

ARTISTICALLY

INNOVATION

by **GLEND A WADSWORTH** | photography by **BETH BUCKLEY**

Betsy Bradley, director of the Mississippi Museum of Art, says of artist Jackson Garner, “I think that Jack Garner is one of the most versatile and interesting artists working in Mississippi today.” After a lifetime of painting both abstract and realistic canvases and photographing scenes from all over the world, Garner mounted his first art exhibits in September 2009. The Fondren Renaissance Foundation sponsored an exhibit at The Cedars, featuring his realistic art, along with the works of two other artists, and a second at Fischer Gallery in the Fondren Place Building dis-

played Garner’s abstract works. “I can’t remember a time when I didn’t draw or paint,” says Grenada native Garner, president of The Ramey Agency and former chairman of the board of the Mississippi Museum of Art. “I paint because it brings me pleasure, not because I consider myself an artist.” He has had numerous commissions and for years has painted pieces for friends and family members. Older brother Walter recalls, “When we were kids, I never thought much about Jack’s art. Art was just what Jack did, in much the same way that I loved hunting and fishing.”

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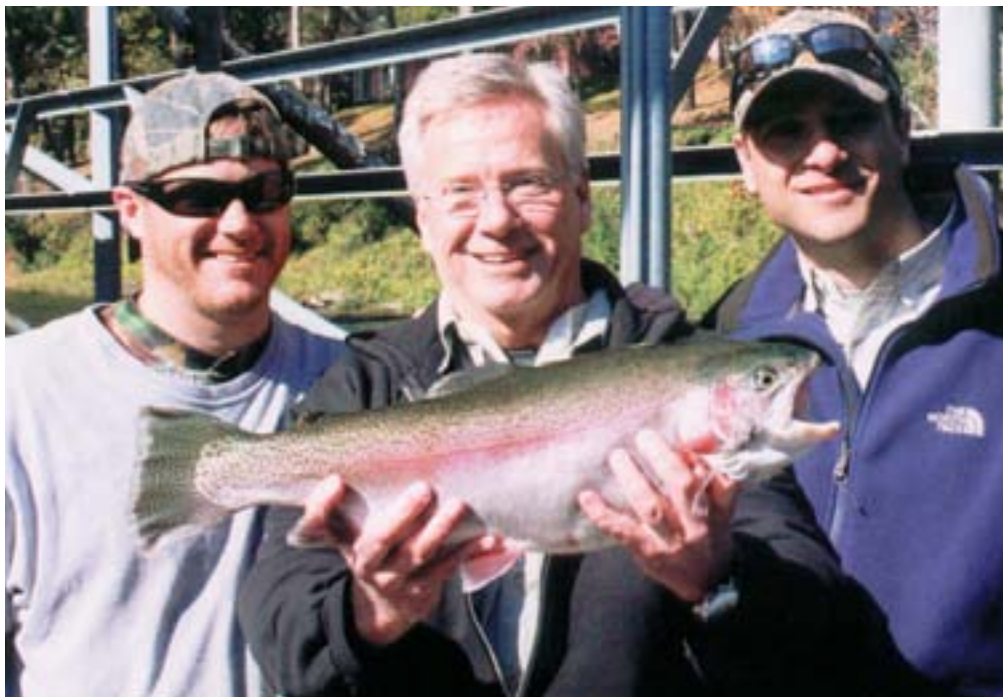


Jack Garner surrounded by family, Christmas 2007. Clockwise from top: sons Jason and Adams; mother, Thelma, grandchildren Jackson, Emily and Sara Adams

Thelma Garner, 98, Jack's mother, says, "From the time Jack was 12 years old until he graduated from high school he took an art lesson every Saturday morning from an excellent teacher in Grenada, Dorothy See, and I knew he was good." Jack acknowledges that Mrs. See had a profound influence on his art and that "she always encouraged me to develop my talent."

At Ole Miss, while he was in the business school studying marketing, Jack found space in his semesters to schedule art classes. His summers were a combination of professional waterskiing at Florida's Cypress Gardens and summer school art classes.

After college he briefly joined his family business, a printing and



Jack Garner (center), with sons Adams (left), and Jason (right), shows off his trophy rainbow trout caught on the White River in Arkansas



Grandchildren Jackson and Sara Adams Garner painting with their Papa in his studio.

office supply company. He went on to become president and CEO of Sunburst Bank of Central Mississippi (later acquired by Union Planters), first working in marketing then switching to bank management. When he joined The Ramey Agency, he moved into an interesting and fun situation, working with great co-workers and clients such as University of Mississippi Medical Center, Bank Plus and Viking Range in a creative atmosphere. "It never feels like work; it's always fun."

