

A. E. BACKUS MUSEUM & GALLERY
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**The A.E. Backus Museum presents the new exhibition
*Artists of Color: Place, Race, and Vision of the Florida Highwaymen***

Fort Pierce, FL – January 4, 2019 - The A.E. Backus Museum will celebrate the vibrant palettes and inspired innovations of the renowned African American artists in the exhibition ***Artists of Color: Place, Race, and Vision of the Florida Highwaymen***. The special exhibition of vintage works assembled from private collections, some never exhibited before, will be on view January 11 through March 3, 2019, with the opening reception scheduled for February 15 to kick off the annual Highwaymen Celebration Weekend.

A unique combination of a variety of factors came together at a critical moment to launch a creative phenomenon that still resounds today. There was only one place where this story could begin, and that was in Fort Pierce, Florida. The well-known, successful artist A.E. “Bean” Backus (1906-1990) was a resident here, and renowned for his acceptance of others regardless of race, creed, or background. First, a young Harold Newton (1934-1994), then a younger Alfred Hair (1941-1970), and then a group of Hair’s friends and classmates met and got to know Backus, learning about materials, technique, and the art market. They learned from and about one another in a way that magnified their efforts.

In the 1950s and 1960s, employment opportunities were limited for African Americans. Isolated by geography and social conventions of race in the Jim Crow era, these young men quickly developed their own popular style of energetic painting – and developed a plan and sales approaches to find their customers by taking the art to them. Their dramatic scenes of the Florida landscape, in vivid colors, performed quickly in high volume for eager patrons, and often sold still wet from the trunks of their cars, made a living for them and sparked a movement.

Backus was the earliest supporter of these young artists of color, opening his studio and helping them to work around those social and economic constraints. He encouraged their vision and their latent talents, and he later exhibited their work in the Fort Pierce Art Gallery (the future Backus Museum). In fact, the very first retrospective of the Highwaymen was held at the Museum in 1995, and the tradition of honoring the origins and achievements of these artists continues today.

Artists of Color: Place, Race, and Vision of the Florida Highwaymen includes more than 50 works by original Highwaymen Harold Newton, Alfred Hair, Sam Newton, Roy McLendon, James Gibson, Maryanne Carroll, Willie Daniels, and Johnny Daniels. The exhibition demonstrates in powerful images how the Highwaymen’s search for economic independence, creative freedom, and a distinctive vision blended together in a way that transformed how we see the landscapes before us.

Highwaymen Weekend Celebration (Free Admission!)

FRIDAY, SATURDAY, SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 15-17

Friday, February 15

- Dealers offer vintage Highwaymen paintings for sale on the Outdoor Mural Plaza (10:00 am - 4:00 pm)
- *Artists of Color* Opening Reception (Members Free, Not-Yet Members \$20); Lecture by Roger Lightle, noted collector and guest curator of the exhibition (6:00-7:00 pm), Reception and meet the artists (7:00-8:00 pm)

Saturday, February 16

- 4th Annual City of Fort Pierce Highwaymen Heritage Trail Festival and Art Fair, Moore's Creek Linear Park, 8th Street & Avenue D (10:00 am - 4:00 pm)
- Dealers' sale of vintage paintings continues at Museum (10:00 am - 4:00 pm); Gallery Talks (11:00 am, 1:00 pm & 3:00 pm)

Sunday, February 17

- Dealers' sale of vintage paintings continues at Museum (12:00-4:00 pm); Gallery Talks (1:00 pm & 3:00 pm)

About the A.E. Backus Museum & Gallery

With a recently added, multi-million dollar expansion, the A.E. Backus Museum & Gallery houses the nation's largest public presentation of artwork by Florida's preeminent painter, A.E. "Bean" Backus (1906-1990), and is home to the state's only permanent multimedia exhibition on the Florida Highwaymen.

With a career spanning more than 70 years, Backus was the first Florida-born artist to build his professional renown by painting the landscape and scenes from daily life of his native state. He was fortunate to have known great success during his lifetime, with paintings hanging in the businesses and the private collections of many of Florida's most prominent citizens. A renowned humanitarian who abhorred the racist attitudes and segregation that engulfed the region, Backus taught and mentored the group of entrepreneurial African American artists who became known as the Florida Highwaymen. Their inspiring story is part of the A.E. Backus legacy.

In addition to preserving and perpetuating the artistic and humanitarian legacy of Backus, the Museum organizes and hosts changing exhibitions from artists of national and international acclaim. It was voted "Best Museum 2018" in Indian River Magazine's annual "Best of the Treasure Coast," where it was described as "a fabulous place to visit."

Regular Hours are: Wednesday – Saturday, 10 AM to 4 PM; Sunday, 12 Noon to 4 PM (closed Monday-Tuesday). Admission is \$5 per person; AARP, AAA, and Veterans with appropriate ID receive a \$2 discount. Students with school ID, children under 18, active duty military, and

current members are always free. During the regular season, the first Sunday of the month is Free Admission Day.

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