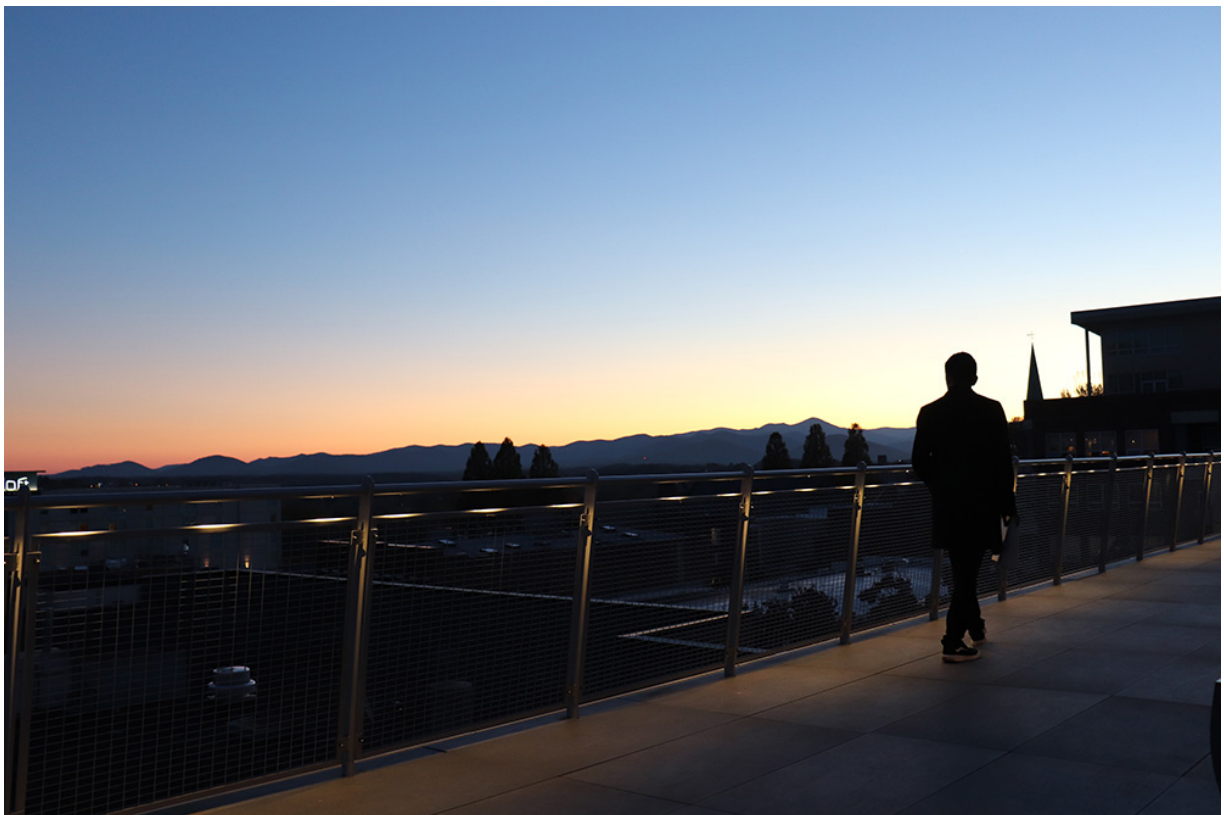


BURNAWAY

Look Homeward, Angel: The Asheville Art Museum Reopens

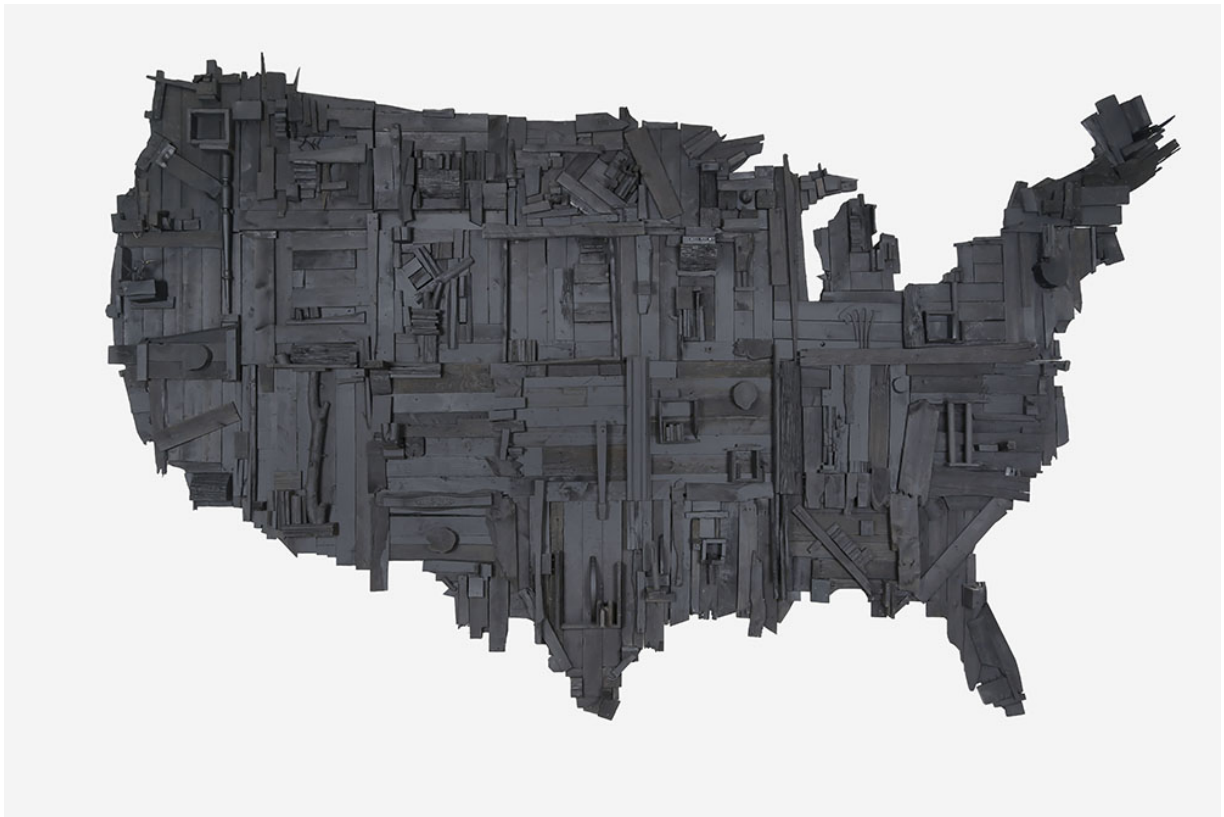
BY SUSAN LEE MACKEY
NOVEMBER 14, 2019



A view from the Asheville Art Museum's new rooftop terrace at sunset. (Image courtesy Asheville Art Museum.)

When I visited the Asheville Art Museum in July, there was only one work hanging on the wall. It was Wesley Clark's *My Big Black America*, an assemblage of black wood in the shape of the United States. In an interview with D.C. publication *East City Art*, Clark says, "[*My Big Black America*] was my tribute to the election of President Obama. It was the first time I, and many other Black Americans, said 'our' country, 'our' president. It was the first time we felt that we had a claim— an acknowledged claim. The aged and weathered nature of the wood brings a sense of time, of work-worn living, and speaks to founding of this country—the labor, the industrialization—it's all in there." In Asheville, the work hangs in the new Windgate Foundation Atrium on the first floor of the museum. Clark's invocation of nature and labor makes it feel particularly at home in this museum located in the Appalachian mountains. Following my visit, Maya Lin's sculptural wall relief *Pin River—French Broad River* was installed across from Clark's *America*, followed by the installation of Ken Fandell's *The Sky Above Here (Asheville, NC)* nearby. For his work, Fandell wandered through Asheville photographing the sky during different points in the day and in varying weather conditions. The result is a three-story photomontage of the Asheville sky. This potent trifecta—Clark's quintessential American work, Lin's homage to the local river, and Fandell's portrait of the Asheville sky—exemplifies the museum's dedication to contextualizing local art alongside mainstream American art of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It serves as a precursor for what will follow throughout the museum: an ongoing dialogue between local and national art.

After initially being scheduled to reopen in the summer of 2019, the Asheville Art Museum will finally reopen its newly renovated Pack Square building on November 14. The museum closed its doors in November 2016 to undergo a twenty-four-million-dollar renovation and moved to a temporary location on Biltmore Avenue, where it continued presenting exhibitions, educational programs, and outreach. The Pack Square building has since gained a new restaurant, shop, rooftop balcony, education center, and gallery space. The changes represent a massive undertaking that has been under way for at least two decades.



Wesley Clark, *My Big Black America*, 2015; stain, spray paint, latex, and salvaged wood, 192 by 120 by 14 inches. © Wesley Clark. (Photo by Lawrence W. Miner Jr. Image courtesy Asheville Art Museum.)

