



**FELANDUS THAMES (b. 1974)****Gamtoos River**

acrylic on canvas

70 x 95 in.

2010

4213

**PROVENANCE:**

Heather James Fine Art

"You enter into the piece without knowing who the body is. All you know is that it is grotesque." Felandus Thames pursues the grotesque or, what he calls, "things that should never have been born." The simultaneity of seductiveness and repulsiveness inextricably involved in any conceptualization of the grotesque permeates Thames's oeuvre. Looking at images of medical traumas, and heavily influenced by Hans Bellmer's "dolls," Thames contemplates the possibilities inherent in the grotesque as well as the opportunities that archival sources offer to his artistic practice. He doesn't simply mine the archive; he engages the narratives held within it, discovers fissures or erasures, and redefines significations through the insertion of another artist-funded narrative. The encounter he engenders is an undetermined one that allows for spectatorial wonder. It is, for all of its openness, however, a barbed encounter in which, no one remains innocent. His preoccupation with the grotesque ties artist, work, and spectator together into a collective pendulum that sways between the poles of seduction and repulsion or rather exposes the connectivity between them.

Thames consistently tests established racial categories by asking, "What is black?" The pedestrian notion that pigmentation denotes character, though based upon faulty premises, endures as a definition of race. It is part of the everyday logic of existence and thus, though it is a conception rather than a concrete substance, lends itself to Thames's Duchampian handling of its everydayness. He transforms mundane racism into a notable phenomenon by placing it within the gallery. The pervasiveness of a narrative that attests to the existence of an authentic blackness, which persists in our contemporary moment, provides fodder for Thames's visual investigations.

Felandus Thames' art will unsettle many viewers. There looms in his use of bodies and body parts --the shards of conflicted histories-- an estranging dialectical play between absence and excess. This play resists triumphalism. It embraces mediation. And, it refuses to provide closure for historical yet ongoing social tensions. By besetting us with hyper real corporeal fragments, an aesthetic modality which transcends didacticism, Thames' work overwhelms the process of viewing. We cannot engage his works passively. We cannot view or consume his works without also being consumed by them. His works decompose us. They alter us. And in the process of undergoing our own forms of psychic fragmentation, the unease experienced as we interface with the density of abjection in Thames' works ruptures the boundaries which subtend our sense of viewership.

Thames' use of the grotesque's aesthetics thus operates as an ethical gesture: at once a critique of spectatorship, a deep reflection on humanism, and a thoughtful meta-commentary on the relationship between and among modern image culture, the body, and histories of objectification. His use of the grotesque also inscribes his current concerns within a larger body of modern art whose ideas about aesthetics, politics, and meaning troubled and continue to upset normative beliefs about art.

The notion of the commonplace not only finds itself in the content of Thames's work, but also in its form. This is most manifest in his utilization of a pop aesthetic. He uses pared down, fragmented and repetitive forms as well as text types and materials that conjure contemporary commercialism. Photography is a central component of Thames's work and, continuing his contemplation of the fragment, he exposes the incoherence of photographs, which pose as objective wholes possessing intrinsic truths. But, rather than the search for some imagined truth to be found within the photographic image, Thames uses them as a way of speaking about the postcolonial body as a "mined" cultural signifier. His "painterly exposition of photography [and] deep interest in spatial relationships," reveals his formalist leanings. He works to activate spaces. Thames employs pop because of its inherent accessibility providing an opening into his works for the spectator.

Thames provides the means for us to enter his works by quoting the familiar. Still, through his processes of collage and assemblage, erasure and insertion, Thames edits the edit. In one instance, he removes Bert Williams's face from a Vaudeville still. Williams's performances explicitly tied blackness to buffoonery and Thames forces us to address the editorial rationale for Williams' initial presence in the archival photo before we can commence contemplation of Thames's act of deletion. Thus we become participants in the creation of meaning while any notion of stability in that meaning is consistently undermined.

