

A. E. BACKUS MUSEUM & GALLERY

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THE BACKUS MUSEUM WELCOMES HOME FAMED FLORIDA ARTIST JAMES F. HUTCHINSON FOR SPECIAL EXHIBITION “VISIONARY TRUTHS”

Fort Pierce, FL – February 14, 2020 –

Florida Artists Hall of Fame inductee James F. Hutchinson returns to the Backus Museum for a special exhibition of his majestic oil paintings. “James F. Hutchinson: Visionary Truths” opens Friday, February 21 and continues through Sunday, April 26, 2020. The exhibition’s opening reception will be held on Friday, March 13 from 6:00 – 8:00 pm, with the artist in attendance. Members may attend the reception free; not-yet members \$20. The Museum is located at 500 North Indian River Drive in Historic Downtown Fort Pierce.

Years before the first Florida Highwayman found his way to Fort Pierce, a striking woman entered the studio at 103 Avenue C with her teenaged brother in tow. The talented teen was a bright young Jim Hutchinson, led there by his older sister, Patricia (or “Patsy”), who was looking for lessons to encourage the artistic talents of the boy. Patsy made an impression on the resident artist, A.E. “Bean” Backus, and on that day in 1948, he opened his studio to the youngster, even though Backus was not known for giving the kind of step-by-step lessons a student might expect. Jim Hutchinson maintained that maybe Bean was more interested in courting his sister than teaching him to paint. Despite this, immersed in a creative environment and under the watchful eye of a master artist, Hutchinson honed his sight and skills, developing into a gifted artist in his own right. Hutchinson, like so many others, traced his beginnings to the open door policy of Bean Backus.

Two years after that introduction, Patsy and Bean married, starting their own creative partnership, and a few months later Hutchinson graduated from Martin County High School and headed off to college. In 1952, he joined the U.S. Navy (like his brother-in-law Bean had ten years earlier) for a short stint, then attended The School of Illustration and Cartooning in New York City on the G.I. Bill to further refine his skills. Returning home in 1954, he worked at the original McKee Jungle Gardens as a tour guide and botanist, befriended Waldo Sexton, and in the late 1950s started joining Backus on his regular painting trips to Jamaica.

But as his talent continued to grow, he knew that he needed to make his own artistic path beyond Bean’s shadow and explore the environment with his own vision, and in his own way. From 1959-1965, Hutchinson had his most profound and inspiring creative experiences to date as an artist, experiences that would resonate within him for the rest of his career. Hutchinson and his wife Joan moved west to

live among, study, and paint Florida's Seminole and Miccosukee peoples on the Brighton Reservation/Big Cypress Reservation. This was a transformational moment in time, as their traditional customs and lifestyles were beginning to drift and yield to the dominant modern culture of 1960s Florida. During this period, Hutchinson became close friends with many of the Seminole elders, including Billy Bowlegs, Charlie Cypress, Charlotte Tommy, and Billy Osceola.

In 1971, Hutchinson received a major grant from the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations to paint 50 works representing the Seminole culture, producing a significant body of work that documented and celebrated the distinctiveness of these Native Americans. The State of Florida arranged for the paintings to go to the state capitol, and later travel throughout the state. In 1975-79, Hutchinson was asked to serve on the state Council of Indian Affairs due to his extensive experiences and advocacy for the Seminole peoples. And in 1980, his art again was used to represent the state, when a set of lithographs of Hutchinson's Seminole War Leaders was given to dignitaries during Governor Bob Graham's visit to Europe.

For nearly twenty more years he continued to paint his home state, as well as other places that would inspire him. In 1998, he and his family decided to embark on a new artistic adventure, moving to the Big Island of Hawai'i, where his keen observer's eye and affinity and respect for indigenous peoples led him to study the lush landscapes of the island chain, and the culture and beauty of the native Hawaiians.

Shortly after Hutchinson was inducted in 2011 into the Florida Artists Hall of Fame, he decided that after fourteen years living in Hawai'i, it was time to return home, and found his way back to Sewall's Point, where he continues to paint in his studio residence.

"Jim Hutchinson is almost a legendary artist these days," says Backus Museum director J. Marshall Adams. "He's enjoyed a long and creatively vibrant career. His art has brought fresh and important appreciation for the beauty of our natural environment, for the respect and dignity of Native Americans, and his compelling and sensitive vision has represented the State of Florida at home and abroad. He has traveled far and wide in those years, but we're pleased to welcome him 'home' in this exhibition, to where it all began."

James F. Hutchinson: Visionary Truths features more than 30 oil paintings that present the exquisite variety of scenes from Florida, Hawai'i, Jamaica, and the American West, as well as perceptive Seminole portraits and glimpses of a vanished way of life, all rendered with deep and genuine insight by a modern master. ***James F. Hutchinson: Visionary Truths*** is on view February 21 – April 26, 2020. For more information, please visit www.BackusMuseum.org.

The exhibition is generously sponsored by Fee, Yates and Fee Attorneys at Law.

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, A.E. “Bean” Backus (1906-1990) 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.

Regular Hours are: Wednesday – Saturday, 10 AM to 4 PM; Sunday, 12 Noon to 4 PM (closed Monday-Tuesday). The Museum is closed on Easter Sunday. 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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Images Available

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