

# MICHAEL MEADS



Michael Wayne Meads was born in 1966 in Anniston, Alabama, on the southernmost slope of the Blue Ridge Mountains. He earned a BFA from Auburn University in 1987, and a MFA from State University of New York at Albany in 1990. In the early 1990's Meads returned to his native Alabama, maintaining a studio near the rural community of Eastaboga.

Meads has developed a style as a painter, draftsman and photographer that expresses a deeply personal narrative filtered through the lens of classical themes and a deep sense of place. From his rural studio, Meads crafted an intimate visual narrative of Alabama. The surviving Alabama work offers a glimpse into a South hidden to outsiders – one where tenderness and vulnerability are revealed in the midst of poverty and violence.

Like many young men born in the Bible Belt, New Orleans held a deep allure to Meads from an early age. "When I was a boy I remember my father listening to the radio broadcasts of a 'hellfire and brimstone' Baptist minister preaching from Bourbon Street. Even at that young age I knew there was something about New Orleans that was enticingly forbidden as my father would warn me repeatedly to never go to that wicked city," he recalls. He moved with his partner to the Crescent City in 1998, fulfilling a dream and deepening a relationship with a place that has served as setting, character and muse for most of his work since. Meads further developed his art through both subject and medium in New Orleans. He drew from the culture and individuals around him – from the bars of the French Quarter to the ritual and history of carnival. He became a New Orleanian. He also became a master draughtsman.

His first job in New Orleans was as a concierge at the Saint Charles Inn. It was here that he daily executed pen-and-ink drawings from behind the front desk, documenting the complicated and often bizarre environment of his adopted city. He later served as chair of the art department at Holy Cross School, an institution steeped in history and tradition, and a place that had a lasting effect on his life and work.

In August 2005, the floodwaters from the breach of the Federal Levee System in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina filled Mead's home and studio. Most of his life's work – including the hand-made works as well as the photographs – were destroyed. Returning to the city in 2007, Meads quickly realized that there was still much healing to be done before he could live in his adopted home again. Choosing the arid, isolated environment of the high desert as the place to heal, in 2009 Meads moved to northern New Mexico, where he continues to work today.

- Bradley Sumrall, Curator of Collections, Ogden Museum of Southern Art



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# In the Studio: Michael Meads

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Blog



## In the Studio: Michael Meads

June 28, 2019

*Michael Meads is an artist based in Abiquiu, NM, who was in residence at the Joan Mitchell Center in Spring 2019. The following is an edited transcription of a conversation about his life and work, conducted in his studio during his residency, accompanied by photos from his studio.*

I was born in Northeast Alabama in 1966 in a small town called Anniston, located at the lower end of the Appalachians not far from the Georgia-Alabama line. There was a big military base there when I was growing up, so you had a lot of diversity coming through Anniston. I was raised as a hellfire and brimstone Southern Baptist, but I managed to survive that.

I started making drawings when I was a little boy, not even walking yet. My mom had me sitting on the floor in the kitchen with crayons and paper, and I'd just sit there and make marks and it kind of started with that. It kept me busy enough, out of the way. I would doodle, and then over time, the doodles became more specific. When I was about five, I started watching horror movies on the TV. I loved the classic horror films and so I would start drawing the werewolf and Dracula and Frankenstein and then anything with Vincent Price. I didn't really understand who he was, but it's like, "This guy—this is my guy."

Also at a very young age, Halloween became very important to me. I remember it was my sixth birthday and my parents got me a Roman Centurion costume for Halloween as I was obsessed with Roman history, and I had the full costume—helmet, shield, breastplate, sword, the whole bit. I still have photographs of it.

So, costuming and masking have always been really central to my life and work. I had to learn at a very early age to wear a mask. Where I was growing up, being queer was not the best thing to be, in fact it could be quite dangerous. And the smartest thing to do back then was to try to blend in.



In 1994, I met my partner, Charles Canada, who would become my husband. We made our first trip to New Orleans together for Halloween in 1996 and then moved there in 1998. The first house that we looked at to rent was a side-hall shotgun, a block off St. Charles near Washington Avenue. The realtor said, “I don’t want to scare you off, but you know the parades come down St. Charles, right there.” We were like, “Really?!!!” So we didn’t even look at another house.

In 2005, we moved to a place on Bellaire Drive in Lakeview that had a main floor and a loft, which is not the smartest decision we ever made. After Hurricane Katrina, if it was downstairs, it didn’t make it, and it was up in the loft, it did.

At that time, I was working on a show. I had a bunch of new work that was ready to go, and I hadn’t even photographed it yet—it was still in the flat files. It was a Friday night, and we knew there was a storm that had moved into the Gulf. I hadn’t been paying that much attention to it because you get into that kind of lazy way of thinking about hurricanes, you know, it will miss us as it always does. And so we had planned to have some friends over for a small dinner party. It was NOT a hurricane party, which I think is in bad taste. We



had the news on, watching Margaret Orr, the local weather person, and she was becoming more and more concerned. It was getting late, and I decided to go ahead and crash for the night, and Charles stayed up with our guests a little longer. The next morning I got up and walked into the bathroom, and taped to the lid of the toilet was a note from him that said, “Wake me up when you get up. Category 4 heading right for us. We need to decide what we’re going to do.” I still have the note. It’s framed.

So that morning, we turned on the television and Margaret Orr—she never gets rattled, she’s like this total professional, and we’re watching her come unglued because by the morning, it had become a Category 5, and it was starting to bull’s-eye New Orleans. Then the mayor decided it was time for everyone to think about heading out, and we always evacuate because we stayed one time (Hurricane Georges) and that was a bad decision. So we packed up for what we were thinking would be a long weekend. We figured the power would be out in New Orleans, which means no AC, we’ll just stay at my sister’s in Anniston. We’d have a barbecue, have some friends over, hang out for a few days then go home once the power was back on. Charles was paying attention to what’s going on, we had satellite pictures, and everything seemed fine, like, “OK, there’s a couple of trees down in the backyard. It looks like there are some windows blown out and the air-conditioning unit has been blown off the roof.” We’re like, “Whew.” And then things started to take a turn, and the reports started coming in. We went back to the satellite images and saw that part of the 17th Street Canal levee had collapsed on the Lakeview side—our side—just a few blocks from our home. And so suddenly, what was supposed to be a long weekend at my sister’s... I think we were able to come back six weeks later to salvage what we could. Then we went back to Alabama, where we were exiled for almost two years.



*A Study of Decadent and Dying Putti*, 2019, (detail) sumi ink on acid free paper

Because my studio was in the downstairs of our house, I lost almost all of my work. At the time of the storm, I was preparing for an exhibition, all works on paper. By the time we got back to Lakeview, all of it was just pulp. You could see where the flat files came apart, and where the paper had settled as the water moved out.

We realized very quickly that we were going to be there in Alabama for a while. Charles is the techno part of the operation, so he started looking for emergency grants, because we knew our insurance company was going to screw us over, and FEMA, of course, was a nightmare for everyone. He ran across the Joan Mitchell Foundation Emergency Grant, and we got the paperwork filled out, got all the images together, resume, and all that sent in. We were afraid, we had nothing. I didn't have a job to go back to, and Charles was trying to maintain his job in New Orleans remotely.



*A book of Chance*, 2018 to present, (detail) mixed media on bound acid free paper

So I applied for and received the Joan Mitchell Foundation Emergency Grant. The grant money went strictly to survival—paying rent, buying groceries, etc. Not long after the grant, the Foundation contacted me and said, “Would you be interested in spending three months in an artist’s residency in Santa Fe?” They had an agreement with the Santa Fe Art Institute to use them as a residency. Much like the grant, it was a godsend because I needed some time to get my head together and Charles needed some time to get his head together and so I went out there for three months. Most of the artists at the residency during that period of time, this would be 2006, had all received the emergency grant and residency because of conditions after Katrina.

The majority of them were from New Orleans and the forgotten Mississippi Coast. The residency in Santa Fe was incredible. Charles came out for a week while I was there, and we basically drove all over New Mexico and just fell in

love with it. Northern New Mexico has got to be one of the most beautiful places I've ever been, and we both decided that it would be nice to live there one day.

In 2007, we moved back to New Orleans and spent two years there, and everything was going pretty well. I mean, we were bat-shit crazy, but we were functioning. Then Gustav rolled ashore, and we had to do another emergency evacuation. We went to my sister's, again, and we both kind of had nervous breakdowns after that. It was like, "We can't do this anymore." We've just spent the past few years trying to rebuild our lives and our world, and our friends have been doing the same thing. So we decided that as soon as we were able, we would relocate to higher and drier land, to New Mexico.

It was exactly what we needed. We found a therapist that deals with PTSD, and she really helped. I kept begging her, "Just move your practice to New Orleans! You won't have a moment where you're not needed." I have some very dear friends that have still not gotten any help. I think everybody kind of lost a decade of their life. All of my friends, other artists that I know out of New Orleans, our careers should all be 10 years further down the road. And honestly, not just the artists but everyone. I think everyone's life got so derailed that we're only really now getting back to what we're supposed to be doing or would be doing. You've had this 10-year-plus interruption, and it's very problematic and tragic.

I consider New Orleans my hometown. Twenty-plus years, it's home. For right now, I'm temporarily living somewhere else until I can figure out a way to come and go and have a little place here in New Orleans with absolutely nothing in it that I can't live without. In the desert, I have my library, and I have access to the internet, and research that I do in preparation for my work. But at a certain point, no matter what, the well starts to dry up. Your creativity starts running low. The battery starts to run out of juice. So I applied for the residency here at the Joan Mitchell Center. I think I applied two times, and the second try, I got it.

Since I've been here at the Center, I've been doing a lot of reference photography, filling the well back up with visual information that I can use when I get back to the desert, like the architecture, street scenes. Especially if it's raining at night, I get down to the Quarter and try to do as much photography of the wet streets and the neon lights as possible.



Punchinello and Plague Doctor studies, 2014, sumi ink on acid free paper

My work has always been based on lived experience. I grew up with storytellers. I'm very much part of the Southern tradition of the storyteller. My grandparents, my great-grandparents were all storytellers. In storytelling, there's mostly truth, but also, there is that degree of exaggeration—no good storyteller tells a story the same way each time. My great-grandfather would say the whole point of getting older is that you have great stories to tell. My work is always about what has been my world, whether it's growing up in Alabama or being in New Orleans. I've kept a photographic journal since high school, and some of that survives still. When I make artwork, everything that's going to be in the piece is something I have seen, and most of the time, I can prove it with a photograph. The event itself may be something magical, but everything in it was something I've seen on the street. I may be condensing some events, but everything is based in a lived reality. It's visual storytelling.

