In the late 1920s, Bill Traylor (ca. 1853–1949) left one lifetime behind and embarked on another. Born enslaved in Alabama, Traylor was an eyewitness to history: the Civil War, Emancipation, Reconstruction, Jim Crow segregation, the Great Migration, and the steady rise of African American urban culture in the South. After seven decades of labor, his tethers to plantation life had all fallen away, so he traveled, alone, into the cityscape of segregated Montgomery.

Traylor would spend the next two decades in Montgomery, looking back at a hard, haunting agrarian past; looking ahead at a rapidly evolving world in the city. Traylor became an artist at a time and in a place where personal expression for black Americans posed great risk. Yet in his final decade, he took up pencil and paintbrush and attested to own his existence and point of view. In just a few years, Traylor put down a lifetime of memories, dreams, stories, and scenes in over a thousand works of art.

Traylor’s compelling imagery charts the crossroads of radically different worlds—rural and urban, black and white, old and new—and reveals how one man’s visual record of African American life gives larger meaning to the story of his nation.

Curated by Leslie Umberger, curator of folk and self-taught art

Got one mind for white folks to see,  
‘Nother for what I know is me;  
He don’t know, he don’t know my mind.

—African American traditional song
Early Work

*Blacksmith Shop*
ca. 1939–40
pencil on cardboard
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Eugenia and Charles Shannon, 1995.399

It is uncertain when Bill Traylor began drawing, but his earliest known works—rudimentary drawings done in pencil—were made in early 1939, when he was around eighty-six. After decades of farm labor, the aged Traylor was spending days drawing near a blacksmith shop and lodging nightly at a funeral home in the segregated black business district of Montgomery. In these first drawings, Traylor takes stock of the world around him, documenting hand tools, objects, animals, and people, and learning how to organize pictures as records and tell stories.

*Untitled (Scene with Keg)*
ca. 1939–40
pencil and opaque watercolor on paperboard
Courtesy The Museum of Everything

Traylor’s extant artworks date between 1939 and 1942; few if any of the works he made before or after that period survived. He started his artistic journey with pencil and soon after took up water-based paints as well, preferring to work on discarded pieces of cardboard from packaging or advertisements.

*Untitled (NRA WPA)*
ca. 1939–42
pencil and poster paint on cardboard
Private collection

*WPA Poster*
ca. 1939–42
pencil and crayon on cardboard
The Harmon and Harriet Kelley Foundation for the Arts

Traylor never became literate, yet with the help of people he knew, he developed a drawn version of his name that he sometimes added as a signature to his works. Traylor’s awareness of significant letters is nevertheless apparent in his careful replication of the “alphabet” acronyms used on posters promoting Depression-era social programs—the Works Progress Administration (WPA), the National Recovery Administration (NRA), and Resettlement Administration (RA). These federal agencies all helped people by providing work. In an unconventional way, Traylor’s art became a literary equivalent—a personal means of recording what he had seen, felt, recalled, or believed.

*Bill Traylor: Between Worlds*
Introductory film by Jeffrey Wolf and Breakaway Films for the Smithsonian American Art Museum, 2018
(Running time approx. 4 minutes)
The Dogs

*Man and Woman*
ca. 1939–42
on reverse: *Man and Large Dog*
poster paint and pencil on cardboard
Collection of Jerry and Susan Lauren

Traylor sometimes made paintings on both back and front of a paperboard support. For this particular artwork, the two images may relate to a single topic. Here, a black man argues heatedly with a white woman; his clothes are strikingly similar to hers and to those of the man (perhaps her husband) shown on the other side. She points in his face but he gestures to something behind him—the past perhaps, a time when his clothes might not have been as fine as a white man’s. Although the reality of the Jim Crow South would have made such an encounter dangerous for him and therefore unlikely, Traylor depicts the man standing up for himself.

*Man and Large Dog*
ca. 1939–42
on reverse: *Man and Woman*
poster paint and pencil on cardboard
Collection of Jerry and Susan Lauren

Traylor adeptly used animals as allegorical stand-ins for people. A diminished white man leading a giant, raging black dog may subtly refer to the paradox of slavery: a strong and mighty being, held in bondage through the powers of social agency and wealth. Traylor’s paintings of single canines—hulking animals painted in or set against blazing reds—convey the enormity of emotions, including fear, rage, and torment, feelings that African Americans had to outwardly suppress in segregated society.

