

RON BECHET

Artist and Educator



Ron Bechet is an artist whose work has been exhibited nationally and internationally. He chairs Xavier University's department of art, where he is the Victor Labat Endowed Professor of Art. He was the founding director of Xavier's Community Arts Partnership Program and has been involved in many arts and youth programs in the New Orleans area. Bechet's work is based on landscape forms, usually metaphors for concepts, difficult realities, and moral allegories.

"There are questions I can't answer, that's why I paint," Bechet says.

There are so many great times I remember with Mrs. Leah Chase. The times I went to lunch with my mother at her restaurant. They talked about the neighborhood and family. My mother grew up in the Lafitte Housing development across the street and she knew Mrs. Chase's sisters well. To hear the stories and the joy and laughter brought joy to me.

Every month Willie Birch and I make it a point to have lunch at Dooky Chase's Restaurant. Of course the meals are great - we usually have fried chicken and fish. But the best thing we have is conversation with Mrs. Chase. She is usually in the kitchen at her table chopping something for one of her delicious meals. She and Willie have this adversarial admiration for each other that usually leads to interesting

conversation and great laughs - often about art, artists and people in New Orleans politics and society. It usually ends in Mrs. Chase calling Willie a crazy man and a great artist.

One of my fondest memories was a breakfast with artists John Scott and William Pajaud. It was a crisp Sunday morning when Mr. Pajaud was in town for an exhibition at Stella Jones Gallery. Bill Pajaud was the artist who was responsible for putting together the Golden State Mutual Life African-American Art Collection. This collection included such artists as Scott, Elizabeth Catlett, Henry O. Tanner, Betty Saar, in other words many of Mrs. Chase's friends and artists she knew. Mr. Pajaud was also born and raised in New Orleans and was a Xavier graduate of the class of 1953.

Of course the meal started with grits and grillades, then came oysters and fish. I can't tell what else came out family style on beautiful dishes. Mrs. Chase would come out with the food on occasion, sit and talk about old times, new artists and people I only knew from books. This is where I was introduced to Shrimp Clemenceau and Scott's favorite split pea soup. We left the restaurant at about 2:30 full, but not just with food. I was full from the wonderful experience with my elders learning about artists in Mrs. Chase's collection and the history of the restaurant, the neighborhood and New Orleans.

Sadly, William Pajaud died on June 16, 2015. He was a graduate of Xavier University and Chouinard Art Institute. He was also a former president of the National Watercolor Society and co-founder of Tutor Art.

— Ron Bechet

Shrimp Clemenceau

by Leah Chase of Dooky Chase's Restaurant

In the summertime, people would come around on trucks selling shrimp and oysters. We were always happy for that, because we did not have shrimp and oysters in the country very often. My mother had a way of cooking those shrimp that was so good. If she was ironing clothes when the man came around, she just washed the shrimp, rolled them in cornmeal and fried them on that iron skillet in the shell – head and all. The recipe below, although the shrimp are peeled, is just as good.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 stick butter
- 2 medium potatoes, peeled and diced small
- 2 lbs. small shrimp, peeled and deveined
- 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- ½ cup button mushrooms
- 1 cup green peas
- ¼ tsp. fresh parsley, chopped
- 1/3 cup white wine

DIRECTIONS

Melt butter in 2-quart saucepan. Add potatoes. Cook 5 minutes. Add shrimp, garlic and mushrooms. Cook until shrimp are tender. Add peas, parsley and wine. Salt and pepper to taste. Cook for 5 minutes. Yield: 4 servings

