

### Exhibit of the week

#### Southern Accent: Seeking the American South in Contemporary Art

Nasher Museum of Art, Durham, N.C., through Jan. 8

“The harder you look for a clear, monolithic South, the less likely you are to find one,” said Brian Howe in *Hyperallergic.com*. The brilliance of “Southern Accent,” an exhibition in Durham, N.C., that will travel to Louisville in the spring, is that it re-enacts that fractured collective consciousness. The curators have assembled 125 works from 60 mostly contemporary artists, and the effect is “an exploded diagram of how it feels to be Southern.” Our music, our food, our speech, our landscape, our religion, and our manners all point back to our history, and this show misses none of that. Southern history in these galleries “exists as it does in life: everywhere, all at once,” requiring visitors to walk “a land still reckoning with unpardonable crimes,” a land that won’t let any of its inhabitants forget that racism and slavery shaped it.

In a key gallery, visitors come upon a large crimson wall hanging that has “an almost



George Jenne in *Spooky Understands: Comically disturbing*

ornamental quality,” said Amy White in *Burnaway.org*. Flowers and vines descend from the work’s upper edge, but veiled among them are dangling black legs, and suddenly the red backdrop and its scalloped bottom edge evoke dripping blood. This is *Strange Fruit*, by Ebony Patterson, and it shares a large room with similarly race-charged works by fellow luminaries Carrie Mae Weems and Kara Walker. But the dominant spirit of the show is surrealistic, as exemplified by a video called *Spooky Understands*. In the 2013 work, artist George Jenne wears blackface and sits in near darkness behind a large microphone so that only the blond pigtailed wig

on his head is easily visible. The monologue he delivers is sometimes funny. But it’s delivered in an “at times malevolent near whisper,” and its sexually savvy tone becomes disturbing once the viewer realizes Jenne is channeling an 8-year-old girl.

Artistic proclivities emerge as you walk the show, said Chris Vitiello in *IndyWeek.com*. Howard Finster, Minnie Jones Evans, Deborah Grant, and others display “a tendency to infest every inch of an artwork with such intense detail that it can’t be apprehended as a whole.” A Dario Robleto installation—two boots standing at the end of a trail of sand—dredges up layers of history once it’s revealed that the piece, *A Defeated Soldier Wishes to Walk His Daughter Down the Aisle*, melds a Civil War prosthetic, World War I cavalry boots, femur bone dust, melted-down Skeeter Davis records, and a gelatin used to test military ammunition. With such mournful details scattered everywhere, “Southern Accent” “demands an emotional commitment.” To the Southerners who’ll see it, said *OneSouthContemporary.com*, it’s a reminder that our regional identity is “forever under reconstruction.”

### Childish Gambino

#### Awaken, My Love!

★★★★★



“Is Childish Gambino suddenly the new Prince?” asked Dan Bogosian in *AVClub.com*. Donald Glover, the comic actor and creator of FX’s *Atlanta*, has recorded hip-

hop as Childish Gambino since 2008, but none of his previous music hinted he was capable of producing such a “boldly fresh” reimagining of the 1970s psychedelic funk of Prince forebears Sly Stone and Parliament-Funkadelic. None of this album is pure imitation. “Redbone,” one of the finest tracks, “plays as if he memorized every note and lyric Prince ever released and jammed it into a Bootsy Collins song.” Still, this “all-consuming” 11-song set “inhabits its own universe,” said Shakeil Greeley in *GQ.com*. While listening, “I found myself zoning out multiple times, getting lost in the numerous layers of melodies, rhythms, and even genres found throughout.” Country guitar, surf guitar, and “squalling” organ or synth give way to full-on gospel choir breaks. *Awaken* is “a standout record in a year full of standout records.”

### The Rolling Stones

#### Blue & Lonesome

★★★★★



Fans of the Rolling Stones have been given “a cosmic gift,” said Maeve McDermott in *USA Today*. The band’s first album in 11 years came about almost by

accident: While working on new material in a recording studio, the wizened legends started playing a few of the Chicago blues tunes they cut their teeth on a half-century ago—and couldn’t stop. Three days later, they had recorded an album’s worth of songs by their heroes—Howlin’ Wolf, Willie Dixon, Little Walter—and the finished set “sounds like the best kind of passion project.” *Blue & Lonesome* is “not a pretty or comforting album,” said Greg Kot in the *Chicago Tribune*. It’s got the noisy, unvarnished sound of 1950s electric blues, and Mick Jagger’s raw vocals and “downright nasty” harmonica vindicate him as a worthy blues heir. On “Just a Fool,” Keith Richards’ and Ron Wood’s guitars become a freight train. It’s the kind of sound a working band makes “in a bar where everyone is carrying a switchblade.”

### The Weeknd

#### Starboy

★★★★★



The Weeknd, on his third album, “has settled into a familiar routine,” said Mosi Reeves in *Rolling Stone*. That’s a shame, because the sweet-voiced singer remade contemporary

R&B with his 2011 debut EP and broke into the pop stratosphere last year with *Beauty Behind the Madness*. Comfortable in his success, 26-year-old Abel Tesfaye, aided by his small army of writers and producers, has put out an 18-song collection of “dreary alt-R&B boilerplate and arch new wave near misses.” There are a couple of surprises, said Nolan Feeney in *Entertainment Weekly*. “A refreshing punk-rock energy” surges through “False Alarm,” while the Daft Punk collaboration “I Feel It Coming” unleashes the Weeknd’s “freaky disco side.” He also gets briefly introspective, reflecting on his experience with homelessness and on his unlikely rise to the top. Mostly, though, *Starboy* is a low-energy ode to debauchery, Weeknd style, and it’s not long before his “terrible-boyfriend shtick” gets redundant.