I'm obsessed with Wagnerian opera, and many of my drawings will be surrounded with a stage proscenium, often shown collapsing. The whole idea is that you're looking onto the stage inside a huge opera house and everything happening there is the big finale of the last act of the opera. It ties back into the artifice of costuming, masking, performance, and storytelling. A dear friend said, "You're just in love with the swag and the drag of the church." Which is true. My world is the Baroque—I've never seen anything that I said, "Oh, that's just too much." More is more, and more is better, dot the dot, gild the lily, and then gild it again. Layer upon layer. I love how over the top it all is.





Charles Canada and Michael Meads, Mardi Gras 2016 (left), and 2019 (right)

When we first moved to New Orleans, my work shifted into the world of Carnival, and mask making. And that *is* my New Orleans. People ask me how has the desert influenced your work, and I say, “Not at all.” The only thing is I’ve got a big wall in my studio where I can do really big drawings. The desert landscape is for contemplation and for healing, but the work is still about New Orleans.

Here at the Joan Mitchell Center, I’ve been trying to find a balance between being in the studio, trying to get some work done, and also wanting to be out and about in New Orleans, documenting things or hanging out with friends and reconnecting. Before Katrina, I had started a series of paintings of my versions of the Stations of the Cross, and they were all going to be set in the French Quarter. Everybody in them was going to be people that I knew from the French Quarter, characters that I’ve known for years, friends, settings, events. The first time Charles and I came to New Orleans, we were sitting in the window of Pat O’Brien’s, and this young man was coming down Bourbon Street wearing a loincloth and a bandanna, a big peace medallion, and he was carrying a heavy cross over his shoulder. I named him in my head, “Well, that’s Hippie Jesus,” and that’s been a character that has occurred throughout my work ever since. I thought, “Hippie Jesus, that’d be a great idea to use for the Stations of the Cross.” They’ll be bawdy, a little naughty, you know, as it should be, but also trying to be true to the source material.





From the series *Twenty Four Patron Saints*. *For Valentine: Patron Saint of Lovers* (left) and *For Saint Ursula: Patron Saint of Orphans* (right). Acrylic on acid free paper.

I had completed three of the stations before Katrina, and I had one unfinished that was upstairs in the loft, so it survived. With all the madness after Katrina, I never got back to it. It's always bugged me that I never got to finish the Stations. With the residency here in New Orleans, my plan was to get all these models over here to the studio and pose. The problem with that is, everybody that I know works a day job and in the evening most are too tired to be bothered. Modeling is not easy to do. Holding poses is not an easy thing and unless you're a professional, I might get an hour out of somebody. In an hour, I'm just getting warmed up.





*Philodendron*, 2019, (detail) graphite on acid free paper

Since I've had a hard time getting models, I've been working on some small sketches, some new ideas, some characters for the stations, and thinking, what can I be working on besides that? The tropical plants that grow in New Orleans figure a lot into the background of my drawings. I said to myself, "Well, they're right outside of the studio...." So into the studio come the banana leaves, philodendron, sago palm, chinese fan palm, elephant ears, etc. I've been drawing those because they're good reference material for later when I'm back in the desert. I'm really enjoying doing them, liking the way they're turning out.



Selected images of Mardi Gras in New Orleans from the artist's portfolio, dates vary, studio installation at the Joan Mitchell Center

The photos on my studio walls are from past Mardi Gras. The bulls, the masks up there, were from this past year. Our theme this year was the Barcelona bullfights. It was our 20th Mardi Gras. These are all friends of ours in various costumes. Brandon and his wife CC, they've started Krewe Divine, which is their filthy tribute to the late performer. They've got about 8 or so people that are members now. They go to incredible lengths to get the gowns right and the makeup and hair right. And then you always have the Jesus folks show up to protest. That's our dear friend Chris, also known as Peggy, with a champagne bottle celebrating in front of all the party poopers... That's the wonderful Princess Stephanie. This gentleman is from the Skeleton Krewe, and he lives in New York, comes down every year for Mardi Gras, and he always brings just the most amazing masks.

All of this is just a tiny sample of my Mardi Gras photographs. I don't have a book of my photographs, and that's something I'd really like to have happen. Finding a publisher is at the top of my to do list.





Twentieth Anniversary of the "Krewe of Conery Street" Mardi Gras poster, 2019, original is acrylic on acid free paper

I had the honor of being asked to do the 2017 Bal Masque poster for the Krewe of Petronius. The Louisiana State Museum at The Presbytere is doing an exhibition about the history of the gay Mardi Gras krewes, which has basically been a hidden history. Wayne Phillips is doing an amazing job of curating it. The exhibition will include my Petronius poster, the painting I did for it, and some sketches. I'm very honored to be in the Louisiana State Museum collection and in this exhibition. The exhibition opens June 6 (<https://louisianastatemuseum.org/presbytere/event/grand-illusions-exhibition-opening>) and runs through 2020.



Getting the Joan Mitchell residency, it's a great honor. The Foundation has certainly been there for me and Charles in the past. This residency was not expected, and I was very shocked when I got it. The facilities here are top-notch, and the folks here could not be nicer or more accommodating. Artists aren't known for being the most group oriented, and the staff has worked really hard to get us to hang out, to bond.

The residency has given me access to home [New Orleans] that I don't think that would have happened otherwise, and it's helping me realize there is a place here for me, that the magic is still here.

*To learn more about Michael Meads's work, visit [michaelmeads.com](https://www.michaelmeads.com) (<https://www.michaelmeads.com>).*

*Interview by Jenny Gill.*

*Photography by Melissa Dean.*



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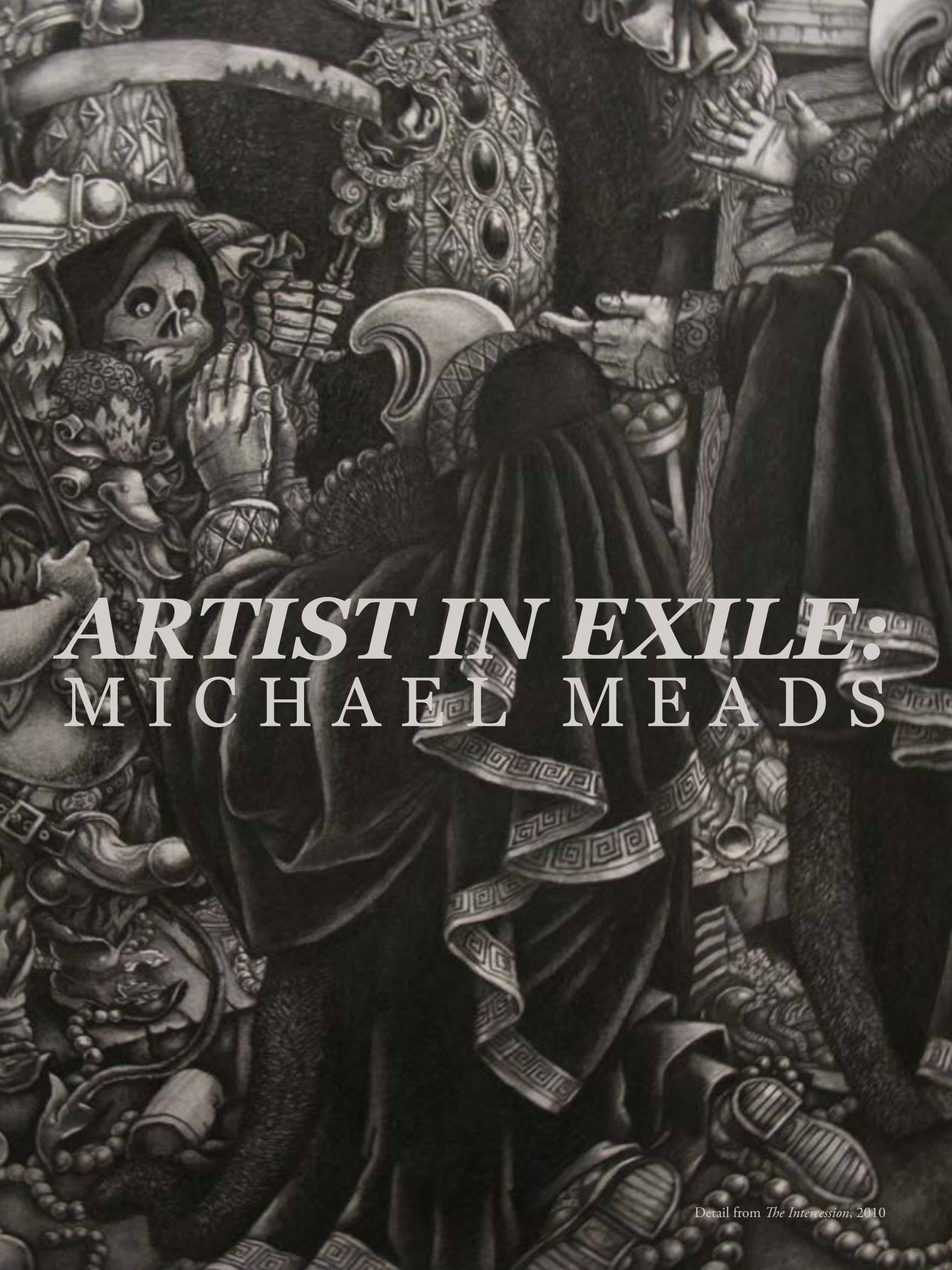
# THE IRON LATTICE

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# ARTIST IN EXILE: MICHAEL MEADS

Detail from *The Intercession*, 2010



*The Intercession (Second Version)*, 2010. Graphite and charcoal on acid free paper. 60”x60”

*It's easy to feel intimidated when approaching Michael Meads, the architect of a body of work ranging from intimate sketches to vast, dramatic tableaux, all of which indicate the kind of mastery of craft few contemporary artists can claim. But if you take a chance and give him a ring at his studio, you will be instantly rewarded, as his warm voice and artistic curiosity make for a conversation as engaging as his drawings. It is rare and refreshing to find an artist as humbled by his subjects and the artistic process as Michael Meads. He meticulously chronicled the New Orleans underworld for decades before Katrina hit and destroyed much of his studio and countless works of original art. Though he has relocated to higher ground in New Mexico for the time being, he remains a devoted reveler and supernumerary in the mad opera of New Orleans.*

**Your most recent work takes on such epic proportions. How do you piece together the arc of one of these larger drawings?**

I've always felt that these big drawings were basically the last 15 minutes of a four-hour epic, like a Wagnerian opera where I'm just trying to capture the most dramatic, intense

moment. First and foremost, I always think of it in theatrical terms—my whole world, really, is about opera.

Ultimately, I would say it's history painting: recording one's experiences, one's history. That's what I've always done. I've never been conceptual. All I know how to do is simply record my world, pay attention to the things

that attract me and interest me, and that's the underdog, the outcast, the loner. Those are the people with whom my sympathies lie. I want to make the work about those people and the things they've gone through, the things that I've gone through. I don't know how to make art otherwise.



