

# OUTLAWS & ARMADILLOS *Country's Roaring '70s*

Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum | May 25 – February 14, 2021



Danny Garrett, *Willie, Laid Back at Tootsie's*, 2017, Acrylic on canvas, 20" x 24"



Guy Juke, *Willie's 2nd 4th*, 2018, Acrylic on canvas, 24" x 18"

Austin, Texas, in the late '60s and early '70s. The music was amazing, the lifestyle laid back. I know—I was there, listening to Greezy Wheels, Ken Threadgill, Marcia Ball, Doug Sahm, Stevie Ray and Jimmie Vaughan, or Freddie Fender as the barkeeps poured Lone Star, Jack's, or Texas Pride at the Split Rail, the Broken Spoke, the Plugged Nickel, or the Rolling Hills Country Club.

Mecca was the Armadillo World Headquarters, a former National Guard Armory transformed into a hipster's paradise. A beer garden outside featured free music by up-and-coming bands, including recent California transplants Asleep at the Wheel. Inside, in a cloying haze of pot and spilled beer, rednecks and so-called cosmic cowboys mingled improbably, drawn by performances that might feature Bill Monroe one night, Frank Zappa the next, with Freddie King, Bruce Springsteen, Charles Mingus, and hometown heroes Kinky Friedman and the Texas Jewboys on the calendar, too.



Sam Yeates, *Rising from the Ashes, Willie Takes Flight for Austin*, 2017, Acrylic on canvas, 24" x 36"

Each act was introduced by Jim Franklin, a key figure of the Austin counterculture. More significant than his emcee work were his murals, which splashed across the walls, and his posters, which sold all over town. With more muted coloring than the posters that captured the Haight-Ashbury vibe in San Francisco a few years before, they emphasized precision, with intricate pen-and-ink crosshatching applied to Surrealist imagery.

Franklin became the focal point in a circle of young artists whose distinctive styles served a common purpose of melding advanced drawing technique with the spacy absurdism of Austin's alternate community. "What we discovered, as they had in San Francisco, was that Surrealism and psychedelia were where art and the music world met," says Franklin, who at age 75 continues to paint prolifically. "We all dipped into the weird aspects that had been revealed about Western art over these past 300 years. And we were inspired by underground comics, which are a way to make a quick literary statement. I wanted to bring out the meaninglessness of apparently related elements in a way that makes everything meaningful. We were the expressive edge, like waves breaking on the shore."

"Drugs had a lot to do with our imagery," adds Guy Juke, another pioneering Austin poster artist. "It's not like we were trying to sell drugs. It was just the atmosphere around us. We thought in terms of comic books. We'd go the library and look up elements of famous artists like Salvador Dali. We had this big collection of old magazines; we'd look at page after page and ask, what can I make out of that?"

For a while Franklin, Juke, Danny Garrett, Micael Priest, Sam Yeates, Kerry Awn, and some of their colleagues shared one studio over a record store downtown. As their work spread and became intrinsic to the scene, fans began to visit. Eventually the artists had to deal with a steady influx of distractions. "It wasn't easy to tell them we were trying to work," Juke says. "So we'd put on an album by Jim Nabors or Wayne Newton—the worst, squarest stuff. Or we'd play



Kerry Awn, *Young Willie*, 2017, Acrylic on canvas, 20" x 24"

these weird old religious records, like this one called 'Love, God and Marriage.' That would always clear the room. It was like mosquito repellent."

Much of that spirit will manifest in Nashville on May 25, as the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum opens its exhibit *Outlaws & Armadillos—Country's Roaring '70s*. The show will feature period and more-recent work by Juke, Garrett, Awn, Yeates, and Franklin, who also was commissioned to create an illustration to represent the show, in which he applies his Magritte influence and depicts the vital icons of the era: Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, and the humble armadillo.

How did this creature come to symbolize this particular time and place? "I wasn't out trying to find a signature animal," Franklin says. "When I was in high school, I went on this hunting trip with my father. That's where I saw my first armadillo in the field. He'd stand up, check for danger, and go back to digging. I got to within five feet when he turned and walked between my legs. That made a real strong impression on me."

Nelson was another touchstone. His smiling face, pre- and post-beard and braids, is nearly as ubiquitous in the exhibit as it was on the Armadillo stage. "No matter where you went, almost every door you walked by had Willie Nelson music coming out of it," Juke recalls. "He was really good, but the main thing was he bridged the gap between rednecks and hippies. And he was even a bigger hippie than any of us!

"So," Juke concluded, with the kind of sly laugh old hippies often favor, "any time you could put part of an armadillo or a part of Willie in the picture, that was generally a pretty good idea." **NA**

***Outlaws & Armadillos – Country's Roaring '70s* opens at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum on May 25 and remains on view through February 14, 2021. For more information, visit [www.countrymusichalloffame.org](http://www.countrymusichalloffame.org).**