing later modern artists in the 1960s through the 1990s, such as Romare Bearden, Wildredo Lam, and Jean-Michel Basquiat. Issa Samb, a Senegalese artist, advocated using "materials at hand," similar to "Doc" Spellmon's method, in order to "engage with local audiences through installations and performance." Likewise, Romuald Hazoumé has risen to international fame by using plastic cans used as kerosene and water vessels in the Republic of Benin to make masks.



*The Mask*  
mixed media on board, 20 x 16 inches

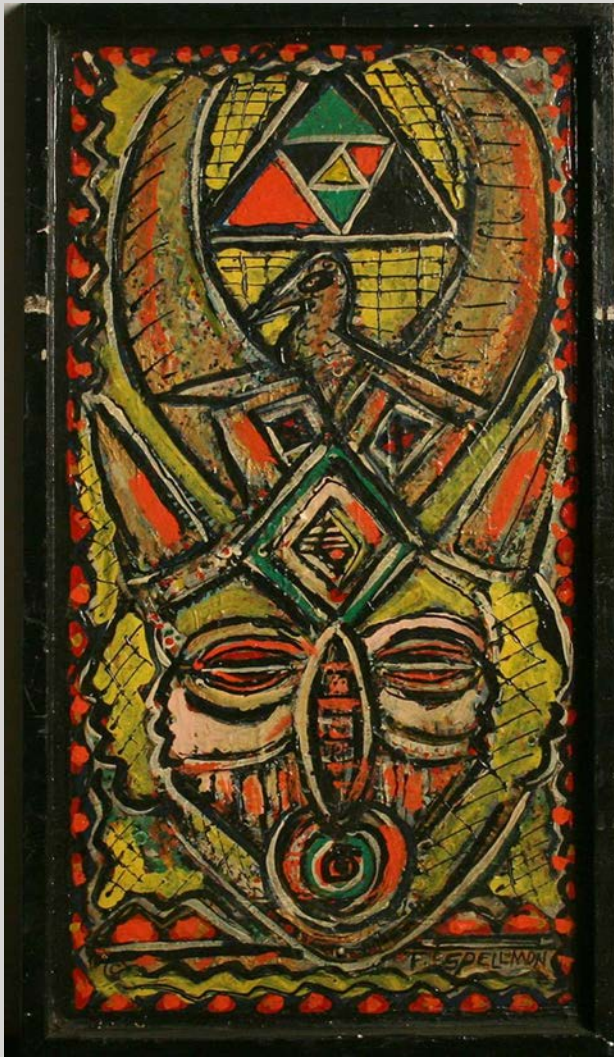
*Out of Darkness*

mixed media on cardboard, 18 x 14 inches



*Fit for a King*

acrylic on board, 14 x 15 inches



*Above:*  
**Mask – Reflections**  
oil on board, 25 1/4 x 14 3/4 inches



*Above right:*  
**African Woman**  
oil on board, 10 x 7 1/4 inches



*Right:*  
**Untitled 076**  
oil on board, 18 x 13 3/4 inches

*Right:*

***High Yellow***

oil on board, 13 x 10 1/2 inches

*Below left:*

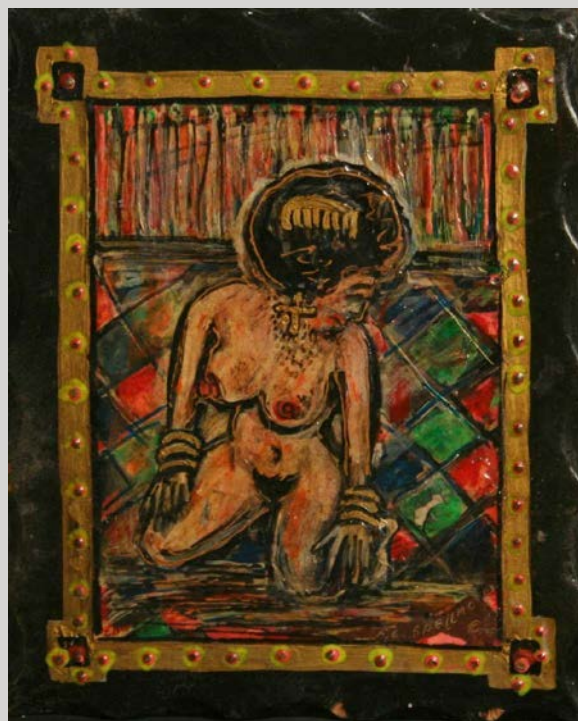
***Untitled 2***

oil on board, 10 1/4 x 8 inches

*Below right:*

***The Artist's Model***

oil on board, 23 3/4 x 17 3/4 inches



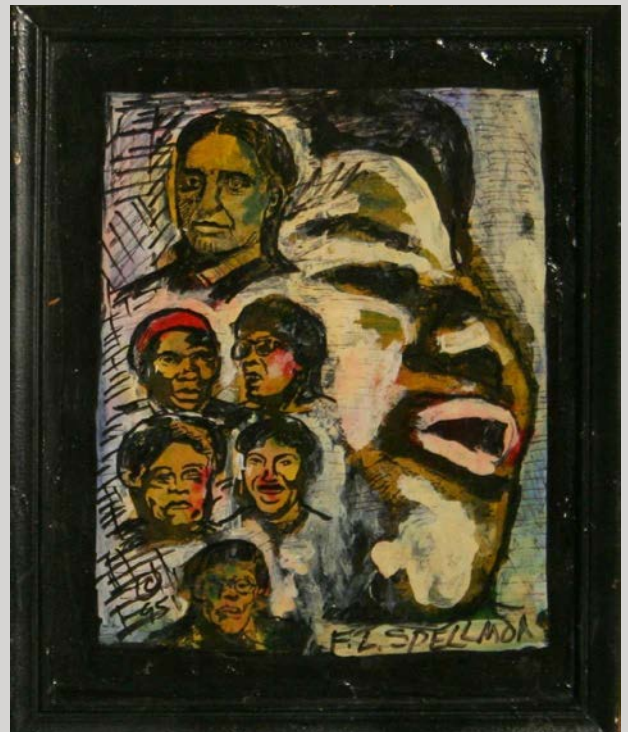
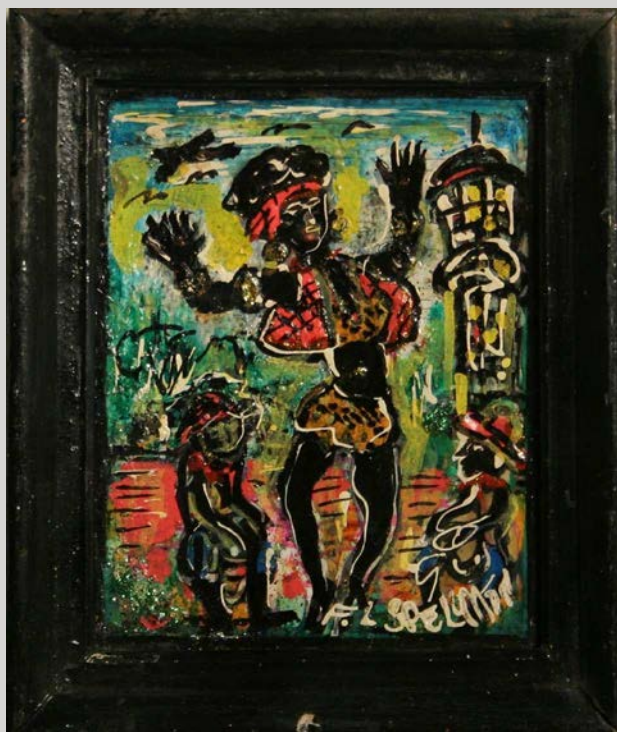




