

Horace Pippin (1888–1946)

*John Brown Going to His Hanging*, 1942

Oil on canvas

John Lambert Fund 1943.11

Collection of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts

In a 1943 letter that Horace Pippin addresses to “My Dear Friends,” the artist reflects on his engagement with art and the role it played in his life.<sup>1</sup> Having worked as a professional artist for two decades at the time the letter was written, Pippin had already created an extensive oeuvre of images that captured domestic life in the twentieth century, his brutal personal experiences as a wounded soldier in World War I, political figures and events, and landscape paintings of Americana. In this letter, he remembers the first invitation he received to make an artwork, when he was a child during Sunday school. He then connects this to his time as a soldier in the first World War. It wasn’t until that moment, he notes, that he once again felt a desire to document his experiences, to express himself through art and writing. The “war of 1917” he wrote, is what “brought out all of the art in me.”<sup>2</sup> Perhaps it was the existential dread of war that encouraged him to return to his childhood self, to a time when he was able to render something formless into an expression of spiritual contemplation. Upon learning that this expression had value and could be sold, Pippin was delighted, reveling in feelings of tenderness, pride and empowerment.

Pippin’s work centralizes the urgency of creation, as well as the importance of documenting and reflecting on our individual experiences. Whether we have technical prowess or not, we are always entitled to this manner of expression—to following and cultivating our intuitions—an intuition that refuses to be lost. Despite having been a self-taught artist, Pippin was prolific in this way, and, in addition to domestic, historic and spiritual artworks, such as *Sunday Morning Breakfast* (1943) and *Holy Mountain* (1944), he left behind an expansive archive of personal journals and letters that recount his experience as a wounded veteran and his life in a country where equal treatment of Black Americans was conditional.

Pippin's *John Brown Going to His Hanging* epitomizes the artist's impulse to reflect upon and render a crucial scene in American history, a tendency that stands in contrast to the traditional narrators of American history, who have typically sought to distort and embellish stories of freedom making in this country. In the painting, made in 1942, a mass of muted colors represent a monolith of spectators, mostly with their backs turned to the viewer to face the controversial figure, John Brown. Brown, a violent and outspoken abolitionist, often quoted biblical scripture in defense of the abolishment of slavery. He was a proud man, and is sometimes considered to be a savior for the cause. His dutiful and unwavering focus on his mission created many enemies for him among those seeking to preserve the dominance of white supremacy in America.

There are many things to glean from this painting. The aspect I find myself most drawn to, however, is Pippin's distinct signature, aptly placed over the elder Black woman in the bottom-right corner. The woman is believed to be one of Pippin's elder maternal figures, who was actually present at the hanging. Pippin's claim to authorship, placed over a representation of his relative, signifies how interpretations of reality can become reified over time through artworks. Pippin is present, and so is his grandmother.

—Taylor Renee Aldridge

1. Horace Pippin notebooks and letters, circa 1920, 1943. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution
2. Ibid

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American artist Horace Pippin executed his first oil painting in 1928, and over the next two decades developed a highly economic visual style that placed African American folk art traditions into serious conversation with early idioms of abstraction and social realism. While much has been written on Pippin's significance to twentieth-century art, his contribution to the discourse of American history painting remains underrecognized. Pippin's depiction of the hanging of John Brown points to the artist's powerful reconstitution of the genre for the purposes of monumentalizing specifically African American political and aesthetic histories.

Pippin's depiction of the white abolitionist being carted away to his imminent hanging takes place in front of a small, but dense crowd of presumably white onlookers. Dark, neutral tones and simple figural forms recapitulate in the surrounding landscape of barren trees, whose sloping branches and leaves bend like the dead weight of a body suspended by a noose. This not only foreshadows Brown's violent death to come, but points to the escalation of hangings of Black people during Pippin's own era. Two different architectures are represented: a Neoclassical architecture reminiscent of state or public institutions (like courthouses and prisons); and the simple wooden homes of the private, domestic sphere. Both point to the ongoing collaboration between government agencies and private citizens to capture and destroy Brown, his cause, and all other emancipatory struggles thereafter. Refusing the sentimental, romanticized tropes used by artists like Thomas Hovenden, which deflated the purpose and context of Brown's actions, Pippin shapes a quiet scene of immense sadness and loss, as is made clear in the singular figure of an elderly Black woman who solemnly faces the viewer, arms crossed in silent confrontation that demands active witnessing instead of passive watching.

