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What's on your list today?



Henry Frison poses at his Portland home with two of his favorite works, 'Under the Spotlight,' depicting President Obama and other civil rights icons, and 'African Prince' a painting Frison describes as his masterpiece.

Creating Positive Images

Gallery shines light on historic mural artist

BY ZACHARY SENN

THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Portland has a rich history of public murals to educate and uplift the African American community, a civil rights tradition that can be traced back 50 years when a "Wall of Respect" mural in Chicago depicted a dozen black heroes and community leaders and inspired black artists around the country to create positive public images in often impoverished neighborhoods.

A new gallery in north Portland will shine the spotlight on one of Portland's most prominent black mural artists of this generation during an exhibit and art show that opens on Saturday, July 29 at GreenHAUS Boutique and Gallery, 18 N.E. Killingsworth St.

Henry Frison was known for his portraits of prominent black figures, especially for five 20 foot by 20 foot murals, part of the Albina Mural Project, long lost to redevelopment at Northeast Vancouver Avenue and Alberta Street.

Born in Texas and raised in New Mexico, Frison says he drew his interest in art from a very early age and always focused on people, even though many

artists prefer to stick to easier subjects, such as landscapes.

"I love drawing people, because everybody that you draw is a little bit different," Frison told the Portland Observer. "I love the challenge. You've got to try to capture the person."

After his uncle told him about the benefits of Portland's unionized workforce, Frison moved to the city in search of higher wages and better working conditions. At 25, he found work in one of the city's iron foundries. The heavy industrial labor took a toll on the artist, however, and he began to suffer from a work-related spinal condition.

A job re-training program allowed him, at the age of 35, to begin pursuing his lifelong dream of working as a professional artist.

"I got to where I couldn't work," he explained. "It was a good chance for me to go to art school. They paid for it, so I joined an art class downtown."

Frison adds that refining his art skills made it possible for him to continue supporting his family, even if his physical condition continued to deteriorate.

"Even if I got to where I might be bedridden because of my illness, I could still set up and draw lying down," Frison said. "I could still make something for my family."

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Lynch Schools Get New Names

Ending any confusion over the word describing the murder of black Americans by white mobs during the civil rights era and other periods of U.S. history, the Centennial School Board has announced plans to rename Lynch Meadows, Lynch Wood and Lynch View elementary schools.

Coakley says the problem is that new students and their families don't associate the name Lynch with the name of a local family who donated land for the schools in the district over a century ago.

Of the 6,000 students attending the elementary schools, 55 percent

Centennial Superintendent Paul come from families of color, the majority bein-g from Latino households. The schools join a growing trend to change racially offensive landmarks, buildings and names across the United States, including the recent renaming of Dunn Hall to Unthank Hall on the University of Oregon campus.