

Willie Stewart

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Willie Stewart was two years old when the Cure's "In Between Days" was released. The song is an earworm that can get you to dance to dour lyrics: "Yesterday I got so old, I felt like I could die." Stewart took this former nightclub staple as the title of his recent solo exhibition, which, like the band's music, was austere, showy, and well-crafted, more thoughtful than its slick finishes suggested.

Stewart, who is also a musician, used the arena of arty punk and synth bands from the 1980s to explore layered notions of time, in an era when any decade's records are instantly streamable. A sense of nostalgia surrounded bygone bands (Joy Division and New Order figured prominently) and media formats—most of the works featured oversize VHS cassettes in sleeves that had been constructed from combinations of photographic prints, painted elements, and drawings, all mounted on large panels. These handsome, Pop-inflected assemblages were the equivalents of mixtapes in an expanded field, deploying art and music to seduce the viewer with their silent objecthood.

The VHS sleeves were adorned with handpainted brand names (Polaroid, a fitting reference to immediacy and to fugitive materials, appeared more than once) and alluded to iconic album covers, which were here rendered as if decorative stickers. *TOTAL youth*, 2019, featured a small painting of New Order's 1983 *Power, Corruption & Lies* LP, with its pale-pink still life borrowed from *A Basket of Roses*, Henri Fantin-Latour's 1980 *nature morte*; this was accompanied by a version, in negative, of Raymond Pettibon's cover for Sonic Youth's *Goo* (1990). Another work included a depiction of Gerhard Richter's moody *Drei Kerzen* (Three Candles), 1982, from the same body of work as the painting that adorned Sonic Youth's 1988 *Daydream Nation*. These references all point to an almost funerary notion of time and obsolescence, countered only by the bright fonts, floral motifs, and bold patterns of some of



Willie Stewart, *TOTAL youth*, 2019, ink and color pencil on cotton board, pigmented ink-jet print and acrylic on polystyrene board, and acrylic on canvas over panel, 60 1/4 x 40 x 8".

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the surrounding imagery. Stewart carefully revels in these layers of citation and circulation. In *A Brief History of*, 2019, three album covers are presented on top of each other in decreasing sizes, echoing Josef Albers's color studies. The smallest, for New Order's 1981 debut *Movement*, is stark and graphic, and covers the faces on the instantly recognizable orange background of *Nancy & Lee*, from 1968, which in turn obscures all but the black-and-white edges of X's classic *Los Angeles* (1980). The playlist, though spanning more than a decade of influences and styles, isn't entirely novel—it speaks to a certain taste profile, perhaps one assembled by Spotify, and communicates most directly to those who might be invited to the same dance party.

Stewart continued to use layered visuals in a nine-minute video, *Love Song*, 2019, also named after a single by the Cure. With a lush, rainy sound-track, meta subtitles (quotes from Albers and New Order, such as THIS IS AN IMAGE. or THIS IS A FRAME.), and costuming and colored lighting à la Mike Kelley, the video follows a female figure who appears in various theatrical guises: in clown makeup as she plays guitar, faux aged as she puts together a puzzle of a Thomas Kinkade-esque painting of a cottage. These scenes nearly fill the screen, but thin strips of other moving images around the central action reveal there is more going on underneath. Stewart is clearly interested in obfuscation and obscurity, even as he remains under the influence of fandom and forebears.

That mixture of the accessible and esoteric, popular and fine art, had an alluring effect, not unlike that of a cover song whose sense of familiarity is warped by interpretative flourishes and new contexts. With his cover of covers, Stewart was attempting to shape his own genre—thoughtful, downbeat Pop.

— Glen Helfand

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Willie Stewart: *In Between Days* at Morán Morán March 30 – April 27

New Haven-based artist Willie Stewart makes his Los Angeles solo debut with *In Between Days*, which features mixed media works resembling enlarged VHS tapes alongside a nine-minute video. The VHS tape compositions may seem like assemblages of found ephemera at first glance, but are in fact composed of meticulously drawn, painted and printed layers—each tied to a complex network of references that include art history, punk music, and various representations of sentimentality. Their meaning is revealed by the artist's self-directed short film, which is comprised of four uncanny parts interspersed with views of a cosmic void. With cryptic words that flash before the screen, Stewart exposes the manner in which we imbue images with arbitrary meaning and nostalgia.

