

# Carl Raleigh Latimer (1913–1991)

Carl Latimer is an African-American abstract expressionist painter, sculptor and actor, who spent most of his life in Italy, France and Denmark. He is part of the African American artists group living in the Nordic countries also known as “*The Lost Generation*” as many of them were unknown outside Scandinavia until recent times.

The group included painters, Clifford Jackson, Herbert Gentry, Walter Henry Williams, Arthur Hardie, and Harvey Tristan Cropper. The majority of them came to Denmark and Sweden from the 1950s and found an environment where they were not considered second-class citizens. But their isolation from the American art world also meant that they were not widely known or celebrated as some of their historical or contemporary peers.

Latimer was more isolated than the others as abstract painting was an uncommon and controversial style for Black artists in the 1960s. Latimer’s transition from abstract expressionism to non-figurative and geometric works in the late 1960s is unique as many African-American artists didn’t believe that abstract art was relevant to Black Americans at the time.

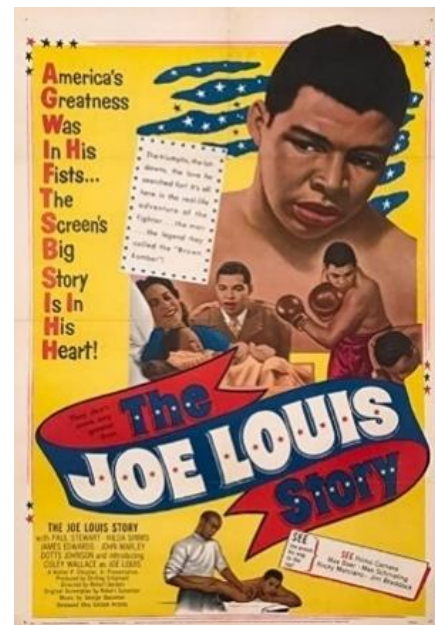
Anne Marie Telmányi foreshadowed this in the catalogue text written for Latimer in 1970 when she wrote “*He will probably stand as a loner because he has the courage required to do so.*”

## Early life and education: New York and Paris.

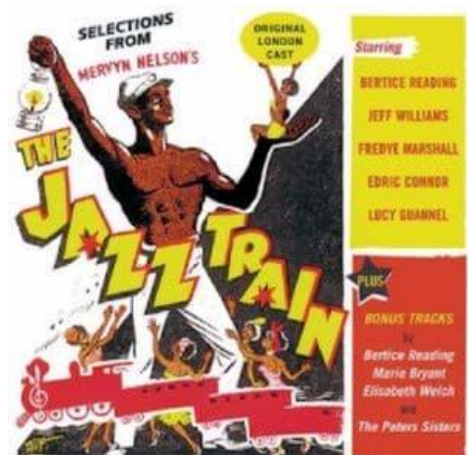
Latimer was born on the island Saint Croix, Danish West Indies in 1913. His mother was an Virgin Islander, with African heritage, and his father was mixed and descendant of Irish immigrants. He obtained US citizenship in 1917, when the islands were purchased by United States. Following this, in 1919, the 6 year old Latimer and his family moved to New York. Latimer grew up in Brooklyn and was an artistic child. At age 8, he won a local drawing competition that gave access to training in the arts. He also studied music and dance. He studied at the American National Academy School of Fine Arts. ( ca 1944-1945) During this time he is thought to have met Russian sculptor, Ossip Zadkine who was a teacher at the academy. Latimer later joined Zadkine at his school in Paris. Zadkine encouraged his pupils to develop a personal creative approach to the ideas of abstraction and also trained African-american sculptor, Elizabeth Catlett. By 1948, Latimer joined the Ossip Zadkine Studio of Modern Sculpture and Drawing, a school located at Rue Notre-Dame-des- Champs in Paris. The courses were taught in English by Zadkine and attracted numerous American pupils, including abstract expressionist painter, Kenneth Noland. Latimer also attended the École des Beaux-Arts and stayed in Paris until the early 1950s.