In the mid-to-late nineteenth century, producers of American academic history painting began to move away from the monumental grandeur and large-scale format that had established the genre in Anglo-European art of the previous century and turned instead to more domestic, individualized, genre scenes of historical figures and subjects. As the United States descended into Civil War by the 1860s, academic history painting could no longer sustain its ideological premise of a shared public patriotism, forcing painters to shape a more individualized and domesticated set of pictorial conventions that placed its emphasis on accessible, eye-level narration of contemporary historical events made in the taste and image of ordinary people. Pippin achieves this task in his intense composure of this event, which neither deflates or neutralizes the scene.

Pippin turns his back on the white supremacist and settler colonialist assumptions of American history painting—namely the convention of monumentalizing “heroes braving the ocean and an unknown wilderness”—in order to craft images for a resolutely African American audience in terms that sutured a significant event in abolitionist history to the immediate realities of the present. The effect is Pippin’s construction of an image-as-historical vista—an extended view of past and present enmeshed and affecting one another across time. If ever historical struggle had meaning and purpose, the violent end to Brown’s life and abolitionist project that became the turning point in the coming American Civil War allowed Pippin to point to the escalating violence and oppression committed against Black people in the United States across the long durée of the interwar Jim Crow era.

—Jordan Amirkhani

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*She Cuts Her Eyes*

Because history is at her back, always.

Because gray-blue cloaks never reach  
the coolness of her resolve.

Because her spirit knows blue as the color of generation.

Because blue begets.

She been here before. This place. This disenchanting scene.  
Another noisome gathering.

She shrouds herself. Stills herself. And slowly, the saliva  
builds.

She cuts her eyes.

She tightens her hips. She feels the orb of spit rounding  
the lining of her cheek. She sets her sights beyond the edge  
of the canvas.

Ready.

Aim.

Wonder.

—Derrais Carter

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The subject matter of *John Brown Going to His Hanging* is familiar enough to us that little needs be said about the history; a violent abolitionist meets his end. What is ironic and irritating is that 150 years after his hanging, this painting remains, in a way, enslaved. I am referring to the fact that this work cannot be separated in criticism from the *accusation* that its creator, Horace Pippin, was *self-taught*. This *self-taught* label is often interchangeable with folk art, outsider, and naive. There is the suggestion that the work has a more teleological than artistic mission and, by extrapolation, is somehow less *artistic or important* than mainstream art, art by *trained* artists. Similar, if not the same marginalization, occurs in the marking of works of art as “African American” or “Hispanic” or “Asian,” the tacit implication being that there is a standard by which these works are measured.

One can call attention to the flatness of the work, *John Brown Going to His Hanging*, a lack of three-dimensionality. One might assume that this flatness lends itself to a lack of rendering. However, this flatness suggests thoughtful intention. In fact, the fence line and the houses on the left of the canvas do provide perspective. Some people in the crowd are foregrounded. The flatness that we observe actually amplifies the tension and gravity of the scene; it creates a space where the horrible ordinariness of the scene is underscored. It is not a mere chronicle of an event, but an artistic expression of how such an event might impact its subjects.

The expression of the only woman in the painting, separated also by the color of her dress, is not one of explicit grief, but of humdrum acceptance. For her, the world has sadly met her expectations. Again. Why is she there and there are no black men? And why that sky blue, patterned dress?

Pippin’s choices are considered and thought out. His use of perspective is subtle and reasoned to create a particular mood, perhaps even designed to allow visual entry to the work by many kinds of viewers, perhaps meant to intentionally contrast other paintings that were more accepted as *mainstream*. The term *self-taught* would have us think that this work is less intellectual than a work by, say, Matisse.

Pippin’s painting is striking, subtle, intentionally lacking in emotion while somehow being quite emotional. None of this is accidental.

—Percival Everett

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This painting served as great inspiration to those of us trying to animate James McBride's *The Good Lord Bird*. The novel re-imagines the life of John Brown through the eyes of a fictional enslaved escapee, 14-year-old Henry Shackleford. At the end of the novel, the boy attempts to attend the hanging of Brown, but like all African-Americans at that time, he is not allowed anywhere near the event. Instead, Henry witnesses Brown sitting on his coffin peacefully riding toward the gallows. The event was recounted in many journals of the day and is described very much in line with the mood and spirit of this painting. It is an extremely unique moment in the history of this country. The hanging of John Brown was attended by individuals such as Robert E. Lee, John Wilkes Booth, and a few hundred other pro-slavers of the time. Interestingly, most everyone who saw Brown hang would be dead within five years, as this was the moment the country was catapulted into Civil War. In one of his letters, Brown spoke of a vision he had of an upcoming great bloodshed when a son would be taken from every American home, North and South. "Wails and laments would be heard from every home across the country as retribution for every child stolen from Africa."