APRIL 8, 2019



There's a heavy metal show going on in a London tube station

Dazed 100er and curator Antonia Marsh sits down with artists Grace Ahlbom and Willie Stewart as they muse on the subculture and the visual vernacular of heavy metal

3 May 2018 | Antonia Marsh

There's a heavy metal show going on in the middle of London, at Piccadilly Circus tube station. It's the latest exhibition at [Soft Opening](#), and brings together [Grace Ahlbom](#) and Willie Stewart to present five artworks between them.

Three photographs from Ahlbom feature alongside one sculpture and one wall-based work from Stewart in *I Can Dream, Can I Not? Dreaming is Heavy Metal* – a show that examines and unpacks

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the visual vernacular of heavy metal. Ahlbom's images shot at Helvete – the famous a record-store-turned-museum that is widely considered the birthplace of the black metal genre – continue the artist's fascination with fandom, boredom, and the fetishisation of subculture. Concurrently, Stewart's three-dimensional investigations reflect on memory and hope. Viewed through a layer of glass, the works take on new meanings and reveal how constructed memory can be. The result feels like a shrine to objecthood, where VHS tapes and CDs of a bygone era become relics of nostalgia that seductively posit heavy metal as a nuanced arena for critical thought. Whether manipulating space, scale, or the visual codes that emblemise our understanding of an artwork, Ahlbom and Stewart situate the viewer both inside their constructed fantasies and from the outside looking in, teasing out their anxieties felt as either a voyeuristic outsider – or keen disciple – of this particular niche subculture.



MAY 3, 2018

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This exhibition isn't the first time you both connected over your work. When did you first meet?

Willie Stewart: We met a couple of years ago at my studio at Pioneer Works in Brooklyn. Grace came by and we immediately connected when she showed me her work.

Grace Ahlbom: We were talking about the shape of the Warlock guitar that I'd made out of cut walnut which, of course, Willie immediately recognised.

Where did the idea of the show engaging with heavy metal originate?

Grace Ahlbom: Originally, from a curatorial perspective, it organically came to engage with heavy metal more than it was originally intended to. I first started thinking of Willie's VHS tapes in relation to my images of Helvete, because I was interested in ideas of reproduction and repetition, but I soon learned that you don't pick and choose a specific work, it's the artist that suggests what they're going to show. It wasn't until after we showed you my images that you proposed the heavy metal VHS tape work, and it was at that point that the show took on even more engagement with that kind of visual vernacular.

Willie Stewart: I had a reaction to the prompt. I started thinking about a work that I really wanted to make that I had never had a chance to. In this show, heavy metal is sort of like the skin. There's not really heavy metal in the blood, you know?

Grace Ahlbom: Even the words "heavy metal" in your piece aren't even directly relating to the music genre: they're just from a magazine.

"Heavy metal is nothing anymore. There's not really much left in it – there's not any scare left in it... No one's trying to pervert it" – Willie Stewart

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If the show was literally about heavy metal, it would be strange to have the word heavy metal visually included like it is. It's almost precisely because it isn't about heavy metal, that that VHS can be in there.

Willie Stewart: The thing about heavy metal and the reason why I made that piece is also the reason I named the piece "Some Scarecrows Have Lost Their Scare". Heavy metal is nothing anymore. There's not really much left in it – there's not any scare left in it. It's an attitude maybe, but I think even that's too generous. To me, it's more of an idea of a moment in one's life, an attitude that's created to sort of have a rupture in oneself. I think it's interesting, I think you need it. I think people need heavy metal, but heavy metal doesn't do much for anything anymore. And the reason why it doesn't do much for anybody anymore is because it can only be understood as a trope and a genre. Someone just sees it and takes it at face value. No one's trying to pervert it. Heavy metal is just a style. The most pictorial way I think about it starts with a scarecrow, then the bird lands on his shoulder and he looks into the landscape: he's not afraid of the scarecrow anymore. The face paint, all of it, becomes just an image. I think that's why heavy metal interests me.

