



Nina Johnson

The Florida Highwaymen
September 6th, 2019 - September 28th, 2019

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The Florida Highwaymen

September 6th, 2019 - September 28th, 2019

Nina Johnson is proud to present a survey of historic paintings by the Florida Highwaymen, opening with a public reception on September 6 (7-9 pm) in the upstairs gallery and remaining on view until September 28th. The Florida Highwaymen were an informal collective of African American artists who painted and sold idyllic landscapes to tourists traveling along the A1A and US1 starting in the 1950s. Defined by the celestial illumination of the Hudson River School, myths of manifest destiny and the open road, and the rise of the middle class in the years after World War II, these paintings are a roseate vision of an ascendant culture. They were also produced in a time of social turmoil, created by artists marginalized by Jim Crow. The result is distinctly American: a mirror held up to the ruthless, naïve, beautiful land, tempting the viewer to see what they wanted to see. A mirror you could buy, put in your trunk, take home with you.

With an established provenance dating back to the artists themselves, the paintings on display in the gallery include some of the best examples of the Florida Highwaymen's prodigious output. The style, which has been copied by countless imitators over the decades, is deceptively formulaic. At the center of the composition, a tranquil body of water reflects a rapturous sky. The sun is rising, or setting. The sky is sherbet: a rich atmospheric gradient punctuated by sawgrass, reeds, cypress and palm trees. Herons either perch in the water or fly through the air. The paintings have a bold graphic sensibility and exhibit a coy degree of painterly gesture—wisps of clouds, of fronds, call attention to the painter's hand. All of them are quickly rendered iterations of the combination of two fantasies: the allure of the tropics, and the American dream.

The exhibition includes works by Hezekiah Baker (1940-2017), Mary Ann Carroll (b. 1940), Willie Daniels (b. 1950), Alfred Hair (1941-1970), Robert Lewis (b. 1941), Roy McClendon (b. 1932), Harold Newton (b. 1934), and Livingston Roberts (1942-2004). Mentored by the Florida landscape painter A.E. "Beanie" Backus, none of the members received formal art education. All were looking for a way to escape the low-paying menial labor that was the lot of African Americans at that time. Blocked from the gallery system because of their race, the Florida Highwaymen created their own economy, quickly producing paintings and then selling them door to door, or from the back of a truck on the highway. Though a response to social conditions, this ingenious mode of producing and distributing artwork is an unexpected detour in the history of studio and gallery systems—a lineage stretching from the Renaissance bottega, up through Warhol's Factory, to the prodigious outputs of contemporary artists like Josh Smith. And it happened here in Florida, land of sunsets and highways.



ABOUT THE FLORIDA HIGHWAYMEN

Beginning in the 1950s, an informal group of 26 African-American painters traveled through Florida to create and sell idyllic landscapes. They produced over 200,000 paintings, many of which are in institutional collections around the country. Their work has been the subject of many articles and books, including Gary Monroe's *The Highwaymen: Florida's African-American Landscape Painters* (University of Florida Press, 2001). The paintings on display at Nina Johnson come from the private collection of an early champion of the Florida Highwaymen.



ABOUT NINA JOHNSON

Nina Johnson is a contemporary art space in Miami, Florida. Opened as Gallery Diet in 2007, the gallery has produced exhibitions by emerging and established artists from around the world, including Anna Betbeze, Cassi Namoda, Peter Shire, Derek Fordjour, Ann Craven, Katie Stout, Nicolas Lobo, Jonas Mekas, Awol Erizku and Betty Woodman.

The gallery is located at 6315 NW 2nd Avenue Miami in the Little Haiti district and is open to the public Tuesday through Saturday from 11AM to 5PM.





