



Thenceforward, and Forever Free

August 22 - December 22, 2012



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*Thenceforward, and Forever Free* is presented as part of Marquette University's Freedom Project, a yearlong commemoration of the Sesquicentennial of the Civil War. The Project explores the many histories and meanings of emancipation and freedom in the United States and beyond. The exhibition features seven contemporary artists whose work deals with issues of race, gender, privilege, and identity, and more broadly conveys interpretations of the notion of freedom. Artists in *Thenceforward* are: Laylah Ali, Willie Birch, Michael Ray Charles, Gary Simmons, Elisabeth Subrin, Mark Wagner, and Kara Walker. Essayists for the exhibition catalogue are Dr. A. Kristen Foster, associate professor, Department of History, Marquette University, and Ms. Kali Murray, assistant professor, Marquette University Law School.

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# Art and the American Paradox

## A. Kristen Foster, Ph.D.

Associate Professor  
Department of History  
Marquette University

On December 1, 1862—before signing the Emancipation Proclamation, before the end of the Civil War, and before the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment—President Abraham Lincoln sent his Annual Message to Congress. Rarely losing sight of either the nation’s debt to its collective past or its obligation to future generations, Lincoln’s writing often tended to the inspired and poetic. On this day, lifting the Civil War above sectional debates, his annual message conveyed to Congress its grand mission: “In *giving* freedom to the *slave*,” he wrote, “we *assure* freedom to the *free*—honorable alike in what we give, and what we preserve. We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best hope of earth.” While Lincoln’s public commitment to the death of slavery remained unclear in 1862, he made plain the fact that the existence of slavery jeopardized all forms of freedom in the United States. And the Union’s exceptional mission to protect freedom, he argued, was in essence “the last best hope of earth.” Already by 1862, the United States boasted a singular relationship with the concept of freedom.

While the colonial past bequeathed a mixed legacy of freedom, indentured servitude, and slavery to America; the American Revolution promised a new inheritance. The centrality of the concept of freedom to America’s identity grew in the pamphlets, sermons, and speeches of the independence movement. As the founding generation struggled to create a viable political movement, its members sought to shape a unique identity and a usable past. Americans were, they argued, freeborn Englishmen suffering under the crippling tyranny of a cruel monarch who plotted (with his aristocratic minions) to deny these honest colonials their God-given rights. The new United States, they trumpeted, would stand for liberty, for freedom.

Not surprisingly, however, the concept also took root and wing in communities without clear access to the halls of power. Ordinary workingmen, for instance, long denied a voice in government because they lacked property, argued that their freedom included the same right that wealthy men had to govern themselves. Their muscular promises to protect this freedom rang in port cities from Boston to Charleston. Women, too, began to think anew about their roles and their freedoms, using the Revolution’s concepts of liberty and equality to build a rights movement in the nineteenth century. And, of course, the continued existence of chattel slavery pointed a righteous finger at all American claims to liberty. Talk as they might about this new birth of freedom, the nation’s first lawmakers danced with the devil as they protected not the freedom

of the enslaved but the rights of slaveholders to their human property. While Pennsylvania organized the first abolition society in 1775 with the revealing moniker the Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage, it would take the rendering of the union eighty-six years later to begin the long process of securing black freedom. With some 450,000 enslaved men and women in the thirteen American colonies when the war began in 1775, the fact that the 1790 census shows almost 700,000 slaves living in the United States, suggests that the institution was alive and well in spite of American claims to liberty.

The American paradox, the symbiotic birth and growth of freedom and racial slavery, had been protected and perpetuated by the very men who, as Samuel Johnson had written in 1775, yelped the loudest for liberty. The legacy of this paradox has been difficult to correct. The struggle between racism, inequality, and injustice on the one hand and equality, justice, and freedom on the other have shaped American history and have defined the process by which the United States perpetually struggles to live up to the high ideals set forth in 1776. The problematic history of American freedom, thus, proves fertile ground for the artist. The tension between America's claim to transcendent freedom and the many ways Americans have both compromised and realized it between 1776 and the present, inspires the seven artists whose work is gathered here for the exhibit *Thenceforward, and Forever Free*.

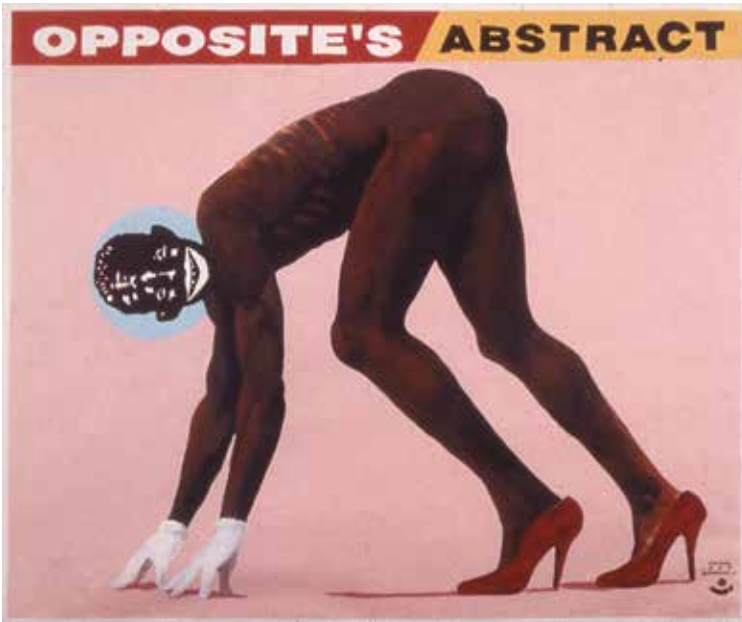
Artist Laylah Ali may employ the whimsical quality of cartoon characters to draw viewers into her work, but upon closer examination viewers confront themes of racial, gender, and class subjugation, oppression, abuse, and power imbalance without the aid of familiar contexts and figures. Because the actors are unfamiliar, their humanity even uncertain, the viewer must use her or his own values to contextualize the scene. In Ali's work, *Untitled*, 2005 (not pictured in the catalogue but included in the exhibition), we see violence; but how do we make sense of it? Is the dominant figure

male and the subordinate one female? Is he black and she white? Her work *Untitled*, 2006-2007 (pictured on page 14) is more direct: the dominant figure's phallic foot keeps the prostrate female figure in a state of subjugation. Laylah Ali's ink and pencil drawings unsettle and shake us out of our complacency. She leaves us wondering if we may claim, even now, to be a truly free society.