**The skeleton is a recurring character in your painting. How does it figure into the theatrical narrative?**

I would say it's my Memento mori. I've always had a very clear understanding of my own and other people's mortality. Even as a kid, I did not have the illusion that life just goes on and on. Growing up in Alabama, when older family members died, you didn't go to the funeral home. Instead the mortician would come to the home with the body. I remember the mortician coming to my grandmother's house and placing the casket in the parlor. I was a wee lad, but I can still remember it, and it was rather grotesque... Alabama in the summer,



*Halloween Party*, 1995. Acrylic and gesso on wood. 32"x48"

no air-conditioning, dead body... you get the idea. And then of course, as I entered college, I suddenly heard about this weird disease that seemed to be affecting gay men in New York and San Francisco. And then I started having friends that were becoming ill and dying—it was a nightmarish period of time. So death has always been part of my vocabulary.

**How would you describe the relationship between the saints and sinners who share the canvases?**

To me, the sacred and the profane are really the same. One of the things I like to emphasize is that religious ceremony used to always

incorporate both, until the Judeo-Christian tradition created the division between the sacred and sin. Mind-altering drugs and sex were all part of the worshipping process, as they brought about the transcendent moment where you could identify with God. Those are the closest things on earth that could give you an example of what the God-like state is about. I think so much has been lost in the human condition because those things have been removed from religion as opposed to being celebrated.

Carnival's roots are in the pagan past as well as being a Catholic holiday. There's a lot of dark history behind Carnival's symbols; they carry a heavy weight, and although I'm not Catholic, I am fascinated by the rituals, or 'the swag and the drag' as a guy I know likes to say. But. I'm not trying to pick on Catholics. I mean, I was raised Southern Baptist, and if you want darkness, honey, let me tell you, go up to Alabama with a Southern Baptist and you'll see just how dark it can get.

**Do you find that your artistic sensibilities fit into the existing art scene in the city, and elsewhere?**

The art scene in New Orleans—when I first moved down there—was like any other art scene, with artists locked in competition with each other. I find that ridiculous. There's plenty of pie to go around. My studio is always open. If people need help or advice, or if I have a contact that might help someone, then why the hell wouldn't I give them that information? It was like that then, and it's like that now. Most of what I see are people with the facility to paint or sculpt, but they have nothing to say. They work hard to make you think they do, but when you cut to the chase, there's really nothing going on. I've known a lot of people who called themselves artists, and you can always hear the capital "A" for Artist. That's why I don't really participate much in the world of contemporary art. You always see more galleries than are needed, that constantly look for new people to show whether or not they're worth showing. I walked into a gallery one time in Chelsea, and there were pedestals throughout the space with melting sticks of butter displayed on top of them. Not ceramic castings, or sculptures, but actual sticks of butter. It's an oversaturated scene.

Just to be clear, one of my heroes is Rothko, so I'm not saying that art has to be narrative or realistic, but it has to be well done with a brain behind it. Art-making is essential. It always will be. When it comes to being an artist, it's not a career choice or a lifestyle. It's about making the work, something you are compelled to do. You're going to make the work no matter what, whether you're getting attention or not. Folk or outsider artists are usually the most honest



Detail of *Jackie Mae's Sour Hour at Le Round Up*, 2004.

and actually have something to say. Those are the people whose work I find to be the most interesting. Even if they're just in dialogue with themselves, and others may not speak the language, that's okay. To me, the excitement is trying to decipher that visual language.

**It seems like you draw a lot of inspiration from subterranean atmospheres like the Corner Pocket. Is that where you feel most at home?**

Well, I've never really been comfortable in the mainstream of anything. Suburbia just makes my skin crawl: the plastic, the manufactured,

the inauthentic. As for the Pocket, Ms. Fly (the late Lee Featherstone) the original owner, who I knew and adored, created a really wonderfully twisted atmosphere. It was just this side of legal for the most part. The clientele was terrifying and the dancers on the bar could be everything from ex-marines to runaways from Mississippi. Back then they'd dance in pretty much whatever they had underneath their clothes: boxer shorts, tighty whiteys, whatever. It wasn't just this G-string business you have now. Even the regular dancers would come out in briefs, and the bar just had a feel to it that was naughty, but not necessarily pretty, which is what I really liked about it. It was something

dark, sad, with a certain air of desperation. Many of these young guys were running away from bad situations; they had drug problems, or they were prostituting themselves. Usually I spent more time watching the crowd than I probably ever did watching the dancers. The crowd at the ballet, that was fun to draw.

But then my favorite bar in the city of course is Molly's at the Market. I've spent more time there than any other bar in the city; ever since my husband and I moved to New Orleans, it's always been our home bar. That's where you would find us on a Saturday afternoon sitting in the window drinking. More so there than the gay bars, unless it was an event or we were just



kind of making an evening of it, going on the grand tour, so to speak.

**Even so, it seems like queer culture in New Orleans is a real preoccupation in your work.**

I wouldn't say a preoccupation, more just a matter of fact. I find gay culture is becoming more and more homogenized, and I find that extremely disturbing. No matter where you go, you can be in Berlin, or you can be in San Francisco or you can be in Atlanta, and it all looks and feels the same. I think New Orleans is something of an exception. The queers in New Orleans are, well, we're a wackier bunch. In New Orleans, by birth right you're an outsider—so then to be the outsiders within the outsiders makes it even more challenging, and also kind of wonderful—being a fabulous freak, so to speak, which I take great pride in. In New Orleans there's also a certain degree of insanity that goes beyond any desire for conformity, and a wonderful disregard for fashion and trends. I think it ties into the larger culture—what everyone that has lived and died here had to go through to be here. Those shared experiences create a somewhat insulating effect from outside influences.

**In what ways would you say New Orleans has shaped your art?**

There is no one way to ever describe it. If you spend any length of time there, you're never going to look at the rest of the world the same way. New Orleans is a hard place to live. I think people have been trying to come up with a description for 300 years, but just breathing the air has its effects. The history, the melodrama, the drama, the tragedy, the comedy, the costuming. If that doesn't fuel one's creativity, I don't know what possibly can.

The people are just some of the most fascinating people you'll ever meet. From your very sweet next-door neighbor, to some of the bizarre, perhaps a little mentally touched individuals just walking down the street. You head out the door for the day and you have no idea what adventure may lay ahead, no matter what you had planned out. That's what I miss the most: on a daily basis, there is just that sense of adventure. What the hell might happen today?

**How did you get from New Orleans to the high desert?**

In 2006, I was blessed to receive an artist residency in Santa Fe for a couple of months, and that allowed me to get out here and kind of check out the lay of the land. The nearest

major body of water from Santa Fe is twelve hundred miles away; I figured it's quite safe from hurricanes. The environment of the high desert is very cathartic, very healing and it was what was really needed at the time.

**Do you still consider yourself in exile?**

Well, the way I think of it in my head is that I live in New Orleans; I just happen to be spending too much time in the desert. What I've been trying to do for seven years now is figure out a way to be there for six months out of the year, and be here for six months out of the year. Unfortunately, it's still weighted towards the desert. Homesickness has just become something that's kind of always there, particularly when oysters come into the season. That's when it gets really bad—I'm a raw oyster fanatic. But no, I have not found the solution to that question yet. If somebody said, "Here's your house. You can live here year round." I would have a very hard time doing that. With all that happened with Katrina, that would be difficult. After all the emotional trauma, it's kind of like, do you really want to put yourself back into that position again full-time? And that's the rub....but we always get home for Mardi Gras. It's something that just has to happen. I spend 364 days a year preparing for that one day.



*The Burden of Love*, 1994. Acrylic on gesso on wood.





## Artist Michael Meads' work celebrates New Orleans Mardi Gras year-round

Life is a Carnival

By JOHN D'ADDARIO | Special to The Advocate JAN 13, 2016 - 11:33 AM



Photo provided by the artist – Artist Michael Meads remembers walking with the Society of St. Anne in “The Grand Pageant of the Mystic Krewe of Saint George the Divine.”



To say that Carnival is a special time of year for artist Michael Meads is an understatement. “Carnival is the world in which almost all of my work resides,” Meads said, “and in my world Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year’s is the price I pay for the magical time of Jan. 6 through Ash Wednesday!” There are many prominent themes at play in Meads’s sprawling retrospective [“Bent, Not Broken”](#) at the [Ogden Museum of Southern Art](#), including sex, death, memory, loss and disasters both natural and man-made. But it is a raucous and richly textured Carnival sensibility that permeates and unites the many disparate elements of Meads’s work, including the more weighty ones. Images of Meads and his husband and their many friends at Carnival celebrations over the years are a central part of the slideshow which form the centerpiece of an exhibition of Meads’s photographic work in one part of the show. Various painted objects, including Carnival masks which Meads designed and wore, fill another set of galleries.



Photo provided by the artist – Michael Meads, ‘The BaPtism,’ 2014

And Carnival is the focal point for several of the epic-scale charcoal drawings that occupy the main part of the exhibition.

One of the drawings depicts a long-ago Carnival parade at [Holy Cross High School](#) in the Lower 9th Ward, where Meads taught for many years before Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005. An apparition of the storm hovers in the background, like an unwanted guest about to crash the party.

Another depicts the burning of the old French Opera House in the Vieux Carre as costumed and beaded figures continue their revelry on Bourbon Street.

“Carnival and the ancient festivals of Saturnalia and Lupercalia, which are the pagan origins of Carnival, provide endless inspiration for my work,” Meads said. “Carnival is the backdrop, and all of those who participate in it in good faith become the characters that populate my handmade pieces and photographs.” Indeed, you don’t have to look very far beyond the Catholic saints (and attendant sinners) who populate many of Meads’s pieces to find a marked pagan sensibility in his artistic worldview.

That sensibility is most evident in the drawing “The Grand Pageant of the Mystic Krewe of Saint George the Divine,” in which horned and masked satyrs take part in the annual [Society of Saint Anne](#) parade from Bywater to the French Quarter on Mardi Gras morning to deposit the ashes of deceased loved ones in the Mississippi River. (“Saint George the Divine” refers to New Orleans artist George Dureau, who died in 2014 and who, in Meads’s view, was a pagan saint if there ever was one.)

While “The Grand Pageant” is a fanciful visual retelling of one of Meads’ most cherished Carnival memories, he speaks passionately about other fondly remembered Mardi Gras experiences that have influenced his work in more subtle ways.

“Mardi Gras 2006 was a gorgeous, sunny day, perfect for Fat Tuesday, and mercy took many forms that day,” Meads said. “For me it was all about the reunions happening throughout that city, the ones I experienced with friends and family as well as the ones happening all around me between other folks.”



Photo provided by Michael Meads – Charles Canada and Michael Meads marked Mardi Gras 2015 as Melvin the Mundane, Appliance Hypnotist and Professor Phate, Fortune Teller and Snake Oil Salesman. “In my world, Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year’s is the price I pay for the magical time of Jan. 6 through Ash Wednesday,” Meads says.



But Meads also says that Mardi Gras was also about commemorating “who wasn’t there.”

“It was also a day of absence and ghosts. It was emotionally exhausting, But despite the hell and high water, we showed the world who we really were that day. It was the most magical Mardi Gras of all!”

