

Herman Leonard

Jackson Fine Art

Three months after Hurricane Katrina devastated his New Orleans home, 83-year-old Herman Leonard began the painstaking process of making new prints from decades-old negatives that had been stored off-site just days before the storm hit. These images came to life in "Jazz Giants," an exhibition of 21 portraits shot largely between 1948 and 1960.



Herman Leonard, *Sarah Vaughan, New York City, 1949*, archival pigment print, 40" x 32".
Jackson Fine Art.

Leonard's signature style is an immediately recognizable mix of smoky ambience, backlighting, silhouetted figures, and jagged, intersecting lines. Included in this exhibition were Leonard's most familiar portraits: *Billie Holiday, New York City, 1949*; *Duke Ellington, Paris, 1958*; and *Frank Sinatra, Monte Carlo, 1958*. Leonard reprinted these and many of the others in a 40-by-32-inch format that presents his subjects literally larger than life.

Leonard's printing technique—accentuating light, texture, and detail—complements his eye for expressive body language. In *Sarah Vaughan, New York City, 1949*, the singer's angled arm, flared fingers, and feathery corsage echo the joyful, expansive expression on her face as she performs. The print is so fine that the whorl of Vaughan's thumbprint is clearly visible.

Other, more intimate images rounded out the show. In one particularly poignant shot from 1960, a pensive Louis Armstrong leans back against a wall, while spotlights cast a tonal trio of shadows behind him. These photographs offer a glimpse into an extraordinary musical era and a blending of art forms that remains elegant and atmospheric. —Debra Wolf

Robert Marx

Trinity

In his wry and complex allegorical works, Robert Marx deftly elaborates on organized religion, the personal cost of war, and the human desire for power.

Among the 27 drawings and sculptures on view here were several recent enigmatic portraits that made use of odd hats, inscrutable expressions, and abraded features. One such face was particularly compelling; its swollen eyes seem to open and close, while its bandaged head-dress transforms into a military helmet. In *Judgment* (1991), a bishop plays puppet master to three nude women dangling from his strings. Gracefully rendered, the women's rounded, imperfect bodies are composed from a thicket of scrawling line and subtle shadow. Nearby, an old man sits astride his dog, holding the pet's snout by a thin cord in a less ominous vignette of control and submission.

Double-Dealer (2007) brings Marx's drafting abilities to bronze. In this superb, mocking relief, two back-to-back profiles are joined by a sturdy neck. The blindfolded face on the left, with its jutting nose and lumpy skin, resembles a literary caricature. Hair sweeps over its head and obliterates the forehead on the right side. All that remains of the head on the right is its mouth and chin, with a curling trail of smoke above, rendering it brainless and as blind as its partner. With sensuously curved outlines, luxuriant patina,



Robert Marx, *Untitled, 2007*, graphite on paper, 16" x 14". Trinity.

and remarkable surface detail, this piece is as stunning as it is provocative.

Using soft, delicate line to explore his take on grim social realities, Marx has created a body of work that is lucid and darkly poetic. —Debra Wolf

Herbert Creecy

Mason Murer Fine Art

A year before his death in 2003, Herbert Creecy was celebrated in the catalogue for a retrospective at the City Gallery East as Georgia's most significant painter. His work more than justified the distinction, yet his name was far from familiar beyond the state—except to those with a long memory. Early in his career Creecy had shown in New York and was included in the 1977 Corcoran Biennial, but he seldom exhibited outside the South in the subsequent quarter century.

This show illustrated the extent of Creecy's accomplishment. Put simply,



Herbert Creecy, *Back Side of Chaos—Red, 1990-99*, mixed media on canvas, 86" x 132". Mason Murer Fine Art.

when you have seen one Herbert Creecy, you have seen only one. Even his best-known technique—using multiple layers of swirls complex enough to make a quick glance impossible—is just part of the story. Works on paper from the same period approach Zen calligraphy in their sparseness of line and use of the void.

The quiet tones of an untitled oil from 1999 might be taken for the resolution of a placid old age if Creecy hadn't completed in the same year a bright blue abstraction titled *Back Side of Chaos—Blue*. It is matched by *Back Side of Chaos—Red* and *Back Side of Chaos—Black* (all 1990-99), each equally vivid and vehement.

Creecy's large abstractions from the late '90s share an expressive sensibility with earlier works but are still a surprise. Coming so late in his life, these unanticipated shifts demonstrate the continued vigor of his imagination. —Jerry Cullum