*Left:*  
***From Kings and Queens***  
mixed media on board, 20 x 15 inches

*Below right:*  
***Untitled***  
mixed media on board, 10 x 8 inches

*Below left:*  
***Down by the Alamo***  
oil on board, 10 1/4 x 8 inches





*Girl with Jug*  
acrylic and glitter on board, 12 1/2 x 9 3/4 inches



*Water Woman*  
mixed media on cardboard, 10 1/4 x 8 inches

# Rural Life, Community and Family

Raised in both rural Texas and Louisiana, Spellmon was surrounded by scenes of everyday life in the country, outside the city. In close-knit communities like these, family, friends, church, and work were priorities. Inspired by these settings in his artistic and personal life, Spellmon looked back at his early youth for inspiration. Spellmon painted many favored universal images: people working in fields, a woman relaxing with a guitar, a little boy handing his father a cup of water under the heat of the summer sun, a family coming home from church. These subjects were familiar to the artist and Spellmon enjoyed telling multiple stories in art while reclaiming his youth.

Likewise, these particular scenes also show a different type of southern rural life than had been seen in the world of art one hundred years before. The newer artistic works show African Americans working for themselves, no longer under the yoke of slavery. There is a joyousness exemplified to these paintings – a work hard, play hard element. Family and friends enjoy each other's company after a long, hard day's work. The pride of working for oneself is expressed through the eyes of the artist.