During the period of the museum's renovation, donors have been enthusiastically adding works to its permanent collection. Since late 2016, 1,274 works of art have been added to the collection. Notable additions include a cache of 332 photographs by the Magnum photographer Bruce Davidson, a sculpture titled *Wing I* by Black Mountain College artist Kenneth Snelson, and an Alexander Calder gouache.

Clark's *America* is hardly alone in its overt politics. The museum's Collector's Circle has a demonstrated record of acquiring artworks that make progressive political statements. In 2018, at their most recent Acquisition Dinner, the Collector's Circle voted to acquire works including Gina Adams's quilt *The Treaty with the Cherokee, 1791* and Roger Shimomura's painting *The Lineup*. Shimomura is known for his graphic paintings that depict the racist treatment Japanese Americans endured in the 1940s. *The Lineup* shows prisoners waiting in an internment camp; Shimomura and his family were detained in one such camp from 1942 through 1944. Adams, an interdisciplinary American artist of Ojibwe, Lakota, and European descent, sews select texts from the American Indian Treaties—agreements which were routinely broken by the United States—onto antique quilts. In an interview with Hyperallergic, Adams said, "My work is both a political

statement and an apology.” She continued, “Inherited trauma is real. We have a lot of healing to do, and we can’t do it alone. We have to do it collectively.”

To accommodate their blooming permanent collection, the museum expansion includes additional gallery space. This includes new galleries designed for rotating exhibitions and regular refreshes of the permanent collection. Broadly speaking, three themes emerge from the collection: time and place, interdisciplinary dialogue and collaboration, and experiments with material and form. Museum staff are arranging the collection deliberately to suggest connections between the local and national, historical and contemporary, dissolving the hierarchy that divides craft and fine art.





Ruth Asawa, *Untitled*, circa 1954; iron wire, 30 by 24 by 24 inches. Black Mountain College Collection, gift of Lorna Blaine Halper. © Estate of Ruth Asawa. Image courtesy the Asheville Art Museum.

Importantly, the museum’s definition of “American” art(ists) within the permanent collection is flexible and inclusive. I asked Lola Clairmont—a former curatorial assistant at the museum who, since my visit, has taken a position at Asheville’s Center for Craft—if the the museum will make any gestures that nod to the ethnic diversity of the region and the contributions made by immigrant artists. She said that, following the Whitney’s lead, the Asheville Art Museum’s new labels will include the country where an artist was born, not just their current nationality, making clear to visitors that “American” and, for example, “born in Germany” are not mutually exclusive conditions. Ethnic and national diversity are not recent phenomena in this region: the legacy of Black Mountain College, which attracted European artists fleeing the encroaching Nazi regime in the 1930s, is largely defined by the contributions of immigrants. Many Black Mountain College artists—Anni and Josef Albers (born in Germany), Willem de Kooning (born in the Netherlands), Dorothea Rockburne (born in Canada)—were not Asheville natives yet are integral to the cultural history of the city and the broader region.

While walking through the permanent collection gallery, Clairmont directed me to a window that looks out over Pack Square, the center of downtown Asheville and site of the Vance Monument, a granite obelisk that honors the Confederate general and former North Carolina governor Zebulon Baird Vance. To address this contested space, the museum will include a special digital exhibition about the works in the collection that are related to the history of the square.



Installation view of *Appalachia Now! An Interdisciplinary Survey of Contemporary Art in Southern Appalachia*.

Image courtesy Asheville Art Museum.

The museum's reopening prominently features the opening of *Appalachia Now! An Interdisciplinary Survey of Contemporary Art in Southern Appalachia*, on view through February 3. The exhibit, organized by New York-based curator Jason Andrew, includes fifty artists across North and South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, and Virginia, with focus on Asheville as a "nucleus of creativity." In addition to fifty-four studio visits Andrew and Clairmont made across the region in preparation for the exhibition, the museum also launched a free open call to which over 400 artists applied. The artists who were ultimately selected vary in nearly every regard, including Asheville-based book artist Clarissa Sligh, whose career spans thirty years; John Henry Gloyne, a tattoo artist of Pawnee, Osage, and Cherokee descent; and Manda Remmen, a Southern transplant from Colorado who uses embroidery to critique traditions of patriarchal land ownership. The exhibition and the museum as a whole destroy the assumption that people, and art, from the South are homogeneous. Rather, the South is home to a stunningly diverse range of artists and art-making practices, and the new Asheville Art Museum celebrates the varied meanings of *American*, *Southern*, and *art*.

