



Jonathan Green, *Daughters of the South*, 1993. Oil on canvas. From the Collection of the Morris Museum of Art, Augusta, Georgia. ©Jonathan Green.

**Jonathan Green**

*Daughters of the South*

1993

**Background information:**

Jonathan Green was born in Gardens Corner, South Carolina, on August 9, 1955 and was raised in a Gullah community north of Beaufort, South Carolina, by his grandmother. *Gullah* is a term for members of a group of African Americans and their language living on the sea islands and coastal areas of South Carolina, Georgia, and North Eastern Florida. Green was born with a caul, or “birth veil.” This is the placental membrane that can cover the head at birth; in Gullah culture, as well as other cultures, this is seen as a sign of a leader.

Green finished high school in New York City and in 1973 he entered the air force. Later, he received a certificate in textile design from East Grand Forks Textile Institute in Minnesota. In 1977 he started at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and in 1982 he received his Bachelor of Fine Arts. From 1982–1993 Green did independent studies throughout the United States and



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in other countries. He was a member of organizations such as the Chicago Academy of the Arts, the Collier County United Arts Council, and Share Our Strength and has received several awards including an Honorary Doctorate Degree in Fine Arts from the University of South Carolina.

Green's earlier works show cubist influences; he is inspired by realism but combines it with abstraction. The subject of his work involves the experience of Gullah culture. Many of his paintings are based on memories from his childhood as well as Gullah traditions. He often links Gullah traditions with African traditions with his subject matter and use of color.

Jonathan Green explains,

*I wanted to go back to my roots. The older people were dying, and I began to see people (the Gullah) differently. I saw them as people with a strong link probably the strongest link with Africa of any of the black American people. I had studied African Art, and I began to appreciate a certain uniqueness.*

### **Information on the painting:**

As in *Daughters of the South*, Green often puts skies stacked with clouds into his work. This was common in Naples, Florida, where he lived for more than twenty years. He explains that he likes to mix elements from times and places beyond his Gullah upbringing: "I still have experiences outside my community and I incorporate it into my work." Also, characteristic of his work are long flowing dresses, bold patterns, and bright color.

### **Gullah music:**

The McIntosh County Shouters have been demonstrating old slave shouts and singing slave songs their entire lives. This tradition was thought to have died out in the early twentieth century; however, it was discovered that members of the Bolden/Briar Patch community in coastal Georgia still practice this custom of music, calling themselves the McIntosh County Shouters. Today, they travel to schools, festivals, churches, and public and private events to educate all audiences about the Gullah Geechee heritage. View their website here:

<http://mcintoshcountyshouters.com/>. There are several YouTube videos online with videos of their music.

### **Interpretative questions:**

1. Who are these women? [Explain that they are figures representing Green's childhood growing up in a Gullah community.] How does the artist feel about them? How does he feel about the landscape? Why do you think this?
2. Do you think the artist, Jonathan Green was thinking about Gullah culture while he was painting this? [Looking for yes, because he was from that culture and a lot of his work reflects it.] Do you think he was listening to Gullah music while painting it? If not, what kind of music was he perhaps listening to? Why do you think this?
3. Green uses a lot of bright colors and patterns in his artwork. If you were to paint while listening to Gullah music, what colors would you use? Why?



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4. Where is the focal point? Where does your eye go first? [Looking for the two women] Do you think the artist did this on purpose? How did the artist use line and color to make your eye go to the women, first? [The women are in the foreground of the painting. The lines on the dress move your eye from the middle of the painting towards the woman on the left.]
5. How does the artist give the painting balance? [Because the women are standing heavily on the center and right hand side of the painting, the Green used the green grass to help create balance. The grass moves upwards toward the left side.]
6. Do you see any movement in this painting? What kind of day is it? How can you tell?