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Harold Newton
Untitled, ca. 1960-1980
Oil on upson board
19.75 x 24 in.
\$6,500



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Harold Newton
Untitled, ca. 1960-1980
Oil on masonite
23 x 29 in.
\$7,500





Roy McLendon
Untitled, ca. 1960-1980
Oil on upson board
28 x 40 in.
\$8,000

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Harold Newton
Untitled, ca. 1960-1980
Oil on masonite
22.25 x 18.25 in.
\$6,000

Nina Johnson



Alfred Hair
Untitled, ca. 1961-1970
Oil on upson board
27 x 39.25 in.
\$9,000

Nina
Johnson



Willie Daniels
Untitled, ca. 1960-1980
Oil on upson board
25.5 x 37.25 in.
\$7,000

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Johnson



Harold Newton
Untitled, ca. 1960-1980
Oil on masonite
29 x 41.25 in.
\$9,000



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Johnson



Harold Newton
Untitled, ca. 1960-1980
Oil on masonite
26.25 x 20.5 in.
\$7,000

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Johnson



Harold Newton
Untitled, ca. 1960-1980
Oil on masonite
27.75 x 36 in.
\$9,000

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Mary Ann Carroll
Untitled, ca. 1960-1980
Oil on stretched canvas
11 x 14 in.
\$5,000



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Hezekiah Baker
Untitled, ca. 1960-1980
Oil on upson board
26.75 x 38.75 in.
\$5,000



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Livingston Roberts
Untitled, ca. 1960-1980
Oil on upson board
25.5 x 19.5 in.
\$6,000

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Johnson



Willie Daniels
Untitled, ca. 1960-1980
Oil on upson board
27.25 x 21.25 in.
\$6,000

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

HAROLD NEWTON (1934-1994, Gifford, FL)

Harold Newton was a self taught painter who started out in the early 1950s painting religious scenes on velvet canvases. He changed his artistic direction towards landscape paintings after meeting established painter A.E. "Bean" Backus at his Fort Pierce, Florida studio. Most art galleries in the 1950s would not sell black art, so Harold came up with a different plan. The young artist would set up on the side of Florida's highways and sell his paintings out of the trunk his car to tourists or go door to door in office buildings and doctor's offices. Thus the Highwaymen were born. Harold is generally regarded as the most talented of the Highwaymen artists. He honed his skills in the 1950s and 60s and eventually became a master of Florida landscape art.

ROY MCLENDON (b. 1932, Pelham, GA)

Roy McLendon is known for his narrative landscapes that depict the daily life of his neighbors. His subject matter is perhaps the most diverse of all the Highwaymen. Unlike most of the other painters in the group, Roy is comfortable including people in his scenes. He also paints still life, houses, figures, and animals. He was born to a sharecropping family which moved around frequently until eventually settling in Fort Pierce. In the late 1950s, he met his neighbor, Harold Newton. Watching him paint and visits to Bean Backus with Alfred Hair inspired Roy to paint. He never has an art lesson but learned what he needed to know from watching Harold. Roy was encouraged to take his landscapes to antique shops to sell which proved to be successful. By the mid-1960s he had been selling his paintings on the road and his career as an artist was taking off.

ALFRED HAIR (1941-1970, Ft. Pierce, FL)

Alfred is considered the founder of the Highwaymen art movement. He combined true artistic talent with business acumen and designed the Highwaymen landscape art assembly line. Alfred began taking painting lessons in Lincoln Park Academy and was later introduced to Fort Pierce's resident landscape artist A.E. "Beanie" Backus. After a semester of college, Alfred dropped out to become a full time artist. He had studied in Backus' Ft. Pierce painting studio for two years. Alfred was a young ambitious guy who wanted to make a name for himself and some money. This is when he shrewdly developed an assembly line business model that would crank out Florida landscape paintings to sell to tourists, homeowners, and businesses. He rounded up friends and family members and taught them how to paint backgrounds and build frames. Alfred also built a sales team led by artists Al "Blood" Black, Canrell "Pete" Smith, and others. The young artist's life was snuffed on August 9, 1970 in a bar room shooting in Ft. Pierce. He was 29 years old.

