

# Only in Your State

by Kathy McShane

## Part I: Alabama- Georgia

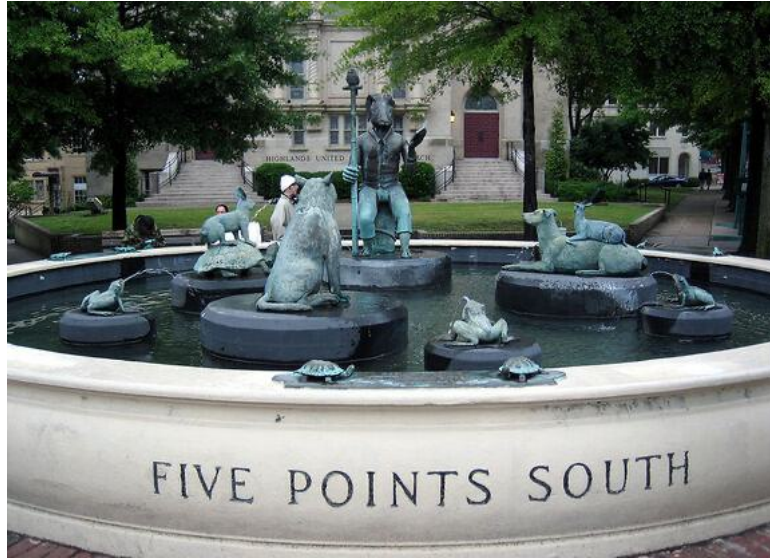
I borrowed this title from a website that highlights events, attractions, food, etc., from individual states. It seemed fitting for this endeavor to highlight artists born, raised, or who worked in our 50 states. Some are probably well known to you; others may not be. They were not necessarily chosen because they are the “most famous”; some I chose simply because they piqued my interest. I won’t try to cover them all in a single article (who would read it?), but I will cover 10 states at a time, alphabetically.

### Alabama

Frank Fleming (1940-2018) was born and died in Alabama. He had a severe speech impediment, leading him to express himself in images rather than words. His medium is clay; he discovered his niche as a college student, taught by a maid who cleaned the classrooms. His sculptures are often whimsical, influenced by his childhood and involvement in the 1970s funk art movement in California, a combination of man and beast. In his hometown of Birmingham, Fleming is best known for *The Storyteller*, a public fountain in the Five Points South neighborhood that depicts a ram-man reading a book to a circle of woodland creatures (see photo below).



Frank Fleming, *Desert Landscape*, 1980



Frank Fleming, *The Storyteller*, 1992

## Alaska

For Alaska, I settled on **Sydney Laurence** (1865-1940). Laurence was a painter of the Romantic era, believed to be the first professional artist to make Alaska his home. After his death from a stroke (which he predicted to the day!), he became known as the foremost painter of Alaska scenes, among them sailing ships and steamships in Alaskan waters, totem poles, dramatic headlands and the quiet coves and streams of Cook Inlet, and Native Alaskans, miners, and trappers engaged in their often-solitary lives in the northern wilderness. He is best known for painting Mount McKinley, then Denali.



Sydney Laurence, *Mount McKinley from the Tokositna River*



Sydney Laurence, *Going to the Potlach (c.1929)*

## Arizona

I chose the architect **Frank Lloyd Wright** (1867-1959) for Arizona. Although a native of Wisconsin, from 1937 to his death in 1959, Wright spent winters outside of Scottsdale, Arizona, where he designed and built Taliesin West. Taliesin West, which was almost entirely built over several years by Wright and his apprentices (“The Fellowship”), incorporates Wright’s key principles of “organic” architecture, which included:

- 1) Site: The building should appear to grow from the site and be in harmony with it.
- 2) Form: The building should reflect a dominant form integrated throughout the structure.
- 3) Materials: The nature of the materials used to construct the structure should be conspicuous.
- 4) Color: Colors used should be indicative of the colors found in nature.
- 5) Space: The interior should be open, with the spaces flowing into each other.

Taliesin West is now a World Heritage site and National Historic Landmark, open to visitors. It is not the only Frank Lloyd Wright structure in the Phoenix-Scottsdale area. Among the eleven buildings in the area designed or partly designed by Wright include the David and Gladys Wright House and the First Christian Church. The David and Gladys Wright House (1950) was designed and built at the base of Camelback Mountain for Wright’s son; it is one of three spiral designs realized by Wright. The structure that would become the First Christian Church (completed in 1973) was initially commissioned by a seminary that closed before the structure could be built. The roof and spire on the church rise some 77 feet.

Taliesin West



David and Gladys Wright Home



First Christian Church



## Arkansas

**Elsie Bates Freund** (1912-2001) was a studio art jeweler, watercolorist, and textile artist. She and her husband, Louis Freund, a renowned muralist of the Ozarks, purchased the home of prohibitionist Carry Nation in Eureka Springs, Arkansas, where they established the Summer Art School of the Ozarks. Freund developed a jewelry-making process that combined glass, clay, and silver. Her husband called her pieces “Elsaramics”, which proved too long to stamp on her jewelry; she shortened it to “Elsa”. Freund’s work, though pioneering, went largely unnoticed until the 1980s, when fellow jewelry artist Robert Ebendorf began to promote her work. Today, her work is in collections of several leading museums, including The Smithsonian Museum of American Art and the Victoria and Albert Museum.