Grace Ahlbom: Did heavy metal ever scare you at one point?

Willie Stewart: No.

This idea of the language of heavy metal becoming much more accessible to the mainstream or diluted in some way really relates to your work too, Grace. To the work in the show, but also the work that you shot outside the show, but still part of this same project. The images of the two figures roaming around London covered in Kiss makeup, for example.

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Grace Ahlbom: In this shoot, I was performing the fan culture that I had been observing, but that I'm definitely seeing from an outsider's perspective. And that's also how I felt at the record store when I shot the interior images in the show.

How did your project come about in the first place, Grace?

Grace Ahlbom: I was in Norway and I went to visit Helvete, which is a record store known for being considered by many as the birthplace of black metal as a genre. The store is now pretty much a museum filled with metal ephemera and floor-to-ceiling stacks of CDs and T-shirts but hardly any of it is for sale so it has this sort of shrine-like museological quality to it. I typically shoot still lifes or landscapes and so this felt like a combination of the two – a still life because it's a collection of objects but a landscape because I didn't have to edit the composition at all, it was completely ready-made. I felt like I was going through someone's basement, full of relics from when I was a kid.

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In our conversations surrounding the show, we have talked a lot about how the glass that separates the viewer from the exhibition affects the artworks, as well as our behaviour in response. How does the space affect the work?

Grace Ahlbom: It's so weird because it's a window display, I keep thinking of it as a small space, but even my pieces which I thought were big, look small.

Willie Stewart: The space interests me because of its brightness, and the fact that it's around the corner of those stairs: it becomes a point of fascination. When we were inside the space installing, it became a performance, everyone was stopping. The glass provides a sort of layer in front of the work. Set in this ambulatory space where people need to from point a to point b, it becomes about fascination.

What I really liked about the photos in this space – all displayed on the same plane – is how it conflates interior and exterior and confuses background and foreground. Then Willie's sculptures mess with scale. Overall the show presents a pretty radical proposition of space and scale. With this in mind, if you were to think about what conversation your works are having with each other, what would you say?

Grace Ahlbom: My images are so flat and Willie's are so three-dimensional, it feels like you are plucking the VHS out of my image and it's ballooned to cartoon size so you can walk around it. It reminds me of the Natural History Museum in a way because it feels like a giant diorama with my work as the background.

Willie Stewart: When I think about how our work works together, I think of it as essentially functioning in the same way but just on different frequencies of criticality. All the work in the show, all my work and all yours is all pointing at something. Some works are pointing really hard and others are pointing much slower, but I think what's interesting is how that comes together to create some kind of tempo or frequency that makes an overall picture.

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“Originally, from a curatorial perspective, it sort of organically came to engage with heavy metal more than it was originally intended to” – Grace Ahlbom

Grace Ahlbom: I appreciate what you said about pointing. Photography is a way of curating the world. You're telling people: look here, look here, look here. Just like when you show someone a photograph, in the work you're making you're replicating things that already exist in the world, but you're bringing so much significance to them because you're remaking it and you're asking people to really look. It's all pointing.

Willie Stewart: And each artwork suggests something else. Taking the picture of the wall and putting it on the wall again can be unpacked deeply and there's something interesting in how a reliquary or a shrine works in a similar way. You build this space for something that you look unto. Photographing that famous graffiti on the wall at Helvete and then moving it transforms it into a transitory version of itself. It reminds me of certain religions where you are encouraged to pray to a certain direction, and then you create a space in your house that directs that prayer. Religion is interesting to talk about in relation to black metal because metal is always constantly critiquing religion. There's upside-down crosses or dissected Jesuses... But if we take Helvete, it's a museum but it's become a reliquary that people take a pilgrimage to see Euronymous' (guitarist and founder of the early Norwegian black metal scene) handwriting on the wall. What you've done is make it portable, turn that image into something that you can move and take around, that like feels like an altarpiece. So the funny thing is, metal doesn't seem so far off from religion itself.