WILLIE DANIELS (b. 1950, Fort Piece, FL)

Willie was raised in Fort Pierce, along with his younger brother Johnny who was also a Highwaymen. He grew up watching his neighbors Harold Newton and Roy McLendon paint and was interested in art at a young age. Like other Highwaymen, Willie learned by watching. By the mid-1960s, he was creating his own work and developed strong relationships with Livingston Roberts and Al Black. Working with Livingston, Willie began making ten to twelve paintings every night. Al Black was usually the salesman. When riots broke out in Fort Pierce on April 8, 1968, after Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination, Daniels was arrested for a curfew violation. Like others in his community, he wanted a better life and was willing to work for it. However, when the demand for landscape paintings faded in the 1970s and Willie had to find other work. When Jim Fitch published his article in the 1993-1994 issue of Art and Artists of Florida naming the Highwaymen, Willie was working as a truck driver in Georgia and still painting on the side. He was unaware of his recent fame and value of Highwaymen landscape paintings. Willie returned to Fort Pierce in 2001 and once again began painting full time. Like many of the other painters, he began creating his landscapes more slowly and carefully, with the goal of making excellent work.

MARY ANN CARROLL (b. 1940, Georgia)

Mary Ann Carroll holds the distinction of being the only female Highwaymen painter. She got her start in 1959 after meeting Harold Newton at the intersection of 20th Street and Avenue D and Fort Pierce, Florida. Harold eventually tutored Mary Ann on basics of landscape painting. She took her new found interest in art that she learned from Harold and went to work selling paintings for Alfred. Mary Ann quickly got to know other painters in Fort Pierce because she was one of the few artists who had a car and could make selling on the highway possible. As a saleswoman, Mary Ann liked the direct approach. She knew that if potential buyers saw the paintings, they might overlook laws about soliciting. She prepared herself for rejection and learned to move on when turned away. Eventually, she found interested customers. She stopped selling on the road in 1997. By that time, she was performing other jobs to make money and was selling her paintings through art shows. Mary Ann continues to paint well into her 70s and is one of the older surviving Highwaymen artists.

HEZEKIAH BAKER (1940-2007, Savannah, GA)

Hezekiah Baker made his living painting in the late 1960s and early 1970s and was able to return to it later in life when the Highwaymen surged in popularity. Hezekiah moved to Fort Pierce in 1942 when he was 13, graduated from Lincoln Park Academy, and later took classes in business and real estate. When he was in his 20s, he entered a drawing contest which allowed for his interests in art grow. He switched from his usual portraits to landscapes after meeting Alfred Hair in the 1960s. Alfred invited him to observe the other Highwaymen painters and taught him how to paint faster. Like the other Fort Pierce painters, Hezekiah went on the road to sell his paintings. After Alfred's death in 1970, when landscape painting was no longer lucrative, Baker worked a number of jobs in Fort Pierce. He was in real estate, worked at the Dandee Bakery, sold insurance, he even owned a restaurant called House of Foods. He painted on the side, and others sold his work for him on the road. When the Highwaymen works began receiving publicity in the mid 1990s, art dealers Sue and David Folds took an interest in Hezekiah's work. They sponsored him at the 1997 Folk Fest in Atlanta, where he sold many of his paintings. In later years he continued to sell his work at art shows and had customers go to him directly for his paintings.

LIVINGSTON ROBERTS (1942-2004, Elkton, FL)

During his early teenage years, Livingston Roberts's family would visit relatives in Miami's South Beach. The memories of the tall coconut palms and brightly colored hibiscus flower stayed carefully stored in his mind when he painted in later years. Seeking a better life, his family soon moved south. Livingston then moved to Fort Pierce in 1957 to live with his grandmother, Gertrude, where he eventually met Alfred Hair when they were both 19 years old. They shared a passion for painting and became inseparable. Painting together, they would switch between Alfred's mother's yard on 13th Street and Avenue G and Gertrude Mason's house at 814 Dundas Court. It was at his grandmother's home where Livingston met Harold and Samuel Newton. In the 1960s, he moved to Gifford, Florida, where he lived for a short time while his brother, Ernest, helped sell his paintings. Livingston taught numerous painters including George and Ellis Buckner, Samuel Newton, Willie Daniels, Johnny Daniels, Jimmy Stovall, his sister, Gertrude Walker, and his brother-in-law, Charles Walker. After Alfred's death in 1970 Livingston moved to upstate New York and mostly sold his paintings in Canada. He returned to Fort Pierce in 1975 where he continued to paint in his backyard.



The Landscape Art Legacy Of Florida's Highwaymen

September 19, 2014 4:16 PM ET

Heard on All Things Considered

JACKI LYDEN



Alfred Hair, Harold Newton, Al Black, James Gibson and Mary Ann Carroll were all part of the original Highwaymen.