***Get 500 Lbs***  
mixed media on board,  
10 1/4 x 8 1/4 inches



***Mom and Dad – Rays of Light***  
mixed media on board,  
10 1/4 x 9 3/4 inches





*Grandfather was Tall*

ink and oil on board, 14 3/4 x 11 3/4 inches



*Water Boy*  
acrylic on board, 10 1/4 x 11 1/4 inches



*Children Feeding the Birds*  
acrylic on board, 13 x 9 1/2 inches



*Are those our Eggs*  
mixed media on board, 20 1/4 x 15 inches

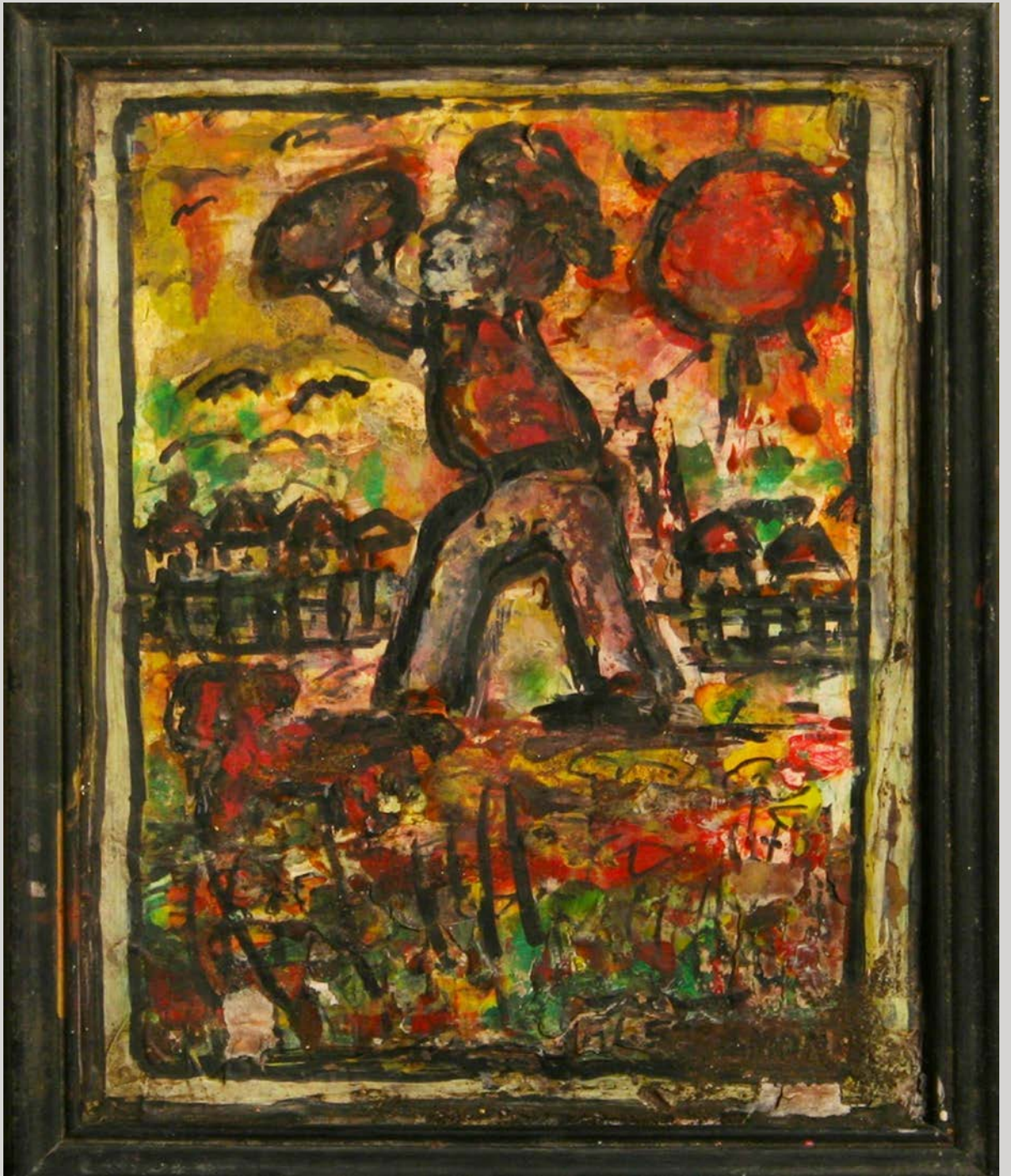


*Bath Time*  
mixed media on board, 15 3/4 x 13 inches



*First Love*  
acrylic on tray, 14 x 14 inches



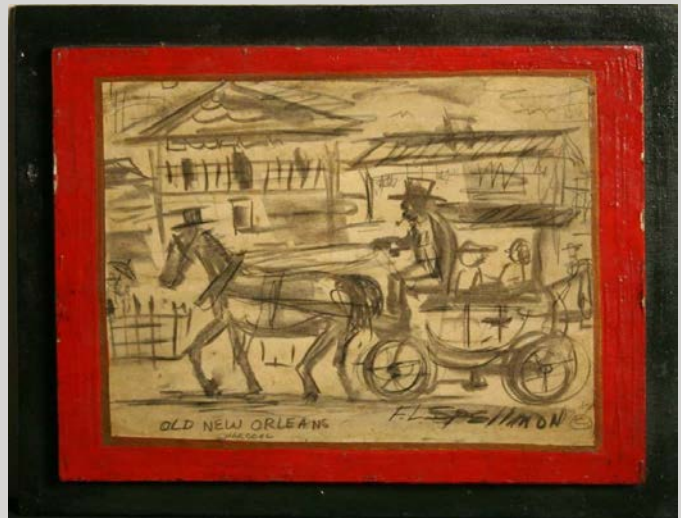


*Early Training*  
oil on cardboard, 10 x 8 inches



*Girls Picking Berries*

acrylic on board, 13 x 19 3/4 inches



*Old New Orleans*

mixed media on board, 16 1/4 x 12 inches



*Going to the Gin*

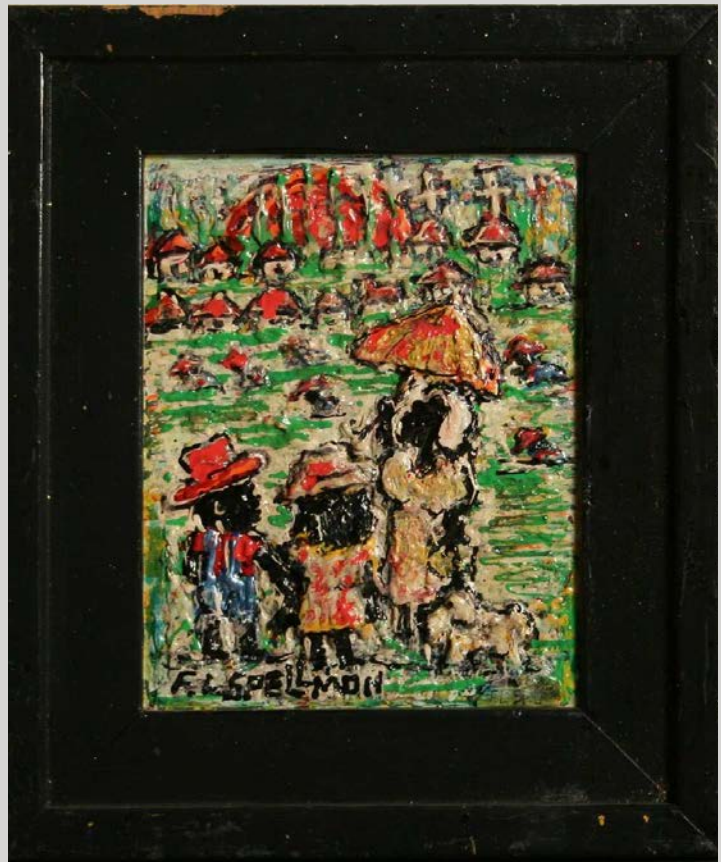
acrylic on board, 6 x 11 1/2 inches



*The Marble Shooters*  
oil on tray, 12 1/2 x 17 1/2 inches



*Untitled*  
oil on board, 12 x 16 inches



*Ain't Our Cotton*  
acrylic on board, 10 x 8 1/2 inches

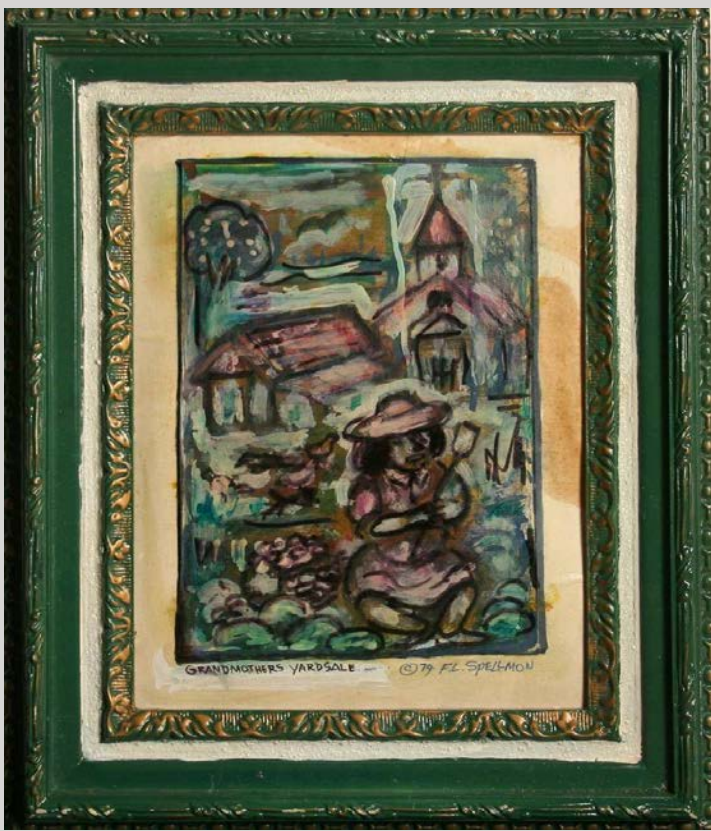


*Angels with Eggs*  
mixed media on board, 6 1/2 x 8 inches



*My First Egg Hunt*  
mixed media on board,  
11 x 14 inches

*Grandmother's Yard Sale*  
mixed media on cardboard,  
14 1/4 x 10 1/2 inches



*The Blaise Singer*  
mixed media on canvas,  
20 1/4 x 16 1/4 inches



*My Mother Teaching me Reading*  
mixed media on cardboard, 20 x 16 inches

# Buffalo Soldiers

During the Civil War, the Union Army was segregated. More than 180,000 African Americans served separately in all-black regiments. After the war, however, Congress recognized the extraordinary efforts and outstanding performance of many of the African-American regiments during the war and established the Ninth and Tenth United States Cavalry regiments and the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth United States Infantry regiments to maintain control over the Southwest and Great Plains regions. The Plains Indians are said to have named these men "Buffalo Soldiers" because of their dark hair.

The four regiments, particularly the cavalry regiments, were effective in the frontier campaigns. In these skirmishes with tribes including the Cheyenne, Kiowa, Comanche, Apache, Sioux and Arapaho, thirteen enlisted men and six officers were recognized with the Medal of Honor. The regiments also were decorated for their efforts in the Spanish-American War and the Philippine Insurrection. In the American West, stationed far away from bustling towns and cities, many days required the soldiers to build roads, escort mail carriers, and patrol the vast expanses of dry, hot land.

