

sculptures are built from PVC tubes, cable ties, plastic bottles, and sails. Like a painter obsessed with his canvas, oil paint, and brushes, Jansen places emphasis on the material and physical process involved in the production of his work. He calls it "a dialogue with material" and his practice a "dialogue with nature."

By subjecting his tubes to evaluation and experimentation, Jansen is constantly surprised with the outcome, an unexpected mix of imagination and reality, inspired by geometrical beauty, motion, technique, function, and life itself.

Christine Han

THE UNITED STATES

Huntsville, Alabama

Ted Whisenhunt at Huntsville Museum of Art

Sometimes called "Southern Gothic," the culture of the Southeast United States is characterized by an abiding sense of "place": an area of eccentrics, alienation, religious bigotry, and violence. Though frequently depicted in literature, this exotic culture is less often reflected in the visual arts. And even less commonly is

it shown with sympathy and with gentle rather than *noir* humor. Ted Whisenhunt, however, offers a refreshing exception to this trend.

Drawing from the culture of two areas—Alabama's Black belt, a swath of rich soil running through the middle of the state, and the Southern Appalachian Mountains in North Georgia—Whisenhunt celebrates the mores of these historically isolated regions. His recent exhibition *Rooted in Place: Ted Whisenhunt's Retro Folk Vernacular* is perceptively titled.

An ingenious configu-

ration inspired by Alabama's profound religious proclivities, *Keep the Devil Pinned Down* (2008) shows myriad hardware nails pounded into a box, the title printed boldly on the side. A conflation of African and Christian references, the work was inspired by Kongo power figures punctured by nails and blades to activate spirits for ritual purposes. The nails also refer, the artist says, to the Crucifixion, and the wooden box suggests a coffin.

A later wall piece (2018) bears the same title. A triad of slender branches is mounted

on forms resembling tombstones with niches holding jars. Filled with water, nails, and clay, these symbolize the Holy Trinity. Painting the lower portion of each branch white, Whisenhunt nods to the Southern practice of partially covering the trunks of fruit trees with lime wash to ward off insects. But this very practical custom is also believed to ward off "haints," that is, ghosts. As one native asserted: "It's to keep the devil pinned down." Does the spider painted behind one of the branches symbolize Satan?

To embody Appalachian life during the Great Depression, Whisenhunt creates a fanciful mule titled *Cultivated* (2015). Hybrid offspring of a male donkey and a female horse, a mule was the "tractor" of the day, the artist says, performing numerous tasks on the farm, in the mines, and in the forest. Constructed of wood, Whisenhunt's animal is static and block-like, congruent with its reputation for obstinacy. He offsets stasis, however, by a hand-crank that activates pulleys, rotating a cylindrical drum painted with a farmer plowing behind a mule. At the same time, a crow at the top rocks to and fro. Compartments hold jars of beans and dried corn—staple foods—and a large jug suggests moonshine, the illegal but ubiquitous liquor, distilled in the woods at night to

elude detection by authorities.

Homage to the white-tail deer, the lithe and elusive animal providing a vital source of food and clothing to people of the area since Indian times, *Whitetail Jangle* (2017) adds sound to movement. The tail doubles as a hand-crank, moving the animal's ears and activating a swarm of bees hovering over its back. At the same time, a dangling loop of metal strikes against a sunburst of nails driven into a tin can, effecting a clitter-clatter, the deer's "imagined soundtrack." The show's curator, Peter Baldaia, likens the bees to "musical notes dancing on a scale." And bones suspended inside the open body bring to mind the fact that the deer was an important source of meat for mountain dwellers.

An almost life-sized three-dimensional silhouette of an ox crafted from steel rods, *Bone Dangle* (2018), rests on wheels rather than legs. This surreal merging animal and cart derives from a small wooden sculpture of a covered wagon and a pair of oxen carved by the artist's grandfather. The heavy cow bones hanging inside the animal refer to Appalachian smoke houses hung with boney carcasses. Countering this grisly image, however, Whisenhunt places above the ox a bird and a whirligig, which circle



Sleeping Princess and Dragon. Image: Courtesy of Atlanta Botanical Garden.

around, lending a jocular note to the otherwise somber work.

Whisenhunt's imaginative reflections of Southern culture bring to mind Charles Darwin's facetious observation about the mule. "That a hybrid should possess more reason, memory, obstinacy, social affection, powers of muscular endurance, and length of life [than either of its parents] . . . seems to indicate that art has outdone nature."

Dorothy M. Joiner

Atlanta, Georgia

Imaginary Worlds: Once Upon a Time at Atlanta Botanical Garden

Just as wanderers in a 16th-century Mannerist Italian garden encountered delightful surprises as they meandered along twisting paths, so do visitors to the summer show at the Atlanta Botanical Garden experience over and over that agreeable frisson of the unexpected.

Joining the several works purchased from the previous exhibition in 2014—*Earth Goddess*, a perennial favorite whose outstretched hand spills water in the Cascades Garden and the engagingly whimsical *Shaggy Dog*—fourteen oversized sculptures depicting "real" and mythical animals and figures inhabit this year's show: among others, *Pegasus*, *Phoenix*, *Peacock*, *Camels*, and *Mermaid*, all masterfully crafted from living plants. Titled *Imaginary Worlds: Once Upon a Time*, the show evokes that numinous realm between the actual and the mythic.