Photos by Gary Monroe

If you traveled by way of Florida's Route 1 in the '60s and '70s, you might have encountered young African-American landscape artists selling oil paintings of an idealized, candy-colored, Kennedy-era Florida. They painted palms, beaches, poinciana trees and sleepy inlets on drywall canvases — and they came to be known as the Highwaymen. The group made thousands of pictures, until the market was saturated, tastes changed, and the whole genre dwindled.

Roadside Innovation

The story of the Highwaymen is one of beauty and heartbreak. Their original — and perhaps most talented — artist was a young man named Alfred Hair. He founded the group when he crossed the color line to study with artist A.E. “Beanie” Backus, a friend of Hair’s art teacher. Backus encouraged him to paint. Hair went on to develop a speed-painting technique that involved tacking up multiple canvases into a kind of artists’ assembly line.

But when Hair was gunned down in 1970, the Highwaymen nearly disbanded.

Al Black was the group’s original salesman. He was the one responsible for getting so many of those glistening, still-wet paintings onto motel and office walls.

“He could sell a jacket to a mosquito in summer,” says Mary Ann Carroll, the group’s sole “Highwaywoman.”

After Hair’s death, the group fell on hard times, but Black kept at it. When he needed more paintings to sell, he just painted them himself. Then came drug addiction and a 12-year prison sentence. Black spent his time in prison painting bayous and beaches. Scores of his paintings have helped transform the state’s jails.

Black and Carroll were eventually rediscovered by Gary Monroe, a Florida documentary photographer who exhaustively researched the group for his 2001 book, *The Highwaymen: Florida’s African-American Landscape Painters*.

The Painter Behind It All

Today, some Backus loyalists feel the Highwaymen absconded with the painter’s vision, never giving him enough credit and surpassing him in fame, if not in talent. Kathleen Frederick, executive director of the A.E. Backus Museum and Gallery, has a harsh perception of the artists. She says they could never have painted as Backus did on private land because they would have “been run off and shot.”

That acrimony is not the legacy Backus himself would have left. He was, by all accounts, one of the most inclusive people the community knew.

The Highwaymen Today

It’s a welcome discovery to learn that the majority of the self-taught Highwaymen still paint. According to the Florida Artists Hall of Fame, the group consisted of 26 painters, 18 of whom are still alive. Today, their paintings sometimes go for thousands of dollars and are collected by people like Steven Spielberg, Michelle Obama, Jeb Bush and a small army of private collectors.