And preserving the kind of Carnival magic which permeates his art is something Meads sees as a challenge and an opportunity in the years ahead.

“It makes me very happy to see the recent arrivals to our city embrace Mardi Gras and costuming,” Meads said. “They’re helping to preserve traditions, and Carnival and Mardi Gras and all of the traditions that surround them must be protected from those that would seek to change them or pervert them in some overtly commercialized or nontraditional way.”

Change is the last thing Meads wants to see happen to Carnival traditions.

“I so look forward to Mardi Gras because I know will see old friends in the same spot at the same time year after year.”



Photo provided by the artist – ‘Mardi Gras Study,’ 2003, a watercolor



## The Ogden Museum of Southern Art Celebrates PRIDE 2019



### Ogden Museum of Southern Art

June 20 at 11:14 AM · 🌐

In celebration of Pride Month, we're highlighting this work by Michael Meads from the Ogden Museum's Permanent Collection! Born in Anniston, Alabama in 1966, Meads received a Master of Fine Arts from State University of New York at Albany in 1990. "Company for Dinner" depicts the first time the artist witnessed a gay couple involved in the mundane domestic chores of a long-term partnership. As the couple prepared dinner for their guests at their home in Albany, Meads was moved by the simple normalcy of their life together, and inspired by the open confidence and comfort these men had in their relationship. It gave the young Alabama artist hope for his own future. This watercolor was a gift to the O's permanent collection from Michael's husband of 24 years, Charles Canada.

[Michael Meads, "Company for Dinner," 1996, Watercolor on paper, Gift of Charles Canada] #pride #yallmeansall #loveislove #ogdenmuseum #sharethesouth #nola #seethesouth #discoverthesouth #celebratethesouth #artsdistrctneworleans #OgdenCollection

**"Company for Dinner" 1996, Watercolor on paper – Michael Meads**

## The Ogden Museum of Southern Art Celebrates National Recognition of Marriage Equality June 26, 2015



Ogden Museum of Southern Art

June 26 · Edited ·

Michael Meads and his husband met in 1994 and exchanged vows the following year in Alabama. The two were legally married in 2013 and today their marriage has become recognized in all 50 states. 2015 marks their 20th wedding anniversary. This 1990 watercolor piece "Coosa River Kiss" was a gift to the Ogden by Meads' husband Charles Michael Canada. We will be showing Meads' work in the exhibition "Bent Not Broken" opening in October. #lovewins



**"Coosa River Kiss," 1990, Watercolor on paper, Michael Meads**



# Michael Meads at Redbud Gallery, Houston

by **Bill Arning** September 24, 2017



*Michael Meads' Der Liebestod*

The art world has been abuzz over the new large-scale drawings Kara Walker is showing at Sikkema Jenkins in New York. While I won't see them until early October, I have been consuming all the press including a popular Facebook live analysis by Roberta Smith. Walker's mix of savage humor, American history, sadistic sexuality and an artistically unique visual language gets audiences to look squarely at the black experience of systemic racism and the seeming intractability of white supremacy. This talent makes her current exhibition of giant drawing-based artworks the must-see revelation of the fall season.

Walker's exhibition came to mind when seeing the excellent exhibition by New Mexico-based Michael Meads at **Redbud Gallery** in Houston. Meads, the subject of a major, brilliant 2016 retrospective at New Orleans' Ogden Museum, does for the queer experience what Walker has been both celebrated and reviled for doing with the politics of race in America. Both are masters of politically charged depiction, but neither presents a pretty picture or offers a happy ending. Meads was based in New Orleans for many years and along with NOLA artists like the late George Dureau made the erotic pleasure-playground that is New Orleans their subject. The **Southern Decadence** celebration, a



weekend-long orgy, is a favorite quick trip with a large Houston contingent who should rush to this show to see their transient joys made into the stuff of history.

Before the retrospective, Meads was best known for his photographic works: conspicuously southern shit-kickers — most not gay-identified — showing off sexually for Meads' lens. These images were mainly harsh — guys in front of confederate flags, pointing guns, and copulating with watermelons — but there were moments of tenderness: two brothers who were previously shown in naughtier acts of boy-world affectionately hug each other. The Ogden show had a rotating slide show on a large flat screen that fixated many of us, while children were summarily kept out of the room.



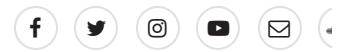
The Ogden show introduced an art form that might be the least practical for an artist hoping to sell art to make a living: massively scaled, detailed drawings. These behemoth artworks are all but unframable and hence perpetually fragile. Fingerprints, a frisky cat or a spilled coke would be enough to spell their end, but nonetheless Meads' chosen media is inescapably beautiful. Just as Walker has chosen to use James Ensor's *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1899* from the Getty Collection as her model for depicting the horrors of Trump's America, Meads also conjures the spirit of the Belgian political surrealist master. As with Ensor's great paintings, Meads recognizes no limits on how many images can be pushed into the surface. As if to prove a point, most expanses of human flesh are covered in tattoos to add a few more evocative pictures in what could have just shown a beauty mark.



*Der Liebestod (detail)*

The current show at Redbud features only one of Meads' monumental histories (no more could fit) entitled *Der Liebestod*, after the aria of erotic climax in Richard Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* – a melody that has been used to indicate how music, lust, and bodily pleasures can create a divine, exquisite delirium. In this masterwork, a celebration of Southern Decadence and drawn as if by Honoré Daumier or Ensor as a mad throng of men — some clad in leather and others nude — co-mingle with Greek and Roman gods, devils, angels, and drag queens. Like Wagner's lovers, the death drive is everywhere and each orgasm that occurs in Southern Decadence is a little blow against the puritan empire of repression. In its complete worldview, in which sex is resistance, its massive blocks of black, white, and gray feel like a *Guernica* for the era of AIDS.

But the specter of death doesn't make transitory pleasures less sweet, and the central masked lover holds his partner tightly against him to keep him from collapsing. We must guess: has he drunk too much, passed out from love or too powerful an orgasm, or expired from AIDS? The difficulty of how to continue experiencing sex, love, and fraternity during an epidemic is already receding into the past. The revolutionary nature of this massive bacchanal is made clear by Meads' inclusion of anti-gay bigots on the upper left. Like any New Orleans celebration, the only way to combat puritans and homophobes is more sex and more joy.



Young men come out and immediately get Truvada, a daily pill that removes any real risk of contracting HIV. This pre-exposure treatment has decoupled sex and death. For my generation of gay men, who can barely remember life before HIV (I was 22 when my friends started dying), this can be very disquieting — the young men we know won't have this war-weary feeling that we have known all our adult lives. Meads' depiction is indeed a form of history painting, and like Kara Walker, Meads must assume that for most of his audience, seeing the street outside Café Lafitte In Exile erupt into a street-filling orgy may be well outside their lived experience.

The undeniability of Meads' topic is crucial, as you cannot even try to discuss his work without starting with queer life, the death drive, and sex. It is the topic.

There have been a number of curators and cultural critics calling the establishment cultural voices on the "progressive" argument for not discussing queer content: A recent and much-debated, three-page press release on Felix Gonzalez-Torres' first exhibition at Zwirner that managed never to use the words "gay" or "AIDS"; or the documentary, *I Am Not Your Negro* that managed to run 90 minutes without mentioning James Baldwin being a homosexual (except for a homophobic quote from his FBI file). Baldwin's move to Europe and Istanbul was as much about wanting to lead a gay life as to escape American racism. Well-meaning progressive heterosexuals tend to take the position "We aren't homophobic; gays have made so much progress that we no longer need to mention the gay stuff!"





Bullshit. With both Baldwin and Gonzalez-Torres, being specific helps rather than hinders our understanding of their work, and there is no risk of them being “reduced” to sexuality any more than Walker’s new masterworks are reducible to race alone. Redbud uses the text from the Ogden’s curator Bradley Sumrall that is both specific and poetic, ending with the heartbreaking phrase: “The viewer is left with the knowledge that, like Tristan and Isolde, these lovers may only be united through death.”



Michael Meads, while quite surreal in his sensibility, tells real stories that feel as much like literature as visual art. The small episodes depicted in the small drawings that surround *Der Liebestod* at Redbud are in many ways more legible, limited to only a few memorable figures each. But it is the courage of an artist practicing such an insane art form and succeeding that will leave you breathless. The lovers’ delirium in the face of death and bigotry is no less crazy than the insanity of this work existing in the first place.

Through Oct. 1, 2017 at [Redbud Gallery](#), Houston.





## Review: Michael Meads: Bent Not Broken

D. Eric Bookhardt Jan 4, 2016 - 3:00 pm



Some art has to be seen in the right context. The Michael Meads drawings I encountered occasionally in the past suggested the work of a rural Southern Fellini who landed on Bourbon Street during Carnival and had been hallucinating ever since. But this Ogden Museum of Southern Art show puts his work in perspective with insightful arrangements of more and bigger drawings, and while his obsessive, orgiastic, rococo psychedelic effects are still predominant, this selection in the museum's large contemporary gallery offers an unexpectedly coherent overview in which his flair for local color and classical mythology come together in a

broadly cohesive melange. Although Meads' odd marriage of grand scale and obsessive minutiae still seem over the top, the result suggests a Cecil B. DeMille take on a south Louisiana *Satyricon* with detailing by a down-home Alabama Aubrey Beardsley. We see as much in *Grand Pageant of the Mystic Krewe of St. George*, a mammoth drawing where a head rather like that of the late George Dureau appears in a corner slyly surveying the chaos around him — an appropriate homage to a legendary painter whose canvases suggested New Orleans characters as figures in a mythic opera.

Drama and intrigue characterize most of these works, although the cast of thousands often causes them to blur into riotous tangles of subplots. In *The Baptism*, Nordic warriors, medieval royals and Victorian villains vie for dominance as the Louisiana Supreme Court building goes up in flames in the background. In *Ghosts Along the Levee* (detail, pictured), a marching group parades in the shadow of a vast skull amid demonic beings. Buffoonish and picaresque yet apocalyptic, Meads' drawings often recall George Grosz's expressionistic Berlin grotesqueries while expressing related sensibilities with regard to the Carnavalesque depravities that characterize the human condition today. In his smaller drawings and photographs, he comes across more like a social realist, but it all adds up to a bravura performance from a unique artist who makes universal statements from homegrown ingredients.



## HYPERALLERGIC

ART

# An Artist's Sprawling Universe of Sex and Death, with New Orleans at Its Center

John d'Addario November 9, 2015



Michael Meads, "Wheel of Misfortune" (1995) (all images courtesy Ogden Museum of Southern Art, New Orleans, unless otherwise noted)

NEW ORLEANS — During a recent tour of *Bent, Not Broken*, the Michael Meads retrospective at the [Ogden Museum of Southern Art](#) in New Orleans, curator Bradley Sumrall jokingly credited the artist with single-handedly inventing the “hot redneck” genre with his photographs of young Southern men in various states of languid shirtlessness, usually sporting

farmer's tans and often accompanied by the odd hunting rifle, buck carcass, or Confederate flag.