Thames endeavors to create images that "compel you to look further" but, can looking truly serve as a means of knowing? Not entirely. By manipulating what can be seen, Thames's artwork forestalls any intellectual closure that could be named "knowing." Rather, he orchestrates an open space of exploration wherein each moment of knowing is thwarted by a new question.

## EDUCATION

2010 Yale University School of Art, New Haven, CT  
M.F.A., Painting and Printmaking

Principal mentors: Peter Halley, Samuel Messer and Robert Storr critical issues,  
Rochelle Feinstein Printmaking,

2008 Jackson State University, Jackson, MS  
B.A., Painting and Graphic Design

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

2010 Yale University School of Art, New Haven, CT  
Teaching Assistant to Samuel Messer, Basic Drawing

## RELATED WORK EXPERIENCE

2010 Yale University School of Art, Teacher's Assistant for Introduction to Drawing  
2003-2008 M3A Architects, PLLC, Jackson, MS, Graphic Designer and Marketing Assistant  
2001-2003 Mississippi Museum of Art, Jackson, MS, Studio Instructor, Installation and preparation  
1995-2000 Saks INC., Chicago, IL and Jackson, MS, Visual Merchandizing and Visual Management for 3 department stores

## EXHIBITIONS

### Solo Shows:

2008 "Works by Felandus Thames," Southside Gallery, Oxford, MS  
2003 "Here & There," Smith Robertson Museum and Cultural Center, Jackson, MS  
2001 "Missing," Smith Robertson Museum and Cultural Center, Jackson, MS

### Group Shows:

2010 Yale M.F.A Thesis Show, New Haven, CT

2009 Yale Second Year Comprehensive Show, New Haven, CT  
Summer Group Show, Lemieux Galleries, New Orleans, LA  
Yale Peer Exhibition, New Haven, CT

2008 100 Hundred Years of Richard Wright," National Civil Rights Museum, Memphis, TN  
The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: Relationships and Love," Walker's Point Center for the Arts, Milwaukee, WI

2007 "Winter Group Show," Southside Gallery, Oxford, MS  
"Fall Group Show" Attic Gallery, Vicksburg, MS  
"Signs," Attic Gallery, Vicksburg, MS  
"Black Artist Group Exhibition," Southside Gallery, Oxford, MS

2006 "Southern Kaleidoscope," Attic Gallery, Vicksburg, MS  
"35th Anniversary Show," Attic Gallery, Vicksburg, MS  
"Kitchen," The Attic Gallery, Vicksburg, MS

2005 "Windows," Annual Theme Show, The Attic Gallery, Vicksburg, MS

2003 "Emerge," Municipal Art Gallery, Jackson, MS  
Mississippi Collegian Competition (Juried), Meridian Museum of Art "Highway 61" Annual Theme Show, The Attic Gallery, Vicksburg, MS

2002 "Self Portrait Show," Gallery 119, Jackson, MS

2001 Mississippi Collegian Competition (Juried), Mississippi Museum of Art

## RESIDENCIES

2002-2003 Smith Robertson Museum and Cultural Center, Jackson, MS

## AWARDS

2009-2010 Scholarship, Yale School of Art  
2007 Grant, Mississippi Arts Commission  
2005 Individual Artist Fellowship, Mississippi Arts Commission  
2003 Individual Artist Fellowship, Greater Jackson Arts Council  
2003 Best in Category, Mississippi Collegian Art Competition  
2002 Travel Grant, Greater Jackson Arts Council

#### PUBLIC COMMISSIONS

2004 Portrait, Blair E. Batson Hospital for Children  
2003 Public Art, City of Jackson, Mississippi Office of the Mayor  
2003 Portrait, Jackson Medical Mall Foundation

The information and material herein represents Gallery's best efforts and understanding of the current history and scholarship with respect to the provenance of the Work(s) of Art described and is not part of any warranty.