

Let Us Now Praise Famous Soil: Exploring Alabama's Black Belt

**Photographs by Chip Cooper, Robin McDonald and Jerry Siegel
Sculptures by Michael Vaughn Sims**

January 7-March 23, 2016

“So far as I can learn, the term [Black Belt] was first used to designate a part of the country which was distinguished by the colour of the soil. The part of the country possessing this thick, dark, and naturally rich soil was, of course, the part of the South where the slaves were most profitable, and consequently they were taken there in the largest numbers. Later, and especially since the war, the term seems to be used wholly in a political sense — that is, to designate the counties where the black people outnumber the white. - Booker T. Washington, 1901



The Georgine Clarke Alabama Artists Gallery is open Monday-Friday from 8:00am-5:00pm.
For more information, please contact Gallery Director Elliot Knight at 334-242-4076 Ext. 250 or Elliot.Knight@arts.alabama.gov

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1. Jerry Siegel. *Mini-bike*, Autaugaville.
2. Jerry Siegel. *Shooter*, Selma.
3. Jerry Siegel. *Gametime*, Selma.
4. Jerry Siegel. *Hunter*, Perry County.
5. Jerry Siegel. *Pageant*, Selma.
6. Jerry Siegel. *Boy and dog*, Perry Co.
7. Jerry Siegel. *Clean and cut*, Selma.
8. Jerry Siegel. *Outfield blues*, Marion.
9. Jerry Siegel. *Would Jesus steal worms*, Selma.
10. Chip Cooper. *The Club*, Uniontown.
11. Chip Cooper. *Remains*, Dallas Co.
12. Chip Cooper. *Lady at night*, Selma.
13. Chip Cooper. *Edmund Pettus Bridge*, Selma.
14. Chip Cooper. *Carlisle Hall*, Perry Co.
15. Chip Cooper. *Rose petals*, Marion.
16. Chip Cooper. *Spanish moss*, Dallas Co.
17. Chip Cooper. *Cross*, Thomaston.
18. Chip Cooper. *Barrinean Swamp*, Sumter Co.
19. Chip Cooper. *Street scene*, Greensboro.
20. Chip Cooper. *Church*, Newbern.
21. Chip Cooper. *Store front*, Forrest Home.
22. Robin McDonald. *Burnt Corn*, Monroe/Conecuh Co.
23. Robin McDonald. *Greensboro City Cemetary*, Hale Co.
24. Robin McDonald. *Kring's Coffin Shop*, Gainesville.
25. Robin McDonald. *Leaning Silo*, Marion Junction.
26. Robin McDonald. *Perry County Courthouse*, Marion.
27. Robin McDonald. *Grave Monument of Emma L. Reeves (1841-1857)*, Dayton Cemetery, Marengo Co.
28. Robin McDonald. *Abandoned Boxcar*, Pennington.
29. Robin McDonald. *Cotton field*, Tyler.
30. Robin McDonald. *Bibb Co. Courthouse Square*, Centreville.
31. Robin McDonald. *Live Oak Cemetery*, Selma.
32. Jerry Siegel. *Venus*, Perry Co.
33. Jerry Siegel. *Painted bus*, Dallas Co.
34. Jerry Siegel. *Freeman's*, Marion.
35. Jerry Siegel. *Warehouse*, Perry Co.
36. Jerry Siegel. *Adler's*, Selma.

Sculptures by Michael Vaughn Sims

Chip Cooper

Chip Cooper was the Director of Photography for the University of Alabama for 33 years and is now artist in residence in the Honors College, as well as a faculty member in Arts & Sciences.

He received his BA from the University in 1972, followed by post-graduate work in photography.

“Most of my career has been devoted to photographing a sense of place.

Through the numerous shows and photography books I have done, I have tried to define the South. I have used landscapes, details, and abstracts, as well as people, to help tell the story. I have just completed a book, *Habana Vieja*, about Old Havana, Cuba.

Through that process, I discovered that Walker Evans, before he did his famous Alabama work, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, photographed in Havana, developing his style for defining sense of place.

He has been an inspiration for much of my work.”

CHIP COOPER - 2011

Robin McDonald

Robin McDonald is an independent photographer and graphic designer living in Leeds, Alabama. Since 1991, he has been the designer and chief photographer for Alabama Heritage magazine. In 2003, the University of Alabama Press published his first book, *Heart of a Small Town: Photographs of Alabama Towns*.

The photographs in this exhibition are from his recently published book, *Visions of the Black Belt: A Cultural Survey of the Heart of Alabama*, which was a collaboration between Robin and author Valerie Pope Burnes and was published by the University of Alabama Press in the fall of 2015 to coincide with the tenth anniversary of Black Belt Treasures.

Jerry Siegel

Jerry Siegel is an artist who observes, seeing the ordinary and revealing what makes it special. The things we look right past in our hurried daily routines, Siegel captures through the lens of his camera. Throughout his artistic career, Jerry Siegel has sought to photograph what his eyes see and what his heart connects to. Renowned photographer, the late Arnold Newman said about Siegel's work, “This is how it should be done. This is not only the work of a professional but the work of an artist.”

Siegel was born and raised in Selma, AL, and graduated from the Art Institute of Atlanta. His first monograph, *FACING SOUTH*, Portraits of Southern Artists was published by the University of Alabama Press in 2011, and features portraits of 100 Southern artists.

This body of work has been featured in solo exhibitions at 6 Museums in Alabama, Georgia and Louisiana. His next book, *Black Belt Color*, due in 2016, focuses his attentions on documenting the unique, cultural landscape of the South, concentrating on the Black Belt region of Alabama.

Michael Vaughn Sims

In the Alabama Blackbelt, there is always the sense that the time of real prosperity is gone forever into the distant past; yet the land is a perpetual garden of Eden, albeit an Eden dotted everywhere with relics of injustice, violence and neglect. Everywhere I see roots and vines climbing eroded banks, abandoned buildings and huge trees. It is as if our cultural legacy and memory are just lying in pieces on the ground, waiting to be picked up and put into a shoebox; or that they are overgrown with a thick mat of vines and briars, preserved and obscured at the same time, held in a state of suspended, picturesque decay. The trees and the soil itself seem to be deeply imprinted by those who once lived here, like fossils. If one doesn't keep moving or keep the vegetation cut back, he or she may find himself enmeshed by the wild growth emerging from the rich land.

Michael is a painter and visual artist living in Lowndes County. Sims holds a BFA in Theatre Technology from Auburn University and an MFA from Yale School of Drama. His work has been collected by the City of Prattville, the Alabama Historical Commission, Auburn University Montgomery School of Nursing, Jackson Hospital Foundation and numerous private collections.