

I AM A CITIZEN OF THE WORLD: Selected Works and Commentary

Steve Locke

Onicas Gaddis

Southern Equality Studios

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I AM A CITIZEN OF THE WORLD: Selected Works and Commentary

In the Spring of 2021, BMCM+AC opened the exhibition I AM A CITIZEN OF THE WORLD, curated by Kate Averett and Alice Sebrell and featuring historic works from Black Mountain College artists and by contemporary artists working locally and across the globe. I AM A CITIZEN OF THE WORLD will be on view through August 14, 2021.

Black Mountain College's identity was formed by its uniquely global influences, with students, faculty, and staff hailing from over 20 countries across Europe, Asia, Latin America, and the Mediterranean. Students and faculty alike were encouraged to participate in world affairs and to advocate for the greater good. To be part of Black Mountain College was to be a citizen of the world.

For this volume of the *Journal of Black Mountain College Studies* we have selected the work and reflections of four contemporary artists featured in the exhibition who utilize tools of the past, present, and future to unpack fraught notions of identity and citizenship. Their work is exhibited alongside historic pieces by BMC alumni and faculty as well as other contemporary responses, including [After the Wake Up](#), an installation by artist Sherrill Roland featured in Volume 11 of the JBMCS.

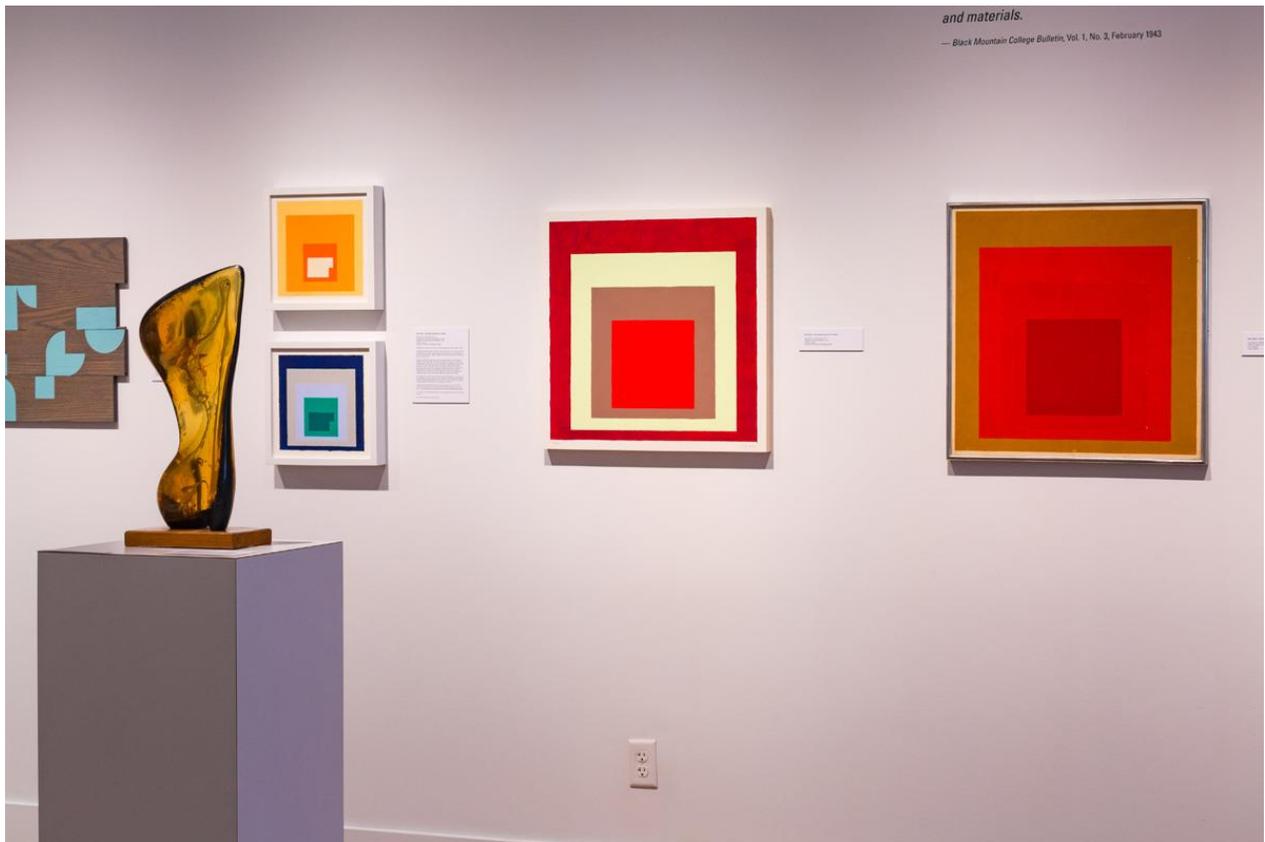
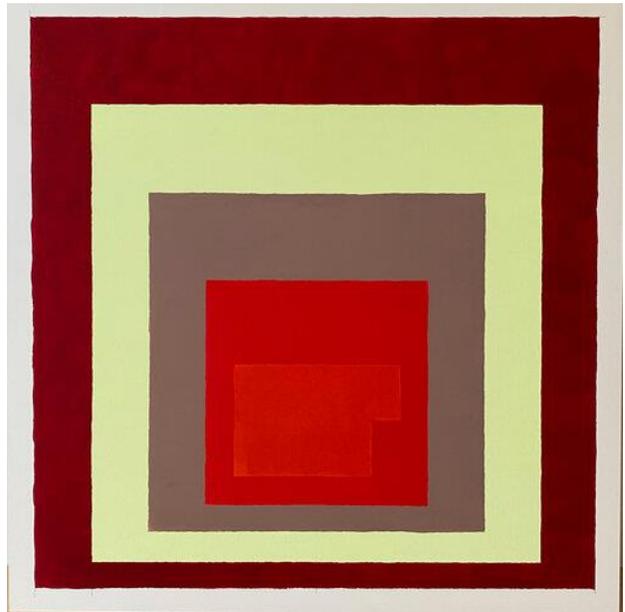
In referencing the work of Josef Albers in his series *Homage to the Auction Block*, Steve Locke places the complexities of color theory into conversation with America's reckoning with racial violence. Onicas Gaddis searched for his identity through abstraction, melding past and present in his painting *Black Mountain* by carrying forth the legacy of his mentor, BMC alumna Sarah Carlisle Towery. Liz Williams and Al Murray of Southern Equality Studios employ new technologies to welcome us into a more equitable future, recognizing the labor of LGBTQ and BIPOC activists and asking viewers to take on a direct role in "building a better table."

