

Alabama, Y'all

"The souvenir is destined to be forgotten; its tragedy lies in the death of memory, the tragedy of all autobiography, and the simultaneous erasure of the autograph."

Susan Stewart, *On Longing*

We are all collectors in some fashion, and we all have collections that we hold dear. These collections stem from a desire to preserve the memory of authentic lived experiences, and their stories lend evidence to our existence in this world. Detached from us personally, our collections are destined to outlive us, to become anonymous. The once treasured family photographs for instance, never properly identified, become at best clues to the fashions of yesteryear.

For the last decade, I have been collecting images and objects from the Alabama landscape, or rather evidence of human interaction within the landscape. Generations of my family have lived in Alabama, and I can drive around the state visiting locations that are a testament to this cherished history. Alabama holds an undeniable pull of loss and memory. Visiting my grandparents and aunts and uncles in Tuskegee with sight-seeing detours to the Natural Bridge of Alabama or Huntsville Space and Rocket Center, even the house where my maternal great grandmother lived or the pond where my dad was baptized, were regular pilgrimages – adventures of my childhood. These personal journeys to Alabama over the past several years have been a continuation of the childhood road trips across the state with my parents – a reliving of those carefree moments and a celebration of time spent with loved ones.

My assemblages are produced from an array of my collections, and they all reference Alabama in some way. As with the photographs, chance is ever-present throughout these sculptural works because the fragments were collected as the opportunity arose. In the studio surrounded by objects, I intuitively see pairs and patterns from a design aesthetic, and I hear fragments of old tales beginning to create contemporary stories. My inspirations are always the found objects themselves influenced by the elements of design and often other artists' practices, like that of William Christenberry and Ronald Lockett.

At times these works also speak to the socio-political climate within our country as suggested by the inclusion of the American flag and other icons of US culture in various states of decay. In 2020 everything boiled to the surface, and unfortunately the events we were presented with represent nothing new, and so the cycle of memory and history continues.

The goal of my work is to prompt viewers to think about memories of family and place, while also considering how the lack of memory influences today's cultural climate within the United States.

Patrick Owens