The Buffalo Soldiers came under increasingly racist scrutiny after the 1890s and were often subjugated to harassment and beatings. They were not commissioned to fight in the First World War and instead were put to work as laborers and servants. The Ninth and Tenth Regiments were disbanded in the 1930s. The Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth fought in the Pacific campaign in World War II, the latter also serving in the Korean War, before being disbanded in 1949 and 1951, respectively.





*Getting Away*  
oil on board, 12 x 9 inches



*No Time to Die – Buffalo Soldiers*  
acrylic on board, 14 x 11 inches



*Two Iron Men: Black Seminole Indian Collection*  
mixed media on board, 12 x 16 inches

# Religion

As the son of a preacher, Spellmon was exposed to Biblical stories at an early age. As examples, parables teach children about the virtues of doing good unto others. Church-goers find comfort in the teachings of Biblical figures and stories which seek to explain our surroundings. Religion gives many people a purpose, an explanation, and a history with which to identify.

Often, a church serves more than a religious function. The church may provide a place at which community members may meet and socialize. Its congregation forms a family which offers support and helps relieve others' stress and anxiety. Particularly in Southern culture, the church has had a very strong social function in addition to its spiritual role. This nurturing church environment may have given Spellmon the level of comfort necessary to portray his personal experiences through his artistic vision.

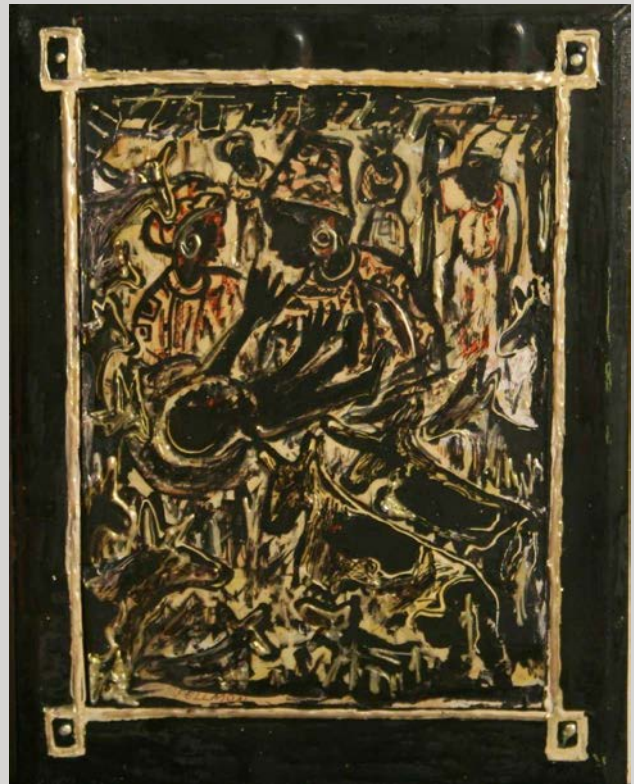
It is interesting to note Spellmon painted many nativity scenes. The theme of the divine birth and the promise of redemption have been popular in art for centuries. Artists present these cherished themes as gentle reminders of God's love. The paintings of Madonna and Child also convey the pure love between a mother and her child and can be understood in religious or secular settings. Years later as an artist, Spellmon drew upon his early experiences in his father's study to produce individual art pieces centering around the Holy Family, among other Biblical themes.