—Kate Averett and Alice Sebrell

Exhibition curators, I AM A CITIZEN OF THE WORLD

Homage to the Auction Block Series

Steve Locke



Steve Locke, *Homage to the Auction Block* #28 and #72, 2020. Courtesy of the artist and LaMontagne Gallery. Installation photo courtesy of Michael Oppenheim.

Citizenship is a prize hard won for me by a host of people I can neither name nor know.

I am descended from the stolen and the enslaved-on both sides of my family. None came here willingly nor were they considered human-let alone citizens. They were stripped of country and forced to build a nation. In building America they built a home for me-the only home I have ever known.

Despite this nation doing everything it could to prove itself unworthy of their devotion (chattel slavery, the three-fifths compromise, the Missouri compromise, rise of the Klan, industrial slavery, debt peonage, Jim Crow, racial terrorism, segregation, redlining, voter suppression, drug laws, mass incarceration) my ancestors fought and died to make America live up to its documents, its self-evident holdings, its promises. That fight is the responsibility of the citizen and my ancestors audaciously claimed the full rights of citizenship in the country they built. Even though claiming such could and did get them brutalized in body and spirit, they claimed nonetheless. That claim is my legacy.

Like my ancestors, I love this country. I know her full and bloody history, her crimes, and her mistakes and I love this country. I refuse to surrender my claims to the full citizenship for which my ancestors paid with their labor and lives. I continue to fight for the full rights of citizenship that are still denied to the descendants of the stolen.

A citizen reminds America what she has done and what she has left to do. A citizen knows what America owes and takes responsibility for what America has done in their name. A citizen knows that love requires the truth and that reconciliation requires justice.

I am a citizen of the United States despite so many attempts by others to remove that title from me.

It is a hard-won title that I will fight to keep.

Black Mountain

Onicas Gaddis



Onicas Gaddis, *Black Mountain*, 2020. Installation photo by Michael Oppenheim.

I am a citizen of the world...

Being a citizen of the world, I feel like it's my responsibility to live on this planet in harmony with all things. Recognizing that all humans are citizens of the world is the one thing I think could solve most of our issues with each other.

I've been painting for over 20 years and drawing for as long as I can remember. I spent a lot of time alone in the creative process. Making art has allowed me to create my own world, a world that I feel comfortable in.

It wasn't until Sarah Carlisle Towery told me that I am an artist, that I actually found a purpose in this life. Growing up in the foster care system in Alabama left me with a lot of scars emotionally. Some of those scars I'm still working on at age 46.

I'm thankful to have met 'Miss Sarah' and everyone else at the Alabama Art Colony. Meeting this group changed my life's course or even more so, it put me on the right path.

I now have two kids, Royal (16) and Roman (14) who are also citizens of the world. My hope for them is that they will be treated as citizens of the world, and that they will also treat everyone they meet as citizens as well.

You're Welcome and Building a Better Table

Southern Equality Studios



Southern Equality Studios, *You're Welcome and Building a Better Table*, 2020. Video footage courtesy of Michael Oppenheim. [\[view at article URL\]](#)

We've been stolen, beaten, killed, cheated. We built your schools. We built your White House. We built your economy. We built the culture. We built this table. Yet you sit at this table we helped build while staying silent and complicit in your comfort. We're bringing our seats, pulling up to the table and we cordially invite you to listen and do better and if you can't do better, we'll build another table and if you want to sit with us, we cordially invite you to tear down the barriers of the patriarchy and white supremacy:

Give us our reparations.

Ask and respect everyone's pronouns. Stop saying ma'am and sir to strangers.

Stop appropriating our culture and denying our representation.

Don't hide behind the bible to justify homophobia and transphobia.

Confront bigotry and speak out against xenophobia.

Stop ignoring us when there are environmental disasters fueled by neglectful racism.

We are not invisible and we are not disposable.

Teach our history!