

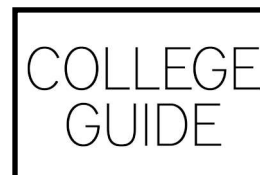
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BUTCHERTOWN'S LAST BUTCHER | ARTISTS TACKLE THE SOUTH

JULY 2017

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South Bound

By Mary Chellis Austin

Photos by Amber Thieneman

The new Speed celebrates its first full year with a powerful exhibition on Southernness.

On a hot June afternoon, the Speed Art Museum feels like a sanctuary, the cool air inside evoking the feeling of movie theaters in summer. Through the light-filled atrium and up the glass staircase is the museum's largest, most ambitious contemporary art exhibit ever: "Southern Accent: Seeking the American South in Contemporary Art," up through Oct. 14.

The Speed's curator of contemporary art, Miranda Lash, a West Coast native who has spent much of her career in Texas and New Orleans, curated the show with Trevor Schoonmaker, curator at the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. Several years of conference calls, spreadsheets and PowerPoint presentations helped the two narrow down "Southern Accent" to 60 artists and 125 works on just about every subject that has branded the South — from biscuits, kudzu and Piggly Wiggly to the KKK, Confederate memorials and lynching. Works date to the 1950s, though most are from within the past 30 years. Lash says the exhibit could have easily been three or four times as big.

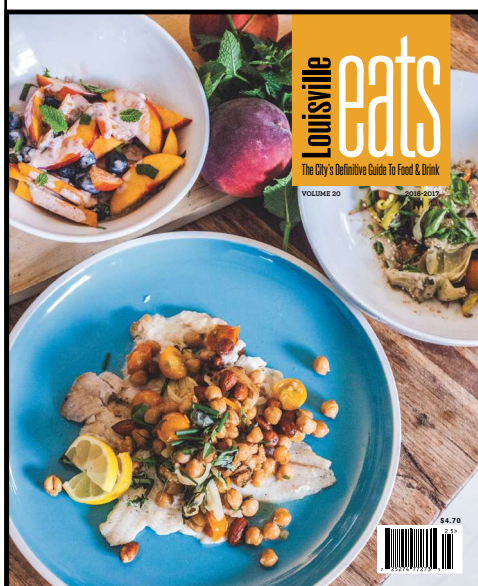
Since the two began curating the show, events such as the massacre at a black church in Charleston, South Carolina, and the rise of Black Lives Matter provide a new context for wounds that the South, and the country, has had trouble healing. The exhibition opened in Durham last September (after its run at the Speed, the show will not travel and the works will go back to their owners). Lash points out how, toward the end of the show in Durham and before opening in Louisville in April, "We had a presidential election in November that I would say heightened the tenor of many of the discussions in the show."

"Southern Accent" deals intimately with racism and race relations. The show has pieces by Kara Walker, whose paper silhouettes depict black exploitation and sexualization. In a work by William Cordova, a 2014 film titled *Silent Parade... or The Soul Rebels Band vs. Robert E. Lee*, the New Orleans



