



Art League Houston
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For Immediate Release

August 30, Houston, TX - Art League Houston is proud to present, *Drawn to Communities*, an exhibition of photography by Houston artist, Earlie Hudnall, Jr., recipient of the 2022 Lifetime Achievement Award in the Visual Arts.

Drawn to Communities

Earlie Hudnall, Jr.
Front and Hallway Galleries

Exhibition Dates:
September 16 – December 3, 2022

Opening Reception:
6 – 8 PM, Friday, September 16, 2022

(image on right)
Flipping Boy, Fourth Ward, Houston, Texas, 1983.
Earlie Hudnall, Jr.
Gelatin silver print. Image courtesy of the Artist
and PDNB Gallery.



Earlie Hudnall, Jr. always has a camera with him. He has been actively photographing for more than 40 years. Hudnall's work and education has taken him around the world, yet some of his most recognized photographs are of life here in Houston's Third, Fourth, and Fifth Wards. His compelling images of families and daily life in some of the city's most neglected neighborhoods remains as a record of these historic communities that persevere with strength, love, and dignity. In talking about his work, Hudnall states: "I chose the camera as a tool to document different aspects of life: who we are, what we do, how we live, what our communities look like."

In an age of digital photography, Hudnall continues to shoot with film negatives and make gelatin silver prints in his own darkroom at his home in Houston's Third Ward.



Art League Houston (ALH) humbly honors Mr. Hudnall as the recipient of the biennial 2022 Lifetime Achievement Award in the Visual Arts with this survey exhibition of some of his most significant and iconic images of Houston and of the world. A catalog published by ALH and designed by HvADesign will be available in conjunction with this exhibition. The catalog includes some of his most celebrated images along with an introductory essay by Anne Wilkes Tucker.



2022 Lifetime Achievement Award in the Visual Arts Earlie Hudnall, Jr.

Earlie Hudnall, Jr. was born and raised in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. He started taking photos of his own at an early age with a box camera and credits his grandmother and her photo album containing family photographs, obituaries, and community articles, for his early fascination with storytelling and photography. When his parents were busy, Hudnall would go next door to his grandmother Bonnie Jean's home where she would tell him stories about his family and many others in his community including the story of the first African American Navy aviator Jesse L. Brown, also from Hudnall's hometown. Hudnall said, *"She told my siblings and I, 'Go on and get Gran's album.' When we opened it, there was a newspaper clipping of his [Jesse L. Brown] picture and*





about what unfortunately happened to him in the Korean War [Brown died a hero at 24 on December 4, 1950].”

Hudnall’s father was an amateur photographer who took pictures during his time in the military and with the family. *“Whether it was on Easter Sundays or when we all had on new school clothes, he would line us up and flick the camera,”* Hudnall said. From then on, Hudnall began to understand, at an early age, the importance of documenting his community and the significance of who one is and how one lives. *“It was important to shed light on what causes a person to move, strive and become so inventive in his or her own way of survival,”* Hudnall said.

Hudnall began to take his photography practice more seriously during his tour of duty as a U.S. Marine in Vietnam from 1966-67. After returning home in 1968, he enrolled as a student at Texas Southern University (TSU), Houston’s historic Black University. While studying, he and fellow photographer, Ray Carrington III were recruited by Dr. Thomas Freedman, the notable orator and Director of the TSU Debate Team, to document the university’s Model Cities Program, which provided a chance for the artist to photograph various Houston neighborhoods (Trinity Gardens, Sunnyside, Third, Fourth, and Fifth Wards). Hudnall discovered reminders of his own life in these Houston enclaves that influenced the photographer to capture the simple, yet, memorable moments of how one lives from day to day. *“I felt that I was documenting my own community and culture by photographing the daily life of these neighborhoods”,* said the artist. Impressed by Hudnall’s artistry and photographic style, Dr. Freeman commissioned him to continue documenting the families, individuals, elders, and children in neighborhoods. The assignment had a lasting impact on Hudnall as an artist, as he continued to photograph these same communities throughout his career, and has produced some of his strongest work from these historic areas of Houston.

During his studies at TSU, he had the opportunity to study with Dr. John Biggers, the notable painter, muralist, and art educator, who founded and developed the art department at TSU along with Carroll Harris Simms. Both Biggers and Simms were influential mentors to so many of Houston’s most notable artists, including Hudnall. One of Hudnall’s favorite quotes by Dr. Biggers is *“Art is Life. One must draw upon his personal experiences from family and sense of community.”*

Hudnall received a BA in Art Education from Texas Southern University in 1976. After graduation, he worked various part-time jobs photographing weddings and events, as well as for publications like the Houston Informer and Ebony Magazine until 1979 when he was offered a full-time position at TSU as the Staff Photographer. He was appointed



University Photographer at TSU in 1990 and was in the position until his retirement in 2020.

In talking about his work, Hudnall states: *"I chose the camera as a tool to document different aspects of life: who we are, what we do, how we live, what our communities look like. Various patterns are interwoven like a quilt into important patterns of history. A unique commonality exists between young and old because there is always continuity between the past and the future. The camera really does not matter – it's still just a tool. What is important to me is the ability to transform an instant – a moment – into a meaningful, expressive, and profound statement – some personal, some symbolic, and some universal. My photographs are archetypes of my own childhood. They represent a literal transcription of actuality – the equivalent of what I saw or felt. The viewer can accept the image as one's own and respond emotionally and aesthetically to the captured image."*

Hudnall has been actively photographing for almost forty years and his photographs have been featured in numerous solo and group exhibitions in galleries and museums locally and around the world, including the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, VA (2021); Harn Museum of Art, Gainesville, FL (2021); Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX (2020, 2016, 2011, 1991, 1991); Kunsthal Rotterdam, Netherlands (2019); Hunter Museum of American Art, Chattanooga, TN (2014); Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC (2012); Centro Cultural Borges, Buenos Aires, Argentina (1996); Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago, IL (1993); de Meervaart Cultural Center, Amsterdam, Netherlands (1991); and many others.

His compelling images of community, families, and daily life has become influential to many artists and photographers and impacted how African American culture should be depicted. Most notably, James Laxton, the cinematographer for *Moonlight*, which won an Oscar for Best Picture in 2017, cited Hudnall's work as inspiration for depicting Black people in the film.

Hudnall's work is represented in numerous permanent collections including the Amon Carter Museum, Ft. Worth, TX; Art Institute of Chicago, IL; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX; The Menil Collection, Houston, TX; National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC; Museum fur Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg, Germany; and Studio Museum of Harlem, NY. He is the recipient of several awards, including the 2020 Visual Artist Award by the Texas Commission on the Arts, and was honored by FotoFest in 2019. In 2021, the City of Houston, led by Mayor Sylvester Turner, designated June 12, 2021, as Earlie Hudnall Day.



His work has been featured in numerous publications including Luncheon Magazine No. 11: *“On Photography: Earlie Hudnall, Jr. and Rahim Fortune in Conversation by Reginald Moore”* (2021); Time Magazine: *“‘I’m Just Trying to Photograph Life as I See It.’ Earlie Hudnall Jr. Has Spent More Than 40 Years Documenting Historically Black Neighborhoods in Houston”* (2020) and *“Photographic Memory: The Importance of Preserving Community History”* (2017).

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