



b.j.U.r.e

biennial juried underground railroad exhibition

Visual Journey: Enslavement, Underground Railroad, Freedom

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NORTHERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY
FINE ARTS CENTER—MAIN & THIRD FLOOR GALLERIES

JOSEPH GERARD SABATINO
PATERSON, NEW JERSEY

Anima
11 x 4³/₄ x 3 IN
MIXED MEDIA ON WOOD

Derived from that Latin word or more specifically the Italian noun, Anima directly translates into soul. The philosophy of Animism concentrates on a higher spiritual existence in nature, as well as inanimate objects, implying an alternate consciousness to the non-living. The particular work at hand evokes feelings of restraint and physical restriction by the usage of wrapped and nestled coverings of the fiber-glass casting tape. Underlying the layers are stainless steel scourers, grasping to free its coiled self from such suffocations. Both the casting tape and the metal wire can be viewed as aiding in the absorption of a possible wound but remain equally threatening by the material's potential to also induce abrasions and scarification. Does deciding to accept the terms of certain circumstances reap greater rewards or can risking any form of substitution of the unknown prevail?

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Visual Journey: Enslavement, Underground Railroad, Freedom

Northern Kentucky University Fine Arts Center invites you to attend the Inaugural Biennial Juried Underground Railroad Exhibition. The exhibition was curated by nationally acclaimed artist Michael Ray Charles with the theme "VISUAL JOURNEY: ENSLAVEMENT, UNDERGROUND RAILROAD, FREEDOM." This exhibition addresses national issues in a regional and local context. The Ohio River between Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky was a contested area for freedom. The Underground Railroad was the first sustained, grassroots, multi-racial, democratic social movement in American History.

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PATRICK MILLS, R
Blue Wall of Silence

"Blue Wall of Silence" is an extraordinary video. A quiet film, its silence is broken only sporadically by the recorded sounds of a low volume police radio. The video is an assemblage of police and security camera film shot on the occasion of Roger Owensby's death by suffocation in November 2000 in Cincinnati, Ohio. Mills' choice of scenes is significant; rather than including the very publicized footage of the struggle between Owensby and the Cincinnati Police, Mills relies on video taken before the violence erupted, while Owensby was still inside Sam's Sunoco, and a continuous view of the parked police cruiser holding the dying Owensby.

Frames are quartered and scenes run simultaneously in one, two, or sometimes all four windows. Scripted facts and questions appear in unframed windows to accompany the visual images. As stated, Mills' exploited none of the violent and controversial footage that the media exposed to the public nearly four years ago. This choice suggests that Mills was less concerned about Owensby's death and more concerned with the perception of a silent conspiracy among police during and following the incident. This theme is echoed in the title, and is also well demonstrated in the limited audio elements in the film. This is particularly well exemplified by the continuous footage of the quietly parked police car accompanied by running text informing the viewer repeatedly that Owensby is lying in the car dying. The viewer cannot see the victim nor can anything be heard until the recording of two police officers briefly becomes audible. Mills echoes the theme still further in the harsh geometric organization of the rectangular frames of images.

JOSEPH SABATINO
Anima

"Anima" presents a complex series of associations. The piece can be described as a stainless steel scouring pad wrapped with fiberglass casting tape. The tape resembles medicinal gauze, evoking most immediately a wrapped wound. Through this association the pad takes on a powerful persona as one injured. It reads as something precious to be handled gently. This intimacy and bondage also suggests its fetish-like nature.

The characteristic bristliness of the pad contradicts this sympathetic response and pushes the viewer to more negative asso-

ciations not only as a pot scrubber but also as drug paraphernalia. Its meaning then becomes nebulous, shifting between an object of pity to one of fear, to something sexual, subterranean, and chthonic.

DERRICK MEADS
Luck

In "Luck," Derrick Meads draws from several great art historical traditions from the Medieval *WHEEL OF FORTUNE* to the Surrealist construction. Meads' reliance on words also reflects contemporary engagement with linguistics and language as a social/cultural construct. Many contemporary artists like Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, and Xu Bing reveal a similar fascination with words and their meaning as well as language in general as a cultural construct. In "Luck" Meads questions social structures and assumptions about individuals in terms of the development of their identity and character, implying that identity is just a chance turn of the wheel.

SONYA A. LAWYER
On the Gulf

The power of Lawyer's work, like that of many of the other pieces in this exhibit, rests on its focus on dynamic contrast. As she stated: "On the Gulf" works through the binary relationship of "Presence" and "Absence," so that one of the most relevant aspects of her work is that which is not visible. Lawyer's photographs of the Gulf Shore reveal two views, one with a figure and one without. The empty seascape serves as a powerful reminder of presence through the footprints visible in the sand. Their inclusion references to past visitors; at the same time their position near the surf portends of the disappearance of these travelers. Transience, history, and time also become a key motives. Lawyer has related this work to an African myth of the Ibo. The footprints then take on a mythic presence, recalling these captives' legendary disappearance into the surf. Through this work time, transience and the ocean become metaphors for the Diaspora itself and the photographs take on a visual narrative or at least signify it.

CHRISTINA L. GIBBS
Take Flight

"Take Flight" is an installation comprised of a curtain of patchwork red strips suspended from a frame and hanging to the floor. As the title implies a strong wind

could buoy up these strips in a second. They are responsive to the atmosphere in other more subtle ways as well. In the late sixties Robert Morris produced installations comprised of large hanging sheets of felt. One of his concerns was the felt's potential for shifting form caused by changing climactic conditions of the gallery space. Gibbs' work functions similarly. "Take Flight" will respond to a breeze or even something as subtle as the ambient humidity.

Humans have associated the color red with life/death even in prehistory. The artist has suggested further the political symbolism of the color red and she explained that the work is a visual metaphor for the covert shift of power and the politics of oppression. "Take Flight" becomes a reminder of moral vigilance.

JOSE CARLOS TEIXEIRA
Take Me Home

"Take Me Home" is, as the artist Jose Carlos Teixeira explained, a paradox. In this respect it becomes a cinematic expression of Thomas Wolfe's declaration "You can't go home again." In fact, after viewing the film, the viewer may feel uncertain if he/she has ever been home in the first place, or even question what is home? Through this film Teixeira provides a synchronous visual and audio experience that rather than functioning as a metaphor, affects the viewer psychologically and physically in the tradition of *KOYAANISOATSU*. Sound and visuals conflict continuously. The viewer struggles to focus on visual elements and is continuously drawn to the fragmentary audio collage of voices, and music. The nocturnal ride through tunnels and freeways recreates an experience most individuals are familiar with but Teixeira's journey has no end and no beginning, and its cycle of repetition perpetuates the sensation of catapulting movement and competing sounds ad infinitum. The viewer experiences a journey whose lack of destination forces him/her into an intensely private internal odyssey filled with tension.