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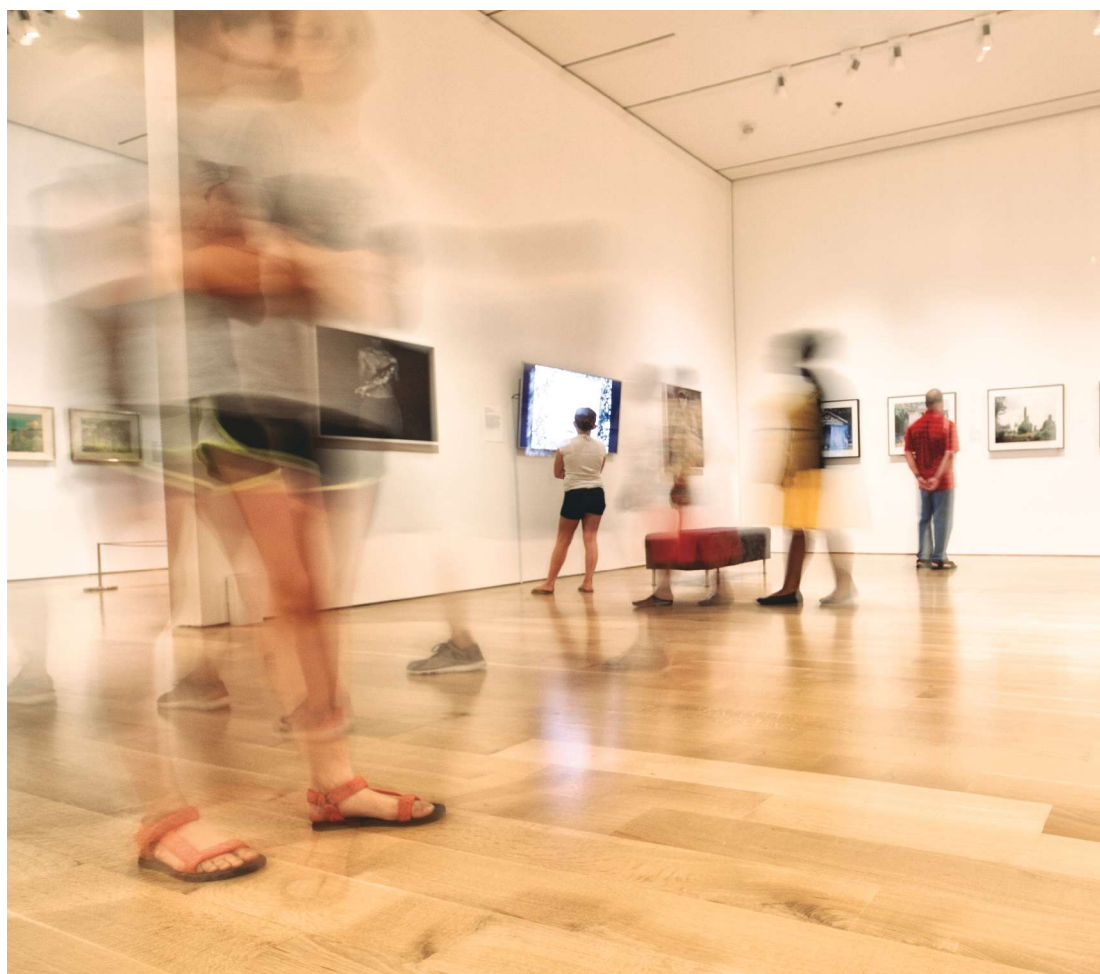
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ensemble toots their horns at Lee's monument, which was taken down in May. *The Day the KKK Came to Town*, a film by Michael Galinsky, shows marchers and protesters in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, in 1987. "We thought it was very poignant that in 1987 we hear people in Chapel Hill saying, 'Oh, this is a relic. I'm coming to see this because surely it won't exist in a few years,'" Lash says.

Recently galleries and museums in town and across the country have grappled with several questions: What is racist art and what is art that depicts racism? And who has the authority as an artist to address these issues? Just this spring, both 21c and Tim Faulkner Gallery removed art from exhibits after people asserted racist intent. One of the pieces in "Southern Accent," titled *Strange Fruit*, by Jamaican-born artist and University of Kentucky professor Ebony Patterson, shows feet dangling among flowers and red glitter. Lash points out that the song "Strange Fruit," which Billie Holiday famously sang, was written by a Jewish guy from the Bronx, a child of immigrant parents, criticizing slavery.