Elsie Bates Freund, *Brooch*, 1967



Elsie Bates Freund, *Pendant with Drops*, 1960-65

## California

**Wayne Thiebaud** (1920-2021) was one of the most well-known pop artists in the United States, active in the Sacramento area. He is best known for his bright paintings of pastries and cakes, but they represent only a slice of the American artist's work. Other commonplace objects featured in his works are lipsticks, paint cans, ice cream cones, and hot dogs (still life art for the consumer age). The Crocker Art Museum in Sacramento has held a Thiebaud exhibition every decade since 1951, including *Wayne Thiebaud 100* in 2020, to honor the artist's 100th birthday.



Wayne Thiebaud, *Three Machines*, 1963



Wayne Thiebaud, *Cakes*, 1963

## Colorado

**Charles Partridge Adams** (1858-1942) was largely self-taught and prolific. Over 950 paintings have been documented, approximately half in watercolors and half in oils. Adams is widely considered to have been Colorado's finest landscape artist. He is known for his views of snowy mountain peaks in early morning, at sunset, or surrounded by storm clouds and his twilight paintings of the river bottoms near Denver.



Charles Partridge Adams, *In the Colorado Mountains*, 1898



Charles Partridge Adams, *Platte River Sunset*, date unknown



## Connecticut

**Julian Alden Weir** (1852-1919) was an Impressionist artist. Ironically, when he first saw Impressionist paintings in the 1870s, he was repelled by them, saying, "I never in my life saw more horrible things...They do not observe drawing or form but give you an impression of what they call nature. It was worse than the Chamber of Horrors." By the 1890s, however, influenced by such luminaries as Childe Hassam, Weir had adopted the style. Like many impressionists, Weir was influenced by Japanese art, as evidenced in the photo below of *The Red Bridge*.

Weir was a member of "The Ten," an artists' group created in 1898 to exhibit their works as a unified group. He was also a member of the Cos Cob Art Colony, the first American Impressionists' art colony near Greenwich, Connecticut.



J. Alden Weir, *The Red Bridge*, 1895



J. Alden Weir, *On the Shore*, 1910

## Delaware

**Frank Loper Sr.** (1916-2011) was a native of Wilmington, Delaware, where he lived his entire life. The African-American's start as an artist was with the Works Progress Administration (WPA), where he illustrated objects of American design. His early art features numerous Delaware landscapes and cityscapes. Loper, who taught painting for over 40 years, is known for his vibrant color palette. After Loper's death, Delaware Thomas Carper memorialized the artist as part of the Congressional Record, saying his "talent for color broke the mold of his time, and his passion for teaching others to see through color was unsurpassed," and that he "changed the landscape for black artists and paved the way for others who came after him."



Frank Loper Sr., *My Father The Bishop*, 1975



Frank Loper Sr., *34 St. Pierre, Québec*, 1980

## Florida

For Florida, I chose **The Highwaymen**, a group of 26 primarily self-taught African-American artists (25 men and one woman), which began in largely segregated Florida. Their work focuses on undisturbed Florida landscapes, including beaches, marshes, water birds, and palm trees. Of the 26, the Fort Pierce founders, Alfred Hair and Harold Newton, are often considered the most talented.

The Highwaymen were not a structured group, but they mentored each other and sold each other's work. Opportunities for employment for African Americans in the Jim Crow south were limited; the Highwaymen found a way to earn a living painting. Unable to be represented in whites-only galleries, the artists often sold their work from the trunks of their cars on the side of the road or door-to-door. The term "Highway Men" originated from their sales method. Prices for their work were low, so they developed a way of "fast painting", often producing dozens of paintings a day. It is believed that the group may have created more than 200,000 paintings during the 1950s to 1970s.

The 26 artists identified as Highwaymen were inducted into the Florida Hall of Fame in 2004. The Smithsonian's African American Museum of History and Culture has 18 Highwaymen paintings in its collection.



Alfred Hair, *The Glades in Dusk, 3 Birds in Flight, c.*

1969



Harold Newton, *Rough Sea, Palms on Sand Dune, c.*

1984

## Georgia

**Howard Finster** (1916-2001) was called (before his death) “perhaps the most famous religious artist alive today.” A Baptist minister, Finster claimed God called him to paint sacred art and called himself “A Man of Visions”. His call to paint holy art came one day while he was repairing a bicycle, and he found a smudge on his finger with a perfect human face. In addition to his religious art (with accompanying text intended to save souls), Finster painted presidents, inventors, and pop culture icons in his primitive folk art style. He also created album covers for R.E.M. and the Talking Heads. Over his 25-year art career, Finster created nearly 47,000 works. The Smithsonian Museum of American Art has 16 Finster works in its collection. In the 1960s, Finster began creating Paradise Garden outside of Summerville, Georgia, a conglomeration of sculptures and paintings by Finster and other artists (including a welded sculpture by Keith Haring). In its obituary of Finster, *The New York Times* referred to Finster’s 2.5 acre “art environment” as a “junk and cement” environment, where the “amount of detritus would fill a book”.



Howard Finster, *God Is Love, Seek his Will and Find his Peace He Saves from Sin*, after 1970



Howard Finster, *Baby Elvis*, 1988

Next time: Hawaii – Maryland