Though no other contenders for the title come to mind, whether or not that's actually the case is besides the point: Meads's photographs turn out to be just one part of a sprawling body of work that manages to be startlingly intimate and contain multitudes at the same time.



Michael Meads, "Drag Stag" (1996) and "Aaron at Sulpher Springs" (1994) (images courtesy the artist)

Those photographs get their own gallery in *Bent, Not Broken*, and it's the best place to start exploring the show. To some audiences, Meads is still best known as a photographer of a certain flavor of Southern beefcake. Mostly taken in and around Meads's studio in Eastaboga, Alabama, his portraits of young men were seen by some

critics as a sort of down-home (or less kindly, white trash) response to work by the likes of Bruce Weber and Herb Ritts when Meads began exhibiting them in the early 2000s.

In retrospect, however, the more profound aspect of Meads's photographs is less their erotic appeal than his observation of more subtle details: a glittery tiara on a deer head trophy, a pile of empty Natty Light cans strewn across the back of a pickup truck, the Nazi slogan "Blut und Ehre" etched on the blade of a knife held against a belly. While some of those more questionable details invite a critical examination, for Meads his body of photographs is first and foremost a tool for recollection: "Simply put those photos are records of my friends that were either posing for me for use as reference material in my paintings and drawings, or the photos were a visual journal of the what all we were doing during that time in our lives together."



The centerpiece of the photo gallery (tellingly titled "It Was Lovely While It Lasted") is a slideshow containing 1,450 images of a cast of faces and bodies that become familiar over the course of its two-hour running time. Covering a

Michael Meads, "Colman and Rayton" (1993) (image courtesy the artist)



Michael Meads, "Adam's Belly" (1998) (image courtesy the artist)

30-year period, the photographs move from rural Alabama to a twilit New Orleans demimonde to the softer glow of the high desert outside of Santa Fe where Meads and his husband Charles Canada moved after Hurricane Katrina. In its diaristic and intimate depiction of a fluidly defined circle of friends and lovers, its most obvious antecedent is

Nan Goldin's *Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, for which Meads's piece establishes itself as a wholly male parallel: a gritty but almost Whitmanesque visual reverie of a shared life that "rejoices in comrades" (not to mention beer, weed, piss, guns, snakes, jockstraps, Carnival parades, and a good crawfish boil).

As compelling as the photographs are, *Bent, Not Broken* foregrounds Meads's considerable skills as a painter and draftsman, and casts him as one of the more compelling history artists working today. For in their operatic scope, the four massive graphite on paper drawings that anchor the main body of the exhibition qualify as contemporary equivalents of "The Raft of the Medusa" or "Guernica": epic depictions of suffering, disaster and loss, dense with allegory and precisely rendered detail.

Spend some time in the hallway adjacent to the main exhibition gallery exploring the installation of Meads's earlier work first. It neatly places the show squarely not only in the context of New Orleans, but almost literally in the shadow of the late artist George Dureau, who occupies a central role in Meads's own artistic narratives. In addition to dividing their talents between drawing, painting, and photography, both artists self-consciously referenced classical themes in their work and situated themselves in the rich tradition of a particular strain of New Orleans bohemianism. Dureau's presence is palpable throughout *Bent, Not*



*Broken*, and he's the subject of one of the epic narrative drawings in the main gallery. (There's also an immense Dureau drawing from the Ogden's permanent collection hanging in the stairwell at one end of the exhibition as well as a magisterial self-portrait in a show of the Ogden's recent acquisitions downstairs.)



George Dureau, "Self Portrait" (nd) and  
Michael Meads, "Halloween Party" (1995)

If Dureau is the *genius loci* of Meads's work, there's no question that New Orleans is the locus itself. Between rural Alabama, where he grew up and went to college, and the desert outside of Santa Fe where he currently lives, Meads lived in New Orleans, and the city became the most prominent background (both

psychic and literal) in his body of work.

Meads describes a childhood spent hearing his father listening to "hellfire and brimstone" Baptist preachers on the radio, where New Orleans was described as a "wicked city." "So naturally," said Meads, "I couldn't wait to move there."

Meads's New Orleans is full of magic and contradictions, a place where the casually devastating beauty of a stripper at the [Corner Pocket](#) can exist on the same plane as episodes of abrupt violence and natural cruelty. But Meads's devotion to the city is absolute: "I would rather have had my worst day there than my best day anywhere else."

Part of that natural cruelty, of course, was Hurricane Katrina, which flooded Meads's studio near Lake Pontchartrain and destroyed half of his art. Four drawings on gessoed wood panels salvaged from his studio after Katrina depict a tangle of nude male bodies intertwined with mythological figures and skeletal fragments, as succinct an

encapsulation of Meads's worldview as you'll find in any of his work. (One is even entitled "Boner," in case that emphasis of sex and death as twin themes wasn't clear enough.)



Michael Meads, "For Saint Genesius, Patron Saint of Actors" (1998)

Another series of drawings embellished with gold paint give Meads's drawings of soldiers and *memento mori* the aura of Byzantine icons, and gold also transforms a coming out letter written to Meads by one of his former students into a sort of sacred object. And a series of paintings devoted to Roman Catholic saints transforms St. Genesius, patron saint of actors, into a sullen hustler in

a male strip bar, and St. Vitus, patron of clowns and comedians, into a leering John Wayne Gacy with clown makeup and bound victim.

Sex, art, and death coexist in overlapping temporal spaces in Meads's artistic universe, and when they collide in works like "Der Liebestod" (2013-2014) the results are breathtaking.



Michael Meads, "Der Liebestod" (2013-14)

Meads's "[love death](#)" takes place on the corner of Saint Ann and Bourbon streets in the French Quarter, the epicenter of gay New Orleans nightlife and celebration for decades. A young man swoons his last breath in the arms of another as a skeletal bishoplike figure looms over them bearing a pharmacy jar



Michael Meads, "Der Liebestod" (detail, 2013–14)

filled with dark liquid, his mantle embroidered with positive signs referencing the HIV epidemic, while all around surge and swirl dozens of figures enacting the various rituals of the annual Southern Decadence street party.

Men drink and ogle on a balcony above the scene, oblivious to the tragedy unfolding in their midst; below them, leather-clad putti attempt to hold up the corner of the crumbling proscenium through which the entire scene is depicted as a battalion of bullhorn-brandishing street preachers attempt to disrupt the festivities under the caustic gaze of a bearded drag queen. Only the stone cherubs in the corners of the frame shed tears for the tragic couple at its center.



Michael Meads, "Ghosts Along the Levee: The Seniors' Mardi Gras Parade at Holy Cross High School for Boys" (2012–13)

Other disasters are depicted in the slightly smaller pieces on the central wall of the main gallery, and are likewise presented as cataclysms marking the end of various periods in the city's history. "Ghosts Along the Levee: The Seniors' Mardi Gras Parade at Holy Cross High School for Boys" (2012–13) contains the most visually explicit reference to Hurricane Katrina in the exhibition: the storm itself swirls menacingly in the distance above a parade of students from the school in New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward where Meads taught for





Michael Meads, "The BaPtism" (2012)

several years before the storm. (The school's historic campus was flooded and badly damaged during Katrina, and stands abandoned and deteriorating to this day.)

"The BaPtism" (2012) depicts two other defining events in New Orleans history. The burning of the old French

Opera House on Bourbon Street, which served as one of the cultural landmarks of the city from 1859 until its destruction by fire in 1919, is here synchronous with another disaster that befell New Orleans nearly a century later: the 2010 BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, which profoundly affected a city still reeling from the aftereffects of Katrina. In Meads's vision, the crude oil with which the Carpetbagger character "baptizes" the crowned figure against harm is just as useless as the firehoses directed at the burning opera house. In New Orleans, magic can only protect you so much.



Michael Meads, "The Grand Pageant of the Mystic Krewe of Saint George the Divine" (2015)

The final drawing in the cycle, "The Grand Pageant of the Mystic Krewe of Saint George the Divine" (2015), represents the apotheosis of artist George Dureau on that most holy day in the New Orleans calendar, Fat Tuesday. As a member of the [Society of Saint Anne](#), Meads regularly took part in its annual ritual whereby ashes of members of the krewe who had died during the preceding year

were taken in a procession through the French Quarter on Mardi Gras

morning and deposited in the Mississippi River. “The Grand Pageant,” however, is only an allegorical depiction of Dureau’s own ashes being “committed to the waters”: an appropriately symbolic sendoff for the artist whom Meads believed embodied so much of the creative soul of New Orleans, and whose passing in April 2014 marked another end of an era.

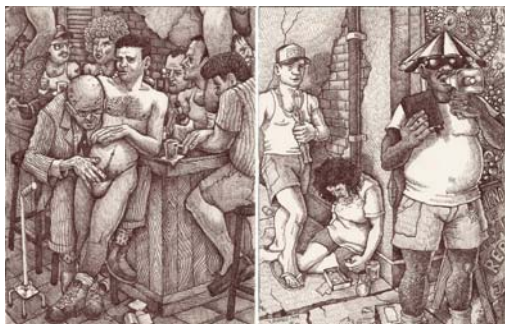


“The Grand Pageant of the Mystic Krewe of Saint George the Divine” (detail, 2015)

Dureau himself appears twice in the painting: once in the guise of Bacchus held aloft by randy satyrs amidst the carnival revelry, and again in a portrait on a shield (an homage to [Caravaggio’s “Medusa”](#)) that Meads says symbolizes the artist’s deteriorating mental and

physical state in the years preceding his death.

And don’t miss the group of rat-headed leather boys in the upper right quadrant of the drawing: That skeletal figure among them with the camera around his neck being led away by police is none other than Robert Mapplethorpe, Dureau’s younger contemporary who some (including Meads) believe never acknowledged the considerable debt he owed to the artist who taught him much of what would become his signature style. Here, Meads makes Dureau’s apotheosis complete by giving Mapplethorpe the retribution he deserves.



After the sweep and grandeur of the large historical pieces, a suite of ink drawings depicting everyday life and street scenes in New Orleans, including several that Meads created while working the night shift of the since-shuttered St.



Michael Meads, "At the Corner Pocket II" (1999) and "Street Preacher on Canal & Bourbon" (1999) (images courtesy the artist)

Charles Inn, comes as a dose of comic relief with its cast of drunk frat boys, bored strippers, and "horrible

tourists" keenly observed in the tradition of Hogarth and Daumier. And a selection of starkly rendered figure and drapery studies show the influence of classical artists like Carlo Crivelli and Domenico Tiepolo.



Michael Meads, "Visiting Colman in the hospital" (1994) (image courtesy the artist)

Beginnings and endings in Meads's artistic universe often take place within the confines of a single artwork. But a series of six drawings in the main gallery serve as a fitting coda to the exhibition as a whole. With a tender but unflinching eye, Meads chronicled the final weeks and moments of his friend and frequent model Colman, who was diagnosed with prostate cancer at age 17 and died two years later.

