Nugent, Richard,


Nugent's introduction to author Langston Hughes in 1925 signaled the beginning of his lifelong fascination with the arts and his contribution to the literary and political movements of the Harlem Renaissance. He explored issues of sexuality and black identity in his poems, short stories, and erotic drawings. His ardent bohemianism was the inspiration for the character of Paul Arbian, an artist and writer, in Wallace Thurman's 1932 novel Infants of the Spring.

"Shadows," Nugent's first published poem, was anthologized in Countee Cullen's 1927 work Caroling Dusk: An Anthology of Verse by Negro Poets. A one-act musical, "Sadhji: An African Ballet" (based on his earlier short story of the same name), was published in Plays of Negro Life: A Source-book of Native American Drama (1927) and produced in 1932. This African morality tale tells of the beautiful Sadhji, a chieftain's wife, beloved by Mrabo, her stepson, who, in turn, is loved by his male friend Numbo. In 1926 Nugent contributed two brush-and-ink drawings and the short story "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade" (published under the name Richard Bruce) to the only issue of Fire!! Controversial in its time, the story depicts a 19-year-old artist's sexual encounter with another man.

During the 1930s Nugent was active in the federal arts programs. From the 1960s he concentrated chiefly on painting and drawing.