This painting captures America sitting on a fulcrum:

“I didn’t stick around for the hanging. There was enough military there to crowd a field and beyond. I hear tell no colored was allowed within three miles of that hanging. They say the Old man was taken out by a wagon, made to sit on his own coffin, and driven over from the jailhouse by Captain Avis, his jailer. He told the captain, ‘This is beautiful country, Captain Avis. I never knowed how beautiful this was till today.’ And when he got on the scaffold, told the hangman to make it snappy when he hung him. But like always he had bad luck, and they made him wait a full fifteen minutes with his face hooded and his hands tied while the whole military formation of white folks lined up by the thousands, militia from all over the United States, and U.S. Cavalry from Washington, D.C., and other important people from all over who come to watch him hang: Robert E. Lee, Jeb Stuart, Stonewall Jackson. Them last two would be deadened by the Yanks in the coming years in the very war the Old Man helped start, and Lee would be defeated. And a whole host of others who came there to watch him hang would be deadened, too. I reckon when they got to heaven, they’d be right surprised to find the Old Man waiting for ‘em... Bible in hand lecturing them on the evils of slavery. By the time he’d be done with them, they probably wished they’d gone the other way.”

—From James McBride’s *The Good Lord Bird*.

—Ethan Hawke

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In the fifty-plus years between Horace Pippin's birth in 1888 and the beginning of his career as a painter, almost 3,000 Black people were lynched. In this atmosphere of terror, African Americans nationwide knew they could be subjected to arbitrary harassment, arrest, beatings, burnings of their homes, and other vicious assaults. It is safe to assume that Pippin—a hard worker from youth, wounded veteran of World War I, and a deeply thoughtful, sensitive artist—would have formulated his own ideology concerning the politics of punishment and death used to uphold white supremacy.

John Brown, the abolitionist martyr, serves as a pivotal ideological figure in Pippin's oeuvre—particularly with respect to Pippin's four Lincoln paintings created between 1933–1942, *Cabin in the Cotton* series (ca. 1931–37, 1944), and *Mr. Prejudice* (1943). These paintings are a commentary on the persistent struggle between white supremacy and African Americans' demands for freedom and justice, a backdrop against which *John Brown Going to His Hanging* stands in relief.

The *Cabin in the Cotton* paintings reflect not only the lifestyle, material culture, and beauty that Africans created in the South, but also Pippin's recognition of the central role of exploited Black labor in the production of U.S. wealth. The Lincoln and Brown series (which include three paintings of Brown) testify to the importance of hard work, study, spiritual resolve, generosity, and courage as essential social values. By contrast, *Mr. Prejudice* depicts the ugly contradictions of U.S. racial capitalism. Pippin appropriates the symbolism of the World War II “Double V” campaign, a call for victory against fascism abroad, and freedom for African Americans at home, but where he might have created images urging wartime unity, he portrays a divided American society with an unclad, boorish Mr. Prejudice, smashing the symbolic “V” with an irrational, dogged commitment to racism and segregation. A Klansman and a farmer carrying a lynching noose also loom large in this painting.

In the context of this set of paintings, we see that *John Brown Going to His Hanging* intensifies Pippin's political critique. Heavy black imagery evokes the impending execution; yet there is a fuming smoke stack in the distance, perhaps implying that John Brown's sacrifice and the associated spectacle are only brief distractions in a society oblivious to the sufferings of the oppressed, where business goes on as usual. An elderly African American woman, presumed to represent Pippin's grandmother, stands back-to-back with an unidentifiable figure, denoted by a gray hat and gray-clad shoulders. In a Janus-like trope, the woman may express African Americans' dismay or abhorrence of the historic 1859 moment, while the anonymous, spirit-like presence might represent the timeless witnesses to all the martyrs who have fought and died for freedom.

