

The Clerk's Black History Series

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Clerk of Superior Court
DeKalb County

Annie Frances Lee

(March 3, 1935 - November 24, 2014)

“Artist”



Annie Frances Lee was born in Gadsden, Alabama on March 3, 1935. When she was a child, she and her mother moved to Chicago, where Annie grew up. Annie's exceptional talent for painting became apparent when she won an art competition at the age of ten. After High School, she was offered a four-year scholarship to Northwestern University. She chose to marry and start a family, instead.

For the next 20 years, Annie lived through heavy losses and life challenges. She lost two husbands to cancer, all while raising three children. She later lost a son in a car accident. Annie worked as a clerk with Northwestern Railroad in the engineering department and continued painting as a hobby. In the evening, she took college courses at Loop Junior College and finally completed her undergraduate work at Mundelein College, in Chicago. After eight years of night classes, Annie earned her M.A. degree in Interdisciplinary Arts Education from Loyola University.

It was Annie's life experiences and challenging schedule with family, work, and school, that inspired her most recognizable painting called "Blue Monday". In the painting, a brown skinned woman, sits in her nightgown, with her head hung low, on the edge of her bed, feeling the weight of another Monday on her thin, weary shoulders. This piece gained notoriety when it was displayed on multiple episodes of "The Cosby Show". Another piece called "My Cup Runneth Over" appeared on the tv show "A Different World". Annie's painting style depicted everyday people, in common life situations and struggles. She omitted defined facial features, so that people could see themselves in her work. Her paintings also appeared in the movies, "Coming to America" and "Boomerang".

In 1985, at the age of fifty, Annie had her first gallery show which changed the direction of her life, forever. Every art piece sold within four hours, proving that her unique perspective on Black life had struck a powerful chord. She allowed prints to be made of her four original paintings so that more people could enjoy her work. Eventually, some of her art sold for nearly \$20,000. Annie then began exploring other mediums of art by developing figurines, dolls, decorative housewares, and kitchen tiles for sale.

After showing her work in other galleries for years, Annie opened the Annie Lee and Friends Gallery where she displayed her works as well as the works of other local artists. Although she regularly received requests for public appearances, she preferred to appear only at art gallery shows. She also enjoyed visiting local schools to encourage and inspire students.

The play "Six No Uptown" written by L.A. Walker, Terry Horton, and Cassandra Sanders was inspired by Annie's painting of the same name. The play opened in Las Vegas in 2014 and centers around a Bid Whist card game, Annie's favorite pastime game.

Annie Frances Lee died on November 24, 2014, in her Henderson, Nevada home, surrounded by her family. In 2015, the Annie F. Lee Art Foundation was incorporated. Annie's grandson is the president and co-founder of the foundation.