In many ways, the social and political struggles that consumed Americans between 1776 and 1861, dividing the United States North and South in the process, attempted to articulate more clearly the meaning of freedom in the young country. Yet as antislavery forces grew in the antebellum North, and states' rights advocates gained momentum in the South, the questions unresolved at the nation's founding begged answers. When these answers could not be found in the halls of Congress or the Supreme Court, the guns of war had their day. While its causes are complex, the Civil War remains a powerful symbol of America's tangled relationship with slavery, and the northern victory stands as an equally powerful symbol of its end.

Kara Walker has taken pages from an 1866 book, *Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War*, and has annotated the drawings with her own artistic additions. In the series, she employs the popular nineteenth-century medium of the silhouette to juxtapose artistic commentary on historical prints. What had been a delicate parlor art for Victorians, becomes a form of social commentary about race, slavery, freedom, and inequality.

Her silhouetted African Americans in *Scene of McPherson's Death, Deadbrook after the Battle of Ezra's Church*, and *An Army Train* are almost playful as they look on or pass by the devastation of the Civil War. These figures have a kind of detached omnipotence; as if the Civil War itself, a cataclysm for (white) America, had little to do with African America. Looking critically at *Buzzard's Roost Pass*, the disembodied parts of a black woman—her



**Michael Ray Charles**

American, b. 1967  
*(Forever Free) Opposite's Abstract*, 2001  
 Acrylic latex and copper penny on paper  
 60 x 72"  
 Collection of Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York

head, her hands, and her breasts—ask the viewer to confront her private devastation against the backdrop of Sherman's Atlanta campaign in 1864. What did the Union victory at this juncture really mean for her? Exposing emotionally detached silhouettes, Walker's work questions our national telling of the Civil War and its many battles.

By the late nineteenth century, although the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments had ended slavery and then enfranchised black men, American culture perpetuated a racial caste system that continued to mock American claims to freedom. Through Jim Crow laws, racial terrorism, and the creation of new cultural stereotypes, black freedom remained elusive well into the twentieth century. In his colorful work reminiscent of Victorian-era vaudeville or circus posters, artist Michael Ray Charles uses late nineteenth-century popular culture images like Mammy and Sambo to interrogate definitions of entertainment and the notion of social progress. In his work *(Forever Free) Opposite's Abstract*,

Charles paints a portrait that might have been familiar at the height of the popular Victorian-era "coon song." A garishly smiling Sambo character promising not to talk (or confront his oppression), sings and dances "24/7." Charles, thus, urges his viewer to consider the nature of freedom in modern American society where slavery is long gone but its legacies of racism and social stereotyping have created their own shackles.

The three works by artist Willie Birch draw us into the contemporary everyday lives and public celebrations of African Americans in New Orleans, a city with a rich and complex racial and cultural heritage. These black-and-white images reflect a vibrant community. In the post-Hurricane Katrina piece *Black Boys*, Birch spins the well-worn pejorative "boys," often used to emasculate black men especially in the American South, to suggest a kind of insider status granted to the two friends in the picture. Conveying an ease with one another, we want to know these men, to be part of their community. Similarly, *Labor Day Parade* draws

us, almost informally, into a parade wherein we can just hear that old-time jazz as we look on. Birch invites us to celebrate the triumph of African American cultural survival in the wake of America's long, twisted path to freedom.

Little in modern memory has tested the integrity of American freedom more than the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States. Democracy, capitalism, cultural relativism, religious ecumenism, and freedom itself went on trial within minutes of the attacks. Aghast with horror and closer to one another than at any time since Pearl Harbor, we swore "they" would not win; "they" would not take away our freedoms. Artist Elisabeth Subrin's work *Lost Tribes and Promised Lands* measures the changes wrought by the attacks on her Brooklyn neighborhood between September 2001 and September 2010. Her juxtaposition of images taken of the same places, with the same camera, at the same time of day asks her audience to explore the meanings of devastation and change. Her lens takes our study of American freedom along an unexpected path. With Osama bin Laden's targeted image displaced by a business-as-usual advertisement for soft-serve yogurt in the still *Osama*, do we see the triumph of American freedom (capitalism) or something else? Without cameras like Subrin's, would we remember the collective anger spelled out in hasty signs pasted in storefront windows?

Finally, the Statue of Liberty, standing watch over New York Harbor, and thus metaphorically over the United States, personifies freedom, the nation's highest ideal. Lady Liberty stands not guard, but as welcome to what poet Emma Lazarus called the world's "wretched refuse" as they arrive from the far corners of the world: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." For the world, the United States thus came to represent the possibility of freedom. Multimedia collage artist Mark Wagner captures the paradox of Lady Liberty and her claim to represent untainted freedom in his large-scale work *Liberty*. Cutting 1,121 U.S. dollar bills into thousands of pieces

in order to make this dramatic work, Wagner demands at the most fundamental level that we explore the link between our iconic statue, the country's self-image, and the almighty dollar.

With multiple panels that use the dollar bill's own iconic Gilbert Stuart portrait of George Washington in a variety of settings and poses, Wagner works with the paradoxical nature of American freedom. A playful, simply drawn, dark figure—perhaps America's dark side, a reminder of slavery's Sambo, or even the personification of childlike innocence—pops up mischievously to suggest alternate interpretations of familiar, often mythical, national narratives. In the uppermost panel where the torch burns in Liberty's hand, Washington addresses a presumed crowd. We are used to this image. But there on the other side of the railed stand is our dark reminder with a crown in hand, holding it triumphantly as if he has stolen it from "King George." In another panel, George fishes while our mischievous figure pirates. And in the bottom left panel, our oversized dark figure threatens to eat George Washington. Is this freedom winning in the end and disposing of unfinished promises, greed, and inequality? Or has America's dark side grown stronger? Like Walker, Charles and even Subrin, Wagner jars us to question our familiar national narratives. In the end, the artists whose work comes together for *Thenceforward, and Forever Free* challenge easy and agreeable assessments of the history of American freedom and equality. Perhaps the better angels of our collective nature are possible in the interaction between art and audience.

