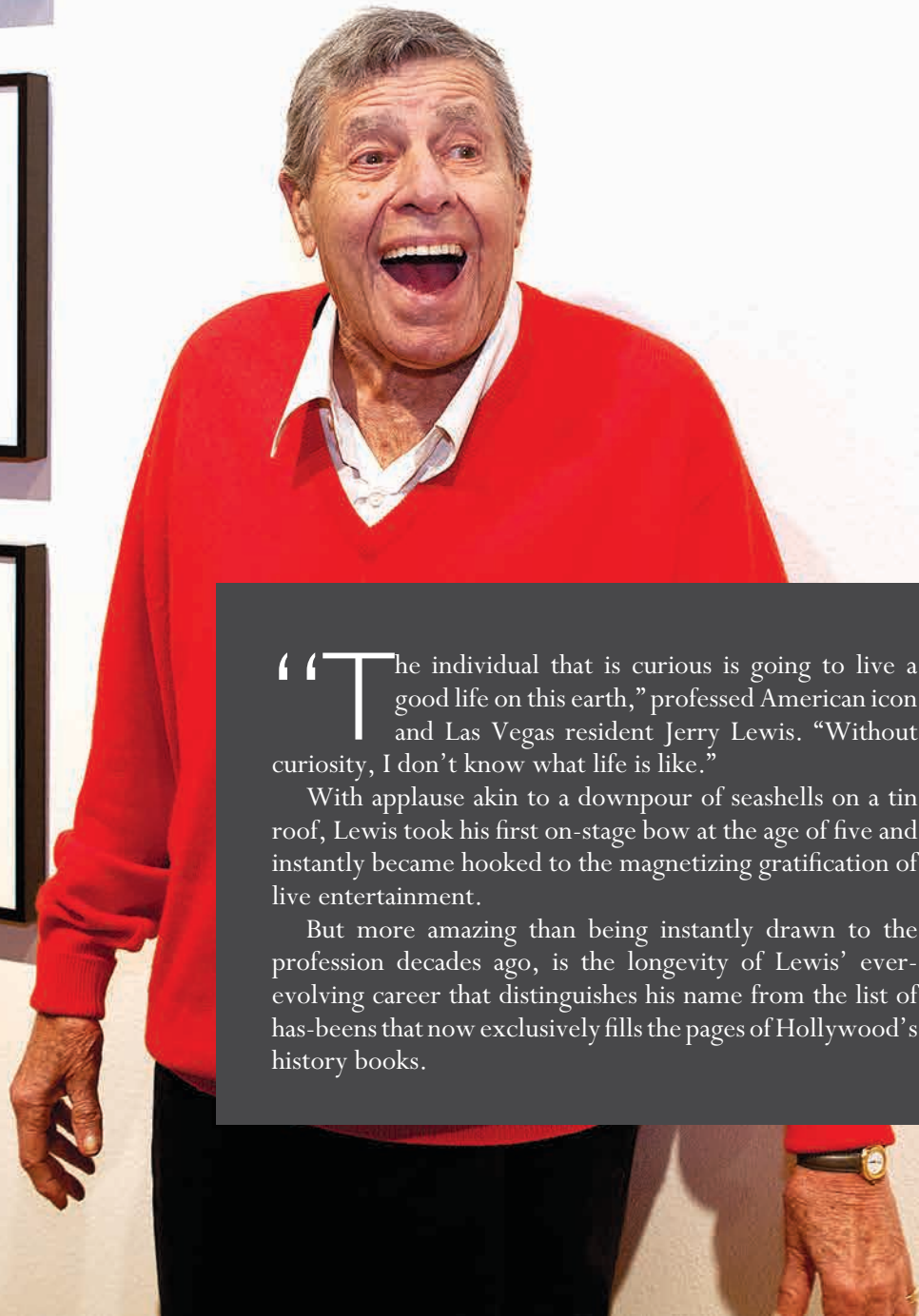


PAINTED PICTURES

Famed funnyman Jerry Lewis shares photographic treasures in exhibit at UNLV's Marjorie Barrick Museum

BY HALEY CALDWELL | PHOTOGRAPHY BY JIM K. DECKER



“The individual that is curious is going to live a good life on this earth,” professed American icon and Las Vegas resident Jerry Lewis. “Without curiosity, I don’t know what life is like.”