*Mean Dog*
ca. 1939–42
on reverse: *Man Leading Mule* (not shown)
poster paint and pencil on cardboard
Collection of Jerry and Susan Lauren

Traylor’s dogs convey a wide range of character types, from docile pets to lethal foes. His many depictions of fighting hounds suggest an ongoing desire to capture raw animal ferocity and the intense dynamic of mortal conflict. On plantations, canines were common farming and hunting aides, but they were also trained to hunt and kill humans. From the time of slavery, through the decades of Jim Crow segregation and into the present, dogs have been an effective tool for instilling terror. Often portraying the embattled beasts in different colors, Traylor subtly conveyed the notion of an interracial battle.
Chase Scenes

Running Rabbit
ca. 1939–42
pencil and poster paint on cardboard
Private collection

Untitled (Rabbit)
April 1940
opaque watercolor and pencil on paperboard
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase through the Luisita L. and Franz H. Denghausen Endowment, 2015.19.1

Exciting Event with Snake, Plow, Figures Chasing Rabbit
ca. 1939–42
pencil on cardboard
The William Louis-Dreyfus Foundation Inc.

Songs and stories have always been effective vehicles for communication. These modes carry tradition and history, but they may also transmit subversive allegories disguised as innocent animal tales. Some of Traylor’s earliest images narrate pursuit: the chaser and the chased. In the segregated South, overt depictions of racial confrontation would have been perilous for an African American man, yet Traylor shows an innate understanding of letting animals stand in for people. Rabbit is an iconic character in folklore—meek, but also clever and fast. For the enslaved and generations thereafter, Rabbit was heroic for outwitting his oppressors and surviving against the odds.

Untitled (Chase Scene)
ca. 1940
opaque watercolor and pencil on paperboard
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Micki Beth Stiller, 2015.25

Rabbit
ca. 1940–42
watercolor and graphite on cardboard
Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, Montgomery, Alabama, Gift of Charles and Eugenia Shannon, 1982.4.10

Traylor often drew rabbits flying through the air, escaping, or simply running free. Sometimes their legs appear uncannily human-like, as if Traylor wanted to only thinly disguise its resemblance to a running man. In Untitled (Chase Scene), Traylor draws a distinct parallel between a rabbit and a fleeing man. Here a figure—the only character painted in black—runs for his life; alongside him, a rabbit matches his frantic pace as a bird above signals the hope of escape. The pair is pursued by a man in a hat and a dog; the predators hunt the prey.
A Nuanced Christianity

_High Man, Small Man_
ca. 1939–42
pencil and charcoal on cardboard
Collection of Judy A. Saslow

Traylor’s paintings often tug at tales of good and evil—or perhaps, specifically, of virtue and debauchery. He often used a visual device of a little man poking or prodding a larger one—as if the personification of trouble was always nipping at his heels. Ambiguous figures populate some images—ghosts from dreams or legends, or haunting figures dwelling within the artist’s mind or memory.

_Preacher and Congregation_
ca. 1939–40
pencil, colored pencil, and crayon on paper
Collection of Judy A. Saslow

Traylor did not articulate his religious views, but his imagery conveys a nuanced Christianity: drawings of people congregating in prayer circles or conducting a ceremonial dance formation known as the “ring shout,” crucified African American figures, and peculiar encounters with devilish or ghostly figures reveal the artist’s ruminations on mortality and realms beyond the earthly.

_Black Jesus_
ca. 1939–42
gouache and pencil on cardboard
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Promised Gift of Charles E. and Eugenia C. Shannon

Traylor was raised in a Baptist environment and in his last years converted to Catholicism. His religious views, never overtly expressed, were likely a complex fusion of African religions, the Black Christian church in America, and the folk recipes and rituals known as conjure, hoodoo, or rootwork—secular practices commonly used as a supplement to religion. Although some African American Christians maintained that such magical practices were at odds with doctrine, boundaries between Christianity and hoodoo were often fluid.