Carl Latimer in *The Joe Louis Story*, 1953



*The Joe Louis Story* Advertisement, 1953



*The Jazz Train* Advertisement 1955

### Boxing and early acting career.

In his youth, Latimer was an amateur boxer and fought under the name: Carl 'Rocky' Latimer. His impressive physic and charismatic persona landed him a role in film, *The Joe Louis Story* in 1953, where he appeared together with American actor and heavyweight boxer, Coley Wallace. In 1955, Latimer joined the cast of the all-black revue and Broadway hit show, *The Jazz Train*, and toured the United Kingdom where it ran for 111 performances. Other members of the cast included: The Peters Sisters, Bertice Reading, Fredye Marshall and Edric Connor.

### The Italian years. ( 1956-1967) An African American in the Post-War Italian Avant-Garde

In the early 1950s, Italy went through a post-war economic boom and cultural revival. Similar to the New York school, a radical art scene emerged and attracted several foreign artists. Piero Dorazio, the internationally-minded Italian artist, recalled that “Americans were no longer going to Paris – that had been in the 1920s and 1930s. In the 1950s, Rome was full of artists.”

Latimer moved to Italy around 1956, together with African American actress Edith Peters, who Latimer had met while touring with *The Jazz Train* in United Kingdom. Edith Peters had an Italian agent, Silvio Catalano, who encouraged them to move to Rome. Edith Peters later married Catalano in 1958 and made Italy her permanent home.

Latimer resided at the San Vito Romano and studied at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Rome. He became a part of a group of African-American expats artists visiting and living in Rome. Other African American artists who became part of Rome’s creative community at the time included:

- Abstract sculptor Richard Hunt who lived in Florence and Rome 1957-58.
- John Rhoden (who was located in Rome between 1951 and 1954);
- Barbara Chase-Riboud who studied at the American Academy in Rome in 1956;
- Ralph Ellison lived at the American Academy in Rome as the first African American writer in residence from 1955-1957;
- The visionary African American painter Bob Thompson, who lived in Rome from 1965 until his early death in 1966; and
- Roman Barden, who visited Rome in 1961.

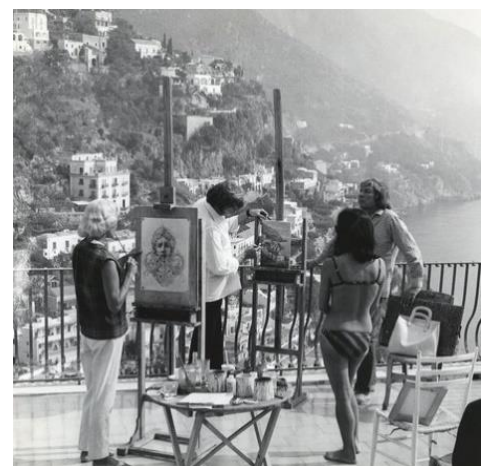
### Edna Lewis' Positano Art Workshop



Edna Lewis at the Positano Art Workshop



Students from the Positano Art Workshop (Latimer in centre)



Outdoor art classes at Positano

During the late 1950s, Latimer moved to Positano to study and work at the Positano Art Workshop, an American art school founded by Edna Lewis in 1952 and operated by American abstract artists Randall Morgan and Eugene Charlton-Rafalsky. The school was located on Amalfi Coast and classes were often taught outdoors and on the beach. It attracted many foreign artists and the town became a colony of jet-set Americans artists and writers.

Latimer received training from the prominent Italian abstract artists, Angelo Savelli and Piero Dorazio who taught at the workshop during the summers. Latimer attended the school's annual exhibitions, showed at Gargiulo/Lopel Gallery, and was a frequent guest at the famous art dinner parties, hosted by Edna Lewis.