With applause akin to a downpour of seashells on a tin roof, Lewis took his first on-stage bow at the age of five and instantly became hooked to the magnetizing gratification of live entertainment.

But more amazing than being instantly drawn to the profession decades ago, is the longevity of Lewis’ ever-evolving career that distinguishes his name from the list of has-beens that now exclusively fills the pages of Hollywood’s history books.

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However, while a seemingly instantaneous onset of profound fortune and fame initially powered the spotlight under which the King of Comedy thrived in his earlier years, it is his undeniably insatiable curiosity that has ensured the eternal illumination of that ever-radiant beam.

“Dean’s and my first film, I had to just ask questions. I didn’t stop,” Lewis admitted in his 2011 autobiographical documentary, *Method to the Madness of Jerry Lewis*. “They couldn’t find me on the lot...I was either in miniatures, camera department, wardrobe, editing, the scoring stage, I was like horseshit -- I was everywhere! And I was getting an education; there was nothing about our industry that I didn’t make up my mind that I was going to learn.”

Composed of passion for an industry he was unmistakably made for, America’s favorite funnyman utilized that relentless curiosity and unshakeable determination to accrue an impressive list of various vocational titles in the entertainment field.

“Someone gave me a hat with four beaks,” Lewis noted in his documentary. Miming to each inscribed bill around the cap he recalled, “This one was the director... producer... writer... actor. [If] they wanted to talk to me, they would switch the hat around.”

But perhaps it is finally time for another hat to be made with a fifth beak that announces: photographer.

Unbeknownst to many, in addition to capturing the hearts and laughter of his global audience through his multifaceted profession, it is through the eye of a still-photo lens that Lewis captured countless memories of his illustrious life purely for his personal enjoyment.

“Jerry always carries a camera or two or three, and photographs everything,” disclosed Michael McGraw, a close friend to the Lewis family. “There are hundreds of thousands of photos in his storage...I don’t think he’s thrown away anything. He has something from every film and everything he has ever done -- it’s like a museum.”

Among the boxed snapshots that revive the momentous and minor memories of Lewis’ yesteryears, there was one collection in particular that instantly captivated McGraw’s attention.

“They weren’t about his celebrity. They weren’t about him and Lady Diana or the presidents, it was about artwork and a craft that people didn’t know existed through him,” McGraw explained of Lewis’ then hidden hobby. “It was just a different facet of who he was as a personality, as an actor, a director, a producer, a photographer, a humanitarian, etcetera, etcetera. They are all abstract pieces of art -- it’s artwork to me.”

These abstract pieces are a product of Lewis’ signature innovation and fearless experimentation using a shutter speed photography technique that was uncommonly practiced before digital technology.

Pinning artificial light as his subject, Lewis would frame the light source and then, simultaneously, hold down the shutter release while gliding his camera through the air in a spontaneous motion.

The outcome?

Electrifying rivers and lustrous globes of formerly stagnate light expertly strewn across a

muddled backdrop.

"I saw some of these photographs and I thought these are really current and relevant, and something should be done with these," McGraw revealed. "I had to enlist the help of Michele [Quinn] and find someone to see if they thought it would spark an interest, and it did."

Intrigued by the idea of showcasing the photos that Lewis called his "Painted Pictures," Michele Quinn, private art advisor and owner of MCQ Fine Art Advisory, began working on bringing this vision to fruition.

"It was a little off my radar because I usually only work with very high-level, established artists but as we really started digging in I said, 'you know these are really quite good and interesting and unique'," Quinn disclosed. "As it went along I got more and more excited about it because of the uniqueness of the material and how he was able to manipulate the camera and make these images really fascinated me."

Working in compliance with the College of Fine Arts at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Quinn presented the idea of developing an internship around the project, which was well-received by the University.

"Jerry had actually just been awarded an honorary degree from UNLV and it just sort of clicked that maybe UNLV would be willing to structure an internship around the cataloging of this material from a fine art perspective and then we would end the internship with the exhibition."