Both your works engage with the still life as a traditional genre of image-making. This is particularly interesting because still lives were so rich with visual codes and symbolism. Often artists wanted their audience to literally read their paintings. You both similarly ask your viewers to read your works: whether the text on your VHS tape or The Smiths lyric on the book page, Willie; or the writing on the wall, poster or ephemera in the store, Grace.

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Grace Ahlbom: Actually the stacks in that interior image of Helvete are illegible. There are moments where I wish they were more easily legible but I think their illegibility complements the trope in metal typography where the text is hard to decipher. This is deliberate and aims to slow the reader down, which is so contrary to how we consume images today. I worked with graphic designer Benjamin Ganz on the typography for the exhibition and we applied the same logic.

Willie Stewart: What I was always interested in is the stacking and collaging of stuff, especially paintings that come off the wall, because they have a porosity to them. It's not a locked viewpoint like a flat painting is locked, I can never see this painting here other than what the artist wants me to see, right, but to move off the wall and become dimensional, is to create many different vantage points and you can move around. So there's this idea of seeing something new based on how you physically approach the work.

It's nice that you can kind attempt to read the image, but you almost aren't allowing people to, it's a tease. What visual codes are your artworks in this show constructed from?

Willie Stewart: Visual codes propose the hope and desire that a painting exists beyond its frame, that the meaning of an artwork can be bigger than simply how it appears before us. Metal definitely doesn't do that, metal is locked down. The VHS tape is nothing more than memory, it's a device that holds a memory but it's scarred by the idea of its technological obsolescence. That it won't last forever.

Grace Ahlbom: I was thinking how important it is that objects hold memory and how everything we receive in terms of visual information is through our screens. So how will our memories be triggered in 30 years from now? Not by objects like VHS tapes or CDs anymore, but by images on a screen? I can't imagine, in however many years from now, looking through a basement, what are you even gonna find?

Willie Stewart: The thing about the screen though is that its obsolescence is actually really quick, you change these phones every year. But the information you look at on them is timeless. We have

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this idea that there's a democracy to this information we are presented with, but, of course, there's the potential that in reality, it's more sinister than that. The thing about a VHS tape is that, just like us, it has an expiration. It becomes like the human body. We will all expire: we'll fade and we'll drift and we'll forget. And maybe we'll forget the things that we love the most and maybe we'll forget what happened yesterday because we don't give a fuck about it anymore.

I Can Dream, Can I Not? Dreaming is Heavy Metal runs at Soft Opening – located in Piccadilly Circus tube station – until May 6, 2018



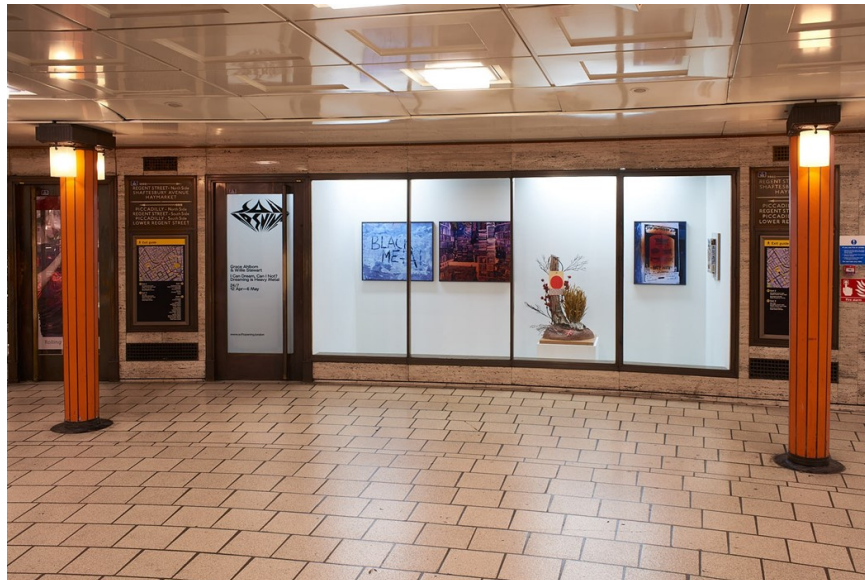
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Grace Ahlbom and Willie Stewart on Ouija boards, Record Stores and Heavy Metal

