

2025 Southern Prize & State Fellowships for Visual Arts

**S O U
A R T S
H**





Travis Townsend
Dead Flower Wheel (detail)
76 x 50 x 24 inches
Plywood, wood, paint, tinted
glue, clamps, found materials,
and mixed drawing media
2019–2025

Photograph by
Sean Carroll

S O U A R T S H

Southern Prize
& State Fellowships
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President and CEO Foreword

This exhibition of the 2025 Southern Prize and State Fellowships for Visual Arts showcases extraordinary visual artists working in the South—artists who create conversations, push boundaries and build bridges between the traditions of the past and the future we are creating together. Transformative art thrives here in the South, and it has been a privilege to witness the Southern Prize evolve from its inception nine years ago to today. Then, as now, our commitment remains unchanged: to elevate artists whose work transforms individuals, communities, and culture itself. These talented artists constantly redefine what art can accomplish.

The 2025 Southern Prize for Visual Arts fellows’ works demonstrate a compelling “*back to the future*” sensibility, merging tradition and innovation in ways that honor the past while reimagining its relevance for today’s most urgent conversations. Our fellows span a wide range of artistic genres—ceramics, textiles, drawing, and sculpture. While the forms may vary, each reveals a deep reverence for material mastery, from the refined surfaces of expertly glazed ceramics to the haunting depth of charcoal and erasure. What emerges is a shared aesthetic of duality: rooted yet futuristic, intimate yet monumental, each piece acting as both artifact and provocation in a changing Southern landscape.

This exploration of the “back-to-the-future” theme deeply resonates with me and embraces both our legacy and our future. South Arts is approaching our 50th anniversary, celebrating five decades of uplifting Southern artists. At the same time, I’m preparing for my own transition, retiring after 13 years of leadership as South Arts President & CEO. Throughout my journey—as a former performing artist, state arts agency director, and now leading South Arts—I have witnessed the transformative power of the arts on individuals, communities, and societies. Our 2025 fellows embody this transformative spirit and represent the future of Southern artists who will continue to reach and inspire audiences far beyond our region.

Supporting artists and amplifying their work is the lifeblood of South Arts. Each of our nine State Fellows receives a \$5,000 award. The Southern Prize for Visual Arts finalist receives an additional \$10,000, and the Southern Prize for Visual Arts winner receives an additional \$25,000. The Southern Prize recipient also receives a two-week residency with The Hambidge Center.

To date, we have awarded \$720,000 to 81 individual artists, helping to sustain their artistic practice and advance their careers through connections with a larger audience. Our funding is made possible through the generous contributions of partners and donors who understand the importance of advancing southern vitality through the arts. We can’t thank you enough for your support of the Southern Prize and South Arts.

We invite you to join us in celebrating these gifted artists. We hope you will witness their artistry as you explore their works in this catalogue and in the touring exhibition that travels the region through 2026.

Suzette M. Surkamer
President and CEO, South Arts



Gonzalo Fuenmayor
*We All Have Our
Shadows (detail)*
96 x 96 inches
Charcoal on paper
2018

Photograph by
Edson Smither



“Objects have personal and cultural meaning because they absorb our stories and reflect our humanity back to us. My stories, your stories, our stories are held in the object.”

— Sonya Clark, Visual Artist

The Southern Prize

Legacy and Innovation in Contemporary Southern Visual Art

by

Shannon Rae Lindsey

2025 Southern Prize and State Fellowships for Visual Arts
Exhibition Curator

How do we define art in the American South when it is difficult to categorize? It encompasses such a broad spectrum of artists, backgrounds, perspectives, and practices. However, any meaningful definition must consider both the historical and ongoing influence of vernacular traditions rooted in craft, storytelling, and place, and the contributions of contemporary artists whose work is conceptually driven and materially experimental. These approaches often navigate, intersect, or challenge conventional boundaries between the vernacular and the avant-garde, revealing the richness at the heart of Southern artistic expression.

The 2025 South Arts Southern Prize and State Fellowships for Visual Arts exhibition continues the rich history of the program’s celebration of diversity in media, subject matter, and conceptual investigations in Southern art. This year’s prize state fellows explore traditional materials through contemporary processes including ceramics, drawing, painting, quilting, and sculpture. They use a variety of mediums and methods to express their identities, environments, imaginations, narratives, and traditions to build their own frameworks to reflect on constructs throughout history and within the contemporary landscape. These artists actively explore a variety of concepts including: craft and process, complex histories and current issues, environments and communities, navigation of real

and imagined spaces or real and imagined geographies; but all connect through a shared passion for connection, representation, and form. All of these artists’ works require an intimate experience of looking closely, visually tactile surfaces, and intentional traces of techniques and materials.

What does it mean to define Southern art when no single definition can fully capture its depth? Like the concept of Southerness itself, Southern art emerges from a rich tapestry of cultures, histories, and lived experiences—woven with threads of resilience, community, creativity, yet also by invisibility, struggle, and systemic oppression. These contradictions and nuances are what unites Southern artists, not fixed traits or styles, but shared values of persistence, resourcefulness, and the drive to transform adversity into expression. The nine 2025 South Arts Southern Prize State Fellows for Visual Arts are all rooted in the American South—whether by birth or by choice—and represent this shared dedication to storytelling, societal reflection, and creative resilience, offering diverse visions that discern the region’s past while imagining its future.

A fifth generation quilter from Gee’s Bend, the Alabama State Fellow, **Loretta Pettway Bennett** creates hand-stitched quilts through traditional approaches she learned from her mother. She honors her family’s traditions by embracing the inherent shape of on-hand fabrics to guide each quilt design. Embracing the principle of “using what you have,” Bennett transforms irregular scraps into striking designs that range from intuitive arrangements to complex geometric patterns.

The Florida State Fellow **Gonzalo Fuenmayor** creates large-scale, highly detailed, and dramatic charcoal drawings with rich black and white tonal variations. In his work, ornate symbols or ornamentation and decorative forms from the past collide with opposing contemporary elements. Through both additive and reductive techniques, he explores the complex impact of modernization on Latin American culture and

environments—assimilating historical memory with present-day tension. Georgia State Fellow **Masela Nkolo** grew up during the Congo Civil War, where he used screwdrivers both as tools of his trade and as weapons for personal protection. Today, he transforms those same tools—along with other mechanical and construction materials—into sculptures inspired by spiritual traditions. Deeply rooted in cultural memory and sacred symbolism, his works reinterpret ancestral forms through repurposed materials, bridging tradition and innovation to embody resilience and the journey from violence to healing.

Process-based sculptor and Kentucky State Fellow **Travis Townsend** constructs familiar yet playfully imaginative three-dimensional forms using accumulated and repurposed materials. His works begin with a sketched idea and intuitively evolve through layered techniques such as gluing, painting, joining, cutting, and reassembling. Embracing the joy and unpredictability of the creative process, Townsend reflects on the complexities of our built environment through forms that balance structure with spontaneity.

Louisiana State Fellow **Edgar Cano** creates paintings that blur the boundaries between lived experiences, memories, and dreams. His works blend real and imagined spaces and are often informed by photographic references. Drawing on his background in theatrical scene painting, Cano uses the human figure as a central element—animating space, embodying emotion, and implying narrative within plausible yet surreal environments that reveal the layered complexity of everyday life.

Clay-based artist and Mississippi State Fellow **Stephen Phillips** explores the interplay of contrasting base colors and glossy glazes on ceramic vessels through patterns of shapes and lines. His forms develop through a series of technical processes—including glazing, firing, and resist techniques—that build surface depth and reveal traces of previous layers. The final works, and the act of making them, reflect the journey of life itself—sometimes winding, layered, and shaped through moments of connection.

North Carolina State Fellow **Lydia C. Thompson** investigates and reflects on how humans occupy place and space in the past, present, and future. As a mixed-media artist specializing in ceramic sculpture, she assembles small strips of clay to create shelter-like forms with visual signs of decay and repair. The forms encourage reflection on human migration—what we build, what we destroy, what we abandon, and what we carry with us.

