

2 Gibbes shows mine North Carolina upbringings in provocative, evocative ways

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“Black Girl Beauty, 2018,” an oil-on-canvas work by artist Beverly McIver, is among the approximately 50 works in “Beverly McIver: Full Circle,” a survey exhibition at the Gibbes Museum of Art. Collection of Matthew Polk and Amy Gould, Maryland/Provided

The art world has long mucked about in biographical matter to get to the nub of the art, as if it were an elusive, illuminating Holy Grail revealing a work’s deepest meaning.

BRIDGETTE MAYER GALLERY

But in the work of Beverly McIver, they can dispense with such pursuits. Her work spares you that sort of “Where’s Waldo” fact ferreting. It’s all right there on the canvas.

Whether lavishing saturated, layered brush strokes or tracing tentative, spare black lines, the Greensboro, N.C. native has long laid her own life bare in the name of her art. From poignant family dynamics to the exploration of racial identity, McIver’s work has centered on her own likeness to mine the depth and range of human emotion, from joy to despair, from frustration to serenity.

Up now at the Gibbes Museum of Art, a survey exhibition of McIver’s work, which runs through Aug. 6, reveals all the deeply felt candor of a decades-long practice. To borrow a phrase from the show’s title, “Beverly McIver: Full Circle,” the artist indeed comes full circle, channeling her personal experiences — and very person for that matter.

Organized by the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, the exhibition was curated by Kim Boganey, arts and culture manager at Museum of History and Art, Ontario, Canada, and was first shown at Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art in Winston-Salem, N.C.

Much about McIver is there for the viewing on the third-floor walls of the Gibbes Galleries 8 and 9. But for more context still, there is “Raising Renee,” the 2011 HBO documentary that chronicles the artist’s journey with her developmentally and intellectually disabled sister Renee. It also examines her upbringing in racially charged Greensboro, as one of three girls raised by a single mother.

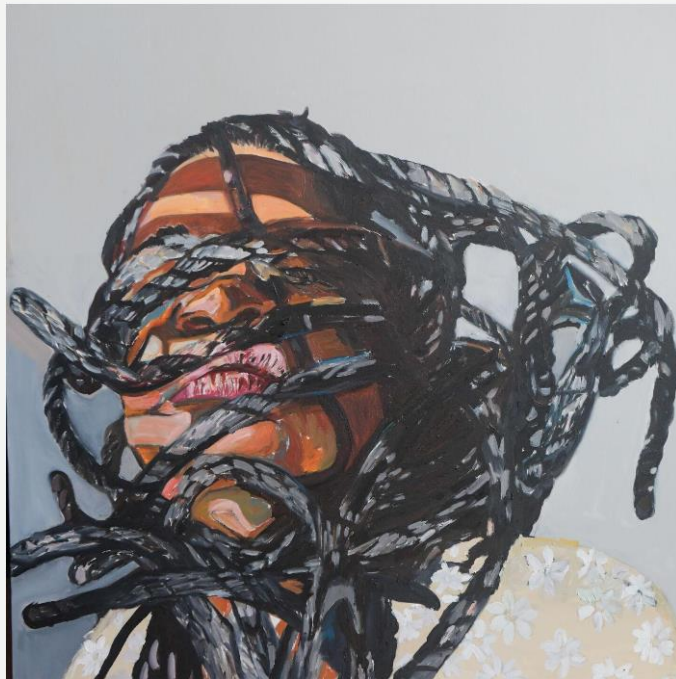
While not required viewing for the show, the film does shed light on some of the paradoxes at play in McIver’s richly and often vibrantly dipped paintbrush. Among them is how the artist took great pains to create portraits of her sister, “My Pretty Red Outfit, 1994,” only to then smear her sister’s features into a lashing blur. She then does the same to her own in other works.

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In “Loving in Black and White #5, 1999,” she rests her head on the lap of her white lover, her tranquil face covered in black clown paint, which many have identified for its unsettling association with minstrelsy, a choice that in the documentary the artist stands by, considering it part of the complexity of her identity.

In “Invisible Me, 1999,” the artist/subject dances with this partner, her smile all that remains in tact in the rubbed-through, painted-and-painted-upon face. Above them on a shelf is a tilted slice of watermelon.

As a high school student from an impoverish part of town, the artist was bussed from a housing project to a better-resourced school elsewhere in town, where she found solace in a clown class on offer. The black clown makeup is a through line of her self-portraiture, seen in works like “Clown Portrait, 2018.”



Artist Beverly Mclver's oil-on-canvas “Defiant, 2020” is among the works in the survey exhibition of the artist at the Gibbes Museum of Art through Aug. 6, 2023. Courtesy of Laura Lee Brown and Steve Wilson, 21c Museum Hotels/Provided

The “Dear God” series goes so far as to take the form of personal journal entries that relay the events of the day, like the election of President Barack Obama, accompanied by self-

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portraits. As the events of her family life unfold, her art reflects them: her mother's death, her once-estranged father's birthday, her own struggles with depression and collaborations with movement artist Eiko Otake.

It might also lead you, as it did me, to mull how a work can be at once laden with thick, rich oil paint, which dissipates in a blink into scant black lines forming figures on the white canvas beneath, as if forever reminding us that this is but paint on a surface, and this imagined world is finite.

Still, whether McIver coats dense dollops or pulls back, this striking artist's singular, beating heart is on full, fearless display, bearing its salves and its shame for all of us to see, perhaps so that we may be seen, too.

In Galleries 2 and 3, another North Carolina native forages in the personal, but with a notably different twist of the brush.

In "Damian Stamer: Ruminations," up through Oct. 15, we get a semblance of his hometown trappings: the North Carolina imagery through which he mines the human experience. But in a departure from his fellow artist, his are produced with an assist from A.I.

Yes, the topic dominating the headlines today is front and center in the art world, too, sufficiently raising all manner of head-wrecking questions that during its recent Art Charleston weeklong event, the Gibbes devoted a session to them.

Moderated by Chase Quinn, curator of education and programs at the Gibbes, the panel discussion included Stamer, along with two other digitally-focused artists — Charleston native CONCEPT RXCH and Carla Gannis, a Brooklyn-based artist with Appalachian roots whose show "wwwunderkammer" is up through July 15 at the Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art.

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As for Stamer's work: Lest visions of starkly digitized landscapes and grids cranked out with sterile precision dance from the realm of your not-so-artificial intelligence, you may want to think again. The artist renders rough-hewn, rural Southern scenes with a detailed brush, but he does so by using a text-to-image generator for the source imagery.

The resulting works are at once elegant and raw, vivid and charged. Merging realism and abstraction, they are punctuated by the detritus of rural North Carolina — its abandoned houses, its time-worn barns.

Thus in the large-scale, oil-on-panel "Horry County 31, 2023," a rendering of window through which one can see what appear to be loblolly pines ignites the somber, interior space from which we stand, going wild with scratches of white and patches of teal and peach and yellow.

In a more frenetic treatment still, "South Lowell 159, 122," cats light the doorway of a rustic wooden barn now a spectrum of charged strokes. In a series of three "collaborations," presumably with that partner being A.I. , the palette is emboldened by sweeping arcs of color, some identified as "Rembrandt blue," to portray the artist's photographic memory of a home heaped in junk.

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"South Lowell 159, 122" is on display at the Gibbes Museum of Art as part of the solo show, "Damian Stamer: Ruminations," through Oct 15, 2023.

Gibbes Museum of Art/Provided

Stamer has said in interviews that fellow North Carolina native McIver had encouraged him, and there are certainly affinities from one artist's vision to the other. Both imbue memories of the South with vivid, oil-based color, segueing from realism to representational, from the layered to the fleeting. Like McIver, at times Stamer stops short, the pulse on his panel abruptly truncated by unblinking white space.

Together, the shows make for a Gibbes foray that is as dynamic as it is probing, as anchored in painterly tradition as it is forward-moving, as personal for two artists from the state up the road as they are strikingly, truthfully, perhaps soothingly, universal.

Full article: https://www.postandcourier.com/features/2-gibbes-shows-mine-north-carolina-upbringings-in-provocative-evocative-ways/article_10595398-f66f-11ed-ad18-f7da81f9e171.html