"I've always been drawn to fan culture, relics, shrines and their relationship to consumerism and boredom." Inside Piccadilly Circus tube station in London Grace Ahlbom and Willie Stewart probe at the visual vernacular and meaning of subcultures, as half a million commuters pass by. Words by Charlotte Jansen



If you've passed through Piccadilly Circus lately, you might have noticed something different. Soft Opening, a home for collaborative shows with artists, is the brainchild of curator Antonia Marsh who has spent five years exhibiting itinerantly between the UK and the US. "It's such a relief not to have to constantly relearn the infrastructure of a gallery space, and now I finally get to work one-on-one with artists in a much more intimate way." Taking over a vitrine-like spot underground, Soft Opening also benefits from the half a million or so people who pass through the station every day. The second exhibition at Soft Opening brings two young NYC-based artists, Willie Stewart and Grace Ahlbom, to London to explore the visual vernacular and reimagine the role of subcultures. I spoke with both artists.

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Soft Opening isn't a regular gallery space: what did you think when Antonia approached you about this show and how have you worked with the space—both physically and considering the way viewers will see the work?

Willie Stewart: As an artist, I am interested in spaces on the margin of the everyday. These types of outsider places have some type of architectural structure that defies utilitarian logic, and it's this resistance that opens up the opportunity for intervention.

Grace Ahlbom: After Antonia showed me her space I was mostly excited because of how different it was from a typical white cube gallery. Of course, most of the time when you see works in a space as public as the subway it will be government commissioned blockbuster artworks or cultural monuments. While there's something different about showing in the underground, there's also a history tied to it, and I think it was really interesting to play with that. The viewer's access to the space is also different, while we were trying to come up with titles for the show, I kept thinking about how the window is the only way to see into the gallery space. It reminds me a lot of window shopping.

WS: When I think about a space on the edge of a path, I think about the possibility of seeing without looking, and what I mean by this is that by being exposed to something visually in your periphery it ingrains itself unconsciously. You are left with a memory that still has the potential for discovery, and when actually looking, the effect is different when analyzing it—because it is strangely familiar. So they become two different registers of understanding; the real, what you are actually looking at, and the remembered, from your unconscious experience.

What was it like working together on this show?

WS: Working with a group of people on a project is always incredible. The way we recalibrate and align ourselves together to create a type of group brain, which fills the gaps related to experience, helping to mitigate a direction towards a larger intent of understanding what everyone involved cares about without having to be from the same place.

GA: I'm thrilled to see we are now showing together nearly two years after first meeting each other. Willie and I met in New York while we were both studying at art school. Willie was doing his BFA at The Cooper Union and I was doing mine at the Pratt Institute. It was a month before our graduations and we were introduced by a mutual friend who saw a link between our works. We both have the same love for the visual vernacular of American culture and its individualism.

You both address the fetishization of various aspects of American culture in your work, can you tell me more about your interests?

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GA: I think we approach the idea of America within a kind of fetish, because America has been delivered to us as fantasy. My most recent work wasn't shot in the States, it was interesting to see the ways my subjects, whether it's the Parisian cowboy or grunge Icелander, identified and embodied themselves through American pop culture. Mostly because they projected the American lifestyle they see through Hollywood and online, as most do. There's a degree of projection on both sides. On one end, they are already performing to the world and bring that with them when I'm shooting, on the other end, I'm also framing that performance within my own lens and projecting my ideas onto them.

“I think we all approach the idea of America within a kind of fetish, because America has been delivered to us as fantasy.”

WS: The apparatus of the Ouija board is very simple as an object, a flat board marked with the letters of the alphabet, numbers, the words “yes”, “no” and “goodbye”. Modes of automatic writing like that of the Ouija board goes back to 1100AD, in historical accounts of the Song dynasty in China. Although it is the rise of spiritualism in the Victorian era, and the creation of the modern talking board in America in the late-1880s by Elijah Bond, then made famous by William Fuld (an employee of Bond) which cements it in our culture. In 1991 all intellectual property of the Ouija board was sold to Parker Brothers, an American toy and game manufacturer, which re-inscribes the purpose of the object outside of the sincere hope of having a connection between the Ouija board and the user, but as an object situated within the irony of teenage mischief.