Harold Willard Bradley Jr at the Folkstudio

### Folkstudio (1961-1967)

In 1961, Latimer met the African American football player and visual artist, Harold Willard Bradley Jr. Bradley ran the art atelier *Folkstudio* in a cellar in Via Garibaldi in Rome. The venue was a popular destination where artists, painters and musicians gathered. The studio had art exhibitions during the day and at nights it morphed into a jazz club. Latimer showcased his art at the studio and also did singing and dancing at the nightclub.



Latimer as a gladiator in *Barabbas* (1961)

To support themselves, Latimer and Bradley attended acting auditions together and both got parts as gladiators in the 1961 religious epic, *Barabbas*, together with Anthony Quinn and Jack Palance. After meeting Quinn on set, they found common interest in arts and their background in boxing created a great camaraderie and Quinn purchased several of Latimer's paintings. It was most likely Quinn who introduced Latimer to Italian director, Federico Fellini who also purchased pieces from Latimer and gave him a part in the film: *The Temptations of Doctor Antonio* (1962) starring Anita Ekberg. Another famous admirer of Latimer was actor, Sidney Poitier who purchased paintings from Latimer while he was on holiday in Rome. Harold Bradley ran the Folkstudio until 1967, before returning to Chicago, USA, the same year that Latimer moved to Denmark.



Images from the Folkstudio

## The Denmark years ( 1967-1983)

### Møn island.

In 1967, Latimer moved to Møn, a small island surrounded by wet and white chalk cliffs, located in the Danish Baltic Sea. In the 1960s, the island had about 3500 inhabitants dominated by fishermen and farmers. It is uncertain why Latimer moved to the tiny Danish island. Perhaps he was curious about his mother's past, as she was a descendant of slaves in the Danish colonies in the West Indies or perhaps it was the island's unique nature which gave it its nickname "The Caribbean of the north"

Latimer's presence on the island was very noticeable, not only as very few African-Americans lived in Denmark, but also due to his outgoing personality. But like African American artist, William H. Johnson in 1930s Kerteminde, Latimer was very much welcomed by the locals.

Latimer and Johnson had many similarities: Both were African American painters, well-rounded in art education and travel, and both had experienced the progressive European art scene before settling in a small community inhabited by rural Danish farmers and fishermen.

Their quotes on Denmark are also almost identical. In a Danish interview from 1944, Johnson said " *I have never worked so well as I did in Kerteminde. Nowhere else did I receive more peace of mind, nowhere else did I find better motifs.*" In 1968 Latimer himself was quoted as saying: "*I've got a need to be on Mon. As the island gives me peace of mind to work with my art.*"

It may also be due to this connection that Latimer was invited to Kerteminde in 1968 for his first Danish Solo show at the Kerteminde Library where he showcased abstract oil paintings and watercolor drawings.

During Latimer's time on Møn island, he lived in his art studio in the village of Stege and produced a number of abstract sculptures in wood, metal and ceramics, as well as pictures. He later rented the estate "Skansesgaarden" A large farm estate with view over the Baltic sea. Møn island is famous for its bountiful supply of fossils, wild orchids and megalithic monuments and must have been a great source of inspiration for the colors and geometry in his works.

In his spare time, Latimer participated in many local activities and volunteered to teach Danish children English language at the local School, Hjertebjergskolen. He was also active at the local Danish women's society where he did lectures on calypso songs and music and entertained in the evenings with black spirituals songs. He also starred in the musical "Patrick X" based on the life of civil rights activist Malcolm X that premiered in Copenhagen in 1968.



Skansesgaarden Estate, Møn, Denmark



View of Møn, Denmark



Press cutting of Latimer, November 1968 "Møns Folkebibliotek opens large solo show with artist, Carl Latimer"



Press photography of Theede and Latimer at Aurora Show (Aug. 1968)

Latimer befriended the Danish art dealer, Christian Theede who had a house on Møn known as *Villa Aurora*. Theede was an openly gay art dealer who had lived in America for many years before settling on Møn in the late 1950s. Theede turned his house into an exhibition centre for contemporary Danish and foreign art in 1961 and became Latimers first patron and they remained very close. It was also Theede who introduced Latimer to the Danish female artist, Anne Marie Telmányi who had a summerhouse on the island.

