

The Stars Fell on Alabama: Southern Black Renaissance

12 September - 26 October 2024

Opening reception | Thursday 12 September 6-8pm



Louisiana Pettway Bendolph | Mary L. Bennett | Richard Dial | Thornton Dial | Lonnie Holley | Ronald Lockett | Joe Minter | Rita Mae Pettway | Mose Tolliver

The Stars Fell on Alabama: Southern Black Renaissance is a fleeting glimpse of a cultural phenomenon too large for any museum or gallery to hold. The exhibition highlights works produced between the 1980s to present day by eight artists from Alabama whose talents are emblematic of an expansive cultural revolution. The vast majority of these artists' peers created works that were seen by too few eyes in settings that were overwhelmingly non-institutional, non-commercial, and perhaps intractably local. The focus on Alabama, particularly on the Birmingham metro area, is a reflection of the state's role as epicentre and unintentional but logical host for a confluence of artists, five of whom continue their work today. The exhibition is produced in collaboration with MARCH. Ranging from mixed media painting to assemblage sculptures and quilts, the works in the show come directly from artists and artists' estates, as well as definitive private collections from the region.

In the month of November 1833, the stars fell on Alabama. The mass witnessing of a Leonid meteor shower burned a deep impression in the memory of Alabama's denizens and ultimately gave rise to a book and popular songs, ultimately earning an official place on every motorist's license plate.

Meteor shower as metaphor: A meteor shower is a celestial

event in which a number of meteors are observed to radiate, or originate, from one point in the night sky.

On April 4, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's assassination sent a shockwave of grief through the country: a mixture of fear, anger, and a sense of profound and irreversible loss. Once again, a collective response slowly began to ferment among the South's Black artists who increasingly expressed themselves through the creation and public display of highly sophisticated and often abstracted works of art. The visual equivalent of jazz, blues, gospel, and a touch of rock n' roll, these artworks spilled out from private spaces: cemeteries, parlors, and backyards, into the front yard and along the road during a heightening flowering of creativity. The environments, dubbed "yard shows," were constructed across the region at vastly different scales and using a host of aesthetics: humble, complex, and metaphoric monuments to shared cultural identity, finally and resolutely displayed for all to see.

*My heart beat like a hammer
My arms wound around you tight
And stars fell on Alabama last night*

Alabama was the epicenter of this creative flowering. The

collector and scholar William S. Arnett posited that visiting Alabama in the 1980s was akin to visiting Florence, Italy at the height of the Renaissance. In contrast, Alabama and the larger South's Black renaissance was not invigorated by an influx of wealthy and competitive patrons, but propelled by the near-simultaneous need to articulate shared experiences, thoughts, and feelings that had been nearly silenced by the realities of chattel slavery, Jim Crow laws, and segregation.

Notes to Editors

About Edel Assanti

Edel Assanti was founded in 2010 by Jeremy Epstein and Charlie Fellowes. Established in London, the gallery works with international artists whose practices engage with the social, cultural or political realities. Edel Assanti's programme's tendency towards interdisciplinary, research-led work demonstrates how artists are uniquely positioned to witness and distill the complex narratives that define our era.

Having been located in London's Fitzrovia since 2014, in 2022 Edel Assanti opened 4,000 square foot gallery in a renovated listed building on Little Titchfield Street. The gallery's premises play host to a dynamic events programme in parallel to gallery exhibitions: talks, performances, screenings and live music. Edel Assanti's digital presence encompasses a multi-chapter series of artist video interviews, alongside short films published to accompany exhibitions.

The gallery hosts an annual gallery residency, giving overseas colleagues an opportunity to present an exhibition in London. We also produce biannual expansive group presentations addressing subjects of cultural and societal urgency.

In 2021 Edel Assanti founded London Gallery Weekend (LGW), an annual celebration of London's diverse gallery community bringing together 140 contemporary London galleries. Now in its third year, the gallery remains at LGW's helm. Chief amongst LGW's initiatives is an ambitious partnership with Art Fund enhancing the relationship between London's galleries and regional museums across the UK, via a research focus group and a travel bursary scheme for regional curators.

Contact Us

For further press information and high-res images please contact: press@edelassanti.com

Social Media

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