As a Black woman, South Carolina State Fellow **Felicia Greenlee** creates art to amplify her voice, which often goes unheard in America’s systemically racist society. She primarily works with wood to construct collaged portraits of Black individuals, inspired by historical events that converge with current issues. She reclaims the chain as a symbol of strength and endurance, and uses the target to draw the viewer face-to-face to the central figure—as if looking through a camera or a gun scope.

Through labor-intensive punch-needle embroidery, Tennessee State Fellow **Tabitha Arnold** creates tapestries that celebrate the working class in the United States. She incorporates symbols from the labor movement, art history, and Southern Christianity to contextualize the lived experiences of workers from the past, present, and future. Her densely layered compositions invite viewers to invest time in looking—an act that echoes the value and reward of sustained labor.

Lydia C. Thompson
Inheritance
11 x 18 x 11 inches
Ceramics
2023

Photograph by
Kamau J. Bostic

“...southern art emerges from a rich tapestry of cultures, histories, and lived experiences—woven with threads of resilience, community, creativity, yet also by invisibility, struggle, and systemic oppression.

These contradictions and nuances are what unites Southern artists, not fixed traits or styles, but shared values of persistence, resourcefulness, and the drive to transform adversity into expression.”

— Shannon Rae Lindsey



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Cover Design:

A Collage of our Southern
Prize & State Fellowships for
Visual Arts Artists:

- Tabitha Arnold
- Edgar Cano
- Gonzalo Fuenmayor
- Felicia Greenlee
- Masela Nkolo
- Loretta Pettway Bennett
- Stephen Phillips
- Lydia C. Thompson
- Travis Townsend

Southern Prize &
State Fellowships for Visual Arts

2025
Southern Prize Fellows



Loretta Pettway Bennett
Alabama



Gonzalo Fuenmayor
Florida



Masela Nkolo
Georgia



Travis Townsend
Kentucky



Edgar Cano
Louisiana



Stephen Phillips
Mississippi



Lydia C. Thompson
North Carolina



Felicia Greenlee
South Carolina



Tabitha Arnold
Tennessee



2025 Fellow for Visual Arts

Loretta Pettway Bennett

Alabama

Biography

Loretta Pettway Bennett is a direct descendant of Dinah Miller, the earliest quilter from Gee’s Bend, Alabama whose name is known today. She continues to create hand-stitched quilts in the tradition taught to her by her mother, Qunnie Pettway, and passed down through her family for many generations. Since 2006, her works have featured in dozens of major museum exhibitions nationwide and in nineteen U. S. Embassies worldwide. In 2007, she collaborated with Paulson Fontaine Press in Berkley, California to create a suite of limited-edition prints based on her quilt designs. In addition to her residency with Paulson Fontaine Press, she was an artist in residence at the Pilchuk Glass School in Stanwood, Washington in 2013 and received Visual Arts Fellowships from the Alabama State Council on the Arts in 2001 and 2009.

Today her quilts and prints are in numerous museum and corporate collections, as well as the U. S. State Department, and have been published in books including Gee’s Bend: The Architecture of the Quilt which accompanied a group exhibition of the same name that toured six museums across the United States. The most recent catalog to publish her work was Souls Grown Deep Like the Rivers: Black Artists from the American South, from a 2023 group show at the Royal Academy of Art in London, England. In addition to gallery and museum exhibitions, she shares the tradition of making quilts by hand by teaching regular workshops in Gee’s Bend and at special events nationwide.

Artist Statement

As a fifth-generation quilter from Gee’s Bend, Alabama, I learned to piece and quilt quilts from my mother Qunnie Pettway and my family. My ancestry traces back to Dinah Miller, my great-great-great grandmother, who was trafficked on the illegal slave ship Clotilda at 12 years old, and was the first quilter in the Bend whose name is known.

I made my first quilt—a Flower Garden quilt—when I was 12 or 13, piecing it by hand just as my mother had taught me. I continued helping my mother and grandmother make quilts using the traditional hand-sewing techniques they passed down to me. After I married and left home, I took those techniques with me and began developing my own designs and creative ideas.

Fabric for quilts in Gee’s Bend was repurposed out of necessity for generations. Today I can use material from designer collaborations with Greg Lauren, Marfa Stance, Chloe, and others as well.

In 2006 I was one of the youngest Gee’s Bend Quilters featured in the exhibition, “The Architecture of the Quilt,” which traveled to 13 museums across the US including the Whitney Museum of American Art. In 2009 I collaborated with Paulson Fontaine Press to create prints based on my quilts, and I paint abstract compositions related to my quilt making, but I always return to sewing.



Loretta Pettway Bennett
Lazy Gal #1
22 x 26.5 inches
Handmade quilt with denim jeans
2008

Photograph by
Steve Pitkin



Loretta Pettway Bennett
Quilt Horse and Frame
 72 x 80 inches
 Handmade quilt with nylon and silk
 2007–2013

Photograph by
 Steve Pitkin

Loretta Pettway Bennett
Lazy Gal #2
 44 x 48 inches
 Handmade quilt with tickin and denim
 2022

Photograph by
 Steve Pitkin

Loretta Pettway Bennett
Bricklayer
 38 x 41.5 inches
 Handmade quilt with cotton fabric
 2007–2009

Photograph by
 Steve Pitkin



2025 Fellow for Visual Arts

Gonzalo Fuenmayor

Florida

Southern Prize Finalist

Biography

Gonzalo Fuenmayor (b. 1977, Barranquilla, Colombia) is a Miami-based artist working primarily with drawing. Fuenmayor has been concerned about the effects of modernization and progress not only on natural environments, but mostly on Latin American culture and its ways of being displayed internationally through stereotypes and common places. His aim seems to be not exclusively, to denounce banalization but also to understand its aesthetic mechanisms and cultural power. Fuenmayor received an MFA from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, MA in 2004, and a BFA in Fine Arts and Art Education from the School of Visual Arts in 2000. Fuenmayor received numerous awards including a 2025 South Arts State Fellowship Award for Visual Arts, a Pollock Krasner Foundation Grant in 2022, the 2020 EFG Bank Latin American Award, a 2018 Ellies Creator Award, a 2015 South Florida Cultural Consortium Fellowship for Visual and Media Artists, a Traveling Fellowship by the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston in 2014, among others.

He has exhibited in numerous solo and group shows in USA, Latin America and Europe; his work was recently showcased in The Florida Prize 2020, at the Baker Museum in Naples, FL, a solo exhibition “Tropical Mythologies” at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA in 2015, “Caribbean Crossroads” Exhibition at the Queens Museum, Corona, NY. His work is part of numerous private and public collections including Perez Art Museum Miami, Miami, FL, USA, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA, The Cornell Fine Arts Museum, Winter Park, FL, among others. He is represented by Dot Fiftyone Gallery, Miami, FL, Dolby Chadwick Gallery, San Francisco, CA, Fernando Pradilla Gallery, Madrid, Spain, and El Museo Gallery, Bogotá, Colombia.

Artist Statement

Drawing on charcoal becomes the main focus of my practice; specifically the choreographed ballet between two opposing gestures: adding charcoal and erasing it. Through my practice I’ve been concerned about the effects of modernization and progress not only on natural environments, but mostly on Latin American culture and its ways of being displayed internationally through stereotypes and common places. My aim is not to exclusively denounce banalization, but also to understand its aesthetic mechanisms and cultural power.