I am fascinated by an object that can move through nine hundred years, and morph through modes of use related to the truly sincere and ironic. This morphing gives me hope that there is potential for it to change again into something I can't even imagine today. It is this illegibility of the future that makes me want to create new objects, by virtue of thinking nine hundred years into the future and speculating what something can become.

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Speaking of which, you deal with the sometimes nefarious and often mystical pull of objects; how do each of you feel about consumerism?

WS: When I was a kid there were magazines ads for mail-order music clubs, like Columbia House and BMG. These ads would be anchored by a big headline that would say something like, “12 HOT hits for a COOL penny”, and the page would be populated with a grid of over one hundred album covers, about half a centimeter in size each, and I would study these intently. What the advertisements were proposing was that you could have twelve cassette tapes for a penny, and you could choose from records like Soundgarden’s Superunknown, Michael Jackson’s Dangerous, Terence Trent D’arby’s Introducing the Hardline According to Terence Trent D’Arby, and Kick by INXS.

I filled out the order form based on what the images gave back to me based on my own taste and subjectivity at that exact moment. After about four weeks my twelve cassette tapes arrived in a small brown shipping box. What I learned from those twelve tapes is that all songs are written in the past, but we listen to them in the future, even if you listen to a track on the day it is released—a distance we are willing to accept.

We don’t think much about the primary, secondary and tertiary processes a cassette tape goes through before we listen to it. However, owning cassette tapes gives us a starting point to investigate the processes they are made from, something we should do with everything we own to understand what is hidden in the banality of its parts.

GA: I started working on this work while on a trip to Norway in the summer, when I stumbled into a record shop that jump-started my curiosity in the fanaticism of the black

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metal scene. I've always been drawn to fan culture, relics, shrines and their relationship to consumerism and boredom. The shop's basement served as a museum of artifacts where fanatics visit the original meeting place for many emerging Norwegian black metal bands during the 1990s. Not dissimilar to my own basement, which serves not only as an archive of my adolescence, but the fantasy these objects seemed to hold for me at the time. Consumerism is already changing as more toy, book and music stores digitize and exist on screen, distancing themselves from actual objects that age and transform through time. In the record shop, the walls were overwhelmingly lined from floor to ceiling with thousands of records, t-shirts, CDs and props from photo shoots. I was fascinated by the way cultural obsession comes to create landscapes and monuments that occupy and manifest into a tangible space.

You're both based in NYC. What's it like working as an artist there at the moment?

GA: While I'm based out of New York, and produce all of my work out of there, I haven't been there in quite a few months because I have been living at Antonia's house [in London] doing a residency.

WS: New York City is steeped in deep histories of art and music, and as a scene, it has been nomadic, which has allowed it the privilege of influencing many different neighborhoods in the city. I grew up in Tennessee, not Brooklyn, but through stories of the city, I felt like I belonged there before I got there.

I once read an article about when the Ramones played the Roundhouse in the mid-seventies. Every British punk band that mattered was there: The Clash, The Sex Pistols, The Damned, The Pretenders... and while The Ramones were hanging out backstage no one would approach them. Accounts of the night claimed that Johnny Rotten was terrified that the Ramones were going to beat him up. I have always found this interesting because stylistically as punks the Ramones are really minimal, and were less interested in fitting in. There is something about the speed of New York City that creates an overall personal minimalism that produces unique ways of creating that keeps me utterly inspired by it. A black leather jacket can be all you need to exemplify forty-five years of an idea related to individualism.

