

source of this consistent approach of repeating imagery can be seen in Theodore's life when one considers, for instance, the mile-and-a-half walk he took with his wife Beatrice every morning of the thirty-six years they were married.

On those walks with his wife, no doubt, Theodore keenly observed, among other things, blooming flowers with vibrant green leaves. Ordinary things like this provided him with rich material for creating art. In his *Hearts and Flowers* series, for example, a linocut of a perfect circle (with one quarter shaded) appears in the upper left hand corner. In a progression of five frames that read from left to right and extends downward six rows, the circle gradually transforms into a heart. One by one, petals appear in each subsequent stage and the heart slowly becomes a flower. If we continue to follow the progression, we would see the transformation reverse with the final image in the bottom right hand corner being the same circle that was in the beginning. In the borders of his *Hearts and Flowers* series, Theodore has drawn an intricate pattern of leaves further emphasizing the organic essence of the work. With a few mundane images, the artist has directly urged us to contemplate the cyclical and transitory nature of life.

Theodore was an extremely generous man. Over the course of a number of years, he volunteered countless hours with the Zora Neale Hurston National Museum of Fine Arts and the Winter Park Art Festival providing both institutions with professional services. He also worked tirelessly to promote emerging artists not only in the Central Florida area but everywhere he went as he traveled the outdoor festival circuit. This generosity is perceived in his works when we consider the layers of mark-making and imagery he often incorporated. In *Migration*, for example, the rich colors from newspaper peek through the linocuts of the three birds that dominate the composition. These colors accentuate the intricate details Theodore has used to describe the complexity of the birds' feathers as they spread their wings in flight. Waves that gradually get lighter and simpler as they move from the bottom of the piece to the top, along with two vertical bands on left and right hand sides, visually push the birds upward. Within the two bands, we can see tiny photo-transfers of various species of fowls fluttering in the air. With *Migration* being replete with imagery and signature techniques, Theodore is not stingy; he gives our eyes and minds plenty on which to feast.

Because visual art is a human endeavor, it is refreshing to contemplate the work of an artist who incorporates the human experience of interacting with the small things of nature. Theodore's work not only helps us to appreciate the crackle of leaves under our feet, or the smell of fresh flowers in the Spring, or the cool breeze of an Autumn morning, it also helps us to appreciate the process of life. What we see in his work are things we encounter in our everyday lives. It is in looking at and studying Theodore's images that we begin to appreciate consistency, ordinary things, and our responsibility to share with others. Indeed, his work encourages us to appreciate the fact that we are alive.

Trent Tomengo
Assistant Curator
Zora Neale Hurston National Museum of Fine Arts

The anomalous nature of Leon Theodore's oeuvre calls to mind a quote by one of the most seminal artists in Western art history, Henri Matisse. It was he who said that he dreamt of "an art of balance, of purity, and serenity, devoid of troubling or depressing subject matter, an art which could be for every mental soothing, calming influence on the mind, something like a good armchair which provides relaxation from physical fatigue." Theodore's work captivates its viewers and allows them to see nature and humanity as he saw them - logical, methodical, and most of all graceful. It is with this idea in mind that one can fully appreciate the work of this fine artist.

ART IN THE CHAMBERS

This is a program of the Orange County Arts & Cultural Affairs Office. The Works of Leon L. Theodore From The Zora Neale Hurston National Museum of Fine Arts exhibition adds to exhibitions from the Orlando Museum of Art, the Cornell Museum of Fine Art and the Maitland Art Center which have been featured previously. The Art in the Chambers program presents some of Central Florida's well-known collections as well as the work of nationally known artists who live or work in Orange County. The Public Art Review Committee makes exhibition selections through an annual review process. More information is available from the Arts & Cultural Affairs Office.

The Arts & Cultural Affairs Office was established by Mayor Richard T. Crotty and the Board of County Commissioners in 2001. The Office's mission is to elevate Central Florida's arts and culture to a status befitting a world-class community. The office works with the Arts & Cultural Affairs Advisory Council to fund arts projects in the community from a percentage of the Tourist Development Tax revenues. For more information check the web site, <http://www.ocfl.net/arts> or call Terry Olson at 407/836-5540 or email at Terry.Olson@ocfl.net.

Public Art Review Committee:

Judy Ann Albertson, Chair; Que Throm, Vice Chair; Ricardo Aguilar; Arthur Blumenthal; Carolyn Fennell; Susie Findell; Anne Grey; Robert Higgins; Michael Houston; Marena Grant Morrisey; John Warbington

Please join be sure to see this exhibition as well:

May 13 – September 12, 2005

Artists From the Theme Park World

The theme park industry has brought thousands of trained visual and performing artists to Central Florida. Often their personal artistic creations are unknown and unseen in the community.