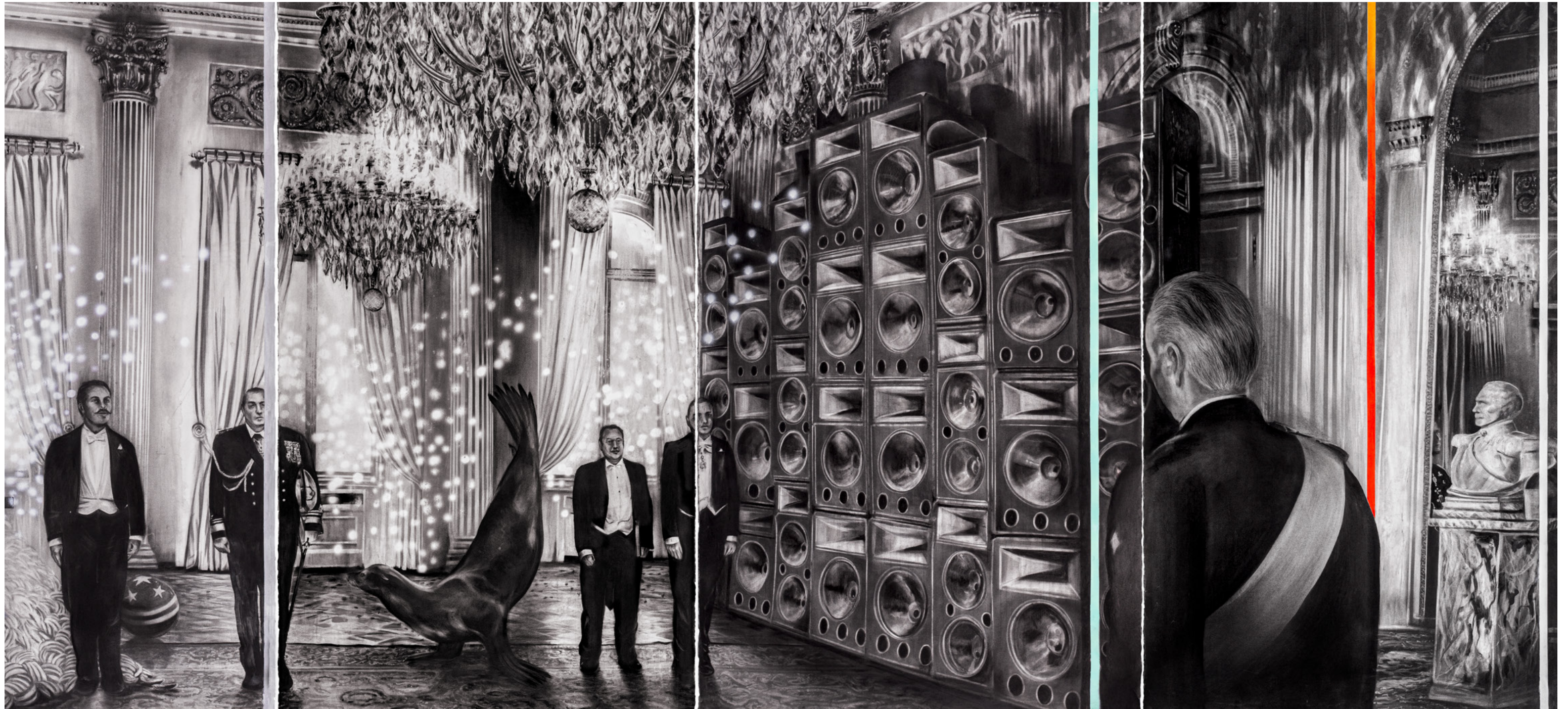
I am interested on how ornamentation with its grace and excess has the capacity to camouflage and overshadow questionable circumstances of all kind. Recently I’ve been exploring the power struggles in acculturation dynamics and strategies on how to survive past empires -both political and personal-. Despite the fact that most current empires lie in ruins, their rules and structures remain present, dictating norms and behaviors regardless of whether they remain compatible with contemporary values and norms. In my recent work, symbols and structures from the past are adopted and interact with opposing tropical elements, providing different ways of assimilating the past and present, as well as challenging expectations about cultural and political realities within individual emotional and psychological terrains.

The theatricality and dramatic nature of the imagery used for my drawings, subordinates the contradictory into a delicate and imaginative order, evoking a certain kind of reconciliation or tense harmony between two disjointed realities. As the past, the present, the exotic and the familiar collide, absurd and fantastic panoramas arise.



Gonzalo Fuenmayor
We All Have Our Shadows
96 x 96 inches
Charcoal on paper
2018

Photograph by
Edson Smitter



Gonzalo Fuenmayor
Eucharist of Amnesia
 208 x 95 inches
 Charcoal, spray paint pastel
 and ink on paper
 2020

Photograph by
 Edson Smitter

2025 Fellow for Visual Arts

Masela Nkolo

Georgia

Biography

Masela Nkolo is an artist whose multidisciplinary practice spans installation, sculpture, textiles, photography, video and performance. By reclaiming discarded materials such as oil lanterns, screwdrivers, and doors, Nkolo creates totemic figures that reflect his personal experiences, offering a syncretic reinterpretation of classical African art.

His work serves as a powerful advocate for peace, social justice, and healing. Through his creations, Nkolo fosters dialogue on themes of resilience, cultural memory, and the enduring human spirit. He invites audiences to engage with these themes, encouraging connections that transcend boundaries and promote understanding.

Nkolo holds a degree in Fine Arts with a concentration in large-scale sculpture from the Academy of Fine Arts. He emerged as a prominent voice within the Kinshasa-based art movement “Neo-Ngongism,” a collective initiative aimed at awakening public consciousness through street exhibitions and community-based artistic interventions.

His work has been exhibited at numerous prestigious institutions, including The Mint Museum (North Carolina) Johnson Lowe Gallery (Georgia), Agora Gallery (New York), Atlanta Contemporary (Georgia), Path Museum (Georgia), the African Diaspora Art Museum of Atlanta, the Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia, and Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport.

Masela Nkolo
King's Head
36 x 50 x 8 inches
Mixed medium sculpture
on panel door
2024