# Tangible Mediums of Freedom

**Kali Murray, J.D.**

Assistant Professor  
Marquette University Law School

The Emancipation Proclamation is, in its own way, an odd legal text. Sanford Levinson, a noted constitutional law scholar, states that the Emancipation Proclamation produces a “cognitive dissonance” insofar as “one of the truly great acts in our history” may “have violated what we like to believe is a Constitution.”<sup>1</sup> The Emancipation Proclamation’s uncertain legal status is compounded by its sheer weirdness as a text: it is by definition, a text that seeks to speak, to proclaim. The text of the Emancipation Proclamation is in some ways not there at all; what is left is what was intended to be heard. You are free.

I suggest—inspired by the works of this exhibition—that we might reconcile ourselves to the strangeness of the Emancipation Proclamation if we see it as a medium of freedom. A medium can mean many things: it can be the person or thing that acts as intermediary. Here, I am interested in one particular definition—that is, when medium is defined as “any raw material or mode of expression used in an artistic or creative activity.”<sup>2</sup> This particular meaning has legal consequence for, in the Copyright Act of 1976, Section 102<sup>3</sup> states that a work may be protected only if it is fixed in a tangible medium of expression.<sup>4</sup> A work that is not fixed is not protected. To be fixed, a work must be readily perceived by others; it is assumed that if tangible, a work is more easily perceived by others. These qualities, of course, are always subject to testing. A computer code, for instance, resists classification because its tangibility is so fleeting; it is difficult to determine whether such code is truly fixed.

Thus, the Emancipation Proclamation’s speaking text is necessary because freedom was achieved in its fixation; a simple speech would have lacked this crucial quality. The speaking text of the Emancipation Proclamation, therefore, acts as a crucial medium of freedom because its specific mode of expression, the marrying of text to speech, fixes its representations of freedom. Of course, negotiating freedom can be a difficult thing. The Emancipation Proclamation, legendarily, did not actually free *all* slaves, only those slaves within the Confederacy; freedom then, as defined in the Emancipation Proclamation, was always a conditional, complex goal. Its very medium (a speaking text) then helps us to further understand the conditional nature of freedom embodied in the Emancipation Proclamation; speech, of course, is subject to the vagaries of its listeners.





**Willie Birch**

American, b. 1942

*Labor Day Parade*, (detail), 2005

Acrylic paint and charcoal on paper

60 x 240"

2011.74

Collection of New Orleans Museum of Art,  
Museum purchase, Carmen Donaldson Fund

The relationship between the medium and fixation then, becomes a crucial metaphor by which we can judge the works in this exhibition; that is: What is the way freedom is to be achieved? What are the mediums of freedom? The exhibited works offer diverse answers to these questions; my goal here is to create a dialogue between these works, these mediums, so as to prompt reflection on how these works interrogate what we gain and what we lose within the condition of freedom.

I imagine that, for many slaves, freedom involved relief. Relief that the sustaining ties of kin could be renewed without interference or the relief of having one's work be one's own. The great tragedy of the Reconstruction and Jim Crow is they involved a kind of theft of relief, an abiding sense of uneasiness even in the face of legal freedom.

The joyous works of Willie Birch in many respects then, offer us visions of communities

made in that space of relief. We experience, for instance, the relief of a friendship renewed through the ease of a smile<sup>5</sup>; the relief of music with its ability to connect you to a present past<sup>6</sup>; the relief felt from an unhurried day in your neighborhood. Birch's vision of relief shows, though, the conditional limits of such freedom. Pay attention to Birch's medium here: his paintings mix paint with charcoal, the temporary and the permanent.

Pay attention again to the neighborhoods Birch depicts, because often they are of one place, New Orleans. Memories of Hurricane Katrina present themselves then, and you think of all those forced to leave these places, the fracture of relief. And Birch's neighborhoods then become Elisabeth Subrin's neighborhoods; both are joined together in the tragic contingencies of the last decade. Subrin took photographs of neighborhoods directly after 9/11 and then 10 years later.<sup>7</sup> Her photographs make explicit what is implied in Birch's work—that moment



**Laylah Ali**  
American, b. 1968  
*Untitled*, 2006-2007  
from *Typology*  
Ink and pencil on paper  
24 x 19"  
Courtesy of the artist

when relief is fractured and, ultimately, how we recover from that moment. Questions haunt her work. Was 9/11 as big as we thought? Will we forget? These questions are intensified because the modes of expression used by the artist—photographs and video—are easily accessible modes of expression. The ubiquity of Subrin's tools suggests that we ourselves could have undertaken Subrin's work; we are left with the question of whether we would do the same hard work.

The images of Michael Ray Charles interrogate another freedom: the freedom to desire. Thus, contemplated, freedom here comes from the satisfaction of desire. Charles clearly sees the compromise of desire in contemporary society because others—advertisers, corporations—make our desire. What happens, asks Charles, when “[b]eauty is a mark?”<sup>8</sup> Charles's question haunts me as he appears to ask: What happens when beauty itself becomes a subject of the market, equivalent to those ubiquitous trademarks that suffuse so much of our daily lives?

I teach trademarks in my intellectual property classes; and when I do, I note that legal protection of trademarks became necessary in the emergence of the mass consumer market of the late nineteenth century. I do not typically say, though, that widespread dissemination of trademarks was complicit in the use of imagery that we now identify as racist: Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben, Little Black Sambo. These images are terrifying for us, because they force us to confront a society in which these images were beautiful and seductive, a satisfaction

of our desire, a freedom: “Beware,” warns Charles, above a depiction of Little Black Sambo<sup>9</sup>, “beauty is a mark.” This terror of beauty, though, can perhaps be mediated; in each of his paintings, Charles places his own mark, a copper penny. Look for it; its placement suggests that our pleasures may be more substantial if we become the agents of our desire, when the work of hands and minds permit a happy pursuit, a desire fulfilled by our own creation.

There are some things about freedom, ultimately, that we just do not know. Freedom is our own kingdom; we make our own mysteries. Laylah Ali's work initially appears baffling insofar as she depicts a culture alien to us; without preparation, the work is steeped in mystery. The spare hieroglyphics of her series, *Typology*, suggest that by creating new typologies that express their own particular hierarchies of powers, we can gain new words for our own experiences. Alondra Nelson has called Ali a technologist, an intellectual that would apply a novel analytic approach to understanding black life “on a higher level of abstraction.”<sup>10</sup> Technologists are important in the project of freedom; like the speaking text of the Emancipation Proclamation, Ali's work becomes a medium of freedom, by teaching us to see and learn new words to describe ourselves to each other.

