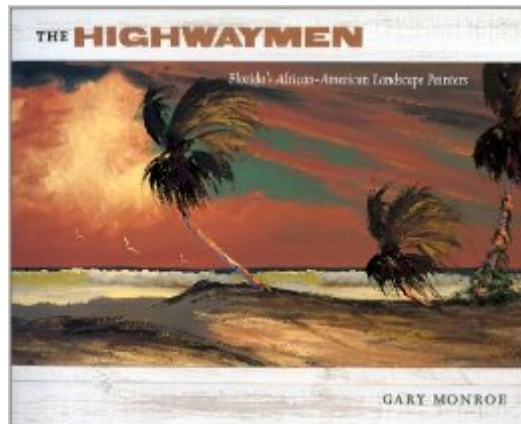


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# The Highwaymen: Florida's African-American Landscape Painters



## Synopsis

"For the first time, the real story behind the Highwaymen has emerged . . . a well-researched, lively, and comprehensive overview of the development and contribution of these African-American artists and their place in the history of Florida's popular culture."--Mallory McCane O'Connor, author of *Lost Cities of the Ancient Southeast*

The Highwaymen introduces a group of young black artists who painted their way out of the despair awaiting them in citrus groves and packing houses of 1950s Florida. As their story recaptures the imagination of Floridians and their paintings fetch ever-escalating prices, the legacy of their freshly conceived landscapes exerts a new and powerful influence on the popular conception of the Sunshine State. While the value of Highwaymen paintings has soared in recent years, until now no authoritative account of the lives and work of these black Florida artists has existed. Emerging in the late 1950s, the Highwaymen created idyllic, quickly realized images of the Florida dream and peddled some 100,000 of them from the trunks of their cars. Working with inexpensive materials, the Highwaymen produced an astonishing number of landscapes that depict a romanticized Florida--a faraway place of wind-swept palm trees, billowing cumulus clouds, wetlands, lakes, rivers, ocean, and setting sun. With paintings still wet, they loaded their cars and traveled the state's east coast, selling the images door-to-door and store-to-store, in restaurants, offices, courthouses, and bank lobbies. Sometimes characterized as motel art, the work is a hybrid form of landscape painting, corrupting the classically influenced ideals of the Highwaymen's white mentor, A. E. "Bean" Backus. At first, the paintings sold like boom-time real estate. In succeeding decades, however, they were consigned to attics and garage sales. Rediscovered in the mid-1990s, today they are recognized as the work of American folk artists. Gary Monroe tells the story behind the Highwaymen, a loose association of 25 men and 1 woman from the Ft. Pierce area--a fascinating mixture of individual talent, collective enterprise, and cultural heritage. He also offers a critical look at the paintings and the movement's development. Added to this are personal reminiscences by some of the artists, along with a gallery of 63 full-color reproductions of their paintings.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In 1994, art aficionado Jim Fitch assigned the name "Highwaymen" to a loose association of young, mostly untrained black artists (including one woman) from the Fort Pierce area who created thousands of Florida landscapes and marketed them from the backs of their cars for about \$25 in the 1960's and '70's. Theirs was an unabashedly commercial venture, and the artists collaborated to create and sell works as quickly and cheaply as possible. Dismissed as "motel art" at the time, these intense, lush and at times otherworldly depictions of an idealized Florida have become a subject of renewed interest and critical attention in recent years. Consequently, many myths and vague tales have grown up around the group. As part of his research, author Gary Monroe interviewed many of the remaining artists to bring the story to life, presented here in a 26-page annotated essay. In analyzing the art, he insists that the speed with which they worked was far from a detriment: "By unintentionally bastardizing the canonical pictorial strategies...they created a new form of fantasy landscape painting." The artists found their strength as colorists, and the emotional hues capture the essence of Florida (or at least, as we imagine it.) As a northerner who visited Florida twice as a child in the pre-Disney days, I must confess that the 63 glorious full-color reproductions here gave me goose bumps of fond memory, real or imagined. A followup: This book launched an explosion of interest in The Highwaymen. Surviving members no longer need hawk their wares, since collectors now come to them and new works sell for as much as \$18,000. They were inducted into the Florida Artists Hall of Fame in 2004.

An all-inclusive journey through the lives and souls of African American painters from days gone by. These creative souls painted breathtaking beach landscapes... Many of their works still survive today, and sell for [a small fortune]. (I know, I have one in my living room.) A great buy! Just be warned; one look through it's pages will draw you toward Florida's shores like a child to the smell of cotton candy!

This book highlights a special group of amateur black artists who lived in Florida in the 1950's. The story is well presented with wonderful details that make their artistic journey come alive. The paintings are wonderful. The only drawback to this book, as I see it, is that the vivid hues of the paintings did not come through in this book. I happened to read a magazine article, full of rich colorful pictures of some of the paintings, which sparked my interest, and led to my purchasing this book. Unfortunately, it seems that this printing process could not represent the original brilliance of the paintings. This is a fascinating peek at a little known bit of Florida art history.

This is the history of African-American self-taught artists who drove the highways of Florida stopping to paint the landscape as they saw it before the age of super development. Many of them have passed but a few relatives remain and are trying to preserve this type of art. Currently, access to undeveloped land is one of their challenges. The original Highway Men painted and sold their work along the highways. They have captured "The old Florida" that many of us miss.

The anniversary of our first meeting, Valentine's Day and my wife's birthday all hit in the same week, give or take a day or two. She had been talking about going to a Highwayman exhibit, so I ordered this book. I got five stars, so I'll pass them on to the book.

Good background information on the various Highwaymen painters. Book was in very good condition and was more than pleased and surprised that one of the pages was actually signed by one of the Highwaymen. That was truly a BONUS!

Gary Monroe does an excellent job in his book THE HIGHWAYMEN. Excellent info told in a short quick manner that anyone can understand. Whether you are new to the Highwaymen or collect like I do, this book is one to own. Set it out in your house and watch people get into it. RECOMMENDED

Great content. Good narratives, I believe that the book would be much more beneficial and enjoyable if it were in a larger format of - say 8.5x11 or even 11 x 17 so that the beauty and details of the art could be better appreciated. But, I hasten to add - the book is Excellent, enjoyable and one you will probably definitely want to keep in your permanent library.

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