Strongly emphasizing the importance of adequately preserving Lewis' "Painted Pictures" series, two interns worked over the course of a four-month semester cataloging hundreds of the original prints.

"We had excellent interns and they did about 20 hours a week for the entire semester," Quinn explained. "It's pretty labor intensive to catalog because you literally do a handwritten condition report, you measure everything, you document everything, we scan the images, and put it into a professional art management system on the computer so all of that takes a lot of time -- it's very administratively heavy."

Perhaps reminiscent to signing autographs for his many fans at the height of his fame, after the complete "Painted Pictures" collection was cataloged, Lewis signed each of his 200 plus photos before they were professionally matted and framed in preparation for the final exhibition.

"We talked about all of the photos," offered



Singer Steve Lawrence joins Jerry Lewis at the opening reception of his "Painted Pictures" exhibit at UNLV's Marjorie Barrick Museum.



Michael McGraw, Michele Quinn, Jerry Lewis and Sean McClenahan pictured at the opening reception of Lewis' exhibit "Painted Pictures," on display through August 16.

AN EVENING WITH JERRY LEWIS

Entertainment legend and Academy Award winner Jerry Lewis is performing in Reynolds Hall at The Smith Center for the Performing Arts on Tuesday, September 30 at 7:30 p.m. "An Evening with Jerry Lewis" is a feel-good blend of stand-up comedy, unforgettable gags, trademark vignettes, big-screen video montages of his most memorable and hilarious feature film moments, and songs that will delight fans of all ages. www.thsmithcenter.com

McGraw. "These were taken 45, 50 years ago but some you can see the marquee images of Piccadilly Circus, or the Las Vegas Strip, or the lightning shots in Mexico City, the car lights on the streets of Paris as they would come and go with the red and white dots. I mean you wouldn't really know what it was because they are so abstract but when he tells the story of what he remembers, it's pretty interesting. Each vignette has a different storyline."

When it came time to select the location for the exhibition, what could have been a difficult decision in a city of countless venues, UNLV's Marjorie Barrick Museum was the clear choice for multiple reasons.

"Well obviously with the UNLV connection it just made sense, and the exhibition space is beautiful," Quinn disclosed.

But in addition to the museum's beauty, McGraw explained, "We thought it could be in a big enough format that it could be a learning [experience] because not only are the pictures all going to be there but Jerry's movies are going to be playing there every week. The museum is attached to a theater and so it just

kind of worked out. It's going to be like a whole summer of Jerry Lewis!"

Undoubtedly accustomed to viewing his photography on a much more personal and smaller scale, when Lewis observed his work illuminated against the white museum walls for the first time he was admittedly taken aback.

"I think Jerry was really blown away by it and his wife was blown away by it and I think our friends and family were as well thinking, 'wow, this is really happening'," McGraw expressed.

Cherishing the art of photography with no other intention than to fulfill a personal passion, Lewis has, for the most part, kept the entirety of his life's photo collection to himself.

"It's a strange feeling; I'm playing to audiences since I am five years old but this is almost like asking your audience to come into a private place to look [at your photos] with you. When I went that night, I was really amazed at how beautifully they did it. They did it classy, tastefully."

However, catering to his true comfort zone of motion pictures is the theater connected to the exhibition that will be playing 18 of

Lewis' films six days out of the week through September 17 (visit www.unlv.edu/finearts for a film schedule); the "Painted Pictures" exhibition closes August 16.

"We just thought to play the films to kind of make it [come] full circle," Quinn explained. "It also kind of puts the works into context because the younger generation doesn't really have the understanding of how important this person has been in the film and art lexicon and what he has done over decades and decades from a career perspective even as an actor and director and filmmaker. So it just seemed like it was another element that seemed so obvious to have this made available to the public. The stars lined up and basically it just all made sense."

If his statement holds true that curiosity is the key to a good life, then with yet another acknowledgement founded upon the question of, "what if," the life of this 88-year-old has far surpassed greatness.

Actor, director, producer, comedian, singer, philanthropist, and now a properly accredited photographer, "He is everything," reveals McGraw. "He is extraordinary." □

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