In comparison to Ali, Kara Walker is a fantasy author; like Tolkien, she creates works of literature based in an unreal world. It is an idiosyncratic literature since the expressive medium Walker chooses is silhouette. The



PACK MULES IN THE MOUNTAINS

**Kara Walker**

American, b. 1969

*Pack-Mules in the Mountains*, 2005

from *Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated)*

Offset lithograph and screenprint, edition 35/35

16 <sup>15</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 34 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub>"

2006.7.1.J

Collection of Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University,

Museum purchase with funds provided by

Monica M. and Richard D. Segal, the Neely Family, and Barbra and Andrew Rothschild

imposition of the silhouettes in effect creates three pictures: the silhouettes themselves, a picture that combines the silhouette and the background image, and the background image alone. The effect of all of these pictures is to create an unreal world, her fantasy. In the works depicted in this exhibit, Walker superimposes silhouettes onto images taken from *Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War*. In one picture, a black silhouette perches like Puck over a series of dead bodies after the Battle of Ezra's Church.<sup>11</sup> What is the meaning of our Puck's placement there; does he judge the living and the dying, or is he amused by it all? The fantasies of Walker tell

us something darker than Ali; like all fantasies, the order of power is already settled. The space of freedom is not inhabited by the future, but rather a distorted past.

The mediums of freedom though, in the end, are many. I end this essay with a suggestion from Mark Wagner, who crafts his collage panels utilizing dollar bills as his mode of expression.<sup>12</sup> This is medium as revolution; what once was the sheer stuff of market is now crafted into a new thing entirely. Wagner's work suggests that freedom is already *at* hand; we just have to look again at the materials *on* hand.

1. Sanford Levinson, *The David C. Baum Memorial Lecture: Was the Emancipation Proclamation Constitutional? Do We/Should We Care What the Answer Is?*, 2001 U. Ill. L. Rev. 1135, 1149 (2001).

2. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "Medium," online version June 2012, accessed June 26, 2012, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/115772>.

3. *Copyright Act of 1976*, 17 U.S.C. § 102(a)(2010).

4. *Id.*

5. Willie Birch, *Black Boys*, 2008.

6. Willie Birch, *A Day in the Life of North Villere Street*, 2007.

7. Elisabeth Subrin, *Flags*, from *Lost Tribes and Promised Lands*, 2010.

8. Michael Ray Charles, interview by *Art 21*, accessed June 21, 2012, <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/michael-ray-charles>.

9. Michael Ray Charles, (*Forever Free*) *BEWARE*, 1994

10. Alondra Nelson, "Aliens Who Are Of Course Ourselves: The Art of Laylah Ali," *Art Journal: Journal of The College Art Association* 60 (Fall 2001): 90, 99-100.

11. Kara Walker, *Deadbrook after the Battle of Ezra's Church*, from *Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated)*, 2005.

12. Mark Wagner, *Liberty*, 2009.



# Laylah Ali

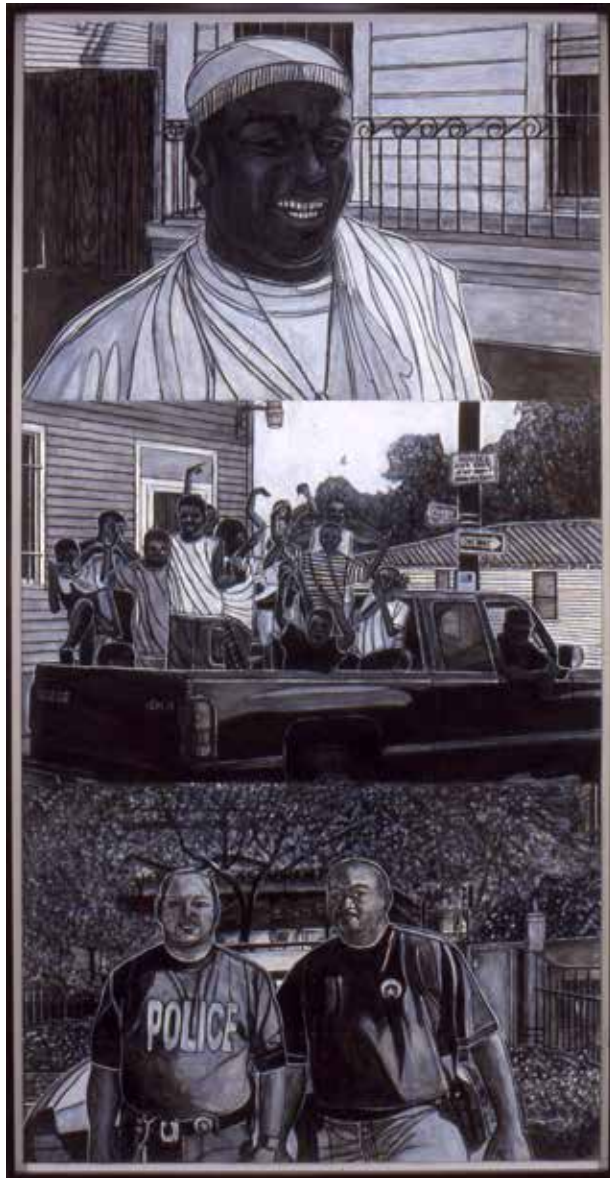
Laylah Ali was born in Buffalo, NY, in 1968. She lives and works in Williamstown, MA. Ali received a B.A. from Williams College, Williamstown, MA, in 1991 and a M.F.A. from Washington University in St. Louis, MO, in 1994.

Typology is defined as the study of types that have characteristics or traits in common. Laylah Ali's series of the same name plays with this "science" of classification as a means for investigating issues of race, power, and identity. Ali's intricately drawn figures appear to be of the human *type* but within that type are countless variances and dissimilarities. Most of the images contain two or more figures in which the relationship between the characters often elicits a sense of confrontation or an unhealthy

codependence. According to Alex Baker, curator of contemporary art at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, "Ali's *Typology* series highlights the ethnic and cultural divides that permeate our contemporary world." By mixing and melding physical characteristics and material accoutrements, the series breaks down stereotypes and scrambles signifiers of recognition, consequently calling into question our perceptions of identity.

