



LESTER GUNTER

The Imagist

Lester Gunter and the Jamaican Art Movement

Lester Gunter studied with the late Jacob Lawrence, Barrington Watson and Robert Brackman. His Major influence however, was Edna Manley, (frequently referred to as the "mother of Jamaican art"), following her call for a greater sense of Jamaican nationalism and cultural expression.

Much of the early work of Jamaican art exhibited showed a preoccupation with European styled landscape paintings and portraiture, using traditional techniques that didn't reflect Jamaica's culture or its people. Black people were rarely depicted other than in a documentary, ethnographic sense.

Manley's challenge emerged in a prevailing atmosphere of change in black people's perception of themselves. Jamaica's modern art movement was motivated by the collective creativity of many Jamaican artists and thinkers reclaiming their history and identities. They offered tuition to young blacks and encouraged students to seek subjects more closely related to Jamaican life. Artists turned their vision inwards and began to paint their own people, landscapes and genre scenes. The Black countenance was freshly explored, not as a novelty but with newly discovered pride.

Ever since the 1950s and 60s, Jamaican art has been predominantly representational, strongly figurative and narrative. It is characterized by a preoccupation with Jamaican iconography, an emphasis on more formal artistic training and an openness to art historical styles expropriated from abroad but reinterpreted to suit the Jamaican context.

As Black-British curator, Eddie Chambers, of Jamaican parentage, noted: "For black people, 'history' refuses to be a lifeless and dull conglomeration of boring dates and events. Instead, it presents itself as earlier episodes of a current existence. We are the latest chapters of our current existence, and as such, we are scarcely able to deny or downgrade its centrality and its importance in our lives. Similarly, 'identity' has an urgency and a relevance which is literally worlds away from the... individualism which many...people take it to be."

Jamaican born painter Lester Gunter - known for his lush landscapes, market scenes and respected series of nudes - has translated and transmitted his identity and experiences through his paintings for more than 45 years.

Lester Gunter (1936...)

Lester Gunter, son of a goldsmith, was born in Trinity Ville, Saint Thomas, Jamaica, West Indies. His studies include: The Jamaica School of Art from 1958 to 1963, Art Students League in New York from 1968 to 1970 and the National Academy of Fine Art from 1970-1972, where he won the James Augustus Suydam Bronze Medal Award for best Figure Painting. Gunter has studied under renowned artists Mayo Cousins, Robert Sawyers, Robert Brackman, Robert Phillipp, Hugh Gumpel and Julian Levi.

He has exhibited his work in several one man shows including the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, New York; Gallery + in the Valley, Jamaica, West Indies; The Jamaica Contemporary Association, Kingston; St. Andrew Parrish Library; and The Institute of Jamaica.

Essie Green Galleries' (dba Park Plaza Galleries) premier opening in December 1979, was a Gunter one man show. Following that opening Gunter valued recognition. In June 1980, a group of black students at the Montclair-Kimberly Academy selected a Gunter to purchase

(from their own pockets) to donate to their prestigious school, as an example of the black experience. Again in June 1980, the Jackie Robinson Foundation chose Gunter's art for exhibition and auction at their annual fundraiser at Mrs. Robinson's Connecticut estate. In November 1980, the Alabama State University, in Montgomery Alabama, mounted an exhibit of Gunter's work in a tribute to his art. September 1995, the Jamaican Consulate in midtown Manhattan mounted a successful retrospective exhibit spanning 35 years of his work. The opening was hosted by Consul General Kay Baxter-Collins and Ambassador to the UN Ms. Pat Durant and was attended by 150 guests. More recently, Gunter exhibited in group shows at the Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Washington D.C. in 2007 and the Dennis and Phillip Ratner Museum, Bethesda Maryland, in 2008.

Institutional collectors of Gunter's work include Chase Manhattan Bank, The Paul R. Jones Collection of American Art at The University of Alabama, and the North Carolina Central University Museum of Art.



Market Scene (Higglering), 1974, Oil on Canvas, 27.25 X 35 inches



Harvest, 1972, Oil on Board, 18.5 X 31.5 inches



Soon Come, No Date, Oil On Board, 13 X 9.5 inches



***Confidence*, 1976 Oil On Board 7.5 X 4.5 inches**



Country Road, 1986, Oil On Canvas, 16 X 20 inches



***Showdown*, 1991, Oil On Canvas, 17 X 11.25 inches**



***Carmen*, No Date, Oil On Canvas 30.25 X 24 inches**



Sisterhood, 1991, Oil on Board, 14.5 X 14 inches



Anjelica, 1985, Oil on Board, 19.5 X 15.33 Inches



Untitled (Red Market Scene), N0 Date, Oil On Board, 15.5 X 24.5 inches



Red Barn, 1976, Oil On Masonite, 34 X 44 inches



The occupation (*Higgling*) dates back to the time of slavery. Slaves, were allowed to have their own provision grounds so that they could grow their own food. They often planted more than what was needed by their families and so were allowed to sell their surplus produce. It was customary for the male slaves to cultivate and maintain the farms while the female slaves took the surplus produce to the market to sell or trade on Sundays, their only day off from work.

During the post-emancipation period the number of higglers increased in Jamaica. It was one of the few jobs the newly-freed slaves knew how to do, outside of farming. The freed slaves then had total control over their trade. They could plant and sell what they wanted, for how much they wanted and to whom they wanted. Given their freedom, some slaves also became owners of plots of land and were then referred to as peasants. They also began to form links with other black traders.

Higgling is still a thriving business in Jamaica and it still maintains some of the characteristics of the trade from the time of slavery. The trade still is a very important component in Jamaica's economy; it is still dominated by women and there are still common spaces in which the trade is carried out.

Essie Green Galleries

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