The Asheville Art Museum reopens today, Thursday, November 14, 2019.
Appalachia Now! An Interdisciplinary Survey of Contemporary Art in Southern Appalachia remains on view at the museum through February 3, 2020.

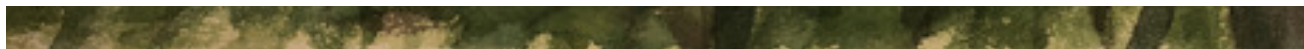
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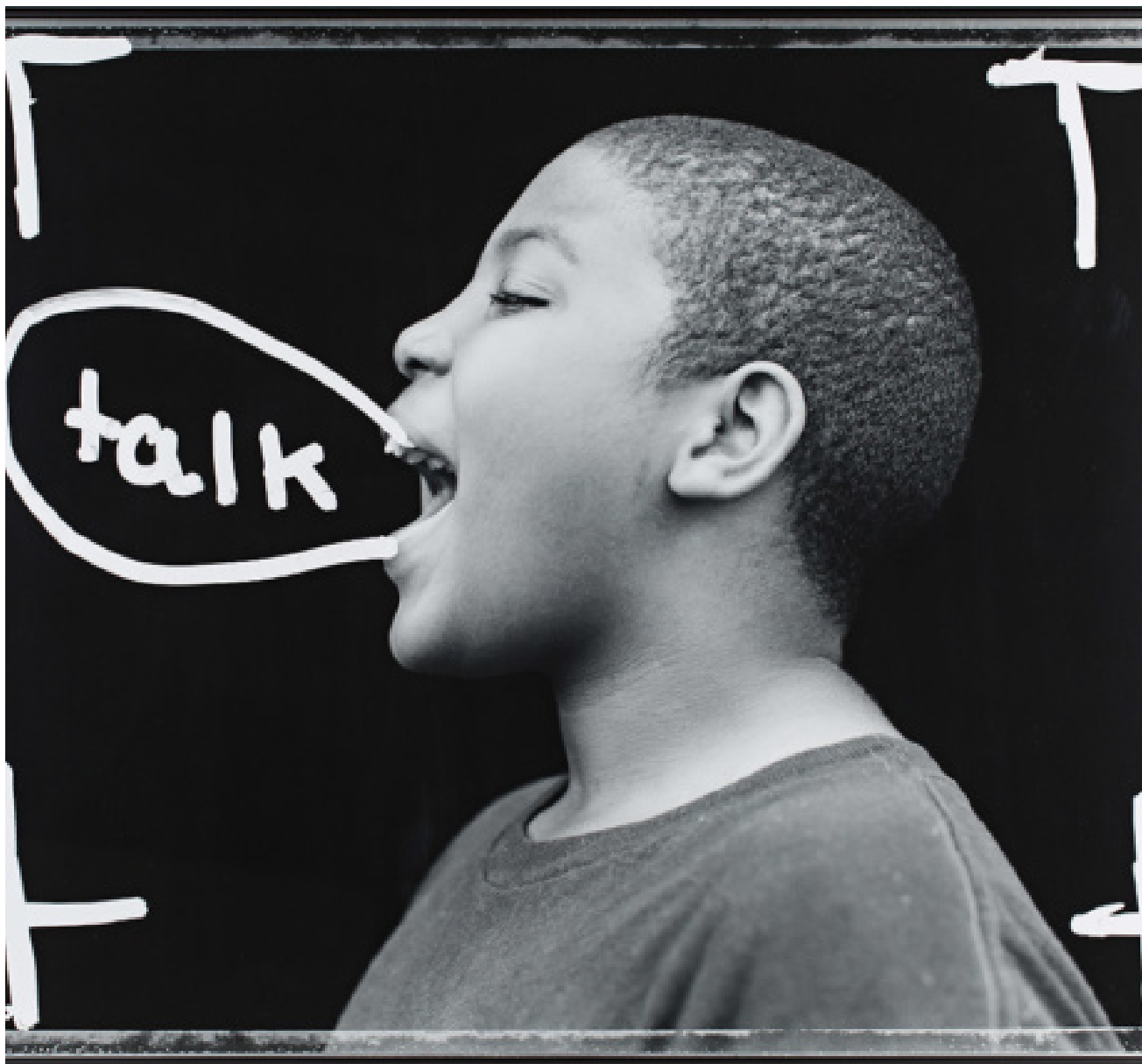




