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Aaron Douglas, *Charleston*, gouache and pencil on paper board, ca. 1928

18 x 12 9/16 in. (45.7 x 31.9 cm)

North Carolina Museum of Art; purchased with funds from the North Carolina State Art Society (Robert F. Phifer Bequest and the State of North Carolina, by exchange, 2005.15. Reproduced by permission of VAGA.

An African American modernist artist active in the Harlem Renaissance, Aaron Douglas produced eight gouache illustrations for the English edition of *Magie Noir* (*Black Magic*, 1928), a short story collection by the French writer Paul Morand that portrayed black-white interactions in Africa, the West Indies, and the U.S. In the story *Charleston*, an American woman raised in Charleston justifies her hysteric fear of black men that leads to the brutal murder of a black saxophone player in France—a “purely American tragedy,” writes Morand, “acted inside provincial France.” The painting illustrates Douglas’s blend of Art Deco design with his unique depictions of slit-eyed figures in silhouette, overlaid with sweeping rays and arcs to intensify the movement and spatial boundaries in the work. Enlarge the image to note the slight use of orange accent in the painting.