



## Preview: “5th of July” captures the aftermath of pandemonium

By Matthew Terrell



*From left to right: Katherine Bernhardt, Cantaloupe, iPhones, Nikes and Capri Suns (2015. Acrylic and spray paint on canvas 96 x 120 inches); Charles Harlan, Tire (2015 Rubber and wood 56 x 56 x 16 inches); Tom Holmes Untitled Plot (2012, Chain-link, plastic, 72 x 150 x 140 inches)*

Curator Daniel Fuller at Atlanta Contemporary is not interested in the party, the shenanigans, the dazzling fireworks or any of the drunken debauchery. Rather, in his new show, *The 5th of July*, Fuller looks towards what happens the day after the pandemonium. The bloated, hungover day when hair reeks of bonfire and we're not sure whose shirt we're wearing — that's the subject of the new exhibition.

"The day after is when you walk out to the backyard to find one sneaker, a thin line of sulfuric smoke somehow still lightly wafting from a should-be-out sparkler, and a large bowl of potato salad sitting on a makeshift table baking in the sun," said Fuller.

This vision is paid off with a variety of artworks grandiose in scale, but a bit blown out once you get up close. Marred up surfaces, discarded consumer goods, repurposed gas station signage, rusting chain-link fences and broken ceramics all evoke notions of day-after trash. Some of the works seem a bit more esoteric on their take of day-afterness; however, the show as a whole casts a wide net for what constitutes the smoldering remains of a party. The strange combinations of materials and styles makes for a goofball kind of exhibition, meant to reflect the fun of letting loose and celebrating.

"[Audiences] will find a certain humor to the show," says Fuller. "It's a little dark, a little off, but I definitely find the combination of the work to have an unexpected playfulness to it."



*Charles Harlan, Tree (2016. Wood, metal).*

This show leans heavily on New York-based artists, but at least one artist has roots in Georgia. Charles Harlan was born in Smyrna and raised by a mother who owned a local hardware store. He moved to New York City to pursue a degree in art at New York University, but brought with him his upbringing in the form of materials. Harlan produces sculptures and installations featuring industrial materials one might find at your local ACE Hardware, such as chain-link fence, bricks and tires. Very often he will

create sculptures where a tree has grown into a piece of metal such as a basket or fence, which — in a very literal way — brings his Southern roots to his artwork. One can easily picture wild, overgrown trees that take over fences, mailboxes and sidewalks all throughout the South.

Harlan provided two works for this show. *Tire* (2015, rubber and wood, 56 x 56 x 16 inches) was seen previously at an art fair in Miami and features a very large wheel stuffed with kindling logs. The tractor-sized wheel is the type kids scrunch themselves into and roll down hills, hoping not to vomit from dizziness at the bottom. The wood is, of course, central to a bonfire prime for the s'more-ing. This work fits into *The 5th of July* simply for its use of materials evocative of childhood summers.

*Tree* (2016, wood, metal) was an actual tree that had grown into Harlan's mother's fence. Knowing that the thing had to be removed anyway, Harlan incorporated it into the commission for the Contemporary. The institution paid for the tree removal, while Harlan finished the piece on a formal display stand. It's a piece prime for the double-take, if not for its scale than for its sui generis. The rusting chain-link, complete with straying broken bits, looks exactly like you might find in some quiet corner of Smyrna. Removed from its original context, it is ensconced as artwork.

Chain-link fencing makes another appearance in the form of Tom Holmes' *Untitled Plot* (2012, chain-link, plastic, 72 x 150 x 40 inches). Holmes inserted colored plastic rounds into chain-link fencing to form a pattern, à la Lite Brite. The piece brings to mind solo cups stuck into a fence after the end of a midnight kegger. It evokes the passing view of a lonely stretch of South Georgia highway, emblazoned with red solo cups fashioned into messages along wide swaths of fence. The familiar form in Holmes' work? A Budweiser can.

Elsewhere in the exhibition Robin Cameron takes broken porcelain and reconstructs them into body parts like hands and feet. Her work *The Dashed Misconstrue* (2013, ceramic, 5.75 x 10 x 2.5 inches) looks like the remains of a chain-smoking aunt's favorite ashtray, or hand, or both. Lucas Blalock's larger than life 4- box (2014, archival inkjet print, 56.75 x

71 inches) simply shows hot dogs arranged in a pattern reminiscent of Stonehenge. The wieners aren't the star of the show, rather the dings and scratches of the surface they are set on bring the personality to the piece. The title of Katherine Bernhardt's *Cantaloupe, iPhones, Nikes and Capri Suns* (2015, acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 96 x 120 inches) pretty much sums up the piece, but let me add for clarity: "in neon pink." Chris Wiley's works are most notable for their interesting frames. Sottsass laminate (a speckled "Saved By the Bell" meets Keith Haring pattern), glued-on magnets and silver lining like you'd find inside of a cooler all make up his eye-catching frames. Alex Da Corte's 3-minute video piece *Chelsea Hotel No. 2* (2010) features hands playing with various items reminiscent of summertime barbecues: fluffy white bread, berries, soda bottles, bologna, etc. The swirling, high-key colors make for interesting visuals, and the hands evoke the Robin Cameron sculptures; however, the video lacked any sort of narrativity to interest the viewer.

If you're looking for an easy breezy, fun show, this is it. Go on down to Atlanta Contemporary and get a dose of summertime nostalgia — smoldering ashes of illegal fireworks surround *The 5th of July*.

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*The 5th of July*

*February 5 – May 1, 2016*

*Curated by Daniel Fuller*

*The Contemporary*