ORANGE
COUNTY
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Arts &
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Affairs

ART IN THE CHAMBERS

Orange County Administration Center
201 S. Rosalind Avenue
Orlando

FROM
THE ZORA NEALE HURSTON MUSEUM
JANUARY 14, 2005 – MAY 15, 2005

Leon L. Theodore (1929-1999) American

Theodore's work is characterized by the reusing of image: "As his work focused on the principles of art, design, repetition, contrast, color, etc. motifs indicative of Christianity (Christ figures, fish, door knockers, etc.) which appear in earlier works, return in later works. A good example of this stylistic component of the artist's work is the repeated linocut figure of the blind man in *Blind World* (ca. early 1970's). About 20 years later in 1993



Blind World II: Four Points, (1933)

Linocut/Charcoal/Transfer, 40 x 36"
Collection of Mrs. Maxine Hixon

Icarus: Unfaithful Wings into the Future, (1990)

Linocut/Charcoal/Transfer, 30 x 40"
Purchased from Marianne Friedland Gallery



Hearts and Flowers: A Series with a Touch of Color (AP), (1997)

Graphite/Color Pencil, 24 x 36"

A Child of Love: Sons and Daughters of the World, (1997)

Linocut/Charcoal, 40 x 40"



The Voyage (AP), (1996)

Linocut/Charcoal/Transfer, 30 x 32"

Winds of Air and Fire,

(1994)

Charcoal/Transfer, 40 x 28"



Hearts and Flowers: A Series in Black and White (AP), (1997)

Graphite/Color Pencil, 24 x 36"



Adam and Eve, (1975)

Linocut/Charcoal



Ambrosia of Life, (1993)

Linocut/Charcoal/Transfer, 24 x 36"



Women of the River, (1995)

Charcoal/Transfer/Color Pencil



Pillars of the Rock (circa early 1970's)

Linocut/Transfer, 40 x 40", n.d.



Migration, (1997)

Linocut/Charcoal/Transfer, 40 x 30"



THE ZORA NEALE HURSTON NATIONAL MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

Established in 1990, the Zora Neale Hurston National Museum of Fine Arts (The Hurston) is a program of The Association to Preserve the Eatonville Community, Inc. (P.E.C.). Its mission is to provide a place "in the heart of the community" where the public can view the work of artists of African descent, who live on the Continent and/or in the Diaspora. The Hurston represents one of P.E.C.'s major initiatives as it seeks to develop historic Eatonville into one of America's premier heritage communities.

A review of its exhibitions scheduled over the past 15 years reveals two major periods in The Hurston's development: (1) 1990 - 1998 and (2) 1998 - present. During the first nine years, Leon L. Theodore (1929 - 1999), volunteer museum director, oversaw all facets of the museum's operations and established, among professionals and patrons alike, a reputation for quality shows. The Legends Series (October 7 1998 - August 7, 1999), which celebrated The Hurston's 10th anniversary, marked a transition for the institution. This show featured legendary artists John Biggers, Elizabeth Catlett, Samella Lewis, and William Pajaud. Since The Legends Series, the museum has continued to exhibit the artwork of some of the nation's most prominent contemporary artists. With the help of Gylbert Garvin Coker, acting as guest curator, The Hurston has brought to the Central Florida arts community artists such as Carrie Mae Weems, Terry Adkins, Willie Birch, Faith Ringgold, Albert Chong, Whitfield Lovell, and, most recently, Benny Andrews.

The Art of Life: Works by Leon L. Theodore (1929 - 1999)

Leon Theodore was a generous man who created multi-layered compositions about ordinary things. His work reveals his appreciation for the simple things in life and his willingness to share that appreciation with others. He was not dependent on his art for income; neither was he concerned with becoming famous. Because of this freedom, he created art strictly for personal enjoyment and chose to focus primarily on the beauty found in everyday things. Theodore often used simple things like leaves, hearts, flowers, and birds as imagery in his compositions. With a healthy dose of patterns, images, and mark-making techniques, each of Theodore's pieces is imbued with his principles of consistency, his love of the ordinary, and his capacity to be giving.

Theodore built his compositions with a meticulous methodology. In *A Child of Love: Sons and Daughters of the World*, a doctor's hands holding up a newborn baby is repeated in a clock-like fashion forming a complete circle. Appearing to be linocut images printed on newspaper, the repeated images flow like a tidal wave from one image to the next. The feeling of an eternal cycle emanates from the circle formed and is further accentuated by ten lines converging at its center. At the open end of each converging line, Theodore repeated an egg shape onto which photo-transfers of children's faces (all different nationalities) have been superimposed. The creative

