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Atlanta artist Bethany Collins reacts to being named the third Hudgens Prize winner. CONTRIBUTED BY HUDGENS CENTER FOR THE ARTS



"Southern Review" by Bethany Collins is featured in the "2015 Hudgens Prize Finalist's Exhibition" at the Hudgens Center for the Arts.

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Atlanta artist Bethany Collins wins \$50,000 Hudgens Prize

By HOWARD POUSNER JUNE 15, 2015

Atlanta artist Bethany Collins has been selected for the third Hudgens Prize, a honor for a Georgia artist in which the winnings include a \$50,000 award and the opportunity to have a solo show at Duluth's Hudgens Center for the Arts.

Donated anonymously, the prize amount makes it one of the country's largest art awards to an individual artist. It will provide Collins support as she creates works for the solo show, planned for April 2016.

The announcement was made in an ceremony at the arts center on Saturday night.

The other finalists were Scott Ingram, Rylan Steele and Orion Wertz. Works by all four continue on display in the finalists' exhibition at the center through June 27.

In her Atlanta Journal-Constitution review, critic Felicia Feaster called Collins "the most politically engaged of the four artists" and noted that she "tackles the topic of race with a deft hand."

"Collins uses the iconography of education: chalkboards, academic journals, dictionaries and pencil erasers to create sculptures, paintings and installations about how race is understood in language and in cultural conditioning," Feaster continued. "In 'Colorblind Dictionary,' she has smeared and obscured references to color, from the "red" in mistletoe to the "white" blossoms of the mock orange shrub. In 'Southern Review,' Collins blacks out thick sections of that academic journal, suggesting these essays focused on revelation may just as likely mystify the artist."

Like Collins, Ingram is an Atlanta artist. Steele teaches photography at Columbus State University. Columbus artist Wertz specializes in paintings and drawings. Find a gallery of their work at thehudgens.org.

Collins provided this statement about her work:

"I am interested in the unnerving possibility of multiple meanings, dual perceptions, and limitlessness in the seemingly binary. Drawing repeatedly allows me to fully understand objects in space, while defining and redefining my own racial landscape.

For me, racial identity has neither been instantly formed nor conjured in isolation. Rather, identity entangles memory: actual and revisited, cultural and historical, individual and collective. Through the dissolution of dichotomies and exploration of language, this work recalls moments in the formation of my racial identity as Black and Biracial. And each re-worked mark is yet another attempt to navigate the binary paradigm of race in the American South by grasping invisible limitations and grounding myself within the collective African American visual narrative."

Jurors were Shannon Fitzgerald, executive director of the Rochester Art Center in Minnesota; Buzz Spector, art professor at Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Arts at Washington University in St Louis; and Hamza Walker, associate curator for the Renaissance Society at The University of Chicago.

The jurors selected the four finalists, viewed the finalists' exhibit and then made studio visits last week before making their selection.

Pam Longobardi won the second Hudgens Prize in 2013; and Gyun Hur the first in 2010. Both are metro Atlanta artists.

The Hudgens is at 6400 Sugarloaf Parkway, Bldg. 300 (in Gwinnett Center complex), Duluth. 770-623-6002, www.thehudgens.org.