NEED TO KNOW

This month's essentials from America and the world

— 1 —

Roadside art gets its due

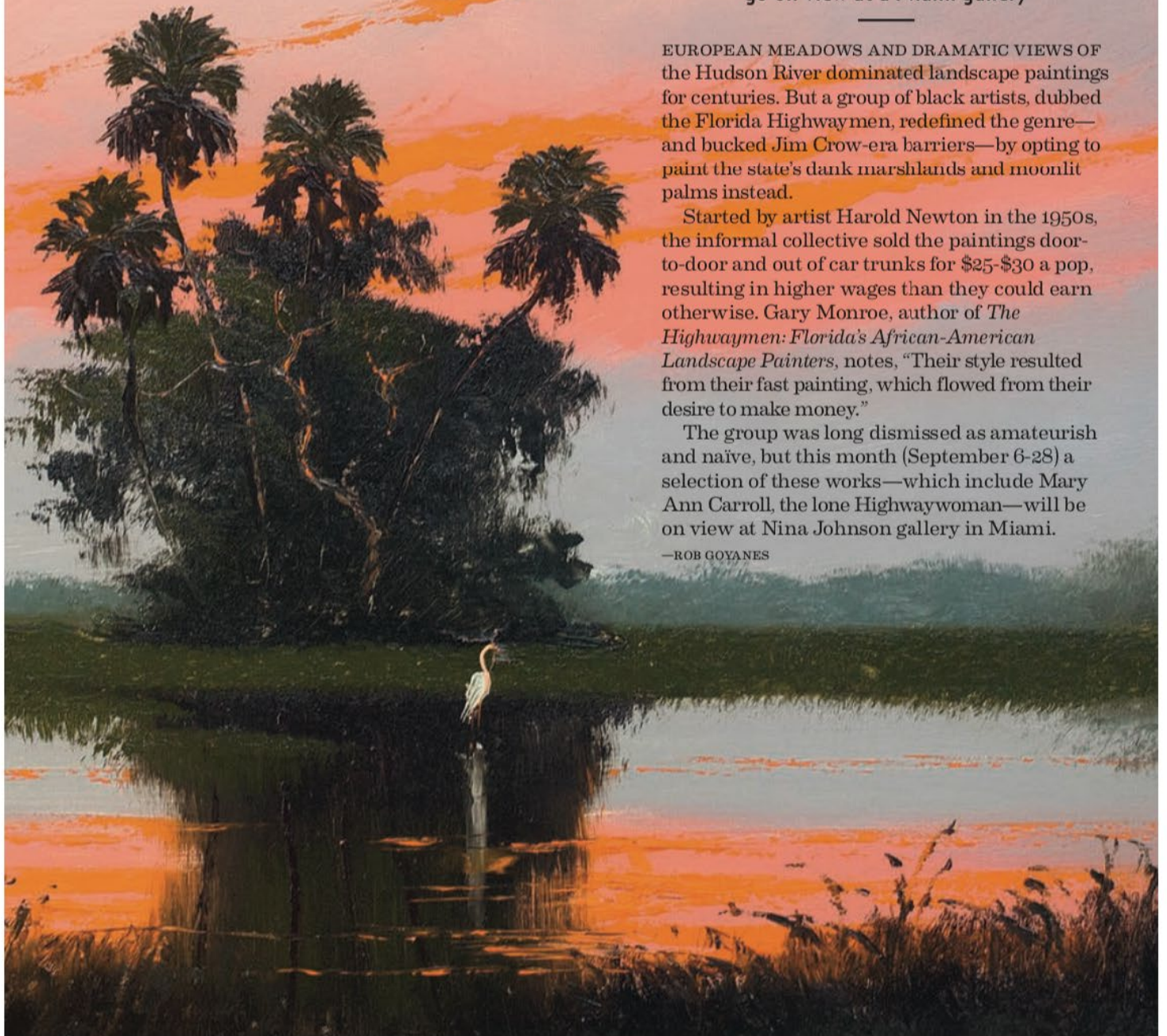
A group of genre-busting Florida artists go on view at a Miami gallery

EUROPEAN MEADOWS AND DRAMATIC VIEWS OF the Hudson River dominated landscape paintings for centuries. But a group of black artists, dubbed the Florida Highwaymen, redefined the genre—and bucked Jim Crow-era barriers—by opting to paint the state's dank marshlands and moonlit palms instead.

Started by artist Harold Newton in the 1950s, the informal collective sold the paintings door-to-door and out of car trunks for \$25-\$30 a pop, resulting in higher wages than they could earn otherwise. Gary Monroe, author of *The Highwaymen: Florida's African-American Landscape Painters*, notes, "Their style resulted from their fast painting, which flowed from their desire to make money."

The group was long dismissed as amateurish and naïve, but this month (September 6-28) a selection of these works—which include Mary Ann Carroll, the lone Highwaywoman—will be on view at Nina Johnson gallery in Miami.

—ROB GOYANES





How Florida's Black "Highwaymen" Painters Made a Living in the Jim Crow South

• Alice Bucknell Feb 15, 2018 5:34pm



Article on Alfred Hair, 1962. Image courtesy of A.E. Backus Museum.



Alfred Hair, *Peach Cloud Morning*, undated. Collection of Roger Lightle. Image courtesy of A.E. Backus Museum.

Being an artist is rarely seen as a ticket to prosperity and social mobility. But for Florida's historical "Highwaymen"—a group of around two dozen black painters who made a living selling their landscape paintings out of car trunks in the Jim Crow South—art was something of a pathway to freedom.

From the 1950s through the '70s, the Highwaymen produced over 200,000 paintings of Florida's diverse ecology—vivid scenes depicting fiery red sunsets over aquamarine bays or the scraggy, Spanish moss-covered banyan trees stretching over the state's backwater regions. Hawking their work straight from their car trunks, the group sold paintings to day-tripping tourists along U.S. Route 1 on Florida's Atlantic Coast and to (predominantly white) business owners in the banks, motels, and laundromats of their native Fort Pierce, even as galleries turned them away.