"I think racism is part of the story of the South," Lash says. "The public would have every right to be disappointed in me if I pretended that it didn't exist. Museums are built for that sort of thing. It's kind of our job." In October, the museum will host a discussion on Confederate memorials — not about whether or not they should remain standing, as mayors are already removing them, but more about what should be done with them and what should take their place. Also in October, artist Sonya Clark will come to the Speed for her interactive work *Unraveling*, which lets the public line up and spend a few minutes unraveling the cotton thread in a Confederate flag. "I think it's just blowing people's minds," says interim director Stephen Reily, "to see art in the South by Southern artists, art by artists outside of the South that are thinking about themes that maybe originated in the South. Seeing an enormous number of incredibly talented black artists who are getting worldwide attention." (Reily's photograph collection "Southern Elegy" is currently being shown as a companion piece to "Southern Accent.")



THE ARTS

The show also covers shrinking rural communities, traffic-jammed urban communities, humans' relationships with nature, Native American heritage, undocumented immigration and LGBTQ issues. "We wanted to talk about decay," Lash says. In a series of photographs by William Christenberry taken over three decades, kudzu swallows a small house over time. "You touch on that hot, fertile, humid landscape, but you also touch on the fact that the South is full of rural communities that are getting increasingly smaller," Lash says.

The contemporary gallery's second floor displays the music section of the exhibit, with works depicting Elvis, jukebox joints and jazz bands. You can see Andy Warhol's take on Dolly Parton. A few iPads set up with headphones allow museumgoers to sit and listen to the 225-song, 13-hour playlist the team curated to go with the show. This month, as part of the Speed Concert Series, the museum will host six female singer-songwriters from the South, in partnership with WFPK and the Center for Women and Families.

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Museum staff make “Southern Accent” sound like a warm-up for what’s to come. Next year the museum will dedicate a sizable portion of programming to women-related shows. “This museum was founded by a woman,” Reily says, referring to Hattie Bishop Speed, “and our endowment is more or less the generosity of her granddaughter, Alice Speed Stoll.” “Women Artists in the Age of Impressionism” is one such show, coming next February. However, with potential cuts to the National Endowment for the Arts, the Speed may not be able to continue showcasing traveling exhibits such as this.

As opposed to only bringing in traveling exhibits and rotating pieces from the Speed’s own collection, the self-generated exhibition, like Lash’s “Southern Accent,” is something *Courier-Journal* arts writer Elizabeth Kramer says she’s seen museums around the country starting to do. Beyond the art museum being a showcase, it’s a producer. Lash has plans for more collaborations, including a project on compassion. Kramer mentions what film curator Dean Otto has been doing — such as screening the Civil War film *Men Go to Bat-*

tle, which was shot and set in Kentucky and won director Zachary Treitz an award at the Tribeca Film Festival. Demand to see *Men Go to Battle* was so high that the film went to Village 8 following several sold-out shows at the Speed. “That kind of specialness makes it personal and local,” Kramer says.

More than a year after the museum’s reopening following a three-and-a-half-year, \$60-million renovation and expansion, it still feels new. Employees and board members like to say that the Speed is both 90 years old and one year old, an acknowledgement meant to treat the museum both as a legacy and a start-up.

Earlier this year, Ghislain d’Humières resigned as director to be with his aging father in France. Reily, a prominent local businessman, took over as interim director in April, promising to stay on for 18 months as the board searches for a permanent replacement. “Ghislain was the right person at the right time to get us open on time and on budget with flair and enthusiasm,” board president Martha Slaughter says. “Stephen is a suc-

cessful entrepreneur looking at the museum financially. I think we’re running a lot more efficiently. We’re still learning how to live in that building.”

Having been closed for so long, the level of staff needed was sort of an unknown, leading to layoffs, and the days and hours open to the public have also taken some adjusting. Reily says he and his team are considering staying open later on Friday nights and are trying to figure out how to use the new spaces, including the cinema, for different events and lectures. A recent report shows that this first year since reopening brought in 130,000 people — about 75 percent more visitors than any of the three years prior to the museum’s closing. It also reveals the popularity of Owsley Sundays, when admission is free, a gift from Brown-Forman Corp.