The artist has dressed the gathering of white men in 1940s clothing, making them his contemporaries. One of them carries an object that resembles a noose—terrorist symbol, threat, and weapon in 1859 or 1942. In whatever era, a noose awaits the abolitionist.

Pippin's message comes into startling focus for us in today's scenes of white supremacist mobs—especially the one in action on January 6, 2021, which carried out an insurrection at the United States Capitol Building in Washington, D.C., hanging noose and all. Our contemplation of *John Brown Going to His Hanging* compels today's abolitionists to continue the revolutionary work required to finally achieve a free and just society.

—Gloria House, Ph.D.

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*This is a beautiful country; I have not cast my eyes over it before, that is, in this direction.*

—John Brown, as quoted on his way to his hanging.

A primary orientation of Horace Pippin's painted plane *John Brown Going to His Hanging* is directional. Brown and his executioners face forward. Pippin's grandmother—a proxy of the artist himself, inscribed with his signature —looks out (at us). Two men adjacent to her in the bottom-right corner conspire inward, one with whip in hand. A mass of similarly rendered men with interchangeable hats, coats and scarves are all faced away from the viewer, watching the wagon roll by. As viewers, we are oriented within this audiencing mass and in direct address with Pippin. That is, in this direction, Pippin, like Brown, asks that we choose our position: Who are we in this crowd?

At the time of his execution, and in popular reading of his actions since, Brown's vision of abolition was regularly viewed as coexistent with madness. He was "crazed," "maniacal," and "apparently insane." Beneath this diagnosis is a singular assumption: It is madness to revolt against one's own whiteness and the benefits it affords. Abolition is always madness in the view of the oppressor. The end of *that* has not happened yet.

Pippin in his own words paints the scene as it is. Black cloak, black hat, black beard, white face —Brown would be indistinguishable from the four bearers carrying him to his hanging except for the rope binding him. With the rope, he is rendered other, carceral, a traitor. Viewed from within the ropes that wrap Brown, or from Pippin's proxy figure facing away in disgust—not only from the wagon but also from the man with the whip—abolition is the only sane option. Consider Frederick Douglass's defense of Brown on these terms in the bluntly titled address "John Brown Not Insane": "Not only is it true that Brown's whole movement proves him perfectly sane and free from merely revengeful passion, but he has struck the bottom line of the philosophy which underlies the abolition movement."

Insanity was used to condemn Brown's acts as unthinkable. Yet, the counter is the bottom line of the abolition movement: If abolition is imaginable, then it becomes inevitable.

Brown is not the only figure bound in the background: lines of leather tether two white horses to their cargo, their position nearer to Brown's than that of his executioners or of the crowd. A common reading of the painting is that the eyes of Brown and his executioners are on the gallows off-scene. But what if they are instead fixated on these horses: will they carry their load forward or break away in revolt? Who is actually in control here? Those bound are always on the verge of refusal.

Regular readings of the painting likewise typically present Pippin's grandmother as the only figure facing away, but following this directional view, the horses, too, follow an unpredictable line. Their view is restricted to their forbearance with blinders. Still, the horse in the background glances over at his twinned beast, past the crowd, at the objector-Pippin, at us, the viewer. Two pale horses; a partial revelation. What is their direction?

We know in the story that Brown goes to the gallows, but in the suspended time of the painting he is *going* to the hanging, and is not quite there. What if the horses run? What if the faceless crowd is there to revolt, to reclaim Brown and carry out his planned insurrection? This is the madness within whiteness. The paranoia of abolition. The fear that requires cords and capital, jails and debt, and diagnoses to persist. The fear of the end of *that*.

We have not seen it yet, but in this imagined direction, this is a beautiful country.

—James McAnally

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It is not a privilege to be tied to a legacy of lynching.  
But what can be claimed from the lineage of a white man  
hanged? John Brown traversed the middle of the West.  
He killed one slaver and freed eleven.

He greeted the crowd, ready to die. He told his wife as  
much. He knew that slavery couldn't end, but for the shed  
of blood. Had John lived just two more years, his prophecy  
would be fulfilled. Enslaved Black bodies finally freed, the  
country's greatest sin.