The paintings originally went for \$25 or \$30 each, and were typically sold on the same day they were made, transported in bundles by car or bike in handmade frames and often still glistening with wet oil paint. Today, paintings by the Highwaymen are included in the Smithsonian Collection; they can clear \$10,000 at auction or in private sales; and originals by the group's most prominent figures, Al Black, Alfred Hair, and Harold Newton—who is estimated to have made over 30,000 paintings alone—are coveted by a diverse fan base that includes the Obamas and Steven Spielberg.



Harold Newton, *Poinciana*, undated. Collection of Roger Lightle. Image courtesy of A.E. Backus Museum.

This little-known history begins with a man named A.E. “Beanie” Backus, the godfather of the Highwaymen. Backus was born into the racially segregated city of Fort Pierce in 1906, when the town’s black and white neighborhoods were divided along train tracks. A largely self-taught artist, Backus created dramatic landscapes with a palette knife, combining what he’d learned at summer art classes at Parsons in New York City with his encyclopedic knowledge of Florida’s wildlife and his love of its epic thunderstorms. Considered the catalyst of Fort Pierce’s landscape movement, Backus kept his studio open to all, and took on a local student, Alfred Hair, as a studio assistant in 1954.

Hair soon graduated from making frames to learning the tools of the trade and developed his own approach to Florida landscape painting: quickly rendered and dramatically lit scenes with infinite skies. Hair made a name for himself painting dozens of artworks a day and driving the beachfront strip of Fort Pierce in search of customers, while blasting music by James Brown. (He worked at that pace up until his tragic death by gunfire at age 29, in 1970.)

The seeds of the Highwaymen had been sewn, with many more schoolboys and girls making the pilgrimage to Backus’s studio to develop their own artistic careers. Author Gary Monroe, who has written about the Highwaymen, describes a key group of nine painters emerging from a generous headcount of 26 loose “members.” Those central figures included Harold Newton, James Gibson, Livingston Roberts, Roy McLendon, and Mary Ann Carroll—each with their own unique artistic style and business approach.



Alfred Hair, *Breaking Wave*, undated. Collection of Roger Lightle. Image courtesy of A.E. Backus Museum.

The group functioned something like a social club. They'd get together at the local dog track with the money they made each day for an evening of hard-earned recreation and story-swapping. But contrary to popular belief, the artists were fiercely independent during business hours. Save for Harold Newton and Livingston Roberts, who could often be seen painting together along U.S. 1, each Highwayman stuck to his or her own part of the Fort Pierce, Clifford, and Vero Beach areas. With persistence, charm, and boundless entrepreneurialism, this band of outsiders tapped into the growing art market of post-war America, overcoming the cultural barriers facing minorities within the Jim Crow-era South. "People would look beyond the race politics of the South when buying my father's paintings," explains Kay McLendon, who is currently helping her father Roy prepare for an upcoming exhibition "Blazing the Trail: Vintage Paintings by the Original Highwaymen" at the A.E. Backus Museum in Fort Pierce. "They'd sometimes ask him to leave the painting and come back in two weeks, but they would always pay him. There was trust there; the art really bonded people."



Harold Newton, *River Road*, undated. Collection of Roger Lightle. Image courtesy of A.E. Backus Museum.

Like many other Highwaymen, McLendon had a large family to take care of—including 8 children—and he used his passion for painting as a means to sustain them. Back then, \$25 or \$30 was more than he earned in a week as a construction worker. Selling a handful of paintings each week enabled the men and their families to enjoy a more prosperous lifestyle than they ever thought possible. Some even achieved the ultimate status symbol: a car. "One time, Roy came back home in a pink Cadillac; my mom told him to take it right back," laughs Kay McLendon. "But you know, he was making good money if he was able to come home in a pink Cadillac." Nowadays, the legacy of the Highwaymen is kept alive by a slew of collectors, curators, writers, and historians, who continue to be captivated by their story. "From the highway to the national museum, the story of the Highwaymen is an essentially untold piece of the American Dream," says collector-curator Roger Lightle, who owns over 400 original Highwaymen artworks and continues to curate, lecture, and exhibit their work internationally. "These Florida backwater scenes are a reflection of the artists themselves. They are their paintings."