CYNTHIA FARNELL AND DAN POWELL: *REFUGE*

CLOSE LOOK

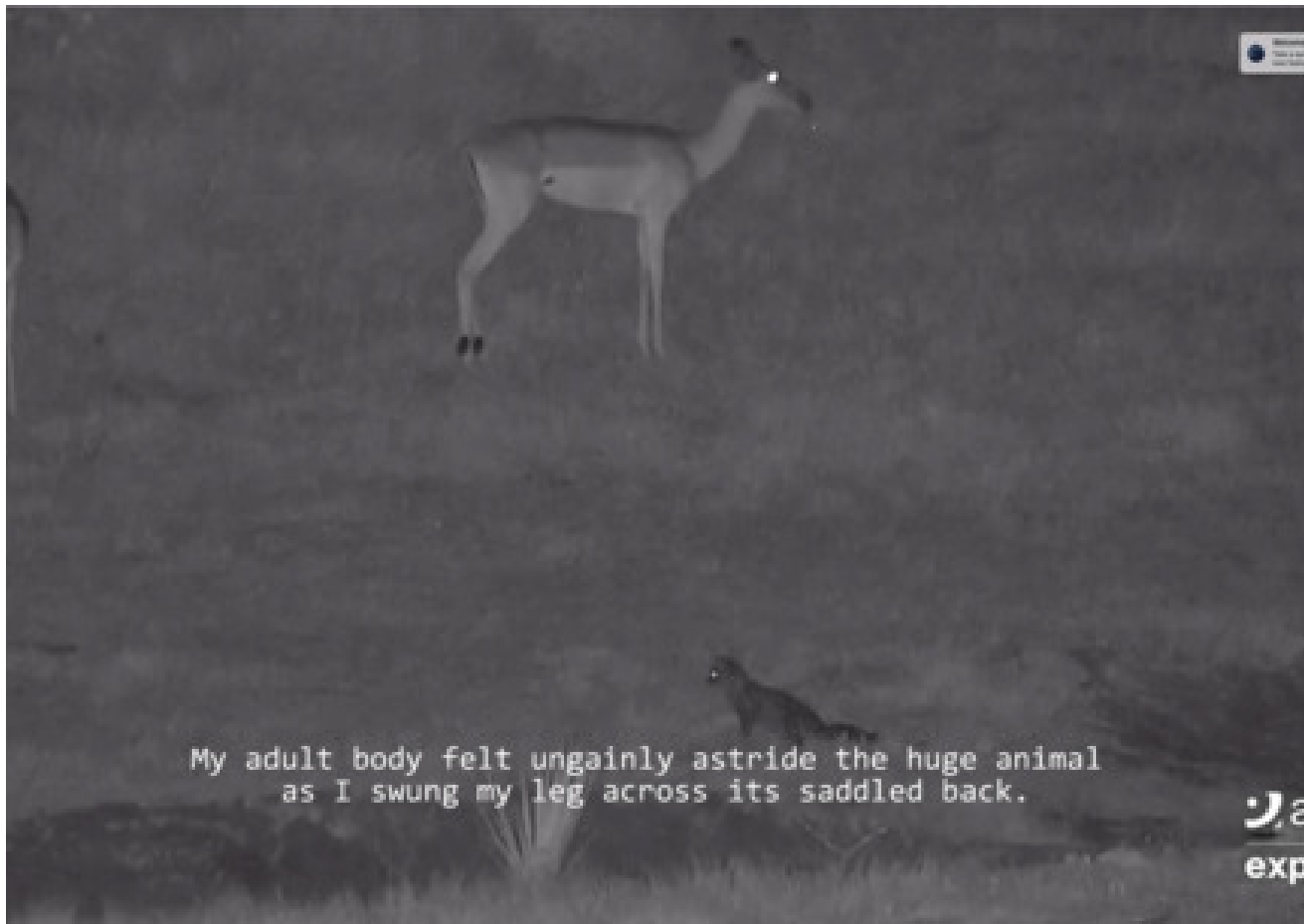
Burnaway takes a Close Look at *Refuge*, a dual exhibition by Cynthia Farnell and Dan Powell at Poem 88 in Atlanta.



CALLS FOR ARTISTS: JUNE 2021

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Burnaway's monthly round-up of calls for artists, and other opportunities.



HORSEGIRL

MOOD RING

Artist Parker Thornton investigates the uneasy intimacy of the modern relationship between human bodies and nature through visual and written storytelling.

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