Photograph by
Stephanie Hanlon

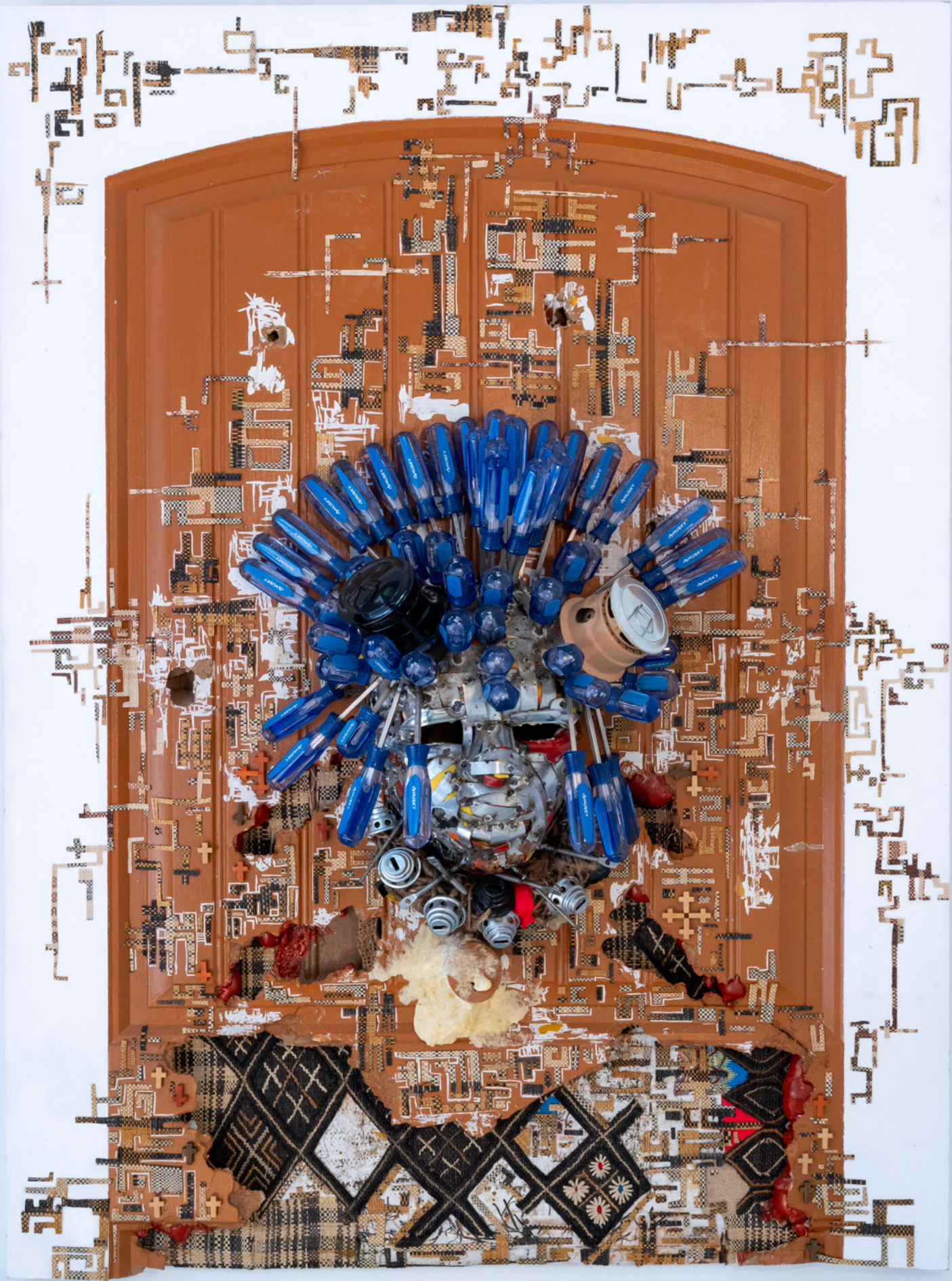
Artist Statement

Growing up during the Congo Civil War, one of the most immediate effects I experienced was the absence of electricity. Oil lanterns became essential. As a child, I repaired them for neighbors to help out. What began as a necessity soon became the seed of my artistic journey. Over time, I began collecting discarded lanterns and other found objects, transforming them into creatures that reflect human experience and personal memory. What once lit the darkness of war has now become my source of inspiration—a powerful form of artistic expression and storytelling.

My creative process is deeply rooted in cultural memory, particularly the Kongo Yombe spiritual tradition of Bibaaku, the act of driving nails or metal into a Nkisi figure. These sacred objects serve as spiritual vessels to seal agreements, ward off harm, or heal. Each nail marks a moment of ritual activation. In my practice, I reinterpret this tradition through the use of screwdriver tools I once carried for protection during the rise of banditry (kuluna) in my city. No longer weapons, they are now aesthetic and symbolic elements welded into my masks. Each embedded screwdriver marks a moment of transformation, a ritual of resilience, channeling energy away from violence and toward healing, protection, and empowerment.

These sculptural forms offer a contemporary, syncretic reinterpretation of classical African art, grounded in the rich heritage of the Congo. Through the fusion of ancestral symbolism and repurposed materials, I seek to bridge past and present, tradition and innovation.

I seek to manifest these ancestral echoes, making the invisible visible, calling on traditions that speak to community, spirit, and survival. I hope that my work can serve as a point of reflection and inspiration: a source of excitement for some, and an emotional escape for others.





Masela Nkolo
Untitled Mask
 20 x 28 inches
 Digital photograph
 2024

Photograph by
 David Clifton Strawn

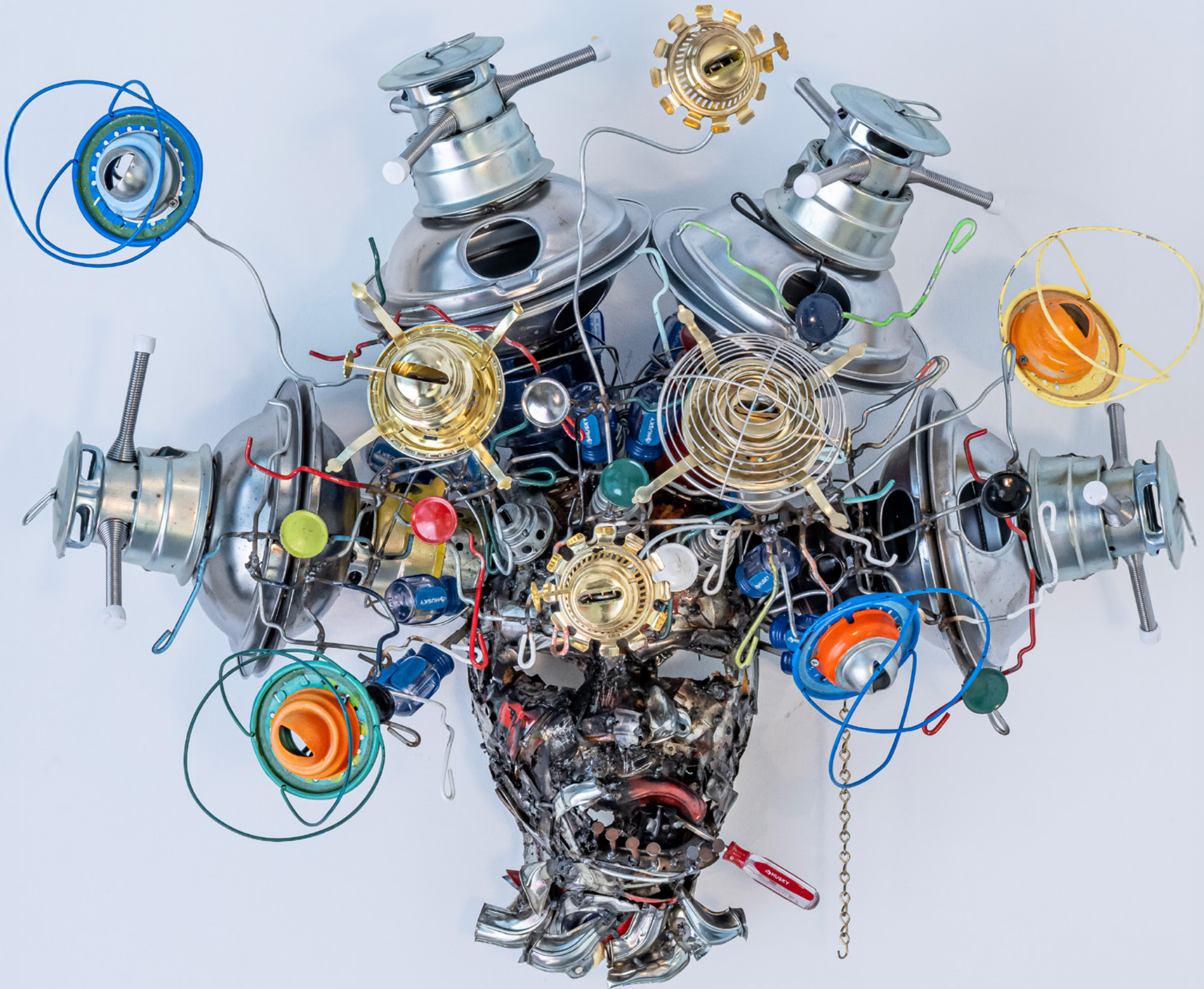


Masela Nkolo
Untitled Mask
 20 x 28 inches
 Digital photograph
 2024

Photograph by
 David Clifton Strawn

Masela Nkolo
Mukanda Mask
30 x 29 x 15 inches
Mixed medium sculpture
2024

Photograph by
Stephanie Hanlon





2025 Fellow for Visual Arts

Travis Townsend

Kentucky

Travis Townsend
Dead Flower Wheel
76 x 50 x 24 inches
Plywood, wood, paint, tinted
glue, clamps, found materials,
and mixed drawing media
2019–2025

Photograph by
Sean Carroll

Biography

Travis Townsend builds wood and mixed media sculptures in his Lexington studio. His process-oriented works evolve from sketches and travel through many transformations before being cut apart, reassembled, and reworked (sometimes many years later). Parts are often transplanted or recycled.

