

## Artist Profile – Clementine Hunter

b. 1886-87 Cloutierville, LA; d. 1988 Natchitoches, LA

Hunter was born on a plantation in Louisiana but moved North at fifteen when her father saw the opportunity for the family to work at Melrose Plantation. Once the family moved North to Cane River Country, they became part of a community that was made up of different cultures including French, Spanish, American Indian, and African. Hunter began painting in 1940 when she was almost sixty, she used found paints as well as found canvases like cardboard, paper bags, and scraps of wood.

Two of Hunter's biggest supporters were Francois Mignon and James Register, men who were supporters and collectors of Hunter's art, as well as good friends. When Hunter's work first began showing in galleries, around 1955, it was still a while before the Civil Rights Act and Hunter was not allowed to view her art in the gallery with any white patrons. In 1986, Northwestern State University awarded Hunter with a degree of Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts.

In Hunter's early works she used oil paints but thinned them down with turpentine so her paintings had a watercolor quality. Hunter's paintings were vibrant, colorful, expressive, and often included the subject of people, houses, and flowers, her painting style was described as "primitive". Many of Hunter's paintings were meant to depict plantation life as seen by someone who was raised on plantations. While Hunter did attempt to experiment with different techniques, she typically continued with the same style and began to reproduce what she had already discovered.

In the 1970s the Melrose Plantation was bought by Southdown Land Company and although many parts of the buildings were reconstructed for other purposes, the buildings that Hunter painted murals on were saved and protected as a National Historic Landmark. Because of the change with plantations during this time, Hunter's art again gained more popularity because now plantation life was viewed as a "vanishing pageant". Hunter's folk art could be found on numerous materials that ranged from canvases to wine bottles and she began selling her works for thousands of dollars instead of the twenty-five cents she charged in the 1940s.

The subjects of her works were still the same, repeating people, houses, and flowers in bright colors but each painting was distinctively different. Hunter did not frequently title her work, but when she did they were titles describing different activities of plantation life, for example *Pickin' Cotton*. The main themes that Hunter's work discussed were work, play, and religion relating to her life on the plantations.

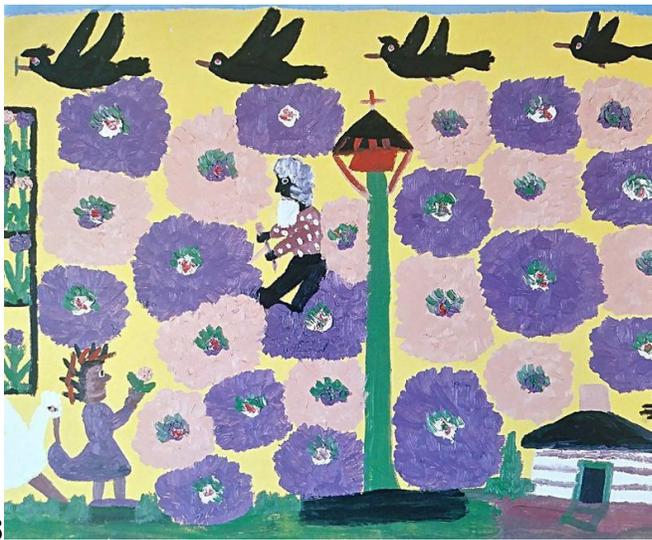
Examples of Hunter's work include *Baptizing (1)*; a scene of how baptism used to be done in a lake away from the church, *Saturday Night at the Honky Tonk (2)*; a depiction of a party where people were drinking, fighting, or having fun, and *Uncle Tom in the Garden (3)*; a painting of a man tending to flowers and a young girl playing with her pet goose.



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