Partnership with Anne Marie Telmányi

Anne Marie Telmányi (1893–1983) was an established Danish painter and writer. Best known for her series of portraits. In 1961, she joined the group of artists based at Theeds Villa Aurora, on Møn and contributed to their exhibitions which toured Denmark. She and Latimer were first introduced in 1967 and in 1971, Latimer moved in with her at her estate and studio in Rungsted located north of Copenhagen. Their partnership did not go unnoticed in the Danish art scene. Latimer was 31 years her junior and when they exhibited together at The Royal Charlottenborg show in Copenhagen 1971 and at the Artists Fall Show at Den Frie in 1973, the Danish press called them “Nat og Dag” (Night and Day) referring to their age gap, different skin color and unlike painting style.



Portrait of Latimer, by Telmányi, 1968



Advertisement for the Telmanyi and Latimer exhibition at Den Frie, Copenhagen. 1973.



Advertisement for the Telmanyi and Latimer exhibition at Charlottenborg, Copenhagen 1971.



Press article from December 1973. “They met at Møn – Now they exhibit together”



Den Frie, The Artists Fall Show, 1973. Geometric oil by Latimer in the back.



Latimer and Telmányi at their joint exhibition at Charlottenborg in 1971

**Sæsonen starter på galleri Klode Mølle**  
 En stor og spændende præsentation af den amerikanske kunstner Carl Latimer



“Latimer portrays his sense of time with events from the Vietnam war and discrimination against his own kind and are expressed in powerful titles as: Paraphrase over Martin Luther King, Harlem and negro ghetto. But Latimer's artistic mind is so richly faceted that it must also manifest itself in other ways. Latimer mainly works in purely abstract painting in where his distinctive character is fascinatingly expressed in a highly nuanced sense of form and in a color attitude. “

Review from Danish Art Gallery, Klode Mølle, Denmark. September 1968

*“The season starts at Gallery Klode Mølle. Big and exciting presentation of the American artist Carl Latimer”*



Portrait of Telmányi by Latimer ca 1970.

**The Art of Carl Latimer.**

He debuted in New York with solo show in 1953 and has since then been exhibited in France, Italy, Germany, Denmark and Morocco. The influence of Latimer's stay in Europe is notable in many of his works: from the lyrical and expressive style taught to him by Ossip Zadkine in Paris, the impact from the Italian Post War Avantgarde to the experimental art scene in Denmark during the 1960s and 1970s. Latimer often stated that Spanish artist Joan Miro was his most significant early influence.

His style reflected the abstract expressionists from the 1950s and transitioned to a pure geometric style and total abstraction beginning in the late 1960s. Black art during the peak of the civil rights era were dominated by figurative painting and sculpture, but Latimer expressed his sentiments through abstraction and colors. His total output were either abstract expressionist or geomatic, except for a few personal pieces (Muhammad Ali boxing glove sculpture 1979, and the Portrait of Telmányi, plaster relief, 1973)

Latimer often gave his works political titles such as: *Lynchtime USA; Seize on freedom; Ghetto life; Rape of Vietnam, Paraphrase over Martin Luther King;* and the 1968 painting: *Olympian noir ( Black Olympian)* that referenced the 1968 Olympics Black Power salute. When his work was untitled, Latimer referred them as *“Farvelade “*: A Danish pun and word for paintbox, meaning diversity of colors.