**Laylah Ali**

American, b. 1968  
*Untitled*, 2006-2007  
from *Typology*  
Ink and pencil on paper  
23 x 19"  
Courtesy of the artist





# Willie Birch

Willie Birch was born in New Orleans, LA, in 1942. After residing in New York for many years, he returned to New Orleans in the mid-'90s and now lives and works in the 7th Ward, near the French Quarter. Birch received a B.A. from Southern University in New Orleans in 1969 and a M.F.A. from the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore in 1973.

Willie Birch is a storyteller. Using images, he records and reveals what he sees happening around him in the neighborhoods of New Orleans. His seemingly joyful, down-home scenes of everyday life are layered with metaphor and meaning and subtly reflect more than what initially meets the eye. According to the artist, "There is no one way to look at these works." His use of paper, for example, pays homage to African American artists such as Jacob Lawrence, Romare Bearden, and Charles White (all worked on paper and all had ties to New Orleans) and, at the same time, may serve as a symbol of wastefulness or uselessness. Although Birch most often depicts people of color, the artist states that his work

"cuts across race, class and gender and speaks to all the things we encounter just by being alive."

Birch typically works in series and refers to his finished pieces interchangeably as paintings and drawings. He cites *Labor Day Parade* as the catalyst for the following body of work that includes *A Day in the Life of North Villere Street* and *Black Boys*. The concept for that series (which was created for the inaugural *Prospect New Orleans* biennial and shown at the New Orleans Museum of Art), Birch said, "was to bring images of my neighborhood to a place you normally would not find them."

## Willie Birch

American, b. 1942

*Black Boys*, 2008

Acrylic paint and charcoal on paper

108 x 54"

Courtesy of the artist and Arthur Roger Gallery, New Orleans



# Michael Ray Charles

Michael Ray Charles was born in 1967 in Lafayette, LA. He currently lives in Austin, TX, where he is a professor of studio art and painting in the Department of Art & Art History at the University of Texas at Austin. Charles received a B.F.A. from McNeese State University in Lake Charles, LA, in 1989 and a M.F.A. from the University of Houston in 1993.

The work of Michael Ray Charles sheds light on the creation and proliferation of African American stereotypes created by advertising and popular culture. The use of bright colors and cartoon-like characters immediately connotes a sense of frivolity and fun, but the viewer quickly comes to realize that Charles's work presents a piercing commentary on racial identity. Charles reinvents known African American characters (e.g., Mammy, Aunt Jemima, Sambo) to show how the past informs the present and how misinformation can leave an indelible mark. The work illuminates what the artist refers to as the "unquestioned appearance of truth." As Charles notes, "Aunt Jemima is just an image, but it almost automatically becomes a real

person for many people, in their minds. But there's a difference between these images and real humans." The artist challenges the notion that racist personifications of a bygone era are truly part of the past. According to Charles, "Negative images about African Americans are hiding throughout American culture, just below the surface, on TV sitcoms and cartoons of every vintage and in advertising and sports." By coupling the images with word plays or overused clichés, the paintings become pseudo-advertisements. Unlike typical jingles or sales lines, however, the words here serve as jabs and reminders and further exemplifications of the chasm between perception and reality.

## Michael Ray Charles

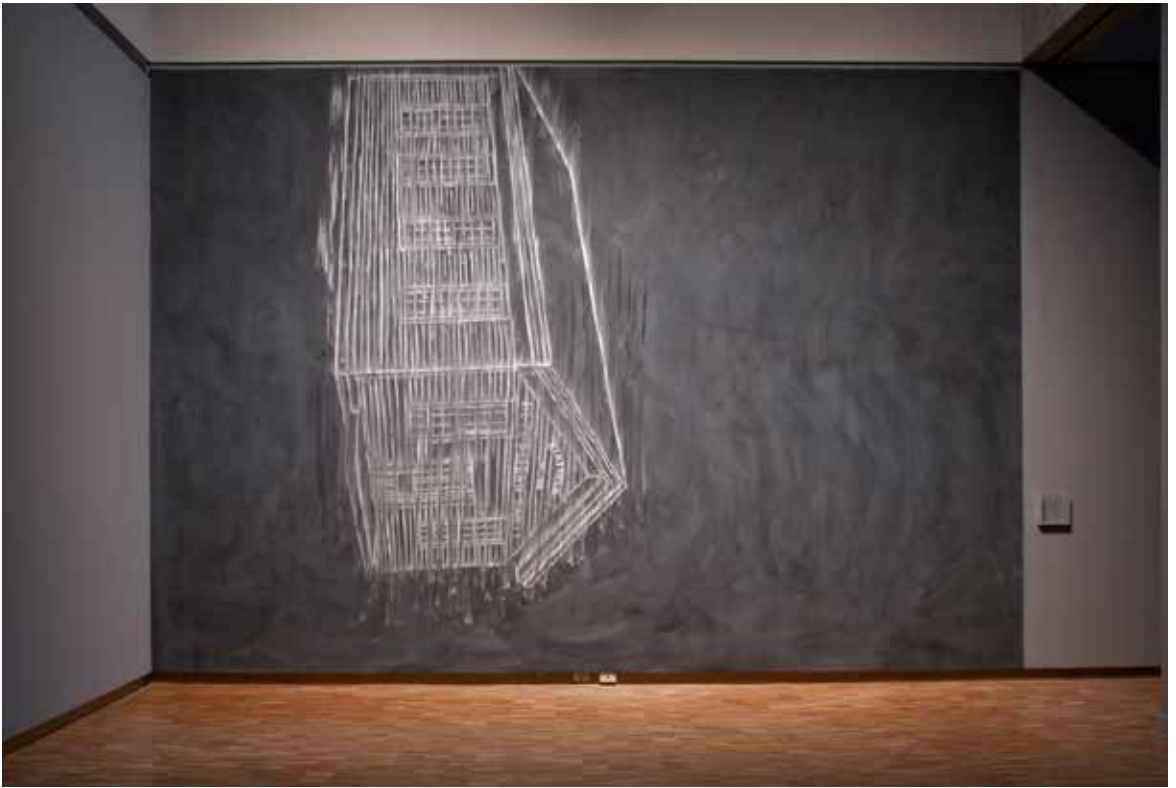
American, b. 1967

(*Forever Free*) *BEWARE*, 1994

Acrylic latex, oil wash and copper penny on paper

44 x 30 1/4"

Collection of Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York



# Gary Simmons

Gary Simmons was born in 1964 in New York, NY, where he still lives and works. He received a B.F.A. from the School of Visual Arts, New York, in 1988 and a M.F.A. from the California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, CA, in 1990.

