HYDRANGEAS SPRING SONG

In this painting, lively blue lines and shapes seem to float, twist, and turn. Each one points in a different direction and encourages our eyes to explore the entire picture. Look closely and you’ll notice that the lines intersect to form letters, punctuation marks, and other symbols. Together, these separate marks evoke flowering hydrangeas. Instead of painting the plant exactly as it looks in real life, the artist Alma Thomas used abstract lines and shapes to capture the feeling and movement of the hydrangeas’ leaves and flower petals.

Thomas found beauty in nature—from the fields she explored as a child in Georgia to the plants in her backyard and the public gardens in her adopted home of Washington, D.C. Later in life, she said that she was always “inspired by watching the leaves and flowers tossing in the wind as though they were dancing and singing.” This painting’s title, Hydrangeas Spring Song, reflects that inspiration and gives us a sense of a crisp spring day, filled with the sounds of birds chirping and winds blowing plants and trees to and fro.

Although Thomas painted for much of her life, she didn’t become a full-time artist until she was sixty-nine years old. For thirty-five years, she taught art at Shaw Junior High School in Washington, D.C. After her retirement in 1960, she became well-known for her paintings. In 1972, Thomas was the first African American woman to have a solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City.

Philadelphia Museum of Art: 125th Anniversary Acquisition. Purchased with funds contributed by Mr. and Mrs. Julius Rosenwald II in honor of René and Sarah Carr d’Harnoncourt, The Judith Rothschild Foundation, and with other funds being raised in honor of the 125th Anniversary of the Museum and in celebration of African American art, 2002-20-1