Travis studied at Kutztown University (BS) and Virginia Commonwealth University (MFA) and has participated in residencies at Penland School of Craft, Oregon College of Art and Craft, Vermont Studio Center, Peters Valley, Arrowmont, and the EMMA Collaboration. His sculptures and drawings have recently been exhibited at the Susquehanna Art Museum, Manifest Gallery, Athens Institute for Contemporary Art, Wharton Esherick Museum, Quappi Projects, and Washington State University. New American Paintings, The Manifest International Drawing Annual, and The Penland Book of Woodworking have also included his work.

His awards include an Emerging Artist Grant from the American Craft Council, a fellowship from the Kentucky Arts Council, three sculpture grants from the Virginia A. Groot Foundation, and travel grants from the Great Meadows Foundation.

Artist Statement

My studio is my garage—a common space for middle-aged American dads’ hobbies—where I tinker at night with memories and reflect on the things men build. Have we built good things? Sometimes yes, but the answer is often murky. I question the idea of progress and my role within it. Do these works improve on the past? Do they help the world, or are they simply clunky, funny-colored, useless objects? These questions, and the self-doubt they spark, live within the work itself and drive my practice.

My work evolves through layers of sketching, building, painting, and rebuilding—often over many years. Each piece accumulates marks and hand-built elements (measurement notations, doodles, globs of acrylic paint, wood joinery, band-sawn bowl forms), before emerging as function-less vessels, tool-like abstractions, or constructed paintings. Some works stem from the idea of a failed ark; others begin as surreal, cartoony plywood paintings. All follow a winding path, shaped by continuously redrawn sketches and travel through many transformations before being cut apart, reassembled, and reworked. Parts are transplanted, left behind, or recycled along the way of making.

These objects aim to feel both awkward and familiar, innovative and well-crafted in their own idiosyncratic way. They exist between clarity and disintegration, carrying a sense of history while embodying the joyfully absurd act of making art.



Travis Townsend
Shakerag Vein Painting
 60 x 24 x 8 inches
 Acrylic and mixed drawing media
 on plywood and wood with clamp,
 string, and painted toothpick
 construction
 2024-2025

Photograph by
 Sean Carroll

Travis Townsend
Smallish BoatStack (with drawings)
 56 x 30 x 36 inches
 Wood, plywood, old door, paint,
 clamps, string, paper, and drawing
 media
 2010-2023

Photograph by
 Kelsey Dillow





Travis Townsend
Line Study (with found eyes)
 80 x 48 x 40 inches
 Wood, clamps, paint, found
 drawings of eyes, string, and mixed
 media
 2016-2025

Photograph by
 Sean Carroll

Travis Townsend
One Fine Thing (1999-2023)
 55 x 50 x 44 inches
 Plywood, wood, paint, clamps,
 string, and mixed media
 1999-2023

Photograph by
 Mary Rezny



2025 Fellow for Visual Arts

Edgar Cano

Louisiana

Biography

Edgar Cano began in the visual arts by creating illustrations and scenography for university theater during his studies at the Faculty of Arts in Xalapa, Veracruz (UV). In two decades of art production, he has been distinguished and awarded in various national and international competitions. Recently he was granted the Gottlieb Foundation in NY, and the South Arts Fellowships both in 2025. He also has obtained multiple scholarships, such as Member of the National System of Art Creators of FONCA (SNCA, 2014) in the discipline of visual arts specializing in painting. With a large new painting project, he received this honor for the second time in 2021. Also, he has been recognized as Best Show at the 61st Juried Show of the Masur Museum at Monroe LA, and Best in show from the Baton Rouge Gallery, Baton Rouge LA, at the 16th Surreal Salon, both in 2024. In 2018. Cano received a grant from the FONCA Promotion and Co-investment Program to carry out the exhibition El Centro Único of his authorship. In 2023 and 2018, he was part of the jurors on the Selection Commission of the National System of Art Creators (FONCA), and the same year he was a juror at the Biennial Alfredo Zalce, in Morelia. Among other fellowships, he was awarded by FONCA Young Creators scholarship (2010 and 2012) and in the State of Veracruz, PECDA (2005 and 2009).

To date, he has had eighteen solo exhibitions in Mexico and abroad and more than fifty group exhibitions in various cities within and outside of the country. He has shown his work in Argentina, Canada, England, Italy, Japan, the United States, Serbia and Sweden. Among the collections where his work can be found, the following stand out: MACO Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Oaxaca; Museo Nacional de la Estampa MUNAE, Mexico City; Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Alfredo Zalce MACAZ, Morelia, Michoacán; Engraving Collection of the Instituto de Artes Gráficas de Oaxaca IAGO; José Guadalupe Posada Museum, Aguascalientes Ags.; Artistic Collection of the State of Veracruz IVEC; Collection of the International Art Studio Radovan Tranavac Mica, Valjebo, Serbia; Artistic Collection of the Lithography Workshop of La Ceiba Grafica, Coatepec, Veracruz; The Luciano Benetton Collection, Italy; Grupo Milenio’s Collection, México City; Collection of the Jagüey Institute, Teotihuacán, Mex.; Collection of the Friday Cottage Art Space, Columbia, SC., Northwestern State University of Louisiana art collection, among other private collections. Edgar Cano moved to Louisiana to pursue his MA in Visual Arts at Northwestern State University of Louisiana with a full scholarship. He lives with his family in Natchitoches, LA, he works as a Professional Artist and Assistant Professor of Art at NSULA.

Artist Statement

My paintings draw from the strange edges of daily life, blending personal memories, archival materials, and my own photographs into layered visual narratives. With a background in theater set design, I see the human figure as the core of emotional resonance and meaning, much like its role on stage. The body anchors my compositions, creating relationships that blur reality and fiction, and shaping a metaphorical space where objectivity dissolves.

I approach painting as both a craft and a dialogue with tradition—deconstructing classic techniques not to reject them, but to critically engage and reimagine their possibilities. Each work refines graphic and pictorial methods to give form to ideas born from the surreal, the everyday, and the dreamlike. I build scenes that invite multiple interpretations, where a quiet unreality disturbs perception and hints at the fragility of the world we think we know.

Imagination drives my practice. I juxtapose seemingly unrelated objects, creating visual traps where the gaze becomes an accomplice in constructing plausible yet impossible scenes. My work subverts expectations with subtlety and humor, navigating the contradictions of contemporary life and confronting its shadows, always with the flag of imagination raised high.

Edgar Cano
Ride on Dreams
65 x 55 x 2 inches
Oil on linen
2022

Photograph by
Anna Poe





Edgar Cano
Life is Beautiful
78.5 x 62.5 x 2 inches
Oil on linen
2022

Photograph by
Anna Poe



Edgar Cano
Fog Fire
 55 x 65 x 2 inches
 Oil on linen
 2023

Photograph by
 Anna Poe

Edgar Cano
We Were Not Alone
 35.5 x 35.5 x 2 inches
 Oil on linen
 2022

Photograph by
 Edgar Cano

2025 Fellow for Visual Arts

Stephen Phillips

Mississippi

Biography

Stephen Phillips was raised and currently lives in the small town of Crawford, MS. His pursuit in ceramics began in his attendance at East Mississippi Community College. Stephen learned the fundamental skills of hand building and throwing at EMCC, receiving an Associate of Arts degree in 2008. He received his B.F.A. from MUW in 2013. In 2015, Stephen established Stephen’s Potter House Productions, a small studio space which can be seen in the countryside of his hometown in Crawford, Mississippi. His work has been displayed and sold in the MUW Eugenia Summer Gallery, the Columbus Arts Council, the R.E. Hunt’s Museum, and the Ohr-O’Keefe Museum of Art.

