

ENTERTAINMENT

Artist woos crowd at gallery appearance

By Brenda Kirkpatrick
Sentinel-Voice

The overflow crowd of admirers and art collectors at the Moonstruck Gallery last Thursday were reminded that the aristocratic gentleman before them, Thomas Blackshear II, was the illustrator of 20 colorful United States postal stamps depicting a range of themes.

Art aficionados will remember the 50th Anniversary Movie Poster Series of stamps entitled, "Gone With the Wind," "The Wizard of Oz," "Beau Geste" and "Stagecoach," that Blackshear illustrated.

The Black Heritage Series of stamps he created were depictions of Jean Baptiste, Point Du Sable, A. Phillip Randolph, Ida B. Wells, James Weldon Johnson and Joe Louis. The Jazz Musicians Series of stamps featured James P. Johnson, Jelly Roll Morton, Eubie Blake and Thelonious Monk.

Thomas also illustrated a commemorative stamp book for the United States Postal Service entitled, "I Have a Dream." This book depicted

28 distinguished portraits of famous African-Americans who made significant contributions to our country's history. Thomas Blackshear has put his artistic stamp on America.

In celebration of Black History Month, the Moonstruck Gallery in Las Vegas, in cooperation with the African-American Cultural Arts Foundation and Caesar's Palace invited Blackshear to Las Vegas to lecture on his prolific and creative artistry which includes fine art, illustrations, porcelains, prints, lithographs, sculpture, figurines, collector's plates and posters.

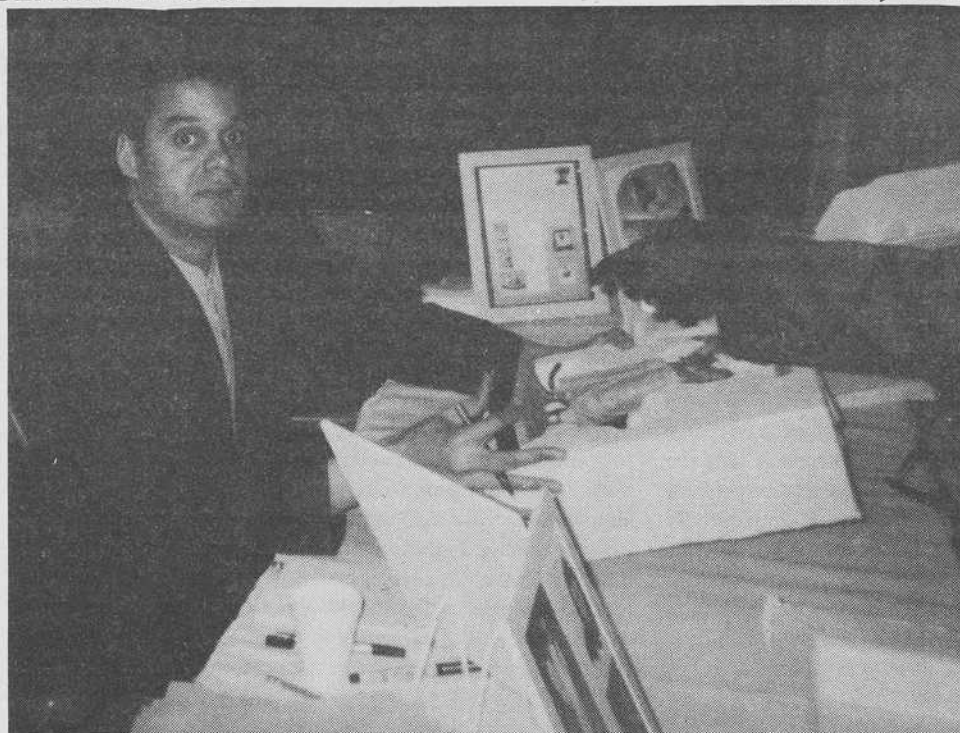
Thomas Blackshear was the recipient of two college scholarships and in 1977 graduated from the American Academy of Art in Chicago. He was recruited by Hallmark Cards to illustrate for them and then began his freelance career. He accepted a contract to illustrate King Dahomey in the Budweiser Beer Series of Great Kings and Queens of Africa.

He has completed several series of Hamilton Group Collector's Plates. These plates

feature scenes from "Star Wars," "Star Trek," and "The Wizard of Oz." In 1992 he exhibited his original works for the Black Heritage Stamp Series at the Smithsonian Institute's Museum of Natural History.

The United States Postal Service has again commissioned Blackshear to illustrate stamps and fans and collectors can look forward to a series of monster themed stamps with a touch of fantasy which are scheduled for distribution in October, 1997.

Feeling a compelling urge to enter the larger arena of fine art, Thomas is now focusing his talents upon ethnic and spiritual material. Limited edition figurines called "Ebony Visions," are examples of his Christian prints named "Forgiven," "Coat of Many Colors — Lord of All," "Watchers in the Night," "A Time to Dream," "The Dreamer," "The Guardian," "The Music Maker," "The Nurturer," and "The Tender Touch." These Christian-themed prints give Blackshear's admirers yet another choice of fine



Blackshear signed hundreds of autographs during his Las Vegas appearance.

Photo special to Sentinel-Voice

representations of Asian and African culture, literature, art deco and art nouveau.

Thomas's new artistic direction is called "Romantic Symbolism." His print, "Night and Day" and his latest print, "The Vessel" are superb depictions of his current style or genre.

The choice of this new method of painting required that Thomas adopt a unique approach to his creativity. He prays over a canvas and God flashes the painting onto Thomas's consciousness. At this point, he is able to paint the image on the canvas.

All of these inspired paintings are spiritual and show God's relationship to and with man, he said. Much of this work is allegorical, that is, they're pictures in which people, things and events have a hidden or symbolic meaning designed for teaching or explaining ideas or moral principles.

Although by the end of the evening, hundreds of people

had clamored to speak to Blackshear, get his autograph, get advice on a variety of topics and have him sign purchases of his work, he was patient and gracious.

"I do not create for the appreciation of a target audience, culture or interest group," he said. "I am not a black artist. I am an artist who happens to be black. Some other artists who happen to be Black whose work I admire are Tom Feelings and Dean Mitchell. Tom's work is particularly unique.

He wrote a book entitled, "The Passage." It has no words, just pictures he painted which tell of the middle passage of Black slaves. "It's a pictorial history and a fine work, he said."


Although modern artist's work is seldom seen in salons and few artists have sponsors, still Blackshear feels that there are avenues which young artists can pursue and stumbling blocks they can avoid. "If


you're trying to become an illustrator of black art, you'll never be considered for other assignments. The art directors will only call you for black work—not anything else. This primarily regards commercial artists," he said.


The biggest stumbling block for young artists is not following their hearts and letting others tell you what's good and what work you do isn't good, he said.

Philosophically speaking, Blackshear said, "There's another side of success that many don't know about—that it can turn around and bite you.

"Any success can consume you if you don't watch out. I have been a workaholic all my life. Now I'd like to enjoy the fruits of my labor. My ultimate dream is trying to get where I can control my life where it doesn't control me and I hope that I can have the time to do what I want — although art will never be out of my life," he said.







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