Horses & Mules

_Yellow Horse, Black Mule_
ca. 1939–42
pencil and colored pencil on cardboard
Private collection

Having lived on farms for most of his life before moving to Montgomery, Traylor was familiar with the varied looks, skills, and character traits of horses and mules, and sometimes depicted their subtle differences in side-by-side comparisons. Mules in particular played a powerful role in African American folklore, wherein mules and enslaved people were often metaphorically linked—similarly assessed as possessions and beasts of burden.
Horse ("Turned him out to die")
1939
pencil and poster paint on cardboard
Collection of Barbara and John Wilkerson

"He’s Sullin"
ca. 1939–42
poster paint and graphite on cardboard
Collection of Scott Asen

Traylor sometimes made brief but telling comments about his artworks. About a painting of a mule he said, “He’s Sullin’,” remarking on the mood of the unhappy animal. About another, seemingly a skinny, old horse, Traylor said, “Turned him out to die.” The forlorn beast has been left to forage on a hillside pasture, until death takes him. Living as he did on the streets of Montgomery, Traylor likely felt a dispiriting kinship with the aged animal.

Memories & Mysteries

Untitled (Black Basket Form, Snake, Bird, and Man)
cia. 1939–42
colored pencil and pencil on cardboard
Collection of Mickey Cartin

A lifetime that encompassed slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and the Great Migration undoubtedly left Traylor with haunting memories. His artworks range from stark and serene to utterly nightmarish. Snakes are a ubiquitous presence in the country—a plentiful and quotidian part of rural life. But they may also inflict great harm, and feature prominently in folklore as portents of bad luck. Traylor employed snakes time and again as symbols of peril and often cast them as instigators of chaos—mouth open and fangs bared, they effectively evoke dreaded encounters with a mortal enemy.

Untitled (Red Goat with Snake)
cia. 1940–42
opaque watercolor and pencil on paperboard
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Judy A. Saslow, 2016.15

Traylor’s drawings rarely have one clear meaning, yet his ability to convey a mood of unease was masterful. He adroitly captured emotion and encounter through pose, gaze, color, and a brilliant use of negative space that describes motion and force; his characters jump, point, tumble, and run; predators and prey stand locked in confrontation. Traylor’s creatures and characters enact wordless, open-ended stories of operatic drama. Birds squawk and take flight; serpents poise to strike, owls shriek. Wielded weapons, pointing fingers, and arcane hash marks capture our attention but keep their secrets.

Brown Lamp with Figures
ca. 1939–42
gouache and pencil on cardboard
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Promised Gift of Charles E. and Eugenia C. Shannon

Oil lamps were the common light source for much of Traylor’s life. In some paintings, they indicate a quotidian tableau—the home fire at the kitchen table. Yet Traylor’s lamps often take center stage, and his
frequent depiction of them—along with the worried countenances of the figures huddling around them—suggests their larger significance, an abiding feeling of vigilance, of needing to be on the lookout for trouble. The artist may have used lamps to symbolize nightfall and the concomitant nightmares some said it brought him. The lamps may also refer to funerary customs of sitting up with the dead, or superstitions about lingering, restless spirits of those who died wrongfully.

**Dressed to the Nines**

*Man in Blue Suit Pointing*
ca. 1939–42
poster paint and pencil on cardboard
Collection of Jerry and Susan Lauren

Men in fancy suits, tailcoats, and tall hats, accessorized with bags, canes, umbrellas, and cigars, are a central enigma in Traylor’s body of work. These striking figures have been explored variously as the personifications of Death, the Undertaker, and the Conjure Doctor—all powerful roles that Traylor’s characters may step in and out of. Traylor identified one such subject as “Ross the Undertaker.” David Ross Sr. was co-owner of the Ross-Clayton Funeral Home and an icon in Montgomery’s black business district; moreover for Traylor, he was a man who had given him shelter when he had no home of his own.

*Walking Man*
ca. 1939–42
opaque watercolor and graphite pencil on board

Traylor had a predilection for blue. The blue pencils and paints available to him varied, but the prevailing favorite was an intense cobalt poster paint, so vibrant it radiates in any light. Traylor’s men in blue appear throughout his larger body of work, but they could also comprise a category unto themselves. These characters are exceptional in various ways, whether through their ability to skirt danger or command attention. In African American culture the color blue is associated with protection—a color that could shield one from harm or malevolent spirits.

