

The New Mexican's Weekly Magazine of Arts, Entertainment & Culture

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03
LAKE



Sloane Bibb: *Vying for Her Attention*, 2009, mixed media, 24 x 36 inches

Laurel Gladden | For The New Mexican

South by Southwest

Automobile license plates in Alabama proudly proclaim the state as “the heart of Dixie.” Alabama native Sloane Bibb picked that name for his show at LaKind Gallery, which opened Feb. 9. “I love the South,” Bibb said, adding that he hopes to share “my heart — my love and connection and understanding of this place I call home — with the heart of the Southwest.” Bibb will be in Santa Fe for a reception on Friday, Feb. 12.

After graduating from Auburn University with a bachelor’s degree in graphic design, Bibb looked at jobs in Chicago and New York. He eventually landed work closer to home, in Atlanta. Before long, though, he was back in his hometown of Decatur, Alabama, near Huntsville. “Never in a million years did I think I’d end up back here. I guess I’m just a small-town person,” he mused.

Part painting, part assemblage or collage, the artist’s work has been compared to that of Joseph Cornell and Robert Rauschenberg, who united painting and sculpture in his Combines. Like Rauschenberg — as well as Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso, who are credited with bringing collage as an artistic technique into the modern era — Bibb uses a variety of materials (paint, paper, wood, wax, and tar) and objects (thermostats, car emblems, scrap metal) in innovative, sometimes quirky or irrational combinations to create a sense of the fantastic and to evoke nostalgia. Bibb achieves the golden, yellowed tone that helps convey a sense of age with his “secret ingredient,” a tar wash. “It changes the character of every painting,” he insisted.

Texture is the essence of Bibb’s work. “When this work originally began ... it was pretty much straight-up painting focused on textures,” Bibb said. “I began on canvas and was gluing paper to the canvas as an undercoating. The canvases were warping, so I decided to start making my canvases out of wood, and the work progressed into collage. I was able to attach metal, and over the years ... my work became more 3-D.”

Bibb stores items for his works in a 1,500-square-foot warehouse. Letters, magazines, old Spiegel and Montgomery Ward catalogs, and other paper materials cover four 8-foot-long tables. When his parents bought an old home in Courtland, Alabama, the artist hit the jackpot: the previous owners had left behind boxes of letters dating as far back as the 1880s. Friends and acquaintances give him items to incorporate, too, and he buys bits and pieces

on eBay. “I do like to go to junkyards,” he confessed. “I gravitate toward junk. I think it’s the greatest thing in the world.”

In the bulk of his work, Bibb combines these disparate elements in images of birds and bird nests, fish, guitars, and women in various states of dress. “I have always enjoyed drawing the human figure,” said Bibb. “I usually start with the figure, and I tend to dress [it] as the work progresses. By the time I finish, it’s a lot different than what I had in mind. Sometimes when I decide I’m finished with the painting, the women are not finished getting dressed.”

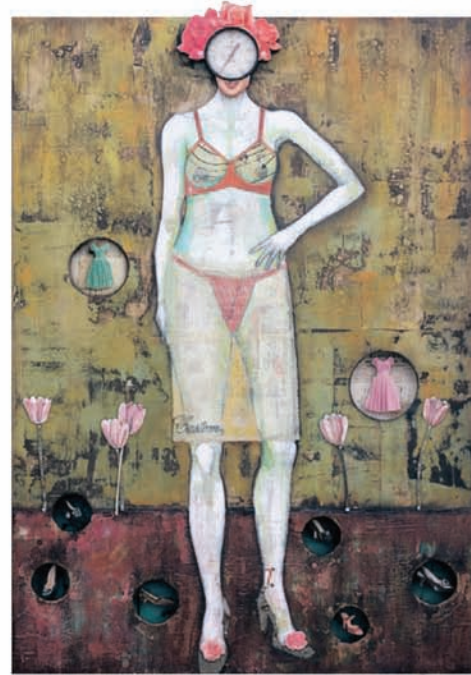
Clothing plays an important role in his art, he added. “Clothing and texture go hand in hand. ... I like getting the Anthropologie catalog as much as my wife does. The clothing, the fabrics, the design ... are all interesting to me. People dress the way they want the outside world to see them. It’s our camouflage or sometimes our beacon. I use a lot of clippings from old Spiegels from the ’30s, ’40s, and ’50s. I find all of the fashions in these catalogs interesting and sometimes quite comical. I especially find the lingerie sections interesting. ... You can see the pains and trouble of making oneself ‘presentable.’ It looks downright uncomfortable. I guess that’s why they adorned the facade with lace and frills.”

Bibb’s work certainly has an air of nostalgia, whether it’s for early-20th-century fashion, cars, or other things. “My grandfather used to take me every summer to trout fish. I have many fond memories of those trips. He was also my biggest fan. He paid for my art lessons as a child and always encouraged me. ... I guess, in a sense, my fish are an homage to him.”

Some pieces feature images that are unmistakably Southern — Elvis Presley and the Krispy Kreme logo, for example. Asked about other, subtler ways his work conveys notions about the South, Bibb wavered. “It’s hard to put into words, because it just happens. I’m a Southerner, and my artwork is me.

“I think the overall essence of it has a Southern feel,” he conceded, citing Alabama’s infamous red clay, the ramshackle look of run-down homes, and the rust of old warehouses and steel mills as influences that somehow make their way into many of the finished pieces. “It sparks your imagination about the grandeur of it, of a particular time.”

Bibb said that, in this collection, “I really pushed myself to explore the interplay of



The Seventh Pair, 2010, mixed media, 60 x 48 inches

happiness tinged with sadness” — or what he has referred to as “constant push-pull between romance and reality.” The South in particular evokes that bittersweet quality, he noted. “The South is a lot better than people give it credit for. We’ve been labeled and will live with it forever.

“Even when things seem perfect or grand, they never really are. I love the South. It’s a part of me. But it has a history that haunts us. You can’t fully love it without fully accepting it; and that’s both happy and sad, really.” ◀

details

- ▼ Sloane Bibb: *Heart of Dixie*
- ▼ Reception with the artist 5:7:30 p.m. Friday, Feb. 12; exhibit through Feb. 23
- ▼ LaKind Fine Art, 662 Canyon Road, 982-3221