*Joy to the World*  
mixed media on board, 16 x 20 inches



*A Child is Born*  
mixed media on board, 18 x 14 inches



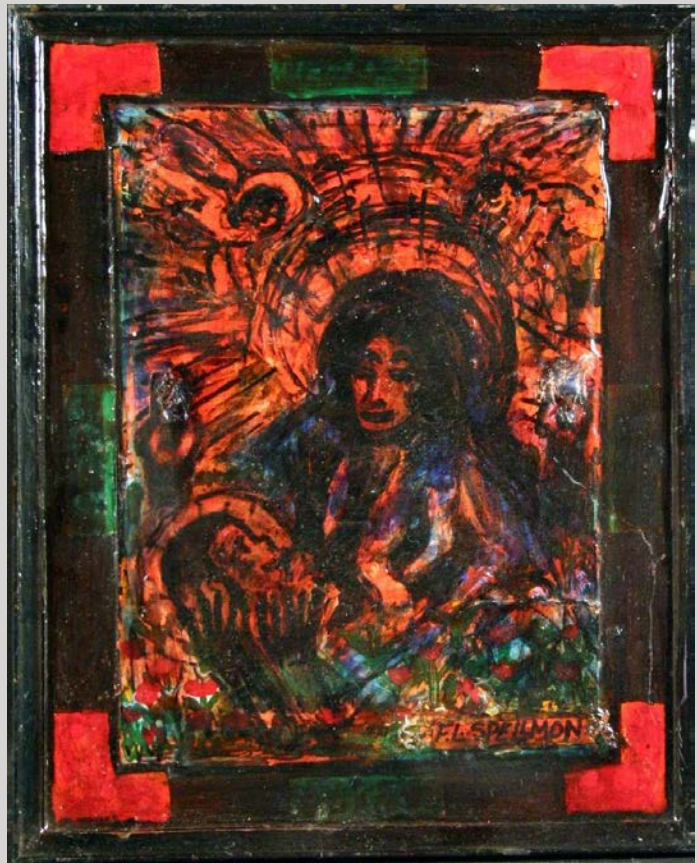
*Untitled - Tribal Nativity Scene*  
mixed media on board, 12 3/4 x 9 3/4 inches



*Untitled (Madonna and Child)*  
glitter and acrylic on board, 10 x 8 inches



*Mother and Child*  
mixed media on board, 12 x 9 inches



*A Child is Born*  
mixed media on board, 14 x 11 inches



*Mother and Child #1*  
mixed media on board, 9 x 15 1/2 inches





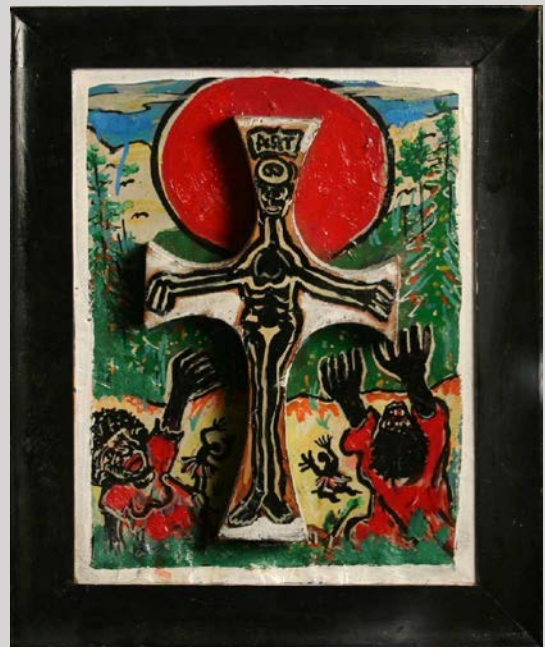
*Born in the Cotton Field*  
mixed media on board, 11 1/2 x 9 1/2 inches



*Likes Christ*  
mixed media on board, 12 x 9 inches



*They Killed Him*  
oil on board, 11 x 14 3/4 inches



*They Killed Him*  
mixed media on board, 17 x 13 inches



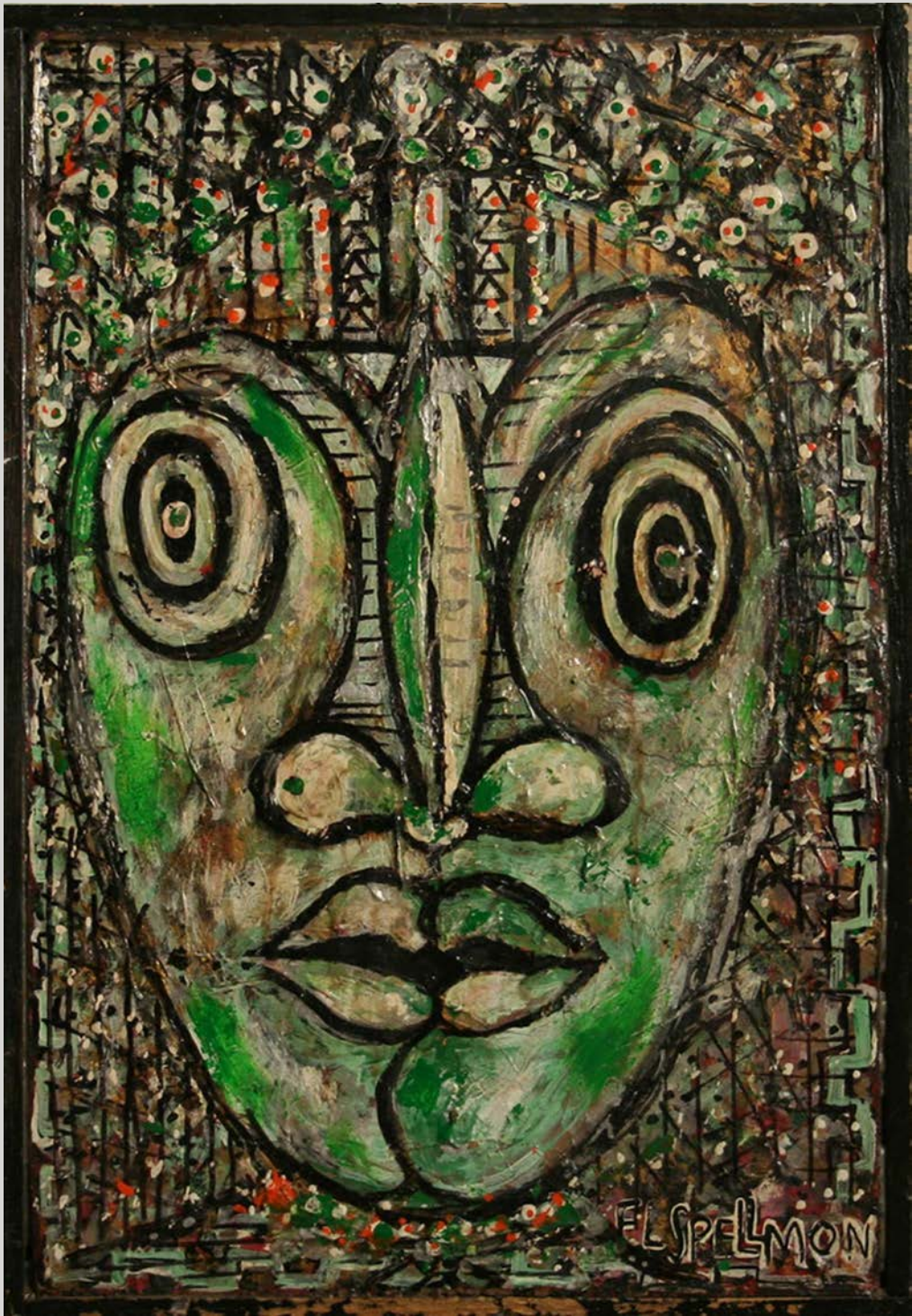
*New Day*  
mixed media on board, 16 1/4 x 12 1/4 inches