Exhibition booklet for solo show
*Bill Traylor: People’s Artist*, New South Gallery, Montgomery, Alabama, February 1–19, 1940
Smithsonian Libraries, Washington, DC, donated by the family of Joseph H. Wilkinson

In March 1939, artist Charles Shannon initiated an artists’ collective in Montgomery. They called themselves New South, indicating a progressive social agenda—a challenge to the status quo of segregation in the Alabama capital. Despite its zeal, the all-volunteer organization was short-lived. In February 1940 the group mounted its last exhibition, *Bill Traylor: People’s Artist*, the first exhibition of Traylor’s art and the only one he lived to see. The members pitched in to hang the show and hand-print a small booklet, with text by Shannon and silk-screened reproductions of Traylor’s art by group member Jay Leavell.
Folk Magic, Dreams & Transformation

* Untitled (Legs Construction with Blue Man)  
  ca. 1940–42  
opaque watercolor, pencil, and charcoal on paperboard  

A number of Traylor’s drawings depict disembodied legs kicking about. The upended, boot-like feet often resemble a cast-iron cobbler’s anvil, which would have been among the tools Traylor used or saw regularly in the late 1920s while working at a shoe-repair shop or in 1940 when he was staying nights at another cobbler’s business. The spare forms create dynamic and elegant silhouettes, but they also transform the shape of a human foot into something threatening, hammer-like, and potentially cruel—objects that might propel dark dreams for one sleeping among their shadowy shapes.

* Untitled (Figure on Construction with Legs)  
  ca. 1939–42  
charcoal on cardboard  
High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia, Purchase with funds from Mrs. Lindsey Hopkins Jr., Edith G. and Philip A. Rhodes, and the Members Guild

* Human Plant Form on Construction with Dog and Man  
  ca. 1939–40  
colored pencil on cardboard  
The William Louis-Dreyfus Foundation Inc.

Although the specifics of Traylor’s narratives are ultimately unknowable, collectively these mysterious dramas spark questions about the degree to which folk magic played a role in his imagery. Spiritual practices, superstitions, and blended beliefs grew out of slavery every bit as much as work songs, allegorical fables, and herbal remedies. Conjure, rootwork, and hoodoo all refer to the secular practices in which African Americans used recipes and rituals to influence their fates, calling on magic as a supplement to religion in an unpredictable and unjust society, and for envisioning the power to change the world.

* Half of Green Man with Dog, Plant, and Figures  
  ca. 1939–40  
colored pencil and pencil on cardboard  
The William Louis-Dreyfus Foundation Inc.

Theologian Theophus Smith defines conjure or hoodoo as a “magical means of transforming reality.” Around 1939–40, Traylor did a number of drawings in green pencil wherein plants and humans converge. Plants have human legs, or a man has sprouted foliage where his head or hands should be. Although the meaning of these scenes of hybridity or transformation is unknown, collectively they evoke the ways in which strange dreams or mystical ideas might have taken shape in the artist’s mind. Traylor’s drawings often reveal an otherworldly sense, a realm in which logic yields to imagination.
**Men of All Stripes**

*Self-Portrait*
c. 1939–40
gouache and pencil on cardboard
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Promised Gift of Charles E. and Eugenia C. Shannon

Although Traylor did not specifically comment on whether his depictions were ever self-portraits, some of his men bear sufficient resemblance to the artist to invite speculation. One painting shows a man wearing a hat and clothing not unlike Traylor’s own and sporting a long beard, as Traylor often did. Most intriguingly, the figure walks with the aid of two canes—as the artist himself did around the time this work was made. In another painting, the man is unhindered and vigorous, possibly the artist recalling himself in an earlier day.

*Untitled (Man with Blue Torso)*
c. 1939–42
pencil and poster paint on cardboard
Collection of Robert A. Roth

Traylor depicts men in a wide array of moods and roles and are among his foremost subjects. The artist’s sophisticated representations of age, personality, and societal function crystalize in a cast of characters spanning common folk, black athletic icons, businessmen, people of diverse physical and ethnic status, and more. Although the men in Traylor’s more complex scenes often seem foreboding or even violent, the men he depicted on their own were predominantly shown as individuals of character and members of a larger community.