Interview

Willie Stewart and Brent Stewart's Long Strange Trip

By Colleen Kelsey | June 14, 2017



Willie Stewart and Brent Stewart initially met by chance, sizing each other up across the room in a Nashville bar. “When I first met Brent, he had on a damn all-white tracksuit and his hair was cut, and he was like, ‘Man, I’ve been living in England,’” Willie recalls. “I was like, ‘I’m making a 4-foot by 4-foot colored pencil drawing of Kiss’s *Destroyer* album cover.’ He was like, ‘I want to see it.’” As it turned out, they had plenty to talk about. The artists and Tennessee natives—no relation, coincidentally—soon channeled their mutual obsessions for the same strains of cinema, music, and genre flick mythology into a collaborative art practice.

Brent received his MFA from Goldsmiths in London and debuted his short film *The Dirty Ones* at Sundance in 2009. Willie, once a guitarist for [Yoko Ono](#), grew up in a motorcycle club and is currently a sculpture MFA candidate at Yale. Last summer, the duo debuted two shows in Nashville: “Freebird,” a video installation and performance (in which the two sat in a parked car listening to Neil Young’s *Zuma*) at the Zeitgeist gallery, and “Runners,” another video work at Seed Space, which was accompanied by an

Interview

immersive, walk-in installation of a Unabomber-esque wooden shack dressed with various ephemera and survivalist artifacts.

Together, the Stewarts have a propensity towards building realized worlds that plumb the errant depths of the subconscious, with one foot deep in the Southern lexicon of their upbringing and an eye towards the abject, bizarre, and supernatural. And now, the pair has unveiled their most ambitious project to date. “Grand Ole Opera,” now open at Pioneer Works in Red Hook and curated by Gabriel Florenz, is perhaps the strongest manifestation of the Stewarts’s specific idiom of postmodern, sociopolitical pastiche. The title, a riff on the venerable Nashville “Home of American Music,” the Grand Ole Opry, is a nod to disrupting the status quo of the Southern tradition—such as Johnny Cash (who was banned after he drunkenly smashed lights onstage at a 1968 show) and Bob Wills did when performing at the hallowed music venue.

The Stewarts deftly digest the iconography of Southern Americana alongside narratives of other tropes of popular culture and certain subcultures. The figure of the outsider looms large in the exhibition. The opening set piece, a sculpture of red neon lights, bathes a taxidermy deer in its glow, and serves as an unofficial opening to the installation. Brent says the piece “creates a psychic space, a fever dream,” and sets the stage for the other major pieces in the show, including two trailers lit with, per Willie, “Argento-like” supernatural lighting and featuring individual works by Willie and Brent—including Brent’s geometric monochrome paintings, and Willie’s video works and sculptures fashioned in the shape of VHS tapes that reference *The Craft* and *Slacker*. A pick-up truck, seemingly possessed with green light, blares AM radio, and the two lifted in the bar from a clubhouse of the biker gang Deth Killers of Bushwick, adding ephemera like an image of Mike Kelley, and a TV that loops a series of vampire performances, such as [David Bowie](#) in *The Hunger* or [Brad Pitt](#) in *Interview with a Vampire*. Next to the bar, the Stewarts built out a room, fashioned to appear as the bar’s bathroom; inside screens the video work *Romulus and Remus* where the two act out a violent fistfight.

“We wanted it to be like you open a book and right in the middle of a page, you just get those fragments, little residues of things, characters and places and feelings,” Brent explains. “There’s a performance aspect to this part as well. We can be behind the bar and be part of the installation, or just back for the conversation and interaction with people. It’s a whole social space within this installation,” he adds. For instance, the two worked off a “dream list” to program a concert series to take place over the run of the exhibition, including acts like Japanese psychedelic rock act Fushitsusha and doom metal band, Sleep, which will appear onstage underneath a revival tent and in front of a massive video rendering of the sun. The religious devotion of the revival tent—typically used to host Christian sermons, healing ceremonies, and church groups—links the fervor of metal or noise-heads connecting with their favorite bands. “What was interesting to me was, what does it mean to take this tent where all these believers came to, whatever they believed in, to try and fix their life?” Willie says. “In the same way when you see a concert. You’re working every day at your job, waiting for your release. You come here to have some kind of transcendence.”

“GRAND OLE OPERA” IS ON VIEW AT [PIONEER WORKS](#) IN NEW YORK THROUGH JULY 30, 2017.