The site-specific installation Gary Simmons created for the Haggerty Museum carries on the artist's practice of manipulating text, objects, places, and characters taken from history and popular culture to lend new and multilayered meaning to familiar imagery. Here Simmons depicts a schoolhouse in Ripon, Wisconsin, often referred to as the birthplace of the Republican Party. On March 20, 1854, a group of Ripon citizens met in this building, primarily with the intention of banding together to fight against the spread of slavery. This meeting laid the groundwork for the formation of a new political party later to become known as the Republicans.

Simmons is most well known for his "erasure" paintings and drawings, in which the artist employs a process of smearing newly created images with his hands and body. The resulting work, in the words of Thelma Golden, director and chief curator of The Studio Museum in Harlem, "invokes an absence as palpable and fraught with meaning as any presence."

According to Simmons, "The erasures are really the evidence of a performance the viewer never sees. It's not often you have the opportunity to physically remove something that has a politic to it. I draw these images and then, sometimes, almost violently, try to erase them. One of the beautiful ironies of it is, as much as I try to obliterate the imagery, I can't completely wipe it away."

## **Gary Simmons**

American, b. 1964

*Untitled (Republican House Fall)*, 2012

from the exhibition *Thenceforward, and Forever Free*

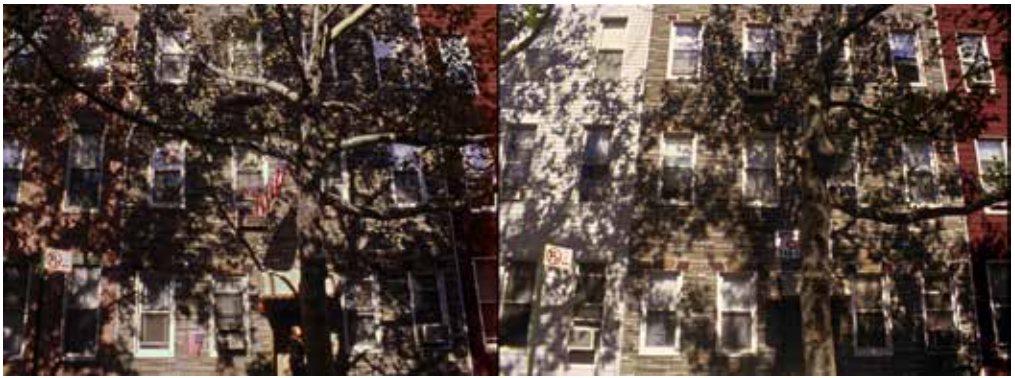
at the Haggerty Museum of Art, Milwaukee, WI, 2012

Mixed media

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist, Metro Pictures, New York,

and the Haggerty Museum of Art



# Elisabeth Subrin

Elisabeth Subrin was born in Boston, MA, in 1965. She currently lives in New York and teaches in Philadelphia, where she is an assistant professor in the Department of Film and Media Arts at Temple University. Subrin received a B.F.A. from the Massachusetts College of Art in 1990 and a M.F.A. from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1995.

"In the days following the September 11 attacks on New York, Subrin took a battered 16mm Bolex camera out into her neighborhood in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, shooting houses and storefronts that had then become suddenly and compulsively festooned with American flags and other accretions of patriotic paraphernalia. Nearly a decade later, with the same camera, on the same date and at the same approximate hour of the day, she attempted to retrace her own steps, now only half-remembered and largely conjectured from the 2001 footage itself: alienated from her own work by time, she approached it as a found object. She combined

the two reels into a double-screen loop, allowing for a visual comparison between then and now."\*

In addition to being a filmmaker, Subrin also works in video, photography, and installation. Her work overall, according to the artist, "explores 'minor histories,' the legacy of feminism, and the impact of recent social and cultural history on the contemporary life and consciousness."

\*Ed Halter, "Again," in *Elisabeth Subrin: Her Compulsion to Repeat* (New York: Sue Scott Gallery, 2010).

## Elisabeth Subrin

American, b. 1965

*Flags*, 2010

from *Lost Tribes and Promised Lands*

Digital C-prints

17 x 24"

