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# BOOK NEWS

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## ***Clementine Hunter Offers First Comprehensive Biography of Self-Taught Artist***

*Authors Reveal Louisiana Painter's Impact on Modern Art World, Detail Decades-Long Forgery Operation*

**Baton Rouge, LA**—Clementine Hunter (1887–1988) painted every day from the 1930s until several days before her death at age 101. As a cook and domestic servant at Louisiana's Melrose Plantation, she painted on hundreds of objects available around her—glass snuff bottles, discarded roofing shingles, ironing boards—as well as on canvas. She produced between five and ten thousand paintings, including her most ambitious work, the African House Murals. Scenes of cotton planting and harvesting, washdays, weddings, baptisms, funerals, Saturday night revelry, and zinnias depict her experiences of everyday plantation life. More than a personal record of Hunter's life, her paintings also reflect the social, material, and cultural aspects of the area's larger African American community.

Drawing on archival research, interviews, personal files, and a close relationship with the artist, Art Shiver and Tom Whitehead offer the first comprehensive biography of this regional self-taught painter, who attracted the attention of the world. The authors trace Hunter's childhood, her encounters at Melrose with artists and writers, such as Alberta Kinsey and Lyle Saxon, and the role played by eccentric François Mignon, who encouraged and promoted her art. Rare paintings and photographs illustrate Hunter's creative process and the evolution of her style.

The book also provides insight into a decades-long forgery operation that Whitehead helped uncover. This recent attention reinforced the uniqueness of Hunter's art and confirmed her place in the international art community, which continues to be inspired by her life and work.

**Tom Whitehead** knew Clementine Hunter personally and has written and spoken widely on the artist. He and Art Shiver coedited *Clementine Hunter: The African House Murals*. A professor emeritus of journalism at Northwestern State University in Natchitoches, Louisiana, he now serves that university's president as a consultant on special projects.

**Art Shiver** was introduced to Clementine Hunter by Tom Whitehead in the early 1970s. Following a career in television broadcast news and station management, he continues to write on subjects ranging from poetry to technology.

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