*hell hath no fury  
like a white racist  
sadist*

*snatch his eyes for the eyes  
he devoured in Kansas  
crush his teeth  
for the lynchers he axed*

*take his soul  
lest insurrections  
to follow*

*and Black grandmothers,  
scowl at the gallows*

*relentlessly murder  
the freers of slaves  
make abolitionists  
scatter in fear*

*should white men liberate  
the captured, from bondage  
the government  
will hang you instead*

Had John lived to witness mass incarceration, the violence  
inflicted in Jim Crow south, the north's cowardice redlining  
—would he have laid his life down to die so valiantly?  
What would John's letters tell us had he discovered the  
lantern laws of the eighteenth century? Or Black babies  
relegated to ghettos, forced to squalor and poverty?

*hell hath no fury  
like a white racist  
sadist*

*property  
ain't meant to be free  
the constitution spoke  
of white men  
when it promised liberty*

*Douglass and Tubman  
knew John's fate  
they warned  
impending defeat*

*John hoped the slaves  
would insurrect  
that night at Harper's Ferry*

*but the military might was strong  
and the people failed to gather  
half John's men were murdered swiftly  
the rest of them were captured*

It is not a privilege to be tied to a legacy of lynching or white supremacy. But what do we make of men like John who “loved liberty for the poor and the weak”? He shook the hands that strung his rope. He held his head up high. He understood the blood he'd shed, the ultimate sacrifice. His final words, prophetic. Martyred across the globe. The world would witness John Brown's fame. Known for his tortured soul.

*hell hath no fury  
like a white racist  
sadist*

*a country spiraling  
in reverse*

*America chases  
a longing for greatness  
supremacy  
center stage*

*a hatred most hoped  
long and gone  
the day the jury  
sentenced John to hang*

—Tawana Petty

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*King of Wands*

Remix on a Spiritual

Chorus: John Brown and his men,

Horace Pippin and an unnamed woman.

I.

blossoming wand

tongue of fire

everyman

the maker

of his fate

eye all seeing

I held you

in mind—

all this time.

all this time.

*See those people dressed in white*

*They look like the children of the Israelites*

fire of fire

a controlled demolition

of magnificent shape

everyman the maker of fate.

eye all seeing

I held you

In mind—

all this time.

all this time.

*See those people dressed in white*

*They look like the children of the Israelites*

II.

eye all seeing

I held you

in mind—

all this time.

all this time.

everyman the maker of fate.

eye all seeing  
I held you  
in mind—

all this time.  
all this time.

eye all seeing  
I held you close  
fate—

you told me  
bring you that

make the witness a woman

you told me  
bring you that

eye all seeing  
I held you close  
fate—

you told me  
bring you that

make the witness a woman

you told me  
bring you that

III.

paint the prison  
with smelt—  
shackles melted

eye all seeing  
I held you close  
fate—

you told me  
bring you that

*See those people dressed in black  
They come a long way and they ain't turning back*

cross the water  
pay the toll  
bring your silver  
and gold

make the witness a woman  
fate—

you told me  
bring you that

*See those people dressed in black  
They come a long way and they ain't turning back*

IV.

chaos as order and reason  
order and reason as calamity

eye all seeing  
you gave me  
lucidity

*See those people dressed in blue  
Look like my people coming through*

living creature  
of soul and reason  
through you  
I am redeemed

chaos as order and reason  
order and reason as calamity

*See those people dressed in blue  
Look like my people coming through*

*See those people dressed in blue  
Look like my people coming through*

V.

*See those people dressed in red  
See those people dressed in red*

tongue of fire  
blossoming wand  
everyman  
the maker  
of his fate

eye all seeing  
I held you in mind  
close  
to you  
I was led  
close  
to you  
I was fed

Make the witness a woman  
Fate—

*See those people dressed in red  
See those people dressed in red*

*Must be the children that Moses led*

*Must be the children that Moses led*

—Kristina Kay Robinson

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Horace Pippin's painting *John Brown Going to His Hanging* depicts John Brown's final moments of life before paying the ultimate price for attempting to secure the freedom of the enslaved. Brown—a white, male, radical abolitionist—desired to move beyond the theoretical underpinnings of this country that are devoid of action, and toward a radical action that sought to reorganize society, putting kineticism to oft-recited phrases like “All men are created equal.” Risking it all, he fought to tear down the institutions that prevented the abolishment of slavery and the flourishing of all Africans and their descendants. This painting also shows how those who benefited from the institution of slavery will attempt to quell the pulse toward freedom.