**Abstraction & Distinctive Works**

*Cedar Trees*
c. 1939–40
compressed charcoal on cardboard
Collection of Dame Jillian Sackler

Traylor’s use of unmodulated color and his ability to flatten and reduce forms endeared him to lovers of modern art. Yet images that seem simple at first, tease and hint at mysterious, underlying content. The artist deftly balanced narration with abstraction and the familiar with the unknowable. Regarding a work seemingly of stacked blocks and cones Traylor gave the succinct remark: “Cedar trees, like they have side of doors.” His explanation of potted cedars illuminates an image that might otherwise remain simplified beyond recognition. Most often though, Traylor’s intentions are unknown, leaving viewers to wonder about a world reshaped by his vision.

*Man with Yoke*
c. 1939–42
pencil and gouache on cardboard
Private collection

Traylor is known for revisiting favored themes, but the individual works are nevertheless unique. He repeatedly explored the concept of a little man hassling or provoking a larger one to evoke the idea of personal choices, perhaps never more clearly than in *Man with Yoke*. The central figure’s load appears to
be a moral one. A small being atop either shoulder reveals his battle. The figure on the left holds a bottle (vice), while the one on the right preaches righteousness. Traylor’s “little man”—the troublemaker—shows up in a number of works, always prodding and pushing people into situations in which they ought not to be.

**Drinkers & Dancers**

*Untitled (Man, Woman, and Dog)*
1939
crayon and pencil on paperboard
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Herbert Waide Hemphill Jr., and museum purchase made possible by Ralph Cross Johnson, 1986.65.199

Traylor’s creatures—both animals and people—sometimes exude an untamed or feral intensity. In *Untitled (Man, Woman, and Dog)*, a couple dances with wild abandon. Although Traylor didn’t speak specifically about after-hours houses or “jook” joints—underground spots for drinking, gambling, and dancing—they surely existed all around him. In the 1930s the uninhibited dance styles that became popular with younger African Americans were held in mixed regard by community elders, who worried they were tools of the devil. Yet blues music encouraged ethnic solidarity and a bawdy, rebellious culture that utilized pleasure as an act of resistance, particularly for those born after Emancipation.

*Black Man with Bottle*
ca. 1939–42
charcoal on cardboard
Collection of Audrey B. Heckler

Traylor often depicted figures, most often men, drinking. Reaching for bottles atop high shelves they pucker their lips, throw back, jump around, bend, and sway. Liquor is often shelved just out of reach—metaphorically forbidden or hard to obtain. On full display is the artist’s exceptional ability to let form describe feeling. Unbound by realism, Traylor’s drunks exude a feeling of freedom brought about by inebriation—possibly Traylor’s own personal snare. He purportedly once confessed, “What little sense I did have, whiskey took away.”

**Mortal Peril**

*Two Men, Dog, and Owl*
ca. 1939–42
colored pencil and charcoal on cardboard
The William Louis-Dreyfus Foundation Inc.

Violence is pervasive in Traylor’s art. People wield hatchets, clubs, or guns, they fall from heights, run from dogs, and flee into trees; sometimes they hang, lifeless. His images draw on the personal but describe an environment rife with peril and challenge. Lowndes County, Alabama, where Traylor lived and worked for much of his life, was the heart of the Jim Crow South, where racial persecution was commonplace.
Traylor often set his visual stories around a tree. These works overtly adhered to a hunting theme, a “possum hunt” for example. Yet Traylor was skilled at multilevel narratives. Seen another way, these images hint at darker stories, in which humans are both the hunters and the hunted.

Between the Civil War and the modern civil rights movement, thousands of African Americans were subjected to acts of torture and murder known as lynchings. Racial terrorism was illegal, but in Jim Crow America it was rampant and far too often tolerated or endorsed. Lynching peaked between 1877 and 1950—Traylor’s adult lifetime. He often drew violent scenes but rarely depicted racial persecution in an overt way. A small number of Traylor’s drawings, however, attest to the injustice and inhumanity he had witnessed.

In his somber silhouettes, Traylor compressed a universe of volume and feeling into the flattest of shapes. He effectively balanced positive and negative space, and reduced physicality and mood into stark, saturated images that distill subjects into succinct versions of their worldly forms. Inherently a minimalist with color, Traylor often rendered his images in solid tones of blue, brown, red, even yellow. But he turned most often to black for elegant translations that seem to perfectly fix a shadow.