*“Latimers views on the civil rights movement, racial discrimination and the horrors of the Vietnam war, are not expressed figuratively or literally but in colors. His protests are in an auxiliary language that is understood by everyone and his subject is universal.*

*As the emotional person he is, it must be in the colors, probably as much as in the concrete design of the subjects, that he gets involved. The effect is based on an immediately perceptible language, which is not hampered by national borders and does not require a specific stage of development to be perceived and understood. Carl Latimer does not forget that he is first and foremost an artist.”*

(Peter Eriksen, on the Kerteminde exhibition, 1968)

**Latimer**

Konstner Båthuset  
 27. okt. - 16. nov.  
 Åben mån. - fre.  
 Kl. 8-19  
 1970  
 Fredags  
 Kl. 8-19

**CARL LATIMER**  
 Udmærkelser  
 og gaver

Carl Latimer født 21. okt. 1924  
 "Poulsten"  
 The National Art Academy, New York,  
 Art Students League, New York, Zadkine  
 School of Sculpture, Paris, Susan Aron,  
 Paris, Académie de Beaux Arts, Rome.  
 Carl Latimer er kunstner først og frem-  
 mest, men arbejder med alt, hvad der  
 kommer under hans bånd. Han lever  
 med sit kunstneriske væsen i samfundet.  
 Han arbejder for alle, og han har  
 en stor og en kædet sig af arbejdspladser.  
 Han har arbejdet med alle typer af  
 kunst, og han har arbejdet i alle  
 lande. Han er en kunstner af 1. rang.  
 Anna Maria Telmányi, C. Carl Latimer

Udvalgte udstillingssteder:  
 No. 1 Dublin 1953  
 2 Danmark 1953  
 3 København 1953  
 4 Østtyskland 1953  
 5 Uge 1953  
 6 Los Angeles de France 1953  
 7 The Art Club 1953  
 8 Paris on Freedom 1953  
 9 Skulptur 1953  
 10 Skulptur 1953  
 11 Skulptur 1953  
 12 Skulptur 1953  
 13 Skulptur 1953  
 14 Skulptur 1953  
 15 Skulptur 1953  
 16 Skulptur 1953  
 17 Skulptur 1953  
 18 Skulptur 1953  
 19 Skulptur 1953

Press article on Carl Latimer ca 1970.

When interviewed by Danish press in 1969 about racism, he stated

*“Of course, I myself have felt racial prejudice and discrimination. But I have so much to do in connection with my work that I don't have time to deal with who likes me or not. “*

When Latimer had his first solo exhibition in Kerteminde, Denmark on 4th december 1968, Danish art critic Peter Eriksen called the show *“Farver som vaaben I kamp mod vold”* (Colors as weapon in the fight against violence). Carl Latimer solo show at Korsor, Denmark in 1970, included catalogue text written by Telmanyi.

### Carl Latimers cinematic career

From 1959 to 1964, Latimer played parts in 11 Italian movies and one tv show. Included notable films including *Barbaras* (1961), starring Anthony Quinn and Jack Palance, and *The Temptations of Doctor Antonio* (1962), directed by Federico Fellini and starring Anita Ekberg. Latimer also appeared in several fotoromanzis ( Italian photo comics). Latimer's impressive physic and dancing background landed him parts in many of the Italian *sword-and-sandal* epics where he also did his own stunt works. During this period he Italianized his name to *Carlo Latimer*.

Several African-Americans found greater opportunity in the Italian film industry than in the United States. Jet Magazine published an article on the situation in 1954 entitled *Italy's Movie Boom for Negro Actors*. Latimer was a part of a large group of black American entertainers who settled in Italy from the late 1950s. The group appeared in many movies together. The group includes actors John Kitzmiller, Alfred Thomas, Harold Willard Bradley Jr. Writer, William Demby, singer Edith Peters, dancers Wilbert Bradley, Van Aikens, Beryl Cunningham and Janine Hendy.

