



Where You Come From Is Gone

Jared Ragland + Cary Norton

October 18 - January 2, 2019

Where You Come From is Gone explores the importance of place, the passage of time, and the political dimensions of remembrance through the historical wet-plate collodion photographic process. Created on the eve of Alabama's bicentennial, Ragland and Norton's large scale images seek to make known a history that has largely been eliminated and make visible the erasure that occurred in the American South between Hernando DeSoto's first exploitation of native peoples in the 16th century and Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Act 300 years later.

Using a 100-year-old field camera and a custom portable darkroom tailored to Ragland's 4x4 truck, the two photographers journeyed more than 1,500 miles across 20 Alabama counties to locate, visit, and photograph indigenous sites. Yet the melancholy landscapes hold no obvious vestiges of the Native American cultures that once inhabited the sites; what one would hope to document, hope to preserve, hope to remember, is already gone. Instead, Ragland and Norton deliberately document absence and seek to render the often invisible layers of culture and civilization, creation and erasure, and the man-made and natural character of the landscape. The result is a body of landscape photographs in which the subject matter seems to exist outside of time, despite the fact that the project is explicitly about the passage of time, the slippage of memory, and the burying of history. While the relative emptiness of the landscapes elicits a sense of loss or absence, the beauty of the photographs conveys a continued sacrality of the space and puts viewers in touch with history and memory, helping us not only to imagine what may have been but also how best to honor what is, and what has been lost.

The artists' deliberate use of the demanding, antiquated wet-plate process strategically highlights the materiality and physicality of both process and photograph, simultaneously uncovering a forgotten history and creating an archival object commemorating the sites photographed. The tintypes are digitally enlarged to 40x50 inch prints to impress upon viewers the magnitude of the landscape and all that transpired there.

Victims of violence, warfare, and cultural displacement, the Eastern Woodland tribes were forced to uninhabit the sites that Ragland and Norton photograph. Conversely, these images seek to encourage viewers to responsibly reinhabit the space rather than continuing on as uninformed, uninvolved residents. At this current moment in American life, the act of remembering is political and can have power, particularly when a polarizing president places a portrait of Andrew Jackson in the Oval Office and whose policies endanger the environment, dispute Native American land rights, and further disenfranchise marginalized citizens. In this way, *Where You Come From is Gone* works as a type of subtle activism by focusing on personal and collective memory-making. Through reasoned confrontation with our history and resistance toward (willful or accidental) cultural amnesia, these photographs provide a defense against the sort of ignorance that threatens democracy and enables totalitarianism and cautions us to be vigilant in guarding against altering, erasing, or "forgetting" our past.

– Catherine Wilkins, Ph.D., University of South Florida, 2017

The Georgine Clarke Alabama Artists gallery is located on the first floor of the RSA Tower in downtown Montgomery. The gallery is open Monday-Friday from 8:00am-5:00pm.