

Nicole Simpkins  
Giving what Takes  
Gallery One  
August 2 – September 28, 2019

## **Large Text Gallery Guide**

North Carolina is no stranger to invasive species. Kudzu in particular is an iconic part of our landscape. Aggressively marketed across the south in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Kudzu was presented as more than just a beautiful exotic vine, but also a tool to keep erosion at bay while providing food to cattle. Years later, as the plant took over expanses of the southern landscape, Kudzu became the vine that “ate the South.” Yet, the true nature of this fascinating specimen exists somewhere between these competing ideas. Artist Nicole Simpkins uses her interest in the complex history of invasive species such as Kudzu to explore what these plants can teach us about mythmaking, resilience, and adaptation.

Simpkins’ site-specific installation is the culmination of a month-long residency at Artspace. Her process involves extensive research and planning. She begins by amassing images from historic texts, family histories, and observational drawings. Some images are cut directly from their source, while others become the source for linoleum blocks or silkscreens that she prints in multiples. A web of ochre yarn is woven onto large wooden frames which contain the mass of printed and drawn imagery. The result is an immersive experience that in some areas emulates a domestic interior, and in others suggests a vast wilderness.

Through this work, Simpkins “invites viewers to feel their way through the intersections between plant behavior and human culture.” What can we learn as members of communities from the ways that plants adapt and conform? In looking at the edge of transformation, whether it’s an area experiencing gentrification or the tangle of Kudzu bordering farmland, there are multiple and nuanced points of interest. In these spaces of transition we can observe tremendous strength, struggle and growth. When we take the time to deeply examine these spaces, both the positive and negative impacts on the overall system are revealed.

## **Artist Biography**

Nicole Sara Simpkins is an artist and educator living/working in Minneapolis, MN, and is currently Visiting Assistant Professor of Printmaking at Macalester College, in St. Paul, MN. She makes installations, mixed-media drawings, prints, artist books and performances. In her work, ecology and psychology, world-and-self, meet in constant entanglement. She has an MFA in Printmaking from IU-Bloomington and a BA in English/Creative Writing from Macalester College.

## **Viewers Guide**

1. How does this installation make you feel? What visual elements inform your response?
2. Can you identify any of the plants that Nicole Simpkins represents in her installation?
3. What kinds of connections can you make between human and plant behavior?