Latimers Italian movies included:

- Erode il grande/Herod The Great (1959)
- Barabbas (1961)
- La vendetta di Ursus/ The Vengeance of Ursus (1961)
- Più rosa che giallo/ More pink than yellow (Television series) (1962)
- Boccaccio 70. The Temptations of Doctor Antonio (1962)
- Maciste contro lo Sceicco/ Samson Against the Sheik (1962)
- Totò contro Maciste / Toto vs. Maciste (1962)
- Le sette folgori di Assur/ War Gods of Babylon (1962)
- L'invincibile cavaliere mascherato / L'Invincible Cavalier noir. Invincible Masked Rider. Invincible Black Rider. (1963)
- Ursus nella terra di fuoco / Ursus in the Land of Fire (1963)
- Anthar l'invincibile / Anthar the Invincible (1964)
  - Ercole contro i figli del sole / Hercules Against the Sons of the Sun (1964)

*“Carl Latimer is an artist first and foremost. He works with everything that comes under his hands. He lives with everything he comes in contact with. His interest in the life he sees around him is explosive. He works with all materials and throws himself into everything with a luminous zeal.*

*He has studied in many places, but has an uncommon self-acquired and very free outlook in his artistic expression. He will probably stand as a loner because he has the courage required to do so.*

*Thanks to his unspoken brave self-awareness. His colors are jumping, it is life and all the violence of life today, he expresses and expresses it all the way. He is an artist of today.”*

(Anne Marie Telmanyi. Korsor, Town Hall. Oct. 27. 1970)



*Various images of Latimer in Italian film.*

## List of exhibitions

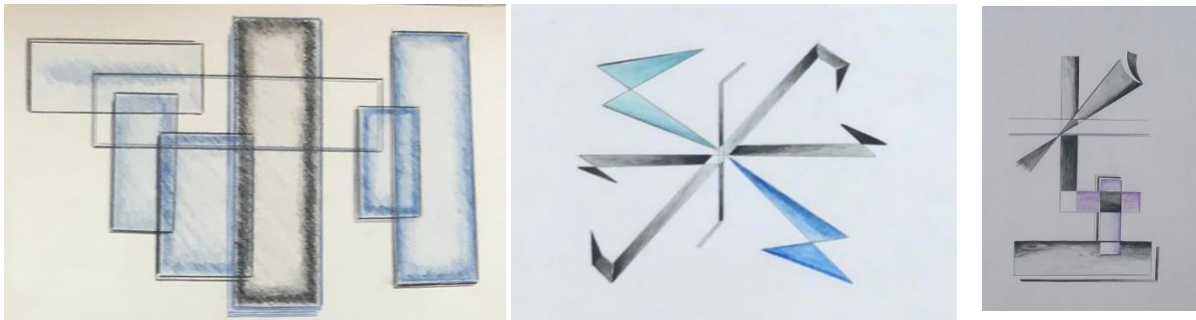
- Cercle Litteraire Française, Tangier, Morocco.
- Novella art gallery. Salerno. Italy
- La Salita, Rome. Italy
- Folkstudio, Rome. Italy
- Positano Art Workshop, Positano, Italy
- Villa Aurora, Møn, Denmark
- Møn Bibliotek, Møn, Denmark
- Kunsternes Efteraarsudstilling Copenhagen, Denmark
- Charlottenborg, Copenhagen, Denmark
- Kerteminde Bibliotek, Kerteminde, Denmark
- Dalum Bibliotek, Dalum, Denmark
- Korsor Raadhus, Korsor, Denmark.
- Klode Molle Kunst Galleriet, Engesvang, Denmark
- Sakskobing Bibliotek, Sakskobing, Denmark.
- Ganzoni Art Gallery. Geneva, Switzerland
- Various group shows in New York, Paris and Dusseldorf

## France and Latimers final years:

Latimer started traveling to France periodically from 1969 and was working in both France and Denmark until the death of Telmányi in 1983. During Latimers time in France, he lived in the small village, Bezalles. There he purchased a large farm estate that he renovated himself and had plans to open his own art school which was sadly never realized. Latimer spent his final years in northern France and had shows in Fontainebleau and at the Ganzoni Art Gallery. Geneva, Switzerland.

## Selected works:

### Gouaches:



### Oil paintings:

