

BLOUIN modern painters

ART / ARCHITECTURE / DESIGN / PERFORMANCE / FILM

JUNE/JULY 2016

DANIEL R. SMALL
DIGS UP
THE MYTHS
OF L.A.

**MARTIN
CREED**
IS NOT
AN ARTIST

THE TIRELESS
GENIUS OF
**CARMEN
HERRERA** >



NARI WARD
SUSAN TE KAHURANGI KING
ALPHACHANNELING
EVA & FRANCO MATTES

\$9.95US/CAN

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REVIEWS

NORTH AMERICA // TORONTO // CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS // DALLAS // KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI // NEW YORK // PHILADELPHIA

INCLUDING A SERIES of terra-cotta, stoneware, and porcelain objects, as well as the artist's well-known videos featuring Lieutenant Uhura of *Star Trek*—one of the very first major roles portrayed by a black woman, Nichelle Nichols, on television—Leigh's exhibition moves from the ancient past into a projected future. Within this temporal framework, time is stretched and reassembled to connect histories, shapes, and materials in subtle conversations about form and function.

Three Way (Water Pots), 2016, is inspired by a 1933 diorama from Kansas City's Nelson-Atkins Museum that featured a wax representation of famed Pueblo potter Maria Martinez, who reframed the perception of Native American pottery from functional handicraft to aesthetic object through her craft and advocacy efforts. Whereas the original diorama placed Martinez in front of a painted Southwestern landscape of vast horizons, presenting her as a curious object akin to those she made, Leigh's abstracted version sets nine pit-fired

terra-cotta pots into clusters of three in a mirrored room. Martinez and her diorama, like all the references in Leigh's work, are places to touch down, but not settle into. Thus, the reflected image of the pots, cast through an illusion of infinite space, speaks to the long history of ceramics.

Three Way finds a companion piece in the three-channel projection *Untitled (The Waiting Room series)*, 2016, in which cultural anthropologist and dancer Aimee Meredith Cox peers out from a human-size terra-cotta vessel. She spins with the vessel, propelled by an unseen potter's wheel. A midrange shot presents her at rest, and the last video in the set shows her enclosed at full length. *Waiting Room* evokes a series of metaphors: the body as a container for the soul, the female body as a sexual and procreative vessel, and references to slave narratives in which terra-cotta pots hid runaway slaves en route to freedom.

Contemporary diasporic movements are conjured in *Wall*, 2016, constructed of the "Ghana Must Go" bags, the

KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI

Simone Leigh

H&R Block Artspace at the Kansas City Art Institute // February 6–March 26



Simone Leigh

Cupboard IV, 2016. Steel, porcelain, and raffia, 103 x 107 in.

flimsy tartan plaid-patterned plastic totes that were first noticed internationally in the early 1980s, when carried by Ghanaian refugees fleeing Nigeria. In recent years, these same bags have graced high-fashion runways, decontextualized from their historical function and reassembled into luxury objects. Nearby, a cluster of oversize porcelain cowrie shells hang suspended from the ceiling. Once a currency used among African people, the cowrie monetary system was subverted when used by European and American traders to buy actual Africans. Scaled to the watermelons whose shape they mimic, Leigh's cowries speak to a currency unhinged from value.

Other encounters between materials and forms across time include *Cupboard IV*, 2016, a raffia-covered hut whose shape resembles an amalgam of the temporary housing of nomadic Africans and Native Americans before conquest; the traditional mud huts of the Musgum people of Cameroon; Victorian hoop skirts; and a mammy-shaped pancake house in Mississippi, where one enters through the mammy's skirt. Formally united by the bell-shape structure and conceptually linked by the mechanisms of power enacted in the transatlantic slave trade, these references speak to the entanglement of women's sexuality with violation, home, and shelter. Through this kind of core sampling, Leigh extracts from history forms that embody ideas at the nexus of race, gender, and sexuality. —RP



Simone Leigh
Installation view of *Three Way (Water Pots)*, 2016. Terra-cotta and mirror.

TOP: H&R BLOCK ARTSPACE AT THE KANSAS CITY ART INSTITUTE