

Jasmine Best, Laura Little, Aaron McIntosh, Renzo Ortega
Dirty South, Gallery One, October 4 – November 30, 2019

Gallery Guide

What does contemporary Southern life look like, and what makes the Southern experience unique? The artists in *Dirty South* explore aspects of Southern identity that deeply inform their individual lives and artistic practices. Through sculpture, painting, video and textiles, this exhibition seeks to expand the stereotypes that so often define Southern culture to present a more encompassing picture of southern experience.

Much of painter, Renzo Ortega's work examines the concept of *mestizaje*, an historic term that continues to resonate for Latinos whose cross-cultural experiences result in a hybrid identity. In *Little Champion* Ortega presents a portrait of a Caucasian father and son from the eyes of the artist, who is himself the father of a young son of mixed heritage. The work is part of his "Southern Series" that investigates the artist's experience as a South American living in a small Southern town.

In *Tears for Dolly*, sculptor Laura Little presents a shrine to Gatlinburg, Tennessee. The Appalachian town experienced devastating wild fires in November 2016. Little's assemblage of materials and contrasting palettes of saturated and muted colors create a jubilant and somber tribute to the kitschy mountain town. Little explains "I elevate 'cheap' synthetic materials to form sculptures reminiscent of religious totems. Using the detritus of contemporary consumption to evoke humor and absurdity, I pose questions about the nature of both the profane and the sacred."

In his ongoing project, *Invasive Queer Kudzu*, artist Aaron McIntosh engages queer communities across the South to share their stories, which are recorded on fabric leaves and stitched together. The growing project creates a mass of queer experience that, like the plant, has a visibly growing impact on the fabric of southern culture. For McIntosh, his works "draw attention to the often murky intersection of personal desires and family institutions, as well as openly question our larger social constructions of deviancy, shame, adolescent imprinting and heteronormativity."

Jasmine Best's deep familial roots in eastern North Carolina are the focus of both works featured in *Dirty South*. *Wilmington Doll* recounts the experience she had as a young child receiving a blond-haired, blue-eyed baby doll that her grandmother had painted brown. In addition to the underlying racial narrative of the work, Best explores the strong kinship among black families living in the South.

Each of these artists use their mastery of material to weave stories that enrich and complicate notions of the South.