Smithsonian American Art Museum
Wall text – *Between Worlds: The Art of Bill Traylor*
9-25-18/lb
**Untitled (Woman in Blue Holding an ABC Sign)**
ca. 1939–42
tempera and pencil on cardboard
Collection of Jerry and Susan Lauren

On several occasions, Traylor remarked that people in his drawings were reading, pointing to the objects he put in their hands—rectangular shapes marked with AB, ABC, or ABCD. Although his letters were sometimes oddly positioned, Traylor’s repeated portrayal of books and his comments about reading indicate his awareness of the power literacy afforded. As a man who never became literate but watched that force carry his children forward into the twentieth century, Traylor would certainly have ruminated on the tool that had been denied to him.

**Woman**
ca. 1940–42
watercolor and graphite on cardboard
Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, Montgomery, Alabama, Gift of Charles and Eugenia Shannon, 1982.4.25

**Woman in “O” and “X” Pattern Dress**
ca. 1939–42
poster paint and pencil on cardboard
Collection of Siri von Reis

Traylor often painted the people he saw in Montgomery’s bustling black business district. A world apart from rural farm laborers, these men wear suits, and the women are proud and glorious; bedecked in print dresses, toting handbags, umbrellas, and pets, they hold their heads high. Traylor most frequently depicted African Americans, yet he also painted others from the downtown neighborhood. Traylor made more than two dozen works showing people with fair skin, dark hair, brows, and eyes, which may depict Mexican immigrants or members of Montgomery’s Sephardic Jewish community.

Rudy Burckhardt
born Basel, Switzerland 1914—died Searsmont, ME 1999
*Montgomery, Alabama*
1941
16mm Kodachrome film; edited digital file, 2:23 mins.
Courtesy of the Estate of Rudy Burckhardt
Footage for *Montgomery, 1941* was located by Jeffrey Wolf during research for his film *Bill Traylor: Chasing Ghosts* (2018)

**Balancing Acts & Precipitous Events**

**Untitled (Figures and Construction with Blue Border)**
ca. 1941
poster paint and pencil on cardboard
American Folk Art Museum, New York, Gift of Charles and Eugenia Shannon, 1991.34.1

By arranging complex scenes on vertical structures, Traylor devised a method of presenting concurrent events on a single picture plane. Thematically and visually, these scenes often engage the notion of
balance. His subjects scale tall central elements where they teeter, play, battle, and fall. Upon this
metaphoric stage, Traylor proposes a precarious cultural equilibrium between a violent past and an
uncertain but hopeful future.

*Figures and Construction*

1941–42
pencil and watercolor on cardboard
Morris Museum of Art, Augusta, Georgia

Traylor often staged scenes of commotion on abstracted vertical constructions. Although reduced to their
essential shapes, these structures resemble things the artist used or saw—from equipment like the cotton
press or whiskey still, to Montgomery landmarks including the Court Square Fountain and the Klein and
Son clock. Here, Traylor mingled the idea of clock hands and human hands, showing a clock-like
structure in which people mark the time with their arms. The clock and fountain appear to converge at
times; a spout of water emanating from a round-faced object shows the fluidity of these forms in the
artist’s mind.

*House Stories*

*Untitled (Yellow and Blue House with Figures and Dog)*
July 1939
colored pencil on paperboard
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase through the Luisita L. and Franz H. Denghausen
Endowment, 2016.14.5

Traylor’s house scenes likely recall his seven decades of plantation life. These pictures often show a
ladder leading from the yard to the roof—a rural custom in case of fire. For Traylor, ladders also served a
storytelling function—carrying the viewer’s gaze upward from the yard to the housetop, where high
intrigue often plays out. This premise captured Traylor’s artistic development better than any other
themetic vein, evolving from hesitant explorations, to carefully drawn works, to fluid, improvisational
paintings that pack a powerful visual punch.

*Untitled (Radio)*
ca. 1940–42
opaque watercolor and pencil on printed advertising paperboard
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase through the Luisita L. and Franz H. Denghausen
Endowment, 2016.14.4

Traylor often painted on discarded cardboard window advertisements or box tops. This large display card
once advertised the Philco Mystery Control, a wireless remote invented for radios in 1939. Here, similar
imagery and story lines seen in *Untitled (Yellow and Blue House with Figures and Dogs)* coalesce into a
single tightly organized scene. The characters may be the same, but Traylor distilled them into loosely
painted, stylized figures that deliver an explosive energy; details give way to fluid abstraction.