His work is currently on display at EMCC in their permanent collection located in Scooba, MS. In 2021, he became a published artist and was featured in Sheen Magazine, Pottery Making Illustrated Magazine, and The Anatomy of a Good Pot. In 2022, Stephen also became one of many black artists featured in the Contemporary Black American Ceramic Artists book. Stephen has currently been traveling across the country teaching and helping others accomplish their desired goals in ceramic. He’s done workshops in various places like Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts, John C. Campbell Folk School, Clay by the Bay San Francisco, and many more.

Stephen Phillips
Copper & Blue Bottle
9 x 6.5 x 6.5 inches
Ceramics, white stoneware,
Cone 5 oxidation, tape
resist, glaze/underglaze
2023

Photograph by
Stephen Phillips

Artist Statement

In my recent work, I have been exploring the juxtaposition of textures and colors. I use underglazes as the base color and gloss glazes on top to give a differentiation between the textures and appearances provided by both glazes. I use electrical tape to create patterns and geometrical shapes. When the tape is removed revealing the underglaze surface, these pieces are fired at cone 5 (around 2167 degrees F oxidation). The lines and shapes created on the surface of each piece is designed to create a sense of movement. Each line causes the eyes of the viewer to travel around the form, therefore creating a moment of appreciation for the form itself. The lines are also a reminder of the journey and paths we take throughout our lives and how our paths sometimes interconnect with others.

Other pieces I create are raku fired up to 1850 degrees F. The unglazed surface of the bisque pot will turn a matte black during the raku firing reduction process allowing the differentiation between the unglazed surface and the glazed area. These pieces are finished using a gold wax as an accent and cold sealed with clear acrylic spray paint. This collection is inspired by the movie Black Panther. The metallic motifs against the dark smoky surface is designed to create a sense of empowerment. This series is created with the idea of being ceremonial objects or pieces to reflect tribal status. Every piece created becomes an individual that belongs to a larger family or collection.





Stephen Phillips
Black on Yellow Bottle
10 x 7.5 x 7.5 inches
Ceramics, white stoneware,
Cone 5 oxidation, tape resist,
glaze/underglaze
2025

Photograph by
Stephen Phillips

Stephen Phillips
Black Panther Series Vol. 2 #611
9.5 x 8 x 8 inches
Ceramics, white stoneware,
Raku Fired, tape resist, glaze,
gold wax, gold leaf, cold sealed-
clear acrylic spray paint
2025

Photograph by
Stephen Phillips

Stephen Phillips
Hunter Green Decanter & Cup
Decanter: 11 x 5 x 5 inches
Cup: 3.5 x 3 x 3 inches
Ceramics, white stoneware,
Cone 5 oxidation, tape resist,
glaze/underglaze
2023

Photograph by
Stephen Phillips



2025 Fellow for Visual Arts

Lydia C. Thompson

North Carolina

Biography

Lydia C Thompson is a mixed-media artist specializing in ceramic sculptures. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from The Ohio State University and her Master of Fine Arts degree from the New York College of Ceramics at Alfred University. She has received a Fulbright-Hays grant for research on traditional architecture in Nigeria, a Windgate Distinguished Fellow for Innovation in Craft Award, the Artist Support Grant from the Arts & Science Council of Charlotte / Mecklenburg, NC, and a Lighton International Artists Exchange Program for research in Ghana. She was awarded an AIR at the Hambidge Center for the Creative Arts & Sciences and has completed residencies at the Guldagergaard International Ceramic Research Center in Denmark and the Medalta Ceramic Center in Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada. In the fall of 2025, she will be an Artist in Residence at Starworks in Star, NC.

Her work has been featured in exhibitions at Mindy Solomon Gallery, Miami, FL, Society for Contemporary Crafts, Pittsburgh, PA the Baltimore Clayworks, Baltimore, MD, The Clay Studio, Philadelphia, PA, Clay Art Center, Port Chester, NY, the Ohr O’Keefe Museum, Biloxi, MS, Mint Museum, Charlotte, NC, the Kentucky Museum of Art and Craft, Louisville, KY, James A. Michener Art Museum, Doylestown, PA, Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, CA, Northern Clay Center, Minneapolis, MN and Utah Museum of Contemporary Art, Salt Lake City, UT. She has conducted workshops for youths and adults and served as a juror and curator for national and regional exhibitions. She resides and maintains her studio in Charlotte, NC, and is a Professor of Art in the Department of Art & Art History at UNC Charlotte.

Lydia C. Thompson
Bulbous Abode #5
12 x 18 x 12 inches
Ceramics
2025

Photograph by
Dominique Rodriguez

Artist Statement

My current work is an investigation of migration and residual ancestral memories that examine spaces and places of human existence. Geographical landscapes have provided resources for the continuous mobility of humans to build communities and construct abodes. I’m constantly going back and forth in time to gather visual languages of abandoned structures left to the elements. These fragments blend the historical chronology of rural to urban human migration. These fragments become sentimental relics and heirlooms, which once held value or importance to a group of people, now reduced to rubble/shards. I imagine nature’s landscape takes on designing and building structures to create abodes to develop an idyllic community.

These structures produce a visual silence, evoke the imagination, offering an option of how humans think about notions of commodities, value systems, and cultural practices and traditions. As humans travel beyond Earth’s surface, space geography becomes an option to consider life. These works are lessons to learn about the persistence and preservation of one’s own culture.





Lydia C. Thompson
*Daydreams:
 Releasing the Shackles*
 20 x 22 x 11 inches
 Ceramics
 2023

Photograph by
 Kamau J. Bostic

Lydia C. Thompson
Inheritance
 11 x 18 x 11 inches
 Ceramics
 2023

Photograph by
 Kamau J. Bostic



2025 Fellow for Visual Arts

Felicia Greenlee

South Carolina

Biography

Felicia Greenlee was born and raised in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania until the age of eight. Her family, originally from South Carolina, would move back in 1979. In high school, Felicia became one of the first students to participate in South Carolina’s new “Gifted and Talented” program. Graduating high school in 1989, Felicia continued her art studies in college. Felicia’s college work consisted of pencil drawings and oil paintings, and she received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Clemson University in 1993.

After graduating from Clemson University, Felicia began working as a textile designer with LaFrance Industries. She would marry her high school sweetheart in 1995 and give birth to their son in 1997. After the birth of her son, Felicia would decide to become a freelance textile designer and work from home. Freelancing led to the creation of her own home décor line based on her color pencil drawings depicting African American figures. Expanding her home décor line, she entered a licensing agreement in 2003 with the textile company The Rug Barn. She would expand her presence in the home décor market and entered licensing agreements with two other companies. Licensing allowed time for Felicia to explore more creative avenues and in her exploration, she embraced working with wood. Abandoning pencil and paper for wood, she decided to no longer depict her subjects with closed eyes. Working in wood would represent a new awakening and Felicia’s subjects now portrayed with their eyes open. With no regrets, Felicia would step away from licensing to devote more time to her newfound love of working with wood.

Today, Felicia devotes her time to creating “wood collages.” She resides in South Carolina with her husband and continues to do what she loves, creating art that encourages social change.

Felicia Greenlee
Justice for All
23.5 x 37 x 5.5 inches
Wood, stain, printer ink,
paint and color pencil
2022

Photograph by
Felicia Greenlee

Artist Statement

As a Black woman, I feel unheard so, my art is my voice. I convey life experiences through portraits using the techniques of relief and collage. Constructing my work entirely of wood, I may incorporate paper and other mixed media. I use pine because it is a light material, and I can transform it using various techniques. Using a variety of saws and chisels, I cut and layer individual pieces of wood. After sanding, painting, and staining the pieces, I join them using wooden dowels, screws, brad nails and glue.