"I promised him that I would be there and draw what I saw, and I did," said Meads. And *Bent, Not Broken* makes abundantly clear that bearing witness to histories — grand and personal, real and imagined — is the defining aspect of his work.

Michael Meads: *Bent Not Broken* is on view at the [Ogden Museum of Southern Art](#) (925 Camp Street, New Orleans) through February 28, 2016

MORE FROM HYPERALLERGIC





## ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

# Out of Exile: An Interview with Michael Meads

Tyler Rosebush [tyrosebush@gmail.com](mailto:tyrosebush@gmail.com)

For many long-standing denizens of the French Quarter, the paintings and drawings of Michael Meads might not come as much of a shock. After all, the orgiastic tableaux he is known for are in fact faithful compilations of the flagrant hedonism he experienced during his time living in New Orleans from the '90s until his exile to the high desert after Katrina. Despite the distance, Michael managed to pull off a solo show at the Ogden in 2015 and makes yearly pilgrimages back here for Carnival season. More recently, Michael has reunited with New Orleans temporarily as an artist in residence at the Joan Mitchell Center where he indulged my request to get on record a few of his most risqué memories, as well as his plans for upcoming art pieces.

**To start off with, why don't we go back to that story you were just telling me about T.T.'s.**

So, a buddy of mine took me into a very upscale bar on Rampart—very swank and I am in there looking around going, "Wait a minute! This was T.T.'s!" This was a place I wish you could have known. Oh my god, the things I have seen people do on that bar—and it's the same bar top. T.T.'s had the dancers who kinda aged out of the Corner Pocket— or their drug habits were so bad that they weren't allowed in the Pocket. Holy mackerel, it was crazy in there! A buddy of mine came to visit from out of town and got roaring drunk. One of the dancers there jacked off onto the bar and my buddy licked it up. I was like "Jeff! That's probably not a good idea!" Not so much what was in the load but what was on the bar!

**I've heard many bars at the time were like that, especially on Rampart.**

Mother Bob's was one of the grand dame gay bars of Rampart. It was a hustler bar and there was an older performer, who I won't name and she would always have on a mini skirt with some sort of midriff sequin number with "DIVA" spelled out in rhinestones. I've got photos of all this. One of the greatest routines she ever did was to Cher's version of *Bang Bang* and when she got to the first chorus, "bang bang, he shot me down," she just collapsed onto the stage and just laid there singing until she was done!

**That's true camp.**

She'd get so drunk and come up to you and go "Ya wanna buy a lady a drink?" and of course Charles and I would buy her a drink. And then literal-



Liebestod by artist Michael Meads (Image Courtesy of Artist)

ly within 5 minutes she'd be back and have no idea that she had just run into us and say "Hey ya wanna buy a lady a drink?" Oh, she was a piece of work but an amazing performer.

I have tons of photographs of these people performing in the Quarter. There was Ms. Fly a.k.a. Lee Fetherston, who started the Corner Pocket and was murdered. She's one of my favorite people. There were several people we knew who got murdered. You gotta use your brain. It's easy to think everyone is here to have a good time. Some people are not. Some people just want to rob you and then kill you.

**Did you ever worry about the models you brought into your studio?**

We used to photograph and draw quite a few models from the Pocket. But I would spend several weeks getting to know them and see what the bartender had to say. All of them were always very nice. I'd never go up to someone on the street and say "You wanna be a model?"

**How did your experiences in New Orleans parallel your art? Did one precede the other?**

I had been dreaming of New Orleans since 1980. I saw Nastassja Kinski and Malcolm McDowell in *Cat People*, which takes place primarily around the French Quarter. It's a fun film, and it captures the atmosphere of New Orleans more than just about any other

film. I was like, "Ok, I have to go there." Finally, when I got to college, some buddies and I snuck down a few times and did the whole stay-up-24-hours thing.

**I guess that saves on a hotel room if you are staying up all night.**

Yea it was a cheap weekend. But New Orleans was always on my radar.

**At what point do you feel like you developed the visual vocabulary that your work is known for?**

It all comes out of my lived experiences. I try to make sure that everything in the drawing is something I have personally witnessed. Now, I might be combining several events into one singular event, but when you see these characters in one of my drawings, I probably have a photograph of that somewhere as reference material. I might do my own interpretation of that moment, or make it more elaborate. Wally Sherwood appears in some of my drawings, particularly as a leather putto figure. I make sure I have some way of backing it up so that people don't think that I am making it all up.

I also have an obsession with grand opera, particularly Wagnerian dramatic operas. I try to always include some sort of a proscenium so that it tells you immediately that it's not a picture frame, it's a stage. When I construct these drawings I always keep in mind the question could you actually stage

this in a theater and how deep does that theatre go? I even do aerial views, not in detail, but where would this be if it were an actual theater stage. Where would the backdrop be? You are always looking at the last 5 minutes of a 5 hour long opera in my work.

**The opera stage is so important because without it no one could possibly believe the story you are telling.**

This stuff all really happened, maybe not all at once, but you could pull that off on Fat Tuesday. That's the only day that I am on the stage, Fat Tuesday. I plan 364 days out of the year for that one day. Those are my people, Mardi Gras people. And carnies.

**What's a carnie?**

It's someone who works at a carnival. I have always wanted to be a snake oil salesman or sideshow Barker. State fairs are one of my favorite things to go to. Carnivals, the cheaper, the sleazier, the better. To this day, it still gives me the willies, the memory of the gentleman running the Ferris wheel who was missing half of his nose.

**Just half? How do you just miss half of your nose?**

It was just like a hole. The flesh was just barely covering the bone. He was greasy, chain-smoked and was filthy. He was operating the Ferris wheel, oh the creaking, it was just one bolt away from being on the news "Thousands



Die In Ferris Wheel Disaster!"

**On a slightly brighter note, How has your time been as a resident at the Joan Mitchell Center?**

It's given me a chance to reconnect with New Orleans, to see if there is still a place for me here, where I could have a go of it once more. [laughs] Third time's a charm. The idea would be to have a small studio here and go back to the desert for the summers, which are actually hotter but it's a dry heat.

But I can tell you that I don't wanna get on that plane when my residency is over. I just really enjoy wandering the Quarter by myself. All the old magic is still there.

**Did you feel that moving out to the desert of New Mexico has removed some of the distractions?**

Even in the desert you have to set up a schedule. It's that *mañana* attitude of "oh, we'll get to it tomorrow." If you don't set up a fairly rigid schedule, you won't get anything done. Also being in the desert there's always something that needs to be taken care of. The desert is always trying to get in. Here it's the roaches, rats, and water that are always trying to get in, but out there it's the sand, the dryness. There's always something that needs to be repaired. If you let that take over, then suddenly that's all you are doing. You can always come up with a project to distract your-

self from working in the studio.

**This city is full of people who want nothing more than for you to come have a drink and waste the day away together.**

And honestly I am more than happy to do it. Molly's is my home bar. I just sit in that window seat and literally the day will be gone.

**Do you have any current projects you are making progress on?**

Before Katrina I had started a series of paintings depicting the Stations of the Cross, but with all the characters played by drag queens, thieves, and prostitutes. I had completed two of them and left the third one on the drawing board as we evacuated. I lost the first two but the one left on the easel made it into my show at the Ogden a few years ago. Something's brewing there. I still wanna do the idea, but I think I have to do more studies. I've got the canvases and everything ready to go. The hardest part is coming up with the story, the characters and making an interesting composition. After that, you are just filling in the blanks.

**You say your religion is Mardi Gras. How much of a Catholic are you?**

I was raised Southern Baptist, so to me, it's all great theater. A dear friend of mine and a Catholic Brother always referred to it as "the swag and

the drag." Putting aside all the their unpleasantness, the Catholic Church kind of invented drag.

**If the Pope had a stroke and said "you know what, I want Michael Meads to paint the inside of our next cathedral," would you accept?**

Are you kidding me? I've always had two dreams: getting a Papal commission and being ambassador to the Court of St. James. But really, when I make a piece of art there's always one simple question I ask myself as I am coming to the end and that is would a big chief say this is pretty. For me that is the highest compliment you can be given. I mean, ok, we are all adorable with our paintings, sculptures, or installations. We go to Julia Street, have our cocktail parties and be all chi-chi. We are all just so precious but let's talk about the real art. The Mardi Gras Indians and their beadwork. That to me is what matters. If I make anything that gets close to that then I'm on the right track. They are the only critics I have in my head.

**Agreed.**

*Michael Meads continues as artist in residence at the Joan Mitchell Center until May 24th. His work can be found at Oleander On Royal (1000 Royal St) and online at [www.michaelmeads.com](http://www.michaelmeads.com).*

## The Ogden Museum of Southern Art Announces Michael Meads' "Bent, Not Broken"



**"Ghosts Along the Levee: The Seniors' Mardi Gras Parade at Holy Cross School" (detail) 2012-2013, graphite and charcoal on paper – Michael Meads**



## ARTICLES

## Best of 2015: Our Top 10 Exhibitions Across the United States



Hyperallergic December 16, 2015



We love [NYC](#) and [LA](#) and all the art they have to offer, but we know they're only two towns of *many* across the country mounting great exhibitions large and small. So we tried to travel and see a lot of shows this year, even though it's next to impossible to be comprehensive with a list like this (and we surely missed a lot). From Nick Cave's Detroit takeover to a retrospective of the artist known as Mr. Imagination, here are our picks for the best exhibitions of 2015 across the United States.

### #6 – *Michael Meads: Bent Not Broken* at the Ogden Museum of Southern Art (New Orleans)

*October 3, 2015–February 28, 2016*

Michael Meads, "Drag Stag" (1996) and "Aaron at Sulphur Springs" (1994) (images courtesy the artist)

No word is as over- and misused as "epic" these days, but the sprawling [Michael Meads retrospective](#) at the [Ogden Museum of Southern Art](#) in New Orleans is a potent reminder of its true meaning. Meads's large-scale charcoal drawings infuse grand spectacle and historical episodes — everything from the AIDS crisis to Hurricane Katrina

— with a heady mixture of sex, death, disaster, and celebration, and his sharply observed and precisely rendered smaller pieces and photographs are no less affecting and powerful. It's a beautifully organized exhibition of work by a major regional artist who deserves to be more widely known. —*John d'Addario*

## Top 10 New Orleans art exhibits of 2015 from arts writer Doug MacCash



Doug MacCash, NOLA.com | Times-Picayune DEC 26, 2015 - 5:00 PM



### 'Bent, Not Broken,' by Michael Meads at the Ogden Museum of Southern Art

As I wrote in the Sept. 28 story [Michael Meads' must-see, mega-drawings at Art For Arts' Sake](#), "Meads sees his Ping Pong table-sized pencil drawings as operas, at the climax of the plot, when the stage is awash in costumed characters. They are tangles of colliding cartoon-like portraits, props and symbols, like impossibly large tattoos."