Edition 1/6 + 2APs

Courtesy of the artist

## Elisabeth Subrin

American, b. 1965

*Osama*, 2010

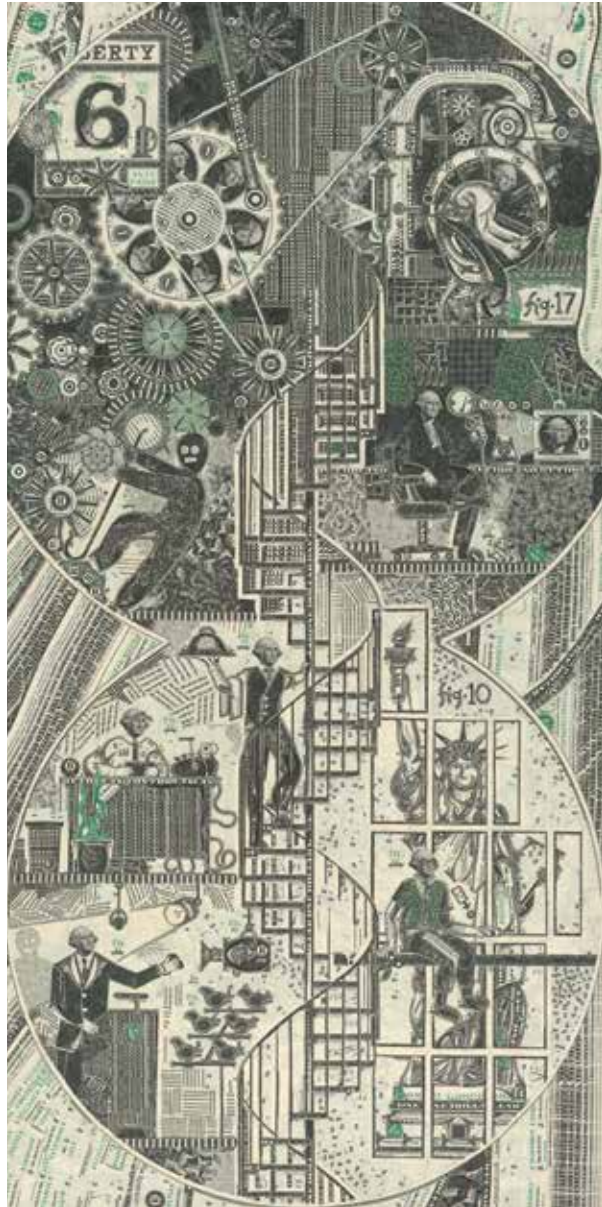
from *Lost Tribes and Promised Lands*

Digital C-prints

17 x 24"

Edition 1/6 + 2APs

Courtesy of the artist





# Mark Wagner

Mark Wagner was born in Edgar, WI, in 1976. He lives and works in Brooklyn, NY, where he is a cofounder of the Brooklyn Artists Alliance. Wagner received a B.F.A. from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1995.

*Liberty* is a large-scale collage comprised of 14 individual panels created from 1,121 dollar bills, cut into 81,895 tiny pieces. George Washington, the face of the dollar bill, is prominently featured throughout the work, engaged in a variety of unexpected, humorous activities taking place from top to bottom of the Statue of Liberty. Beyond its humor and craftsmanship, however, *Liberty* addresses issues of civil liberties, economics, and American self-image.

According to Wagner, “The one-dollar bill is the most ubiquitous piece of paper in America. Collage asks the question: What might be done

to make it something else? It is a ripe material: intaglio printed on sturdy linen stock, covered in decorative filigree, and steeped in symbolism and concept. Blade and glue transform it—reproducing the effects of tapestries, paints, engravings, mosaics, and computers—striving for something bizarre, beautiful, or unbelievable . . . the foreign in the familiar.”

A mixed-media trunk containing a time-lapse video, drawings, a scale model, etc., accompanies the *Liberty* collage, acting as an archive for the creation of the project.

## Mark Wagner

American, b. 1976

*Liberty*, (panel #6), 2009

Currency collage on panel

204 x 75"

Courtesy of an anonymous collector



DEADBOOK AFTER THE BATTLE OF KARA'S CHURCH.

# Kara Walker

Kara Walker was born in Stockton, CA, in 1969. She currently lives and works in New York, NY, where she is an associate professor at Columbia University's School of the Arts. Walker received a B.F.A. from the Atlanta College of Art in 1991 and a M.F.A. from the Rhode Island School of Design in 1994.

For this series, Kara Walker overlaid silhouetted paper cutouts onto printed images taken from *Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War*—a book first published in 1866 and often referred to as the “definitive illustrated history” of the Civil War. The silhouettes convey a sense of nostalgia, reminding us of early portraiture and genteel eighteenth- and nineteenth-century décor. At the same time, however, the silhouettes serve as symbols of generalization and dehumanization. According to the artist, “The silhouettes lend themselves to avoidance

of the subject, not being able to look at it directly.” By merging these disparate pictorial forms, Walker creates a tension between fact and fiction, thus drawing attention to what's been featured in and excluded from the annals of history. In pieces where the portraits have been hollowed out and the battle scenes appear within, the viewer is asked to literally read between the lines. We are reminded not only of the atrocities of war, but more specifically of the realities of slavery and the ongoing impact of racism on contemporary culture.

## **Kara Walker**

American, b. 1969

*Deadbrook after the Battle of Ezra's Church*, 2005  
from *Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated)*

Offset lithograph and screenprint, edition 35/35

16 15/16 x 34 7/16"

2006.7.1.C

Collection of Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University,  
Museum purchase with funds provided by Monica M. and Richard D. Segal,  
the Neely Family, and Barbra and Andrew Rothschild

## Exhibition Checklist

**LAYLAH ALI**

American, b. 1968

*Untitled*, 2005  
from *Typology*  
Ink and pencil on paper  
14 x 11"  
Courtesy of the artist

*Untitled*, 2005  
from *Typology*  
Ink and pencil on paper  
11 x 14"  
Courtesy of the artist

*Untitled*, 2005  
from *Typology*  
Ink and pencil on paper  
14 x 11"  
Courtesy of the artist

*Untitled*, 2005  
from *Typology*  
Ink and pencil on paper  
14 x 11"  
Courtesy of the artist

*Untitled*, 2005  
from *Typology*  
Ink and pencil on paper  
14 x 11"  
Courtesy of the artist

*Untitled*, 2005  
from *Typology*  
Ink and pencil on paper  
14 x 11"  
Courtesy of the artist

*Untitled*, 2005  
from *Typology*  
Ink and pencil on paper  
14 x 11"  
Courtesy of the artist

*Untitled*, 2006-2007  
from *Typology*  
Ink and pencil on paper  
24 x 19"  
Courtesy of the artist

*Untitled*, 2006-2007  
from *Typology*  
Ink and pencil on paper  
23 x 19"  
Courtesy of the artist

*Untitled*, 2006-2007  
from *Typology*  
Ink and pencil on paper  
23 ½ x 19"  
Courtesy of the artist

*Untitled*, 2006-2007  
from *Typology*  
Ink and pencil on paper  
23 5/16 x 19"  
Courtesy of the artist

**WILLIE BIRCH**

American, b. 1942

*A Day in the Life of North  
Villere Street*, 2007  
Acrylic paint and charcoal on paper  
112 x 144"  
2011.75  
Collection of New Orleans  
Museum of Art, Museum purchase,  
Carmen Donaldson Fund

*Black Boys*, 2008  
Acrylic paint and charcoal on paper  
108 x 54"  
Courtesy of the artist and  
Arthur Roger Gallery, New Orleans

*Labor Day Parade*, 2005  
Acrylic paint and charcoal on paper  
60 x 240"  
2011.74  
Collection of New Orleans  
Museum of Art, Museum purchase,  
Carmen Donaldson Fund

