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SWAP supports artists in the creation, presentation, and discussion of new work, while facilitating collaboration with artists and audiences in Northeast Ohio. Johnny Coleman is SPACES' 70th SWAP Artist-in-Residence.

Large print available at the front desk.

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CROSSING THE WATER: REQUIEM FOR LEE HOWARD DOBBINS

Johnny Coleman (Oberlin, OH)

On view: January 25 - March 22, 2019



ABOUT THE PROJECT

Crossing The Water is composed as the second in a series of gestures invoking the memory of an enslaved child, Lee Howard Dobbins acknowledging him as more than a forgotten symbol of local opposition to the institution of slavery. In 1853 this child—accompanied by his adoptive mother and siblings—fled Kentucky, crossed the Ohio River, and traveled north to reach Canada by way of Lake Erie. However, the boy was too sick to continue the journey, and it was necessary to leave him in the care of a family in Oberlin, with the intention of rejoining his people in Canada upon recovery.

Lee Howard Dobbins died among strangers at four years of age in Oberlin two weeks later, and is interred there. He experienced his first moments as a free person upon touching ground on the Ohio side of the river, however, this child never saw Lake Erie, or reached soil beyond the grasp of bounty hunters.

Crossing the Water: Requiem for Lee Howard Dobbins is a meditation on a liminal moment of transition between the trauma experienced in his brief life and a space beyond boundaries: an imagined place in which he might have been free.

Sam Hubish for your incredible skills and generosity. I met you on the way in, and from day one, you brought your eye, gifted hands, and experience to the project. “Crossing” could not have happened without you, Adam, and Megan. I cannot thank you enuf.

Camilla Turner and Ashley Rowell for the time and care and invaluable energy that you brought to the project. It is perfect that your hands braided the cord that the boat/cradle is suspended by...you already know. Thank you.

Jack McMillin for your incredibly skilled hands and open heart. The boat would not have even gotten started without your assistance in ripping that unruly green oak (who knew?) and your assistance on day one in the space got the whole thing started. Thank you.

DeAllen Young for your time, skilled hands, and generosity. I am looking forward to sharing a pot of rice and peas, some good greens, and whatever else we think up! Good food & good conversation.

Megan Young for all that you did waaay beyond the call of duty: weeks of daily check ins, excellent planning and follow through, braving snow storms, gifted generous hands, seemingly endless energy, and an amazing experience overall. I’ll cook first.

Christina Vassallo for building upon the SPACES legacy with so much vision, imagination, and skill.

Rhonda Hill Coleman for everything *everyday*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank the following people, without whom this project would not have been possible:

Pipo Nguyen-Duy for talking through ideas with me, understanding, suggesting the film, and introducing me to Pang Fei Chiang.

John Seyfried for all of your work, the clarity of your eye, and always finding the shot that didn't occur to me. You have been photographing work for me over the last 26 years, and I will continue to look to you first. The image of the elder oak is stunning. You made what I was seeing visible.

Pang Fei Chiang for your patience and impeccable skillset in the photo lab. I wasn't sure that the image could be printed on the film. You made it happen as I envisioned.

Boat designer/builder, Platt Monfort. Thank you. Thank you. I imagined a boat that was translucent and as light as a kite. When I found your designs, it was as if you read my mind 30 years before the image occurred to me. Your "Whitehall" design plans gave me a solid foundation upon which to improvise. I can't thank you enough.

Adam Zimmerman, thank you for your impeccable craftsmanship and generosity. There is no way that I would have been able to build all of the walls that this environment required without your involvement. With you on board, I turned my attention completely to the feel and flow. Nothing but confidence in your work.

ARTIST BIO

Johnny Coleman has created installations for institutions throughout the United States, including his first exhibition in Cleveland, previously at SPACES; The Sculpture Center (Cleveland); MOCA Cleveland; Akron Museum of Art; Fort Wayne Museum of Art; N'Namdi Contemporary Center for the Arts (Detroit); Museum of Contemporary Art (San Diego); Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum; El Centro Cultural (San Diego); Randolph Street (Chicago); California Center for the Arts (Escondido); Hall Walls (Buffalo); William King Museum of Art (Abington, VA); University of Northern Iowa; Wooster Art Museum; and David Zapf Gallery (San Diego).

Over the last twenty five years, Coleman has worked collaboratively with a range of poets, musicians, dancers, and visual artists. Additionally, he has performed on stage at BAM, Majestic Theater: Next Wave Festival '96, and his work is included in the permanent collections of Fort Wayne Museum of Art, San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art, The California Center for the Arts, N'Namdi Center for Contemporary Art, and numerous private collections.

Coleman holds a joint appointment in the departments of Art and African American Studies at Oberlin College. His research interests include the African roots of the banjo, furniture design, and the maroon communities of the Great Dismal Swamp.

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ARTWORKS & FLOORPLAN

1. *Elder Oak, Westwood Cemetery*

Photo grid and light box

2. *Two Mothers*

Wooden figures

3. *Boat*

Muslin and green wood with baby's breath and blanket, improvised upon design by Platt Monfort

4. *Dock*

Found oak post and beams, sprouting chamomile

5. *Sound*

Original recordings of Lake Erie, stream feeding Oak Creek, lullaby sung by actress Debra Rose, rocking chair, and Canadian geese