## Michael Meads' must-see, mega-drawings at Art For Arts' Sake 2015



Doug MacCash, NOLA.com | Times-Picayune SEP 28, 2015 - 7:01 PM

Michael Meads exhibit of drawings, watercolors and photos titled "Bent, Not Broken," on the fifth floor of the Ogden Museum of Southern Art, is the not-to-miss stop at this year's [Art For Arts' Sake](#) fall stroll that takes place Saturday (Oct. 3) evening.

Meads sees his Ping Pong table-sized pencil drawings as operas, at the climax of the plot, when the stage is awash in costumed characters. They are tangles of colliding cartoon-like portraits, props and symbols, like impossibly large tattoos.

Though Meads was born in Alabama and now lives in New Mexico, his dark, boiling images are always set in the Crescent City, the psychic center of his universe.

"They all revolve around aspects of New Orleans," he said, "festivities and tragedies."

Speaking of the opera, in one drawing, Meads said, he blended images of the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill with images of the fire that destroyed the French Opera House in New Orleans in 1919. In another enormous drawing, he said, he depicted a long-ago Holy Cross high school Carnival parade that he views as a ghost story.

In another of Meads' mega-drawings, the Mexican Day of the Dead celebration has melded with Mardi Gras. In yet another, he envisions Medieval plague doctors, with beaked costumes, helplessly stranded in the era of HIV.

Meads said that he has no use for irony or sarcasm in art. If he appears to be reveling in New Orleans culture or lamenting tragedy, he is doing just that. There's no thematic contraflow, so to speak.

Sexual themes and occasional explicit images are woven through some of his drawings.

It takes time to bring Meads' drawings into focus. They glint with graphite and are as visually intermingled as spaghetti. He said they take from six to nine months to

complete, leaving behind scads of pencil stubs. Honestly, Meads said, they're "not fun" to make.

Some time ago, Meads decided to do a drawing as large as his studio wall, just to see if he could do it, he said. But there's more to it than the self-challenge. The size, the complexity of the designs, the density of the drawing style and the sheer labor involved, all point to a sort of artistic meditation.

Among the biggest drawings is a tribute to the late New Orleans artist George Dureau reigning over his own memorial Mardi Gras parade. It was necessary to climb a ladder to photograph the 10-by-10-foot drawing as it lay on the floor of the Ogden awaiting hanging.

Dureau, [who died in 2014](#), was an artistic hero to Meads. That's his portrait, as the Medusa embossed on a Roman soldier's shield, in the corner of the big drawing. Artistically, Dureau and Meads had a lot in common.

Both practiced a type of classical art in a world of modernity. Both executed oversized drawings. Both regularly turned to Carnival for subject matter. And both were inspired by the grit of Crescent City street life.

Meads' selection of small drawings sketched during his time working the desk of a hotel on St. Charles Avenue are like a series of short stories about the down and out, the desperate and the *demimonde*.

One last thing Meads and Dureau had in common: Both began taking photos of friends as source material for drawings and paintings.

Some of Meads' photographs of young men from rural Alabama from the 1990s are featured in the show. When he's exhibited them in the past, some onlookers interpreted them as rustic erotica, others interpreted them as a sort of wry commentary on erotic photography in general.

Meads welcomes the attention, but in truth, he said, they were just portraits of the ordinary guys he knew, who used to go out snake hunting or drinking beer by the river.

In one photo, a young man carries a taxidermy deer's head. The trophy, which Meads said was a tongue-in-cheek studio prop, is topped with a glinting tiara and strung with pearls. In another photo a young man removes the same decorated deer's head from Meads' flood-ruined New Orleans studio.



In 2005, Meads lived on Bellaire Street in Lakeview, not far from ground zero of the 17<sup>th</sup> Street Canal breach.

"The end of our backyard was the levee," he said.

His home studio, crowded with artworks, was lost. Holy Cross high school, where he taught, also flooded.

Though Meads, 49, now lives high in the mountains, an hour from Santa Fe, he said he's still plagued by post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms, including anxiety and memory loss related to the 2005 storm and flood. The New Mexico rainy season, he said, annually threatens to send water into his studio.

# MICHAEL MEADS

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**Born** Anniston, Alabama 1966

## **Education**

Master of Fine Arts, State University of New York at Albany; Albany, New York - 1990

Bachelor of Fine Arts, Auburn University; Auburn, Alabama - 1987

## **Special Collections**

The Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans, Louisiana

The Ogden Museum of Southern Art; New Orleans, Louisiana

Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Houston, Texas

The Worcester Art Museum; Worcester, Massachusetts

The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Collection of Art, Prints, and Photographs; New York Public Library; New York City

## **Grants & Residencies**

Artist-in-Residence, Joan Mitchell Center New Orleans - 2019

Artist-in-Residence sponsored by the Joan Mitchell Residency, Santa Fe Art Institute - 2006

Joan Mitchell Emergency Support Art Grant - 2006

Pollock-Krasner Foundation Emergency Grant - 2006

Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation, Inc. Emergency Grant - 2006

Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts Emergency Grant - 2006

KAT Fund of the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston - 2005

## **Solo Exhibitions**

**Der Liebestod and other works;** Redbud Gallery; Houston, Texas - 2017

**Bent, Not Broken;** The Ogden Museum of Southern Art; New Orleans, LA – 2015 - 2016

**La Ofrenda;** Palma Gallery; New Orleans, Louisiana – 2007

**Carondelet;** Clamp Art; New York, New York – 2004



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## Solo Exhibitions (continued)

**Eastaboga**; Nikolai Fine Art; New York, New York – 2002

**Recent Works**; Jemison Carnegie Heritage Hall Museum; Talladega, Alabama -1995

**Recent Works**; Telfair-Pete Theatre Gallery; Auburn University; Auburn, Alabama – 1995

**Michael Meads: Solo Exhibition**; Little House Gallery; Homewood, Alabama - 1993

**Recent Works**; Telfair-Pete Theatre Gallery; Auburn University; Auburn, Alabama 1991

## Selected Group Exhibitions

**Cream**; Red Truck Gallery; New Orleans, Louisiana – 2019

**Grand Illusions: The History and Artistry of Gay Carnival in New Orleans**; Louisiana State Museum – The Presbytere; New Orleans, Louisiana – 2019 – 2020

**Contemporary Alabama Photography**; Contemporary Art Gallery; Houston Baptist University; Houston, Texas – 2017 – 2018

**Contemporary Alabama Photography**; Mobile Museum of Art; Mobile, Alabama – 2017

**Garden of Earthly Delights**; Claire Elizabeth Gallery; New Orleans, Louisiana - 2017

**The Beauty of Disguise - Asking USA**; Sprechsaal Gallery; Berlin, Germany 2017

**/’pāpær/**; The Ogden Museum of Southern Art; New Orleans, Louisiana - 2016

**Queer x Desire**; Sprechsaal Gallery; Berlin, Germany - 2016

**Self-Processing**; Instant Photography; The Ogden Museum of Southern Art; New Orleans, Louisiana 2014/2015

**A Sense of Place**: Ten Years of Art from the Ogden Museum; The Ogden Museum of Southern Art; New Orleans, LA 2013 - 2014

**Into the Light: Photographs from the Permanent Collection**; The Ogden Museum of Southern Art; New Orleans, LA 2013

**Eat Me**; Curated by Paulina Bebecka; Postmasters Gallery; New York City – 2010/2011

**New Southern Photography**; The Ogden Museum of Southern Art; New Orleans, Louisiana – 2010

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**Kids Behaving Badly**; Curated by Brian Clamp; ClampArt; New York City – 2009

**Recently Acquired Works**; The Ogden Museum of Southern Art; New Orleans, Louisiana – 2009

**Postcards from the Edge Benefit**; Visual AIDS; New York, New York – 2008

**Katrina: Catastrophe and Catharsis**; Arthur Roger Gallery; New Orleans, Louisiana – 2008

**Pencil and Paper**; Collins C. Diboll Art Gallery; Loyola University; New Orleans, Louisiana – 2008

**Male: Works from the collection of Vince Aletti**; White Columns, New York City – 2008

**Ten Curatorial Perspectives**; Haven Arts; Bronx, New York – 2006

**Surviving the Hurricane: Katrina's Impact on New Orleans Art**; CAC; New Orleans, Louisiana – 2006

**Culture of Queer**; Leslie/Lohman Gay Art Foundation; Curated by David Rubin; New York, New York – 2006

**Culture of Queer; Creative Arts Center** – New Orleans; Curated by David Rubin; New Orleans, Louisiana – 2005

**What I did on my Summer Vacation... Autobiographical Photography and the Snapshot Aesthetic**; Curated by Brian Clamp; Clamp Art; New York City – 2005

**Seduction: Shedding Light On Dark Desires**; Curated by Ray Cook; Queensland Centre for Photography; Bulimba, Queensland, Australia – 2005

**The Hybrid**; Curated by Mateo Neivert; Palma Gallery; New Orleans, Louisiana – 2005

**Growing Up Absurd: Boys Becoming Men in an Insane World**; Radiant Light Gallery; Portland, Maine – 2005

**LaGrange National Biennial XXIII**; Chattahoochee Valley Art Museum; LaGrange, Georgia – 2004

**My people were fair and had cum in their hair (but now they're content to spray stars from your boughs)**; Curated by Bob Nickas, Team Gallery, New York, New York – 2003

**K 48 III Teenage Rebels Show**, Group Exhibition Curated by Scott Hug; Galerie du Jour Agnes B; Paris, France – 2003

**K 48: DAAG ONS NIET UIT**; Curated by Scott Hug; Capucijnenstraat 98; Maastricht, Netherlands – 2003



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**Scope-New York**; with Nikolai Fine Art; New York, New York- 2003

**Disturb**; Group Exhibition Curated by Dimitrios Antonitsis; LAB Art Projects, Athens, Greece - 2002 – 2003

**Scope-Miami**; with Nikolai Fine Art; Miami, Florida, - 2002

**K 48 III Teenage Rebels Show**; Group Exhibition Curated by Scott Hug; John Connelly Presents, New York, New York - December 2002 - January 2003

**Disturb**; Group Exhibition Curated by Dimitrios Antonitsis; Center for Contemporary Art, Thessaloniki, Greece – 2002

**Disturb**; Group Exhibition Curated by Dimitrios Antonitsis; 1st Public School of Hydra Contemporary Art Center, Hydra, Greece – 2002

**Turin Art Fair**; Group Exhibition; Turin, Italy – 2001

**Snakes, Snails & Puppy Dog Tails**; Group Exhibition Curated by Bill Previdi; Nikolai Fine Art, New York, New York – 2001