My wood collages address systemic racism deeply embedded in American society. I articulate these social indifferences with the use of the chain. The chain represents our ancestors’ sacrifice and is a symbol of strength and endurance. The use of the circular shape in my work embodies the repetition of America’s turbulent history. The circular shape takes center attention as a target. The target becomes a viewfinder to guide the viewer face to face with the subject. The target is for the viewer to interpret as either cross hairs of a camera’s lens or a gun’s scope or both.

The reference to America is unmistakable and may be notable in the name of the piece, or with the image of the American flag or the red, white, and blue colors. America is a diverse nation that struggles to acknowledge the contributions of Black Americans, and it is my mission to change this narrative.



Felicia Greenlee
Déjà vu
23.25 x 48 x 6.5 inches
Wood, stain, acrylic
paint and polyester/
cotton flags
2022

Photograph by
Felicia Greenlee

Felicia Greenlee
Sign of the Times #Too
22.5 x 36 x 5.5 inches
Wood, stain, printer ink
and paint
2022

Photograph by
Felicia Greenlee





Felicia Greenlee
Bars and Stripes
 20.625 x 35.875 x 6.25
 inches
 Wood, stain, metallic spray
 paint, printer ink, acrylic
 paint, three pennies and
 two nickels
 2025

Photograph by
 Felicia Greenlee



Felicia Greenlee
American Made
(in Memory of McKinley
Reid)
 21.75 x 37.31 x 6 inches
 Wood, stain & acrylic paint
 2021

Photograph by
 Felicia Greenlee



2025 Fellow for Visual Arts

Tabitha Arnold

Tennessee

Southern Prize Winner

Biography

Born and based in Chattanooga, Tennessee, Arnold studied painting at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, then began to make tapestries using a rug-tufting tool as a make-shift embroidery needle. Arnold's work has been covered in Jacobin, Hyperallergic, and Burnaway, and featured on print covers for Dissent Magazine since 2021. She has held solo exhibitions at the Worker's Art and Heritage Center, List Gallery at Swarthmore College, and ICA Chattanooga. Her work has been acquired by international collectors as well as the Boston Museum of Fine Art. In 2024, the Ford Foundation awarded Arnold a grant to support her ongoing collaboration with the People's History of Chattanooga: a tapestry series depicting 100 years of labor history leading up to the United Auto Workers' historic union victory at Volkswagen Chattanooga.

Artist Statement

I make labor-intensive art. As a socialist and labor organizer, my work reflects coming of age during a new wave of unionization in the United States. My tapestries borrow imagery from Bible Belt spirituality, social-realist public art movements, and ancient art motifs to create new historical artifacts from a working-class perspective. These objects interweave contemporary events with images of historical class struggle, with a special focus on the lesser-known history of labor organizing in the South.

Tabitha Arnold
Pure Finder
44 x 72 inches
Punch needle-embroidered wool
yarn on linen backing
2021

Photograph by
Tabitha Arnold



Tabitha Arnold
Workshop of the World I & II
 44 x 72 inches (each)
 Punch needle-embroidered
 wool yarn on linen cloth
 2022

Photograph by
 Heather Moqtaderi



Tabitha Arnold
Hot Labor Summer
 36 x 54 inches
 Punch needle-embroidered
 wool yarn on linen cloth
 2023

Photograph by
 Tabitha Arnold

Tabitha Arnold
Sleeping Dragon
 18.5 x 22 inches
 Punch needle-embroidered
 wool yarn on linen cloth
 2025

Photograph by
 Tabitha Arnold

Exhibition Checklist

Alabama

Loretta Pettway Bennett

- Quilt Horse and Frame*
72 x 80 inches
Handmade quilt with nylon and silk
2007–2013
- Lazy Gal #1*
22 x 26.5 inches
Handmade quilt with denim jeans
2008
- Lazy Gal #2*
44 x 48 inches
Handmade quilt with tickin and denim
2022
- Bricklayer*
38 x 41.5 inches
Handmade quilt with cotton fabric
2007–2009

Florida

Gonzalo Fuenmayor

- Eucharist of Amnesia*
208 x 95 inches
Charcoal, spray paint pastel and ink
on paper
2020
- We All Have Our Shadows*
96 x 96 inches
Charcoal on paper
2018

Georgia

Masela Nkolo

- La putréfaction #3*
23 x 9 x 8 inches
Mixed medium on cabinet doors
2024
- King’s Head*
36 x 50 x 8 inches
Mixed medium sculpture on panel door
2024
- Mukanda Mask*
20 x 28 inches
Digital photograph
2024
- Untitled Mask*
20 x 28 inches
Digital photograph
2024
- Mukanda Mask*
30 x 29 x 15 inches
Mixed medium sculpture
2024

Kentucky

Travis Townsend

- One Fine Thing (1999–2023)*
55 x 50 x 44 inches
Plywood, wood, paint, clamps,
string, and mixed media
1999–2023
- Smallish BoatStack (with drawings)*
56 x 30 x 36 inches
Wood, plywood, old door, paint, clamps,
string, paper, and drawing media
2010–2023
- Dead Flower Wheel*
76 x 50 x 24 inches
Plywood, wood, paint, tinted
glue, clamps, found materials,
and mixed drawing media
2019–2025
- Shakerag Vein Painting*
60 x 24 x 8 inches
Acrylic and mixed drawing media on
plywood and wood with clamp, string,
and painted toothpick construction
2024–2025
- Line Study (with found eyes)*
80 x 48 x 40 inches
Wood, clamps, paint, found drawings
of eyes, string, and mixed media
2016–2025

Louisiana

Edgar Cano

- Ride on Dreams*
65 x 55 x 2 inches
Oil on linen
2022
- Life is Beautiful*
78.5 x 62.5 x 2 inches
Oil on linen
2022
- Fog Fire*
55 x 65 x 2 inches
Oil on linen
2023
- We Were Not Alone*
35.5 x 35.5 x 2 inches
Oil on linen
2022

Mississippi

Stephen Phillips

Black Panther Series Vol. 2 #611
9.5 x 8 x 8 inches
Ceramics, white stoneware, Raku Fired, tape resist, glaze, gold wax, gold leaf, cold sealed- clear acrylic spray paint
2025

Black Panther Series Vol. 2 #612
9.5 x 6 x 6 inches
Ceramics, white stoneware, Raku Fired, tape resist, glaze, gold wax, gold leaf, cold sealed- clear acrylic spray paint
2025

Copper & Blue Bottle
9 x 6.5 x 6.5 inches
Ceramics, white stoneware, Cone 5 oxidation, tape resist, glaze/underglaze
2023

Hunter Green Decanter and Cup
Decanter: 11 x 5 x 5 inches
Cup: 3.5 x 3 x 3 inches
Ceramics, white stoneware, Cone 5 oxidation, tape resist, glaze/underglaze
2023

Black on Yellow Bottle
10 x 7.5 x 7.5 inches
Ceramics, white stoneware, Cone 5 oxidation, tape resist, glaze/underglaze
2025

Firebrick Vase
15 x 7 x 7 inches
Ceramics, white stoneware, Cone 5 oxidation, tape resist, glaze/underglaze, gold luster Cone 018
2025

Green on Green Vessel
Decanter: 5.5 x 8 x 8 inches
Ceramics, white stoneware, Cone 5 oxidation, tape resist, glaze/underglaze
2025

North Carolina

Lydia C. Thompson

White Abode #1
16 x 26 x 7 inches
Ceramics
2024

Hollow Abode #2
9 x 9 x 28 inches
Ceramics
2024

Daydreams: Releasing the Shackles
20 x 22 x 11 inches
Ceramics
2023

Inheritance
11 x 18 x 11 inches
Ceramics
2023

Bulbous Abode #5
12 x 18 x 12 inches
Ceramics
2025

Hollow Abode #3
28 x 21 x 9 inches
Ceramics
2024

South Carolina

Felicia Greenlee

American Made
(in Memory of McKinley Reid)
21.75 x 37.31 x 6 inches
Wood, stain and acrylic paint
2021