**MICHAEL RAY CHARLES**

American, b. 1967

*(Forever Free) Opposite's Abstract*, 2001  
Acrylic latex and copper penny on paper  
60 x 72"  
Collection of Tony Shafrazi Gallery,  
New York

*(Forever Free) BEWARE*, 1994  
Acrylic latex, oil wash and copper penny  
on paper  
44 x 30 ¼"  
Collection of Tony Shafrazi Gallery,  
New York

*(Forever Free) Mixed Breed*, 1997  
Acrylic latex, stain and copper  
penny on canvas tarp  
99 x 111"  
Collection of Tony Shafrazi Gallery,  
New York

*(Forever Free) Target of Opportunity*, 1994  
Acrylic latex, oil wash and  
copper penny on paper  
36 x 60"  
Collection of Tony Shafrazi Gallery,  
New York

*(Forever Free) Have A Nice Day!*, 1997  
Acrylic latex, stain and copper penny on  
paper  
60 x 35 ¾"  
Collection of George Horner, Brooklyn,  
New York

**GARY SIMMONS**

American, b. 1964

*Untitled (Republican House Fall)*, 2012  
Mixed media  
Dimensions variable  
Courtesy of the artist, Metro Pictures,  
New York, and  
the Haggerty Museum of Art

**ELISABETH SUBRIN**

American, b. 1965

*Lost Tribes and Promised Lands*, 2001-2010  
Two-channel video installation,  
16 mm/HD, silent 6 min. loop  
Courtesy of the artist

*Trash*, 2010  
from *Lost Tribes and Promised Lands*  
Digital C-prints  
17 x 24"  
Edition 1/6 + 2APs  
Courtesy of the artist

*Flags*, 2010  
from *Lost Tribes and Promised Lands*  
Digital C-prints  
17 x 24"  
Edition 1/6 + 2APs  
Courtesy of the artist

Osama, 2010  
 from *Lost Tribes and Promised Lands*  
 Digital C-prints  
 17 x 24"  
 Edition 1/6 + 2APs  
 Courtesy of the artist

## MARK WAGNER

American, b. 1976

*Liberty*, 2009  
 Currency collage on panel  
 204 x 75"  
 Courtesy of an anonymous collector

*Liberty Archive Trunk*, 2009  
 Mixed media  
 Dimensions variable  
 Courtesy of an anonymous collector

## KARA WALKER

American, b. 1969

*Scene of McPherson's Death*, 2005  
 from *Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated)*  
 Offset lithograph and screenprint,  
 edition 35/35  
 16 15/16 x 34 7/16"  
 2006.71.H  
 Collection of Nasher Museum of Art at  
 Duke University, Museum purchase with  
 funds provided by Monica M. and Richard  
 D. Segal, the Neely Family, and Barbra and  
 Andrew Rothschild

*Buzzard's Roost Pass*, 2005  
 from *Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated)*  
 Offset lithograph and screenprint,  
 edition 35/35  
 16 15/16 x 34 7/16"  
 2006.71.N  
 Collection of Nasher Museum of Art at  
 Duke University, Museum purchase with  
 funds provided by Monica M. and Richard  
 D. Segal, the Neely Family, and Barbra and  
 Andrew Rothschild

*Exodus of Confederates from Atlanta*, 2005  
 from *Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated)*  
 Offset lithograph and screenprint,  
 edition 35/35  
 16 15/16 x 34 7/16"  
 2006.71.L  
 Collection of Nasher Museum of Art at  
 Duke University, Museum purchase with  
 funds provided by Monica M. and Richard  
 D. Segal, the Neely Family, and Barbra and  
 Andrew Rothschild

*Alabama Loyalists Greeting the Federal Gun-Boats*, 2005  
 from *Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated)*  
 Offset lithograph and screenprint,  
 edition 35/35  
 16 15/16 x 34 7/16"  
 2006.71.O  
 Collection of Nasher Museum of Art at  
 Duke University, Museum purchase with  
 funds provided by Monica M. and Richard  
 D. Segal, the Neely Family, and Barbra and  
 Andrew Rothschild

*Pack-Mules in the Mountains*, 2005  
 from *Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated)*  
 Offset lithograph and screenprint,  
 edition 35/35  
 16 15/16 x 34 7/16"  
 2006.71.J  
 Collection of Nasher Museum of Art at  
 Duke University, Museum purchase with  
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 Andrew Rothschild

*Deadbrook after the Battle of Ezra's Church*, 2005  
 from *Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated)*  
 Offset lithograph and screenprint,  
 edition 35/35  
 16 15/16 x 34 7/16"  
 2006.71.C  
 Collection of Nasher Museum of Art at  
 Duke University, Museum purchase with  
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 Andrew Rothschild

*Foote's Gun-Boats Ascending to Attack Fort Henry*, 2005  
 from *Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated)*  
 Offset lithograph and screenprint,  
 edition 35/35  
 16 15/16 x 34 7/16"  
 2006.71.E  
 Collection of Nasher Museum of Art at  
 Duke University, Museum purchase with  
 funds provided by Monica M. and Richard  
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 Andrew Rothschild

*Lost Mountain at Sunrise*, 2005  
 from *Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated)*  
 Offset lithograph and screenprint,  
 edition 35/35  
 16 15/16 x 34 7/16"  
 2006.71.G  
 Collection of Nasher Museum of Art at  
 Duke University, Museum purchase with  
 funds provided by Monica M. and Richard  
 D. Segal, the Neely Family, and Barbra and  
 Andrew Rothschild

*Signal Station, Summit of Maryland Heights*, 2005  
 from *Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated)*  
 Offset lithograph and screenprint,  
 edition 35/35  
 16 15/16 x 34 7/16"  
 2006.71.M  
 Collection of Nasher Museum of Art at  
 Duke University, Museum purchase with  
 funds provided by Monica M. and Richard  
 D. Segal, the Neely Family, and Barbra and  
 Andrew Rothschild

*An Army Train*, 2005  
 from *Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated)*  
 Offset lithograph and screenprint,  
 edition 35/35  
 16 15/16 x 34 7/16"  
 2006.71.F  
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**HAGGERTY ♦ MUSEUM OF ART**  
at Marquette University

**HAGGERTY MUSEUM OF ART**

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