# Road to Freedom

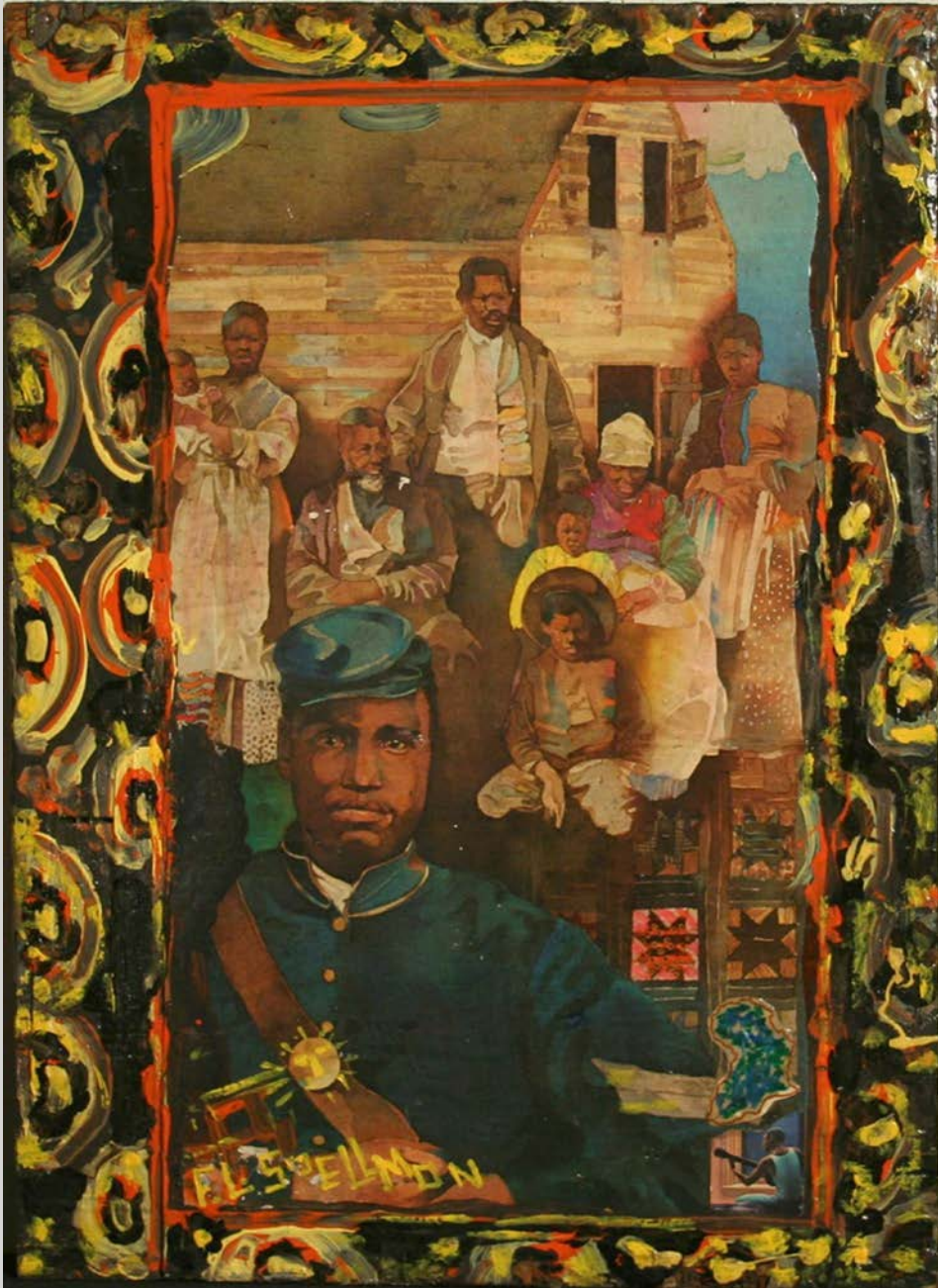
During his lifetime, Spellmon saw America move from segregation towards civil equality. Growing up in the South, he was never far from the shadows of the past. Memories of slavery and its aftermath still haunted the South. His family and community would have remembered the days of Reconstruction and its failure when it was abandoned, a country reverting to the pre-Emancipation Proclamation ways, and the fight to maintain civil rights which were not preserved.

Spellmon himself bore witness to segregation and un-equal opportunity during his time in the Navy in World War II, allowed only a service job as a Steward's Mate 1st Class serving meals to white officers. Later, during the 1960, America was transform as the Civil Rights Movement peaked, leading towards the end of segregation.

Through his paintings, collages and mixed media works, Spellmon recorded images from African American cultural history, from slavery to Juneteenth and beyond, and commemorated contemporary events and figures such as the Space Race and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. His compositions, colors, and forms convey the heavy burden of slavery in the South and Apartheid in South Africa, but also the purity of hope and the exuberance of finding freedom at last.



