**Thomas Blackshear II** was born in Waco, Texas on November 14, 1955. Mostly raised in Atlanta, Georgia, Blackshear loved to draw. On finishing high school, the Art Institute of Chicago awarded him a scholarship. After spending only one year there, he enrolled in Chicago’s American Academy of Art, and after graduating from there in 1977, he worked for a year for the Hallmark Card Company in Kansas City, Missouri. While at Hallmark, he met the famous illustrator Mark English and became his apprentice for several months. By 1980, he was working as head illustrator for Godbold/Richter Studio. He became a freelance illustrator in 1982 and has been self-employed ever since.

Known for his dramatic lighting and sensitivity to mood, Blackshear’s career has spanned a wide array of artistic expression. He has produced illustrations for advertising, books, calendars, collector plates, greeting cards, magazines, stamps, and national posters. His early production included more than 140 illustrations for Anheuser-Busch, Lucasfilm (*Star Wars* and *Star Trek* movies), Universal Studios, Paramount Pictures, Smirnoff Vodka, 7-Up, Coca-Cola, the Walt Disney Company, *National Geographic*, and the Milton Bradley Company. In the early 1990s, fellow Black illustrator Jerry Pinkney contacted him to work on stamp portraits in the Black Heritage series issued by the U.S. Postal Service. The series premiered in 1992 at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History and was later exhibited across the nation. The majority of these stamp portraits featured distinguished African Americans such as James Weldon Johnson, Dorothy Height, and Ida B. Wells-Barnett. He also completed a Jazz Series and commemorative stamps for actor James Cagney, writer James Baldwin, and classic Hollywood movies that included *Stagecoach*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Gone With the Wind*, and *Beau Geste*. In addition, the Hamilton Group commissioned him to do four scenes for collector plates. To date, he has illustrated 30 United States postage stamps and a commemorative stamp book titled *I Have a Dream*.

Well-known and highly respected in the religious art world, Blackshear’s colorful, emotion-infused paintings of Christ and other Biblical figures enhance the interior walls of numerous churches. His best-selling Christian prints were produced for DaySpring’s Masterpiece Collection. In 1995 he created *Ebony Visions,* which has been the number-one-selling black figurine collectible in the United States for the past 20 years. This large and varied collection of skillfully painted religious and historical figurines humanized African Americans. He won Artist of the Year in 1999 for that line from the National Association of Limited Edition Dealers and the prestigious International Collectible Artist of the Year Award in 2001. In 2000, he expanded his figurines with the collection “The Blackshear Jamboree Parade,” centered on youthful pastimes. Other themed collections followed, reflecting religious praise and often whimsical, romanticized renderings of common folk appreciating everyday events.

Because of his success, Blackshear has lectured and conducted workshops in Germany and Sweden and taught for three semesters at the San Francisco Academy of Art College. In 2006, Blackshear had a one-man show through the Vatican in Rome. There he unveiled his painting of Pope John Paul II for the 25th anniversary of the Pope John Paul II Foundation.

In 2020, Blackshear was inducted into the Society of Illustrators Hall of Fame. In 2019, he won the prestigious James R. Parks Trustees’ Purchase Award at the Autry’s *Masters of the American West* for his painting *Wild West Show.* In 2018, Blackshear won the Artists’ Choice Award at *Masters* and the Best of Show Award at the *SLOPOKE Fine Art of the West* *Exhibition and Sale*. His many other awards included Gold and Silver Honors in the 1982 Kansas City Art Directors Club; two Gold Awards and Best of Show in 1986, Best of Show in 1989, and in 1990 two Gold Awards in the *Illustration West* shows; a Gold Medal in the 1988 National Society of Illustrators’ exhibition; two Silver Awards in the 1989 San Francisco Society of Illustrators’ exhibition; and the Plate of the Year Achievement Award in 1990. His work has appeared in *Art of the West*, *Cowboys & Indians*, *Fine Art Connoisseur*; the *Society of Illustrators* annuals 24, 25, 27, 28, and 30; *Southwest Art*, and in Volume 2 of *Outstanding American Illustrators Today*. His paintings are displayed at the Museum of Biblical Art in Dallas, Texas, and the Booth Western Art Museum in Cartersville, Georgia.

Thomas Blackshear II is represented by the Broadmoor Galleries, Colorado Springs, Colorado; Legacy Gallery, Santa Fe, New Mexico; Maxwell Alexander Gallery, Los Angeles, California; Mark Sublette Medicine Man Gallery, Tucson, Arizona; and Trailside Galleries–online.

755 words