

MEREDITH WARD FINE ART

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Meredith Ward Fine Art

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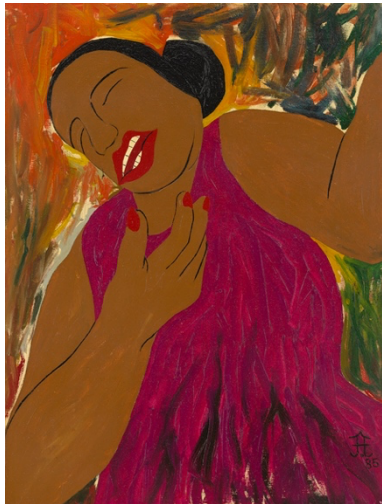
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FRANK DIAZ ESCALET: SING ME THE BLUES

April 29 – June 24, 2022



Bessie! Sing Me the Blues, 1985
Acrylic on board, 24 x 18 in.

Meredith Ward Fine Art is pleased to present **Frank Diaz Escalet: Sing Me the Blues**, an exhibition of paintings and inlaid cut leather works on view from April 29 through June 24, 2022. Centered on music and dance in the work of Frank Diaz Escalet (1930-2012), the show is the second exhibition of the artist's work at Meredith Ward Fine Art. The gallery successfully debuted Escalet's work last year, which was the first exhibition since his death. Almost entirely self-taught, Puerto Rican-born Escalet was a painter and master leathercrafter, and developed his own technique for creating images out of cut leather that vividly capture the dynamics of a scene.

From his inlaid cut leather works of the 1970s and 1980s to his later paintings, Escalet's bold compositions celebrate the joy and solace found in music and dance. These works convey the pulse of New York City nightlife and share a deep pride in the folk traditions of his native Puerto Rico. A jazz enthusiast who spent time in New York City jazz clubs, Escalet depicted figures from across the history of 20th century jazz while tapping into the creative energy that sustains the genre. Escalet's keen eye and confident hand captures the vivacity and humanity shared through these cultural pastimes.

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Tango No. 12, 1977, cut leather on masonite, 24 x 18 in.

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Born in Puerto Rico, Escalet grew up in a poor, immigrant family in New York City. He dropped out of school after eighth grade to help support his family, and served in the Air Force in the 1940s and 1950s. Back in New York, Escalet worked in a gas station, and learned metalworking from a customer. He opened a leather shop in Greenwich Village called The House of Escalet, and by the early 1960s, he had developed a celebrity clientele, designing and creating leather garments for Sly and the Family Stone, The Rolling Stones, Gary Puckett and the Union Gap, and Aretha Franklin. In 1971, Escalet moved his family to Eastport, Maine, and lived there for 11 years until moving to Kennebunkport where he reestablished The House of Escalet as a gallery and studio.



Baile de los Jivaros, 1992, acrylic on board, 48 x 48 in.

Escalet began making his inlaid leather compositions in 1974, after several years of struggling to make a living in Maine. Drawing on memories and personal experiences, he created innovative works that tell the stories of his life and the lives of those around him, and reflect the experiences of immigrants, Latin Americans, and people of color. He began painting consistently in the mid-1980s and started working in sculpture using found metal pieces scavenged from building sites in the late-1980s. In 1988, he was featured on *La Plaza*, a PBS program targeted to Latin Americans, which brought him to the attention of curators around the country. Escalet began exhibiting widely through multiple one-person and group shows at colleges and universities in the 1990s. In a 1996 interview with *The Boston Globe*, he acknowledged the perseverance required to gain this recognition: “I have quite a track record as far as achieving things, although it wasn’t quite mapped out for me. The road wasn’t even paved.”

The exhibition is accompanied by an online illustrated catalogue.

About the Gallery

Meredith Ward Fine Art opened in 2004 specializing in American art from the 19th century to the present. The gallery is the exclusive representative of the estates of Flora Crockett, Joseph Fiore, and Steve Wheeler. Meredith Ward Fine Art is located at 44 East 74th Street, Suite G, in New York City and is currently open Monday through Friday, 10am to 5pm. For more information or images, contact Meghan Schwab at 212-744-7306 or info@meredithwardfineart.com.

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