

FORT GANSEVOORT

DAWN WILLIAMS BOYD

The Tip of the Iceberg

Opening: Wednesday, September 21, 6 – 8 PM

On View: September 22, 2022–November 19, 2022



Dawn Williams Boyd, *Leaving Alabama*, 2022, Assorted fabrics, cotton embroidery floss, and mixed media, 60.5 × 60.5 inches.

New York... Beginning September 21, Fort Gansevoort will present *The Tip of the Iceberg*, its first solo exhibition with Dawn Williams Boyd at the gallery's space in New York City. Featuring twelve new large-scale works, this presentation coincides with the last leg of the artist's traveling museum exhibition *Dawn Williams Boyd: Woe*, on view at Sarah Lawrence College in Bronxville, New York.

Based in Atlanta, Boyd is widely celebrated for her “cloth paintings” that establish a powerful, unblinking sociopolitical narrative with textiles. Using fabric as her pigment, she layers and stitches together personal recollections, history, and contemporary political references into striking compositions that challenge and provoke. Sometimes allegorical, often focusing on racial and social justice, Boyd's scenes are populated by life-sized figures and rendered with elaborate textures and ornate patterns that evoke the rich legacies of quilting and collage that critic Sasha Bonét has described as the “historical practice of Black imagination” – but here with a difference: Boyd establishes a unique visual language of her own within the wider traditions of sewing, by employing unexpected materials such as beads, sequins, cowry shells, laces, silk ribbons, and found objects. She delivers a figurative truth fashioned from a canny transformation of ordinary fibers, introducing the viewer to her own contemporary interpretation of visual storytelling.

The title of the exhibition, *The Tip of the Iceberg*, was inspired by Boyd's observations of catastrophic headlines that have increasingly dominated the news cycle over the past few years. As the artist explains, “...others, more learned than I—scientists, historians, social commentators were already discussing these matters and being mostly ignored. And yet, here we are, in 2022, on the very precipice of changes to the way we define ourselves—the tip of the iceberg that we know hides disaster if we don't make a course change immediately.” Boyd's artworks reflect the urgency of our politically polarized world and implores radical corrections to the way humans treat each other and the planet.

In the cloth painting *The Death of Democracy*, 2022, Boyd depicts Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin, and Kim Jong-un carrying a casket—a visual metaphor for the near demise of democracy for which these figureheads are culpable. To extend her metaphor, Boyd inserts an allegorical character into the left side of this scene, its fiery eyes and bloody claws the personification of evil. The smug facial expressions of the actors here belie the mournful atmosphere of the funerary procession, which takes place against the backdrop of an upside-down American Flag. Boyd summarizes: “Our democracy has obviously been at risk since the 2016 election. Many think the climax of the

FORT GANSEVOORT

movement to overthrow our government happened on January 6, 2021, but if we peek behind the curtains of the Republican Party's slow takeover of local school boards, state legislatures, electoral officials and then add in the Supreme Court's recent landmark decisions regarding guns, privacy, women's rights, etc., plus the U.S. governments ignoring the urgent need for climate change reform it is easy to see that we are on the verge of cataclysm." The artist's aptitude for naturalistic portraiture makes the figures in this work immediately recognizable, asserting their palpable presence as their eyes confront those of the viewer.

In *Leaving Alabama*, 2022, a diverse group of women share a road trip, rejoicing as they cross the Alabama state line. Although the context of this scene may not be immediately clear, the number written on the license plate, 410US113, references the office citation of the historic 1973 *Roe vs. Wade* Supreme Court case. Boyd had the idea to create this piece in 2019 as Alabama's governor, Kay Ivey, signed a bill outlawing abortion at nearly any stage of pregnancy. Since this amendment passed to the state's constitution, twenty-five additional states have instituted laws that violate a woman's right to privacy and physical autonomy and criminalize any person attempting to assist a woman seeking and receiving an abortion. When *Roe vs. Wade* was overturned on June 24, 2022, Boyd avers, "we stepped backwards in time 50 years in the stroke of a pen." Boyd's masterful work—combining clever visual signifiers and wry humor with scathing social commentary—responds with particular poignancy.

Fear For My Life, 2022, shows a young boy lying in a pool of his own blood, a toy water gun at his feet and a scattered sea of police badges around his limp body. The classical torsion of Boyd's figure echoes the art historical and religious trope of the Pietà, the iconic expression of grief. The artist's use of aerial perspective here exaggerates the boy's terrible helplessness. Boyd explains that "the subject represents all the innocent mother's sons who have been murdered by those who are sworn to protect and serve." Her chosen title suggests dual meaning: it describes both the fear and vulnerability of Black children under attack in America, and the defense often used by law enforcement to justify irrational acts of violence against unarmed individuals. In this work, Boyd incorporates real police department patches sourced online and from a local Georgia antique market. By including badges from across the U.S., Boyd highlights the pervasiveness of police brutality that continues to perpetuate racism and ravage communities across America.

While Boyd does not shy away from difficult subject matter, *The Tip of the Iceberg* demonstrates through her masterful handling of both topic and technique that her art ultimately enlightens, harnessing its own beauty and power to invoke change.

About the artist

Dawn Williams Boyd's work is included in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, NY; Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, AL; Birmingham Museum of Art in Birmingham, AL; Columbus Museum in Columbus, GA; Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse, NY; and the Richardson Family Art Museum at Wofford College in Spartanburg, SC. Her art has been exhibited at Wofford College in Spartanburg, SC; Southwest Art Center in Atlanta, GA; Hammonds House Museum in Atlanta, GA; Bulloch Hall in Roswell, GA; the Lamar Dodd School of Art's Dodd Galleries, at the University of Georgia, Athens, GA; Agnes Scott College in Decatur, GA; Callanwolde Fine Arts Center in Atlanta, GA; Contemporary Craft in Pittsburgh, PA; and the Everson Museum in Syracuse, NY.

For additional information please contact:

Andrea Schwan, Andrea Schwan Inc., info@andreaschwan.com, +1 917 371.5023