Thelma Garner believes her son's move to Jackson and his association with artists here allowed him, to use her words, "to spring forth in art." Part of his growth of his talent is based, she believes, on his being in the right locale, on his association with other artists and art lovers. "In Jackson he, and we, finally realized that he is truly an artist."

The father of two sons, Jason, a Birmingham dentist, and Adams, business manager of Ridgeland-based "Coattails," Garner is also a grandfather of four. Adams recalls, "I will always remember my dad taking his paints and sketch pad whenever we went on family vacations. He always painted scenes that stood out and were reminiscent of the area. Three of my favorites are small, postcard-sized watercolors that he painted on our rafting trip through the Grand Canyon about five years ago. They hang in my house now and bring back such fond memories."

Marcy Nessel, owner of Fischer Gallery, where Garner held the first show of his abstracts in September 2009, has been a friend of Garner's for many years. "He is smart, sweet, and extremely talented. He is a Renaissance man - excellent in business and a gifted artist. Until now he has been what I call a closet artist. I knew he was really good, and when he came by my gallery, I would urge him to bring in a few pieces. When people saw what he had done, they were surprised, because no one suspected he had such talent."

Garner's body of work consists of both abstract and realistic work, examples of which hang in his office. A large handsome multicolored abstract hangs over his desk, lively and colorful. At the same time lying on his desk is a photograph of a realistic painting of an artist crafting a portrait of his model, a painting which was recently accepted by the Mississippi Museum of Art for the Mississippi collection. The two paintings are excellent examples of his craft.

The vast body of his painting is done in acrylics. Garner also works with watercolor and black and white drawings. Nessel notes that Garner's abstracts are a variety of colors and techniques. "There are those that are soft and quiet with just an edge of color, some with



Jack Garner with sons Adams and Jason at the Grand Canyon during a week of camping and rafting down the Colorado River.

gold and silver leafing. Some are bolder with much color. What is striking about them all is the texture. He uses his pallet knife to build layers of color. Every painting is beautiful.”

Bradley agrees. “Jack’s large, abstract works are arresting and compelling and certainly hold up well to close scrutiny of his techniques, materials, and composition. But perhaps more compelling may be his smaller, highly realistic, narrative paintings which capture the essence of a scene and its inhabitants as well as any artist working since Norman Rockwell.”

Bradley continues, “The museum was honored to receive one of these paintings from the artist. It is a painting of a scene Jack witnessed here at the museum, where artist Jason Bouldin was painting a portrait of our longtime preparator, L.C. Tucker. Jack was moved by the event, and beautifully captured the strong dignity of the artist’s subject, Tee, as well as the dynamic energy of the painter at work. Jack’s ability to capture a scene without imposing his own personality, as well as his ability to create an abstract painting completely from his internal imagination, truly creates a range most artists would long to have within them.”

Garner finds inspiration in the world around him as he travels, mainly the landscapes he has seen, and photographs particularly moving scenes. “I have traveled a lot in my job, as well as for personal pleasure,” Garner says. “I have been to Europe a number of times, always taking pictures of places I want to paint.” Some of his favorite places are Italy, Turkey, Russia, England, and the South of France. “I can understand why southern France is so loved by

artists.” Istanbul, Turkey, holds special fascination for Garner. “It is European enough to be manageable but Eastern enough to be exotic.”

Abstract patterns simply come to Jack’s mind, and he paints the designs only he can see. When asked which type of painting he prefers, realistic or abstract, he responds that it depends on his mood at the time of asking. Garner also has a gift for photography, and several of his framed photographs are displayed in his office. Son Adams has become a fine photographer in his own right, and the Fischer Gallery show of his father’s works will include some of Adams’ photographs.

Adams attributes much of his talent to his dad’s encouragement and nourishment. “I feel that Dad’s natural, creative ability, as well as his passion for art, have definitely enhanced and influenced my interest in photography. He has encouraged me to visualize my subject in many different ways, in order to capture the most powerful image possible. When you’ve grown up watching your dad paint or draw, you begin to look at things, objects or scenes in a different manner. You begin to think outside the box, so to speak, which I believe is reflected in my photography.”

Jack sees his future filled with painting. He owns a condo on the water in Miami Beach, where he enjoys painting, and where he says he will eventually spend some retirement time though “not in the near future.” He adds, “I feel extremely privileged to have whatever talent I might have. I get such pleasure from it, and I am flattered when someone wants one of my pieces. Each one is an extension of myself.”

Bradley concludes with praise for Garner, “We at the museum are thrilled that Jack Garner’s work is getting the attention it deserves.”



MMA permanent collection



Jack and granddaughter Emily painting