

>> *Rose J. Smith*

“My drawings, watercolors, oils, and acrylics have always been, for me, the means by which I render my true feelings to the world. In essence, my art is a confession made to clarify what I have witnessed in life.” – Rose J. Smith

Born in Kansas City, Missouri, Rose J. Smith grew up in St. Paul, Minnesota. She has been painting since the age of five, when she says she discovered how easily one can venture into a new world with a brush stroke. Her love of painting led her to study the visual arts at the University of Minnesota and the Minneapolis School of Art and Design. Her artwork has been exhibited across the country and is included in many private and public collections including the Oklahoma State Art Collection at the Capitol.

Early in her art career, Rose and her husband, fellow artist Melvin R. Smith, chose to follow the path taken by numerous other African-American artists of the 20th century. They traveled in search of community, like-minded individuals, and free expression of culture. This led them to explore places like New York City’s Harlem and Chicago’s Bronzeville. These locations are touchstones in the history of African-Americans, offering abundant and nurturing resources for artists of the era like William H. Johnson, Jacob Lawrence, and Romare Bearden.

Through their travels, the Smiths said they found validation that comes from authentic African-American communities where one is empowered by recognition of their own culture. They became messengers of this culture through their artwork. Together, they brought this idea to Oklahoma and founded the Oklahoma Museum of African-American Arts in Oklahoma City. The museum reflected the messages they discovered in their travels and offered an environment of expression for African-American artists in Oklahoma.

Rose painted *Summertime in Bartlesville* while living in Oklahoma in 2000. The painting is distinctive in her style, featuring African-American women who are large in stature, disproportionate in shape, and elegant in posture. Through Rose’s simple composition, color, and style, she is able to express loneliness, dignity, solitude, peace, and tranquility. The starkness of the background keeps the viewer’s eye focused on the figures. The women in Rose’s paintings are often strong, innocent, and powerful.

***Summertime in Bartlesville***

by Rose J. Smith (2000)

>> **Activity: Paint like Rose Smith****Supplies Needed**

- Paintbrushes • Tempera paints
- Heavy paper, butcher paper works well
- Small paper cups for color mixing

Instructions

1. Lightly sketch a line drawing on your paper. Consider having a friend model for you by standing or sitting in a chair. Like Rose Smith, allow the figure to be disproportionate. Elongate the arms and legs and make the feet and hands larger than normal.
2. Choose only five colors for your painting. Mix your desired colors in the paper cups.
3. Begin filling in the shapes with tempera paint. Paint one color at a time and allow it to dry completely before moving on to the next color. This will keep the colors from mixing together.
4. Once you have all of the objects filled in, paint the background one solid color.
5. Complete your painting by signing it in the bottom right-hand corner.

Further Knowledge: Use the internet or library to research more paintings by Rose Smith as well as artwork by William H. Johnson, Jacob Lawrence and Romare Bearden. Find the similarities and differences in each artist’s artwork.