*Dr. King*  
oil on board, 19 x 12 3/4 inches



*The Emancipation Proclamation*

collage and mixed media on board, 21 1/2 x 15 1/2 inches

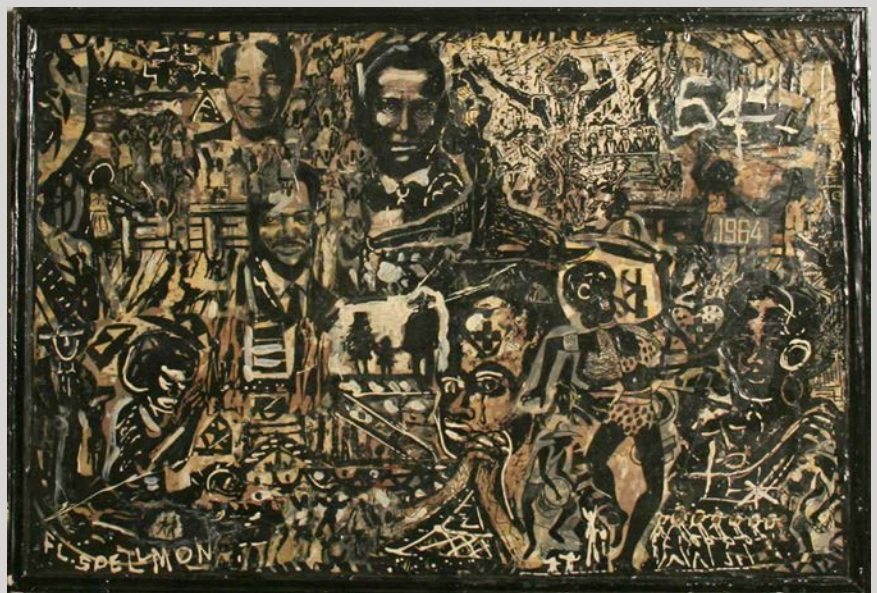


*A Statement*

mixed media on cardboard, 21 3/4 x 26 3/4 inches

*Black and White Sounds*

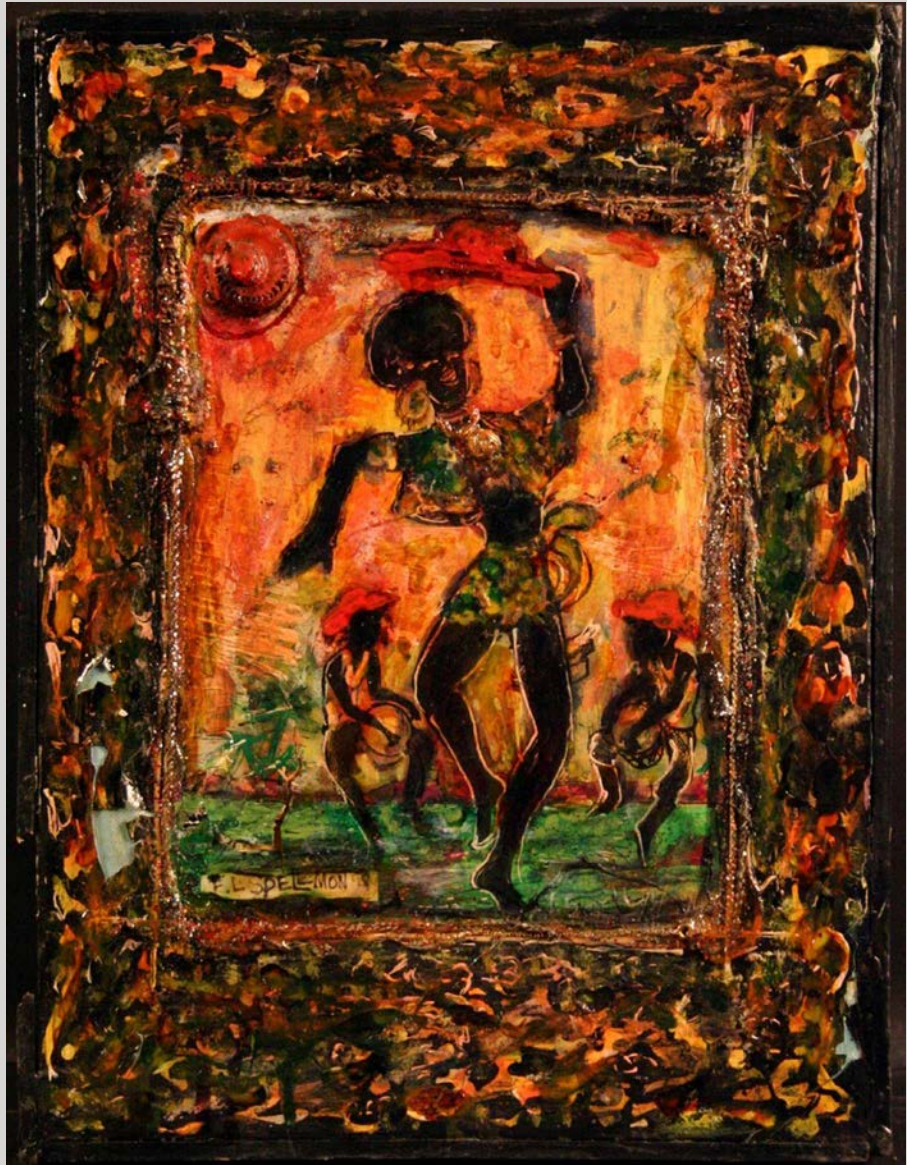
mixed media on board, 31 1/2 x 21 3/4 inches





*Free at Last*  
mixed media on canvas, 23 1/2 x 48 inches





*Freedom Dance*  
mixed media on canvas, 15 1/2 x 12 inches

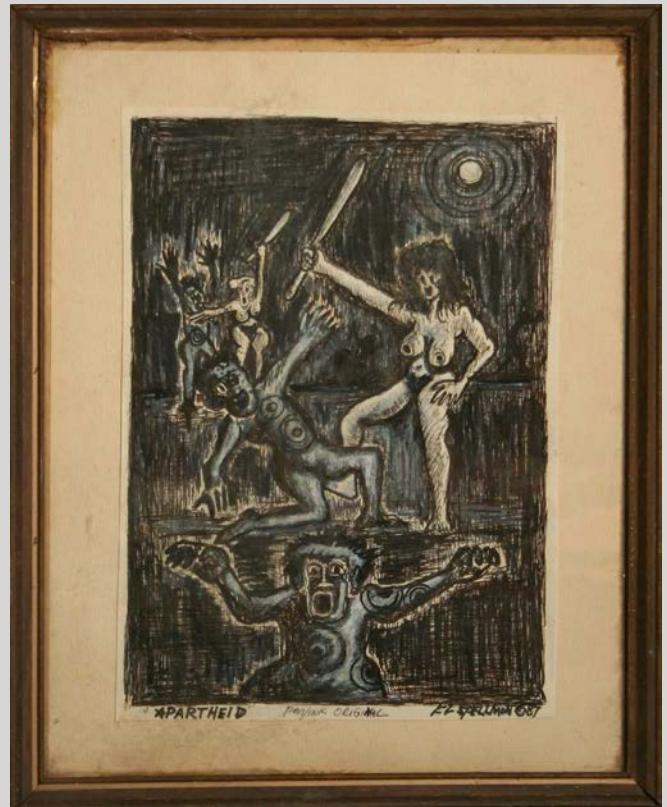


*Confronted*  
mixed media on board, 14 1/4 x 11 inches

*That Day*  
mixed media on board, 18 x 14 1/4 inches



*Apartheid*  
pen and ink on paper, 10 3/4 x 7 1/2 inches



*Redemption of African American  
(Not Bill Cosby)*  
oil on board, 13 1/4 x 16 1/2 inches



*New Hope*  
oil on canvas, 36 x 24 inches



*African American Art Against Apartheid*  
oil on board, 12 x 9 inches





*19 June 1865 #3*  
acrylic on board, 12 x 16 inches



*Untitled*  
mixed media on board, 10 x 6 inches



*The Looking Glass*  
mixed media on board, 14 x 8 inches



*Blacks in Space*

mixed media on board/relief, 10 x 15 inches



*Art in Space (Miss Ella)*

mixed media on board, 22 x 28 inches



*Where You Learn to Drive Man?*  
mixed media on board, 19 1/4 x 29 1/4 inches

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## Co-Author's Note

When I began interning with Banks Fine Art, LLC. during the summer of 2013, I quickly realized how much work it takes to run a gallery. The learning curve I encountered often seemed more like a mountain. Despite my inexperience, Bob and Maloree Banks trusted me with a lot of work. A lot. And I loved every minute of it.

I was, however, surprised when my biggest assignment yet was presented to me: to write a book on African American folk artist F. L. “Doc” Spellmon. I felt this was an important and large enough project that it should be handled by someone who had more time to commit to it. Once I saw Spellmon's painting of “The Mask,” however, I was thrilled. There is something so enigmatic about that piece. It’s vibrant yet mysterious. It catches your eye immediately and draws you in. From that initial glimpse, I had to learn more about this artist.

The fascinating thing about researching and writing about Spellmon is that he, like his mask, is enigmatic. Over the years he has taken on a legendary quality. Discerning fact from fiction was an interesting part of this project. In the end, however, some of the fiction is as much imbedded in Doc’s story as is the fact. They are both intrinsic parts of this larger-than-life man. Those who did not have the privilege to meet Spellmon will likely never fully understand him, but all who hear about him are brought into contact with a legend.

I’d like to thank Bob and Maloree Banks for taking a chance on me, Michael Judd Moore for coaching me and pushing me each step of the way, and Drew McColley for her previous research on Spellmon and for showing me that graduate school is not just a necessity, it’s a reality for me. Thanks are also due to Professor Bibiana Obler at the George Washington University for her insights on folk art and to the rest of the GW community, which has impacted my life and education in a profound way.

-Andrea Marshall

## About the Authors

### **Robert H. Banks**

Robert H. Banks has been dealing in American and European paintings since 1980 and has over 20 years of experience appraising fine art. His company, Banks Fine Art, LLC., is a respected gallery representing artists world-wide and selling to galleries internationally. Mr. Banks often purchases artwork overseas and at major auction houses on behalf of private clients and dealers

Mr. Banks is a Certified Member of the Appraisers Association of America, Inc. (AAA), their highest designation of expertise. He was elected and served several years on the National Board of Directors of Appraisers Association of America, Inc. (AAA).

Mr. Banks has recently finished the definitive book on the mid century modernist Charles Levier, and the first monograph on modern artist Marcia Banks. He has co-written a book on the French Impressionist Raymond Thibésart and also on the Jackson Pollock contemporary Etienne Roudenko. Mr. Banks has written the guidebook titled *How to Buy Art Wisely* and lectures extensively on purchasing art, the intricacies of the art market and art investment. He has spoken several times at the National Conference for the Appraisers Association of America, Inc. and has done appraisals for Public Television's *The Antiques Roadshow* and A&E's *Storage Wars*. Mr. Banks has donated his time doing appraisals for the Dallas Historical Society and The Preservation Society of Fort Worth.

### **Andrea Marshall**

A native of Dallas, Texas, Andrea Marshall is a rising senior at the George Washington University in Washington, D.C. with a Major in Art History and a Minor in History.

While in high school in the Dallas Independent School District she was published several times in the Dallas Morning News and she conducted research for and co-authored a scientific paper,

“The Over Expression, Purification and Crystallization of the PTF1-J and PTF-L Complexes.” She presented the findings at an international Biomedical Research Conference in Washington, D.C. and the paper was published in the FASEB Journal (The Federation of American Societies of Experimental Biology Journal) in April 2010.

In addition to her work at Banks Fine Art, LLC., Ms. Marshall has interned as the Curatorial Intern at the Heurich House Museum in D.C. and has worked at Lindamood-Bell Learning Processes in Dallas. After completing her undergraduate and graduate degrees, her goal is to pursue a career in exhibition design or museum education in one of D.C.'s many museums in to make art exciting and interactive for students.

### **Michael Judd Moore**

As advertising and marketing specialist and gallery director, Michael Judd Moore has promoted both sales and shows at Banks Fine Art, LLC. as he had done at the Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas, Texas and before that with The Georgia O’Keeffe Museum in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Previously with Neiman Marcus, Downtown, Dallas for over 20 years, Mr. Moore assisted to implement the Internship Program at Banks Fine Art, LLC., beginning in 2005. During a ten year history with over twenty five student interns, a total of seven gallery books were published, the most current being about the life and works of Texas folk artist F.L. “Doc” Spellmon.

A graduate of Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas, Mr. Moore received degrees in Spanish and Latin American History. He has personally collected pre-Columbian art and textiles and 18th century Spanish Colonial and Continental paintings since 1970.



