

MEREDITH WARD FINE ART

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Meredith Ward Fine Art

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FRANK DIAZ ESCALET (1930-2012)

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May 14 – June 25, 2021

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English Road Race, 1984, cut leather on masonite, 24 x 29 7/8 in

Meredith Ward Fine Art is pleased to present **Frank Diaz Escalet (1930-2012)**, an exhibition of 18 paintings and inlaid cut leather works and on view from May 14 through June 25, 2021. This will be the first exhibition of Escalet's work since the artist's 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. "Escalet's work was known and exhibited widely in his lifetime," said Meredith Ward, President of the gallery. "It is our privilege to re-introduce his work to a new audience."

Escalet began making his inlaid leather compositions in 1974, after several years of struggling to make a living in Washington County, Maine. Drawing on memories and personal experiences, he created bold and innovative works that speak to the joys and hardships of ordinary people. His compositions chronicle the dignity and determination of laborers, iron workers, lobstermen, and

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railroad workers. Images emerged from his childhood in Puerto Rico, time spent in Texas and England, and from hanging out in New York City jazz clubs. They 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. In the 1990s, Escalet began exhibiting widely through multiple one-person and group shows at colleges and universities. 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.”



Greenwich Village 1920's, 1980,
cut leather on masonite, 30 x 23 7/8 in

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. 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.

The exhibition is accompanied by an illustrated catalogue available in print and online.

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, Larry Day, 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 by appointment only. To make an appointment, or for more information or images, contact Meghan Schwab at 212-744-7306 or info@meredithwardfineart.com.

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