2020 was an apocalyptic uncovering of the fact that there still exists, in this country, a drive to quell the impulse toward Black liberation. President Trump used his presidency to remind American citizens that there is an “in” and an “out.” He used his presidency to galvanize a vigilante force to enact violence and terrorism in an attempt to preserve the status quo of this democracy that continually rests on the backs of those who bear the brunt of its inequities. In the midst of a societal breakdown that many of us have never seen before, there was still the roll call of new Black men and women who were killed at the hands of the police and vigilantes.

In the lower right-hand corner of the painting, there is a Black woman looking away from Brown as he is carted off to his death and the cheering of people who celebrate his death. Her refusal reminds us that we don't have to play a role in the death-dealing systems that stop advances toward freedom. She reminds us that there have always been other options and ways of being that we can choose. In selecting these choices, we have to let go of the things that have been normalized as our only options.

Brown refused to participate in the privileges of whiteness. He was willing to give up a life of comfort, because he knew that his comfort would necessitate the continued dehumanization of African people. He dared to be a traitor to his race even until death, paying the ultimate cost.

Are we willing to take the risk and pay the cost of building a new world?

—Joe Tolbert, Jr.

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*I, John Brown, am now quite certain that the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away, but with blood. I had, as I now think, vainly flattered myself that without very much bloodshed; it might be done.*

—John Brown, December 2, 1859

On October 16, 1859, John Brown led nineteen men in a raid to take over the United States Armory and Arsenal at Harper's Ferry, Virginia, in an attempt to start a revolt to end slavery. This led to a 36-hour standoff against the Virginia and Maryland militias and U.S. Marines led by Colonel Robert E. Lee. As a result of the failed plot, ten men were killed during the raid, five escaped, and seven were put on trial, sentenced to death, and hanged. On December 2, 1859, Brown became the first person in the United States to be executed for treason. He also became a martyr to the abolitionist cause and a sign to Southerners that more antislavery invaders might be headed their way. The Harper's Ferry raid is widely considered a prelude to the U.S. Civil War.

Horace Pippin's *John Brown Going to His Hanging* memorializes a moment of Brown in transition. Despite the sensational accounts of Brown's actions, he is not shown shouting sermons, rallying raiders, engaged in violence, or surrounded by carnage. Pippin's depiction is solemn, muted. Near-bare trees and gray and white buildings are set against the blue sky. In the center of the painting, Brown is seated in a horse-drawn cart, bound by rope, surrounded by four men in black who are transporting him to be hanged. In Pippin's careful, capable hands, Brown is not lionized as a great freedom fighter, rendered as a religious fanatic, a madman, a traitor or a savior. Pippin's Brown is merely a man in state custody, sentenced to death.

In the foreground of the painting a crowd of men watch Brown on his way to his execution. An occasional red or white scarf breaks up the subdued palette of their black, brown and gray coats and hats. While the sea of witnesses looks on with their backs to us, an older Black woman in a blue dress and gray shawl faces away from Brown, her back to the crowd. She stands next to two men in conversation with one another, and refusing to look at the spectacle, she faces the viewer, watching us witness this scene.

—Dr. Brittany Webb

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In my every return to this painting, I start with the Black elder.

Situated in the bottom-right corner of Pippin's canvas, this woman's eyes are cast to her left side. Her lips light. I can almost hear a scoff.

Her gaze is focused away from the scene at hand: a gathering of spectators assembled to watch John Brown as he goes to his hanging. A gray shawl is draped over her shoulders, covering the upper half of a blue dress spotted with white dots. Her hair is wrapped in a scarf.

I always turn to this elder first—perhaps like many of us do—because the look on her face, turned away from the mob's hunger, is decidedly compelling. It is one of refusal and foresight, which I have seen on the faces of Black women who I know well during times of political upheaval.

I know, too, the fate that awaits John Brown. I know that he has betrayed the mandates of white supremacy. Death is certain.

Pippin's crowd is depicted as a mostly motionless group of witnesses, but next to this Black elder is a figure clutching a whip. I know that this weapon signifies a violent desire. The elder knows this as well.

As I think of the many brutalities that have terrorized Black life, so too do I think of the many defiances enacted *in honor* of Black life. I think of the refusals, the diverted gazes, the backs turned, the bodies in the streets, the quiet resistances.

This elder appears to go unnoticed by those who would eagerly seek her death and dehumanization. It is a deliberately provocative choice by Pippin.

I wonder if this is the artist's way of saying to us that Black life—in spite of all that threatens it—remains possible?

— Jessica Lynne