

## Helen LaFrance (1919- )

Helen LaFrance is a renowned Kentucky folk artist who has been painting since she was 5 years old. Born in Graves County, her works reflect images from memories of Western Kentucky farm life.

She received no formal art instruction and never attended high school; it was her mother who inspired the young LaFrance, placing a pencil in the child's hand and instructing her to paint what she saw, then helping to gently guide Helen's hand across the paper. LaFrance's first work was a large gray rabbit, painted on the back of a piece of leftover wallpaper with watercolors given to her by her aunt. LaFrance remembers how her mother kept her supplied in paints by blending laundry blueing with dandelions and berries.

LaFrance practices a type of folk-art called "Memory Painting", in which the artist records her autobiography in visual images. For over 70 years, LaFrance has re-created memories of a lifestyle that is rapidly disappearing. Her paintings portray Southern farm scenes like plowing, church picnics, cotton fields, and river baptisms. LaFrance's signature painting, "Church Picnic" is of a time that is dear to her. Each painting depicts a different mood.

LaFrance's paintings have been featured in galleries in Richmond, Ky., Columbus, Ga., and St. Louis, Mo. Her biography is featured in an art reference book written by Kathy Moses, "*Outsider Art Of The South*." Of her art, LaFrance says with modesty, "I just do what I do. I thought if I kept doing it, one day I'd do something worthwhile."

Helen LaFrance has an art galley in the historic downtown section of Mayfield, Ky.