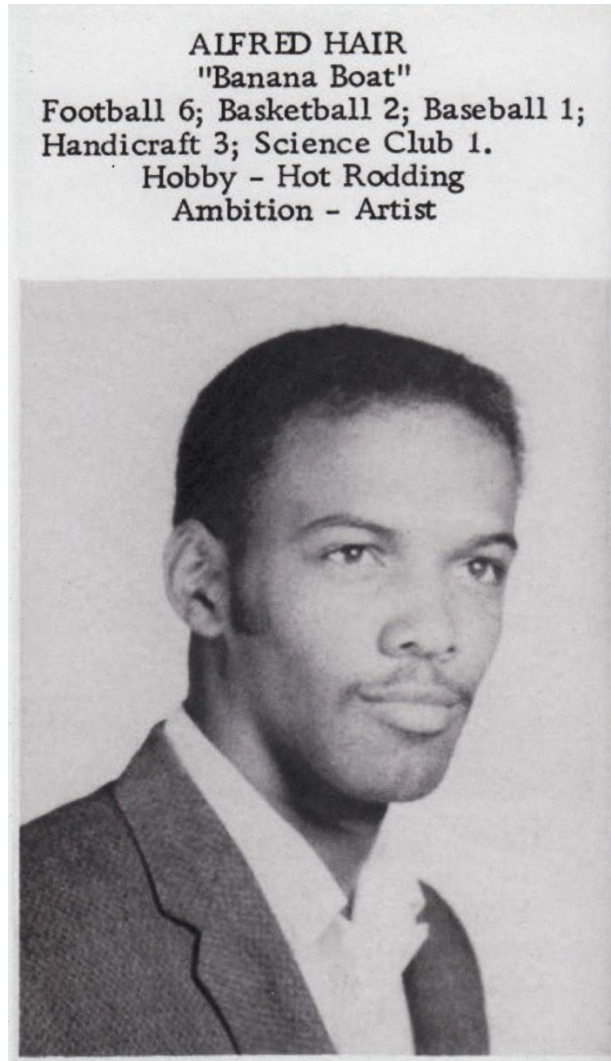
The New York Times

1941-1970

Alfred Hair

A charismatic businessman who created
a movement for Florida's black artists.

BY GORDON K. HURD



Alfred Hair in his high school yearbook photo. He helped start the Highwaymen, a collective of Floridian artists, all African-American, who painted vibrant landscapes of their home state. via Gary Monroe

“Well-Known Artist Alfred Hair Slain,” read the headline in The Fort Pierce News Tribune newspaper in Florida.

But before he was killed in a barroom brawl on Aug. 9, 1970, at just 29, Hair had become more than just an artist. With his drive, charisma and business acumen, he helped start a collective of Floridian artists, all African-American, who painted vibrant landscapes of their home state. They would later come to be known as The Florida Highwaymen, or more simply The Highwaymen.

In the 1950s and '60s the artists produced an astonishing amount of works that they hocked along the roads and highways of Florida. More importantly they did so at a time and place where opportunities for black people were extremely limited. The Highwaymen paved their own way.

These enterprising artists did everything they could to scrape together a living through their art. They used inexpensive, accessible materials, painting on a building material called Upson board instead of on canvasses and making frames out of crown molding. They spurred each other on to paint faster, then competed to see who could sell the most.



A painting by Hair. He eschewed formal color theory and relied on intuition to depict beaches, palm trees and Everglades scenes. Monroe Family Collection, via Orlando Museum of Art

Hair was the star of the group, having been among few in the group to receive formal training, from Albert Ernest Backus, a white artist known as Bean who became his mentor. Backus also mentored another Highwayman, Harold Newton.

Hair and Newton developed their own approach to capturing Florida in full color. More than anything, what distinguished the Highwaymen artists were their colorful landscapes, eschewing any formal color theory and relying on instinct and intuition to depict their steady stream of beaches, palm trees and Everglades scenes. Organic colors were not their main focus; they wanted to wow buyers with burnt-orange Florida skies or unnaturally florescent clouds.

