

MARDI GRAS INDIANS
Robert Freeman & Max Stern

Adelson Galleries Boston
March 2 – April 29, 2018

From March 2 – April 29, 2018 Adelson Galleries Boston presents MARDI GRAS INDIANS, an exhibition of new works by painter Robert Freeman and photographer Max Stern that celebrates a history of New Orleans parades coinciding with the City's 300th anniversary.

NEW ORLEANS PARADES

Unique to New Orleans is its institution of near constant parades – celebrating holidays, funerals, joyous occasions, expressing the solidarity of clubs and societies, and observing historic events and traditions. On any given day one may encounter a parade, led by a brass band and parade organizers, and followed by the Second Line made up of an ever-growing group of followers who join the procession to enjoy the music and the march. Some Second Lines are annual institutions. Others are serendipitous celebrations or memorials to whatever moves the participants.

MARDI GRAS INDIANS

Many consider the parades of the Mardi Gras (or “Black”) Indians to be the true heartbeat of New Orleans. Although associated by name with Mardi Gras, the Black Indians are a distinct culture who partake of rituals going back centuries. Something of an underground society of uncertain origin with its own language, rites, and ceremonies, Mardi Gras Indians continue to transform the streets of New Orleans when, usually without advance warning or police “permission,” they parade, in full masks and “suits,” chanting, drumming, and dancing in performances that harken from Africa and the original tribes of America. Second Liners are welcome to join behind the Indian Chiefs and their tribes, waving handkerchiefs and moving to the complex, polyrhythmic tones that envelop the crowd. The Black Indian culture offers spiritual space to the maskers, and the joy and play of a parade to all other celebrants.

SUPER SUNDAY

On the third Sunday in March, tribes from all over the city parade in great numbers for the Super Sunday Festival. Chiefs proudly wear elaborate suits with intricate hand sewn beadwork and headdresses with enormous plumes of colorful feathers and lead their tribes through the streets to meet up with each other. Tribes prepare all year for Super Sunday – offering sewing classes to young people on Saturdays and gathering for practice on Sunday evenings, usually late into the night, creating their suits, leading funeral processions that celebrate the dead and living alike, and preserving mystical customs that include the young and old, women and men.

ARTIST STATEMENT – ROBERT FREEMAN

The celebration of people of color has always been a part of my visual narrative. A visit to New Orleans with photographer and friend Max Stern in March 2017 was my first opportunity to experience a Second Line and Super Sunday with the Mardi Gras (Black) Indians of New Orleans. The pageantry of color and music was intoxicating. My heart and my eyes were stirred

as I took in the array of elaborate headdresses with glorious feathers, intricate beading, and the sounds of NOLA jazz.

I wanted to capture on canvas this unique celebration of the convergence of Native American and African American cultures that comes to life in New Orleans on Super Sunday.

Back in my studio in Waltham, MA with Max Stern's NOLA photographs pinned to the walls, I could feel the heat of the day, remember the vibrant colors, and the intoxicating sounds of the music. The magic of New Orleans' art and music that transports the soul allowed my paintings to emerge as I moved from canvas to canvas applying oil paint, gold leaf and ostrich feathers.

ARTIST STATEMENT – MAX STERN

As a trial lawyer, I have always been interested in how one piece of evidence can suggest a whole narrative – a story to be inferred or hypothesized by the investigator. Thus, my favorite photographs capture an instant from which viewers must bring their own imagination to the scene, decoding the history of what just happened or will happen, implying past or future movement, or perhaps leaving suspended and unresolved the still moment captured by the camera.

Constant energy and motion – in the moment and from times long past – are on full display in the parades of the Mardi Gras Indians. History and its creative incarnation are the moving forces here. In reiterating the common heritage of African Americans and Native People, the performers illuminate past exchanges and also capture current commitments to keep the observance alive, the streets crowded, and the traditions passed on. When I first viewed the Indians on parade, it was the intensity of the moment that kept me shooting the vibrancy of the masks, the power of the dancers' movements, the determination in their expressions. Behind the shot are the endless hours laboring over the "suits," selecting the beads, colors, feathers, threads; the profound pride in tradition; and the vivid contrast between the fantastical Super Sunday celebration and the daily routines of the performers and their followers.

At the end of the day, the camera captures the millisecond in stark detail, but Bob Freeman's paintings extend the moment and flesh out the movements so as to draw the viewer into the dance and the history. It is an honor to collaborate with one of the country's finest painters. Perhaps we have shown something bigger than its parts, which, after all, is what the Indians of New Orleans are also aiming for.

EXHIBITION DETAILS

MARDI GRAS INDIANS: Robert Freeman & Max Stern

Adelson Galleries Boston

520 Harrison Avenue, Boston

March 2 – April 29, 2018

Friday – Sunday, noon – 6pm and by appointment

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