**ANP: City Projects, Group Exhibition**; Curated by Jimi Damms; Century Gallery, London, England – 2000

**ANP: City Projects, Group Exhibition**; Curated by Jimi Damms; Cokkie Snoei Gallery, Rotterdam, Netherlands – 2000

**ANP: City Projects, Group Exhibition**; Curated by Jimi Damms; Galerie S & H de Buck, Ghent, Belgium – 2000

**Second Skin, Group Exhibition**; Curated by Corrinna Ripps; University Art Museum; State University of New York; Albany, New York – 1998

**The Erotics of Denial**; Group Exhibition; Curated by Bill Arning; E. S. Vandam Gallery; New York, New York – 1998

**Thirty-sixth Tennessee All-State Art Competition**; Watkins Institute; Juried Group Exhibition; The Parthenon Galleries; Nashville, Tennessee – 1997

**Red Clay Survey**; Juried Group Exhibition; Lois Tarlow, Juror; Huntsville Museum of Art; Huntsville, Alabama -1996

**Art With A Southern Drawl**, Juried Group Exhibition; Juror's Merit Award Recipient; University of Mobile; Mobile, Alabama – 1996

**The Fourth Photo Annual**; Leslie/Lohman Gay Art Foundation, Invitational Group Exhibition; New York, New York – 1995

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**Cheaha Exhibition;** Juried Group Exhibition; Jemison Carnegie Heritage Hall Museum; Talladega, Alabama – 1995

**Cheaha Exhibition;** Juried Group Exhibition; Juror's Merit Award Recipient; Jemison Carnegie Heritage Hall Museum; Talladega, Alabama – 1994

**The Learned Image;** Invitational Group Exhibition; Five Points Gallery; Chatham, New York – 1994

**Together;** Invitational Group Exhibition; Russell Sage College; Troy, New York – 1994

**Transfiguration: University at Albany Fine Arts Alumni Exhibition;** University Art Museum; State University of New York at Albany; Albany, New York – 1994

**Light;** Invitational Group Exhibition for the AIDS Council of Northeastern New York; Russell Sage College; Troy, New York – 1993

**Cheaha Exhibition;** Juried Group Exhibition; Juror's Foundation Award Recipient; Jemison Carnegie Heritage Hall Museum; Talladega, Alabama – 1993

**A Political World;** Invitational Group Exhibition; The Fifth Gate Arts Center; Birmingham, Alabama – 1992

**One Dome;** Birmingham Artists' Association Invitational Group Exhibition; B.A.A Gallery; Birmingham, Alabama – 1992

**New Works;** Three Person Exhibition, Little House Gallery, Homewood, Alabama - 1992

**Auburn University Fine Arts Alumni Show;** Invitational Group Exhibition; Symposium on the Arts, panel member; Auburn University; Auburn, Alabama – 1992

**Eat;** Invitational Group Exhibition; Russell Sage College; Troy, New York – 1992.

**Superstition and Personal Ritual;** Invitational Group Exhibition; The Fifth Gate Arts Center; Birmingham, Alabama – 1992

**Spirituality and Eroticism;** Invitational Group Exhibition; Five Points Gallery; Chatham, New York – 1992

**Operation New Birmingham Show;** Invitational Group Exhibition; The Times Eight Space; Birmingham, Alabama – 1991

**Times Eight Invitational;** Group Exhibition; The Pepper Show Room; Birmingham, Alabama – 1991

**Ethics of Desire;** Invitational Group Exhibition; Five Points Gallery; Chatham, New York – 1991.



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**Second Thoughts**; Juried Group Exhibition; Russell Sage College; Troy, New York – 1991.

**Thesis Exhibition**; Group Exhibition; University Gallery; State University of New York at Albany; Albany, New York – 1990

**Artists of the Mohawk Hudson Region**; Juried Group Exhibition; Juror's Award Recipient; Ken Johnson, Juror; Albany Institute of History and Art; Albany, New York – 1990

**Dogmatic**; Group Exhibition; Curated by Leon Fried; Installation Collaboration with Bruce Stiglich; Ted Gallery; Albany, New York – 1989

**Thesis Exhibition**; Group Exhibition; Foy Union Gallery; Auburn, Alabama – 1987

**Head**; Group Exhibition; Behind the Glass Gallery; Auburn, Alabama – 1987

## Charities and Donations

**O What a Night**; The Ogden Museum of Southern Art; New Orleans, Louisiana – 2019

**O What a Night**; The Ogden Museum of Southern Art; New Orleans, Louisiana – 2018

**O What a Night**; The Ogden Museum of Southern Art; New Orleans, Louisiana – 2016

**O What a Night**; The Ogden Museum of Southern Art; New Orleans, Louisiana – 2014

**O What a Night**; The Ogden Museum of Southern Art; New Orleans, Louisiana – 2013

**O What a Night**; The Ogden Museum of Southern Art; New Orleans, Louisiana – 2012

**O What a Night**; The Ogden Museum of Southern Art; New Orleans, Louisiana – 2011

**Postcards from the Edge Benefit**; Visual AIDS; New York City – 2010

**O What a Night**; The Ogden Museum of Southern Art; New Orleans, Louisiana – 2010

**Postcards from the Edge Benefit**; Visual AIDS; New York City – 2009

**O What a Night**; The Ogden Museum of Southern Art; New Orleans, Louisiana – 2009

**O What a Night**; The Ogden Museum of Southern Art; New Orleans, Louisiana – 2008

**O What a Night**; The Ogden Museum of Southern Art; New Orleans, Louisiana – 2007

**O What a Night**; The Ogden Museum of Southern Art; New Orleans, Louisiana – 2006

**O What a Night**; The Ogden Museum of Southern Art; New Orleans, Louisiana – 2004

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**OUT Auction;** GLAAD; New York, New York – 2004

**Postcards from the Edge Benefit;** Visual AIDS; New York City – 2004

**White Box Annual Auction;** White Box; New York City – 2002

**Take Home A Nude Benefit;** Sotheby's New York; New York City – 2002

**Open Your Heart;** Ninth Annual Bailey House Art Auction Invitational; The Puck Building, New York City – 1997

**Times Eight Charity Art Auction;** Group Exhibition; Birmingham, Alabama – 1992

**Flower;** Benefit Exhibition for Our Brother's Keeper Foundation; Group Exhibition; Russell Sage College; Troy, New York – 1990.

## **Bibliography**

**In The Studio: Michael Meads;** Interview by Joan Gill, Photography by Melissa Dean - Joan Mitchell Foundation - June 28, 2019

**Out of Exile: An Interview with Michael Meads** by Tyler Rosebush; Ambush Volume 37 Issue 11 - May 21, 2019

**Southern Decadence in New Orleans;** Smith, Howard Phillips & Perez, Frank; Louisiana State University Press - 2018

**Unveiling the Muse: The Lost History of Gay Carnival in New Orleans;** Smith, Howard Phillips; University of Mississippi Press – 2018

**Michael Meads at Redbud Gallery, Houston by Bill Arning – September 24, 2017**

**The Iron Lattice: Artist In Exile: Michael Meads by Holly Devon October 11, 2016**

**Pelican Bomb Exhibition Pick: Michael Meads; Laurence Ross; USA - February 8, 2016**

**Life is a Carnival: Artist Michael Meads' work celebrates New Orleans Mardi Gras year-round;** John d'Addario; Cover feature of Beaucoup, The New Orleans Advocate; USA - January 7, 2016

**Michael Meads: "Bent, Not Broken" Carnival abandon and classical mythology at the Ogden Museum of Southern Art;** D. Eric Bookhardt, Gambit.com: USA - January 4, 2016

**Top 10 Art Exhibits of 2015;** Doug MacCash and NOLA.com: USA - December 26, 2015

**Best of 2015: Our Top 10 Exhibitions Across the United States;** Hyperallergic.com: USA - December 16, 2015



# M I C H A E L M E A D S

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**Studio 505-685-0014**

**An Artist's Sprawling Universe of Sex and Death, with New Orleans at the Center;** John d'Addario; Hyperallergic.com; USA - November 9, 2015

**Michael Meads' Must-see, Mega Drawings at Art for Art's Sake;** Doug MacCash; NOLA.com / The Times-Picayune; USA - September 28, 2015

**Michael Meads' Bent, Not Broken;** Bradley Sumrall; Louisiana Cultural Vistas; USA - Fall 2015

**Photographs Not Taken;** Steacy, Will; Daylight Publishing; USA-2012

**Another Country: The Cultural Poetics of Queer Anti-Urbanism;** NYU Press; USA - 2010

**Male: Works from the collection of Vince Aletti;** PPP Editions; USA - 2009

**Fanzine 137;** Luis Venegas, Publisher; Spain - 2007

**The Other Mardi Gras: Fat Tuesday in New Orleans with Michael Meads;** Johnston, Brad, SX Magazine, Issue 316; Australia - 2007

**Mardi Graphite (La Ofrenda Solo Exhibition Review);** Bookhardt, D. Eric; Gambit Weekly; U.S.A.- February 13, 2007

**Dark Vision (La Ofrenda Solo Exhibition Review);** McCash, Doug; Times-Picayune; U.S.A. - January 19, 2007

**Let The Good Times Roll: Michael Meads After Katrina;** Clamp, Brian Paul; Useless Magazine Issue 4: Fiascorama; U.S.A., U.K., France - October 2006.

**Caravaggio's Rednecks;** GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies, Vol. 12, Number 2, pp. 217-236; U.S.A – 2006

**Currency;** Sico Carlier, Publisher; Belgium - 2006

**Fanzine 137;** Luis Venegas, Publisher; Spain - 2005

**Deep Blue;** Studio Magazines, Publisher; Australia – 2004

**Bad;** Studio Magazines Publisher; Australia – 2004

**Men in their Natural State: Michael Meads Defies Stereotypes;** Robinson, Andrew; Gay City News. Vol. 3, Issue 28, pp. 25, 36; U.S.A. - July 8-14, 2004

**Sweet Homo Alabama;** Hakim, Jamie; Attitude, pp. 30-34; U.K. - June 2004.

**Alabama Souvenirs;** Pisters, Caspar; Squeeze, Vol. 2, p. 30; Netherlands – April/ May 2004

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**Sweet Home Alabama:** The Bad Boys of Michael Meads; Barbe, Yannick. Tetu, Number 87, pp. 102-111; France - March 2004

**The Boys: Growing up with Michael Meads;** Johnston, Brad; Blue, Issue 47, pp. 42-51; Australia - November 2003

**Good ol' Boys: Michael Meads;** Northcross, Wayne; Instinct; Vol. 6, Issue 3, pp. 94-95; U.S.A. - March 2003

**Rural Rhapsody: Michael Meads;** Northcross, Wayne; Gay City News, Vol. 2, Issue 8, p. 34; U.S.A. - Feb. 21-27, 2003

**Boys, Bonds and Beyond;** Previdi, Bill; HX, Issue 589, p. 26; U.S.A. - Dec. 20, 2002





**Michael Meads, 2018 – photo by Kyle Cahall**





**Michael Meads, Mardi Gras in New Orleans, 2015**