The two were considered the best Highwaymen artists, with Newton the more technically accomplished and Hair the more lyrical and spontaneous.

But unlike Backus, there was no way Newton, Hair or any other black painter at that time in South Florida could expect to have their art displayed on gallery walls. Instead they took their work door-to-door to local businesses along the roads of coastal Florida.

The Highwaymen, more a movement than a group, grew as Hair and Newton invited others in their circles to participate.

“It was like spontaneous combustion,” Gary Monroe, a Florida-based photographer and scholar of the Highwaymen, said in an email. “Alfred encouraged and welcomed all who had an inkling or expressed an interest in painting. There was no organization, no rules, dues or business plan — just like-minded 20-somethings coming together.”

In all experts have identified about 26 painters as part of the collective — all men except for one, Mary Ann Carroll.

Hair was known to work on dozens of paintings at once. His technique was to mix a specific color and apply it across various canvasses at a time. He might start with blues, then progress with greens, red, oranges, and so on, creating 20 unique landscapes at a fast-moving pace to produce as much as he could. He sold his paintings for \$20 or \$25.

“He didn’t do anything halfway,” said his widow, Doretha Hair Truesdell, in 2014 in a video interview. (She later remarried.)



Hair in 1969 with his wife, Doretha, at a nightclub in Gifford, Fla. “He didn’t do anything halfway,” she said. via Doretha Hair

The fact that he was selling his paintings from the trunk of his own brand-new Cadillac pointed to a level of hard-earned achievement at a time and place where people of color were expected to be satisfied with modest lives, at best.

“But Alfred was not at all arrogant; to the contrary, he was openhanded and gregarious,” Monroe wrote in his manuscript for a soon-to-be-published book. “His brother, Donald, puts it this way: ‘Alfred didn’t have a mean bone in his body. If he had \$20, he’d gladly give it away. He knew he could make more. He was just unique.’ ”

Hair, who was believed to be selling around 50 paintings a week, swore he would be a millionaire by 35, a bold statement for a black man in the Jim Crow South. But he did not live long enough to achieve his lofty goal.

One day he was at Eddie's Place, a popular hangout for the Highwaymen, when he got into a fight with Julius Funderburk, a field worker.

"It is impossible to know precisely what happened as the beer flowed around the unfolding events," Monroe wrote. "The juke joint noise got louder and louder. The barroom became increasingly crowded and smokier and hot inside on that summer night. People came and went. It was clearly a sociable place, until a few minutes past 11 p.m. A few hours later Dr. H. L. Schofield would remove a single bullet from the body of Alfred Hair."

Some say Funderburk shot Hair out of frustration that he was not a part of the Highwaymen. Others said Hair, who had an ease with women, had been involved with Funderburk's girlfriend.



Organic colors were not Hair's main focus in painting. He encouraged the Highwaymen to wow buyers with burnt-orange Florida skies or unnaturally florescent clouds. Monroe Family Collection, via Orlando Museum of Art

Alfred Warner Hair was born on May 20, 1941, and lived his whole life in Fort Pierce. He was one of seven children born to Samuel and Annie Mae Hair, along with his two brothers and four sisters. He is buried in the same town, at the Pine Grove Cemetery.

While many of the associated painters continued to work on their own well into the 1980s, eventually sales waned. It wasn't until the early 1990s that interest resurfaced, after a Florida art dealer named Jim Fitch, seeking to give the group recognition, gave the group its name, The Highwaymen. Later in 2001, Monroe wrote a seminal book about the group, further sealing interest in it.

Their work reflected a Florida that is no more, one of America's final frontiers.

"These unlikeliest of artists left the visual legacy of modern Florida," Monroe told The Times. "Their paintings are more than Florida art."

It is an American art, as Florida was the place to realize the postwar American dream.”

While some might downplay the group’s work as industrial-level commercial art because of the assembly-line fashion in which they were created, a fascination with the paintings among a network of collectors reveals the depth behind their work. Today, the paintings hang on the walls of the likes of Michelle Obama and Shaquille O’Neal, and sell for as much as tens of thousands of dollars.

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