“The main thing I’ve learned is literally how much everyone who works here wants to work at a museum,” Reily says. “I had coffee a few weeks ago with 15 security guards and almost every one of them is a practicing artist on the side. It means a lot to be around art.” □

The advertisement for Milagro Tequila features a vibrant blue background. At the top, the words "AGAVE EXPRESSIONISM" are written in a bold, white, sans-serif font. In the center is a large, stylized jaguar head with orange fur, black spots, and large, expressive eyes. On either side of the jaguar head is a white skeleton figure with a green agave plant growing out of its head. The skeletons are holding small blue bowls. To the right of the skeletons is a bottle of Milagro Silver Tequila. The bottle is blue with a white label that reads "Milagro Tequila" and "100% DE AGAVE SILVER". At the bottom of the advertisement, the words "MILAGRO MEANS MIRACLE" are written in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. On the left side, there is a small vertical text that reads "PLEASE ENJOY MILAGRO RESPONSIBLY. Milagro Tequila, 40% Alc./Vol. (80 Proof) ©2016 William Grant & Sons, Inc. New York, NY."

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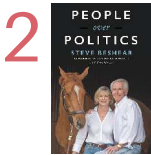
Artists as critics



What do you think of the Wyandotte Park basketball courts restored by Grammy-nominated Louisville R&B singer Bryson Tiller?

1 Shadwick Wilde is the frontman of Quiet Hollers, which will release *Amen Breaks* July 7 and play Forecastle a week after that.

2 Madeleine Dee stars in her new web series, *The Seasoned Cynic's Guide to Entertaining*, and owns Fond (2520 Frankfort Ave.), which hosts private dinners on Friday and Saturday nights.



Read the first page of *People Over Politics*, by former Kentucky Gov. Steve Beshear. Would you continue reading? (First sentence: “If it weren’t for Teddy Roosevelt, I might never have been governor.”)

“This page could serve wonderfully as a bio, but if you’re trying to capture the attention of a reader for the long haul, you need to grab them with a good story. I’m afraid this first page reads too much like a Wikipedia entry.”

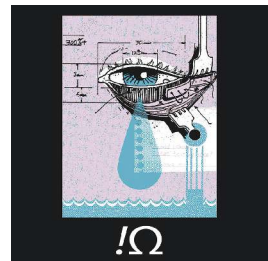
“Old Ted gave me these wise words for entertaining: ‘Host smartly and carry a big steak; you will go far.’”



3 The Louder Than Life Festival (Sept. 30 & Oct. 1) recently announced its lineup. Thoughts?

“I would be excited to watch members of Rage Against the Machine, Cypress Hill and Public Enemy onstage together as Prophets of Rage. Would also be interested to see Mastodon and Eagles of Death Metal. As for the rest of the lineup, I’ll keep my mouth shut and let the people have their nostalgia! I’m sure many headbangers would react with equal indifference or antipathy about the lineups of most of the festivals I’m playing this summer.”

“Even Ozzy Osbourne screeching onstage with Zakk Wylde is better than listening to the guy who shows up to your party with an acoustic guitar.”



COVER STORY

False Omega, Dream Eye Color Wheel

Ben Traughber, writer-singer-arranger for the lo-fi band Dream Eye Color Wheel, recorded the New Albany group’s recently released second album, *False Omega*, in his home. “I have a small room filled with recording gizmos and gadgets, tape players, various stringed instruments and other oddities,” he says. All of which can be heard throughout the whimsically ominous folk album with waltz timing.

The album’s cover art presented itself in this “subterranean cubicle.” “I was trying to figure out what to do when the tape holding (an art print) to the wall became so weak that it gave up,” Traughber says. “I watched it float to the floor and I knew in that moment that it had to be the cover.”

Louisville artists Matt Dobson and Tyler Deeb created the print of blue and pink pastels using an old drawing of eye measurements from a filing cabinet in an abandon building. Traughber’s wife gave it to him as a gift, and it hung on the wall for years before falling. “*False Omega* was created as an attempt to make sense of themes in life that everyone shares,” he says. “Taking note of meaningful coincidences can be your own personal foreshadowing if you let it.”

— Katie Molck