Sign of the Times #Too
22.5 x 36 x 5.5 inches
Wood, stain, printer ink and paint
2022

Déjà vu
23.25 x 48 x 6.5 inches
Wood, stain, acrylic paint and polyester/cotton flags
2022

Justice for All
23.5 x 37 x 5.5 inches
Wood, stain, printer ink, paint and color pencil
2022

Where I'm From
28 x 39 x 4.5 inches
Wood, stain, paint, screen mesh, acrylic, paper and polyester/cotton flag
2023

Bars and Stripes
20.625 x 35.875 x 6.25 inches
Wood, stain, metallic spray paint, printer ink, acrylic paint, three pennies and two nickels
2025

Tennessee

Tabitha Arnold

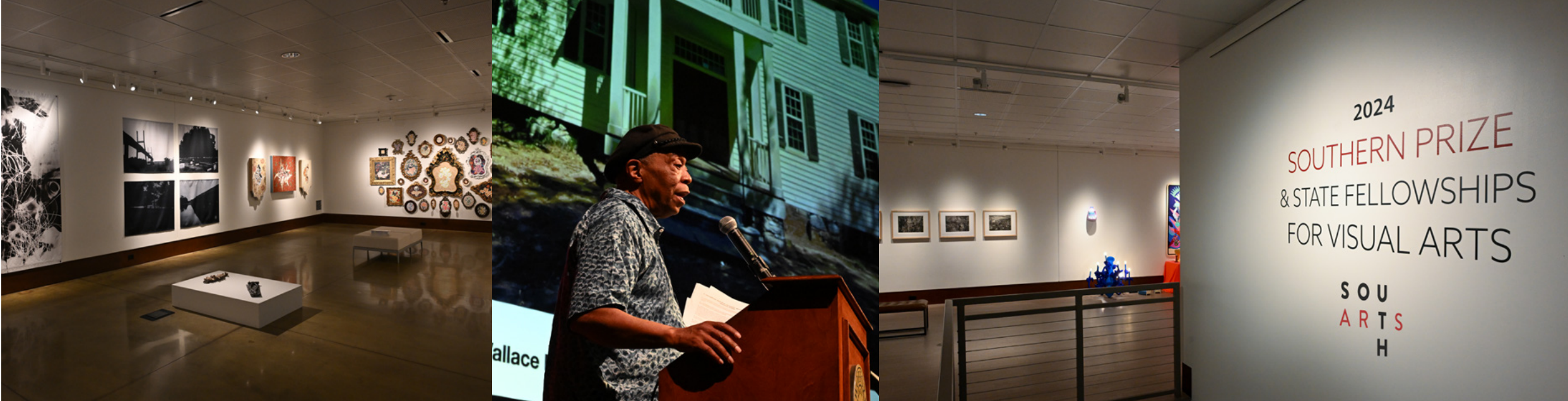
Sleeping Dragon
18.5 x 22 inches
Punch needle-embroidered wool yarn on linen cloth
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Hot Labor Summer
36 x 54 inches
Punch needle-embroidered wool yarn on linen cloth
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44 x 72 inches (each)
Punch needle-embroidered wool yarn on linen cloth
2022

Pure Finder
44 x 72 inches
Punch needle-embroidered wool yarn on linen backing
2021

Southern Prize for Visual Arts
State Fellows: 2017–2024



2024 Southern Prize Exhibition & Artist Talk with
Tony Bingham at Wofford College in Spartanburg, SC

						Southern Prize Winner			Southern Prize Finalist		
2024	Alabama	Tony Bingham	2022	Alabama	Jenny Fine	2020	Alabama	Carlton Nell	2018	Alabama	Amy Pleasant
	Florida	Elliot & Eric Jimenez		Florida	GeoVanna Gonzalez		Florida	Alba Triana		Florida	Anastasia Samoylova
	Georgia	Zipporah Camille Thompson		Georgia	Antonio Darden		Georgia	Fahamu Pecou		Georgia	Paul Stephen Benjamin
	Kentucky	Robyn Moore		Kentucky	Crystal Gregory		Kentucky	Letitia Quesenberry		Kentucky	Garrett Hansen
	Louisiana	Macon Reed		Louisiana	Hannah Chalew		Louisiana	Karen Ocker		Louisiana	Jeremiah Ariaz
	Mississippi	Brooke Alexander		Mississippi	Gloria Gipson Suggs		Mississippi	Ashleigh Coleman		Mississippi	Dominic Lippillo
	North Carolina	Isys Hennigar		North Carolina	Marcus Dunn		North Carolina	Sherrill Roland		North Carolina	Meg Stein
	South Carolina	Charles Clary		South Carolina	Brittany M. Watkins		South Carolina	Kristi Ryba		South Carolina	Kate Hooray Osmond
2023	Tennessee	Nelson Gutierrez		Tennessee	Sarah Elizabeth Cornejo		Tennessee	Bill Steber		Tennessee	Vesna Pavlović
	Alabama	Kelly Bryant	2021	Alabama	Tameca Cole	2019	Alabama	Jamey Grimes	2017	Alabama	Pete Schulte
	Florida	Chris Friday		Florida	Marielle Plaisir		Florida	Amy Gross		Florida	Noelle Mason
	Georgia	Victoria Dugger		Georgia	Myra Greene		Georgia	Bo Bartlett		Georgia	Masud Olufani
	Kentucky	Rachel Moser		Kentucky	Joyce Garner		Kentucky	Lori Larusso		Kentucky	Becky Alley
	Louisiana	Carlie Trosclair		Louisiana	Keith Calhoun & Chandra McCormick		Louisiana	Stephanie Patton		Louisiana	Joey Slaughter
	Mississippi	Alexis McGrigg		Mississippi	Ming Ying Hong		Mississippi	Rory Doyle		Mississippi	Coulter Fussell
	North Carolina	Nadia Meadows		North Carolina	Jewel Ham		North Carolina	Andrew Hayes		North Carolina	Stephanie J. Woods
	South Carolina	Michael Webster		South Carolina	Fletcher Williams III		South Carolina	Virginia Scotchie		South Carolina	Herb Parker
	Tennessee	Beizar Aradini		Tennessee	Raheleh Filsoofi		Tennessee	Andrew Scott Ross		Tennessee	Georgann DeMille

About South Arts

South Arts advances Southern vitality through the arts. The nonprofit regional arts organization was founded in 1975 to build on the South’s unique heritage and enhance the public value of the arts. South Arts’ work responds to the arts environment and cultural trends with a regional perspective.

South Arts offers an annual portfolio of activities designed to support the success of artists and arts providers in the South, address the needs of Southern communities through impactful arts-based programs, and celebrate the excellence, innovation, value, and power of the arts of the South.

For more information, visit www.southarts.org.

Contact us at southernprize@southarts.org to inquire about hosting the Southern Prize for Visual Arts exhibition.

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KMAC is honored to host the 2025 Southern Prize and State Fellows Exhibition. We are grateful for the South Arts and all they do to recognize and elevate the arts across the South. KMAC would like to congratulate the nine finalists who are all remarkable artists and deserve the top prize.

KMAC Contemporary Art Museum is Louisville’s premier educational contemporary art museum in historic downtown Louisville on Museum Row. Through exhibitions, education, and outreach, KMAC works to fulfill our mission of connecting people to art and creative practice. For more information and to learn how you can support KMAC’s mission, visit kmacmuseum.org

The museum would like to give a very special thanks to the visionary support of Mary and Al Shands and the Charles M. and Joan R. Taylor Foundation who continue to support the museum in their memory. We are also grateful to former KMAC Executive Director Aldy Milliken for his continued support.

KMAC is supported by the Kentucky Arts Council, Louisville Fund for the Arts, the Windgate Foundation, members, and individual donations. Admission to KMAC is free for students and children thanks to the generous support of our donors.



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