Sanford Biggers’ paintings on found antique quilts contain a variety of visual references, some historical, others rooted in global popular culture. (For three years, in the 1990s, Biggers lived in Japan.) Central to the artist’s choice to use quilts as canvases is the oral tradition suggesting that these homespun textiles and their distinct patterns were once used as signposts for slaves traveling the Underground Railroad. For instance, star motifs may have been a reminder to escaping slaves to follow the North Star. Biggers’ paintings represent a dialogue with this storied past. The artist responds improvisationally to the work of unnamed artisans and, in the process, creates something entirely new.

In addition to amplifying the cultural and historical properties of quilts, Biggers explores global imagery in works that include video, sculpture, and performance. The artist makes reference to subjects as wide-ranging as Buddhism, sci-fi, astronomical charts, and sacred geometry (which he discovered through the influence of his older cousin, the artist John Biggers). In its entirety, Sanford Biggers’ work comprises an abundance of artistic methods and materials. His virtuosity allows him to create a rich, and sometimes cosmic, cultural mash-up, encouraging us to rethink what we believe we know about history, culture, and identity.

More about Sanford Biggers:
Born in Los Angeles, CA, the artist Sanford Biggers now lives and works in New York City, near Columbia University where he teaches. His work has been exhibited widely throughout the United States and around the world. In a 2011 interview with the artist Terry Adkins, Biggers spoke about his interest in symbols: “My experience tells me that symbols are, in fact, not universal, but our primordial impulses, needs, and desires are. In fact, I’ve been experimenting with whether or not symbols can be redefined, particularly with my Lotus and Cheshire pieces. How steadfast are symbols?”

For a more in-depth biography and to learn more about Sanford Biggers’ work, visit sanfordbiggers.com.

Weatherspoon’s concurrent exhibition, Baggage Claims (January 27-April 22, 2018), dovetails with key themes in Sanford Biggers’ works. The enslaved refugees from nineteenth century American plantations faced hardships, heartbreak, and dangers not unlike those of today’s global immigrants and refugees whose stories are told metaphorically through varied types of baggage.
For class discussion:

1. What cultural references and symbols do you recognize in Sanford Biggers’ paintings on antique quilts?

2. What relationships do you perceive between Biggers’ paintings and his video Moonrising?

3. In what ways do specific symbols, such as the lotus or the cross, communicate meaning in the era of globalization?

Related programs

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 8 PM
UNC 125TH LECTURE: COLSON WHITEHEAD
UNC School of Music

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 12 PM
NOON @ THE ‘SPOON PUBLIC TOUR

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 12 PM
TALK: DOCUMENTING SLAVERY AND FREEDOM
Gwen Erickson, Guilford College Archivist and Librarian, and Richard Cox, UNCG Digital Technology Consultant

THURSDAY, MARCH 1, 7 PM
BOOK DISCUSSION: COLSON WHITEHEAD’S “THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD”
Pre-event Reception 6:30 PM

THURSDAY, MARCH 15, 7 PM
ARTIST TALK: SANFORD BIGGERS
Elliott University Center, UNCG

THURSDAY, APRIL 5, 7 PM
AN EVENING OF POETRY
UNC MFA Creative Writing Program Students


This exhibition is organized by Dr. Emily Stamey, Curator of Exhibitions. The show is presented in collaboration with the UNCG School of Art as part of the Falk Visiting Artist program and with support from the North Carolina Arts Council, the UNCG College of Visual and Performing Arts’ and University Concert and Lecture Series.

This project was supported by the North Carolina Arts Council, a division of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, with funding from the National Endowment for the Arts. Support for this gallery guide comes from the Charlotte W. Toler Education Fund.

weatherspoon art museum
THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA
GREENSBORO

Tue-Wed-Fri: 10am–5pm; Thu: 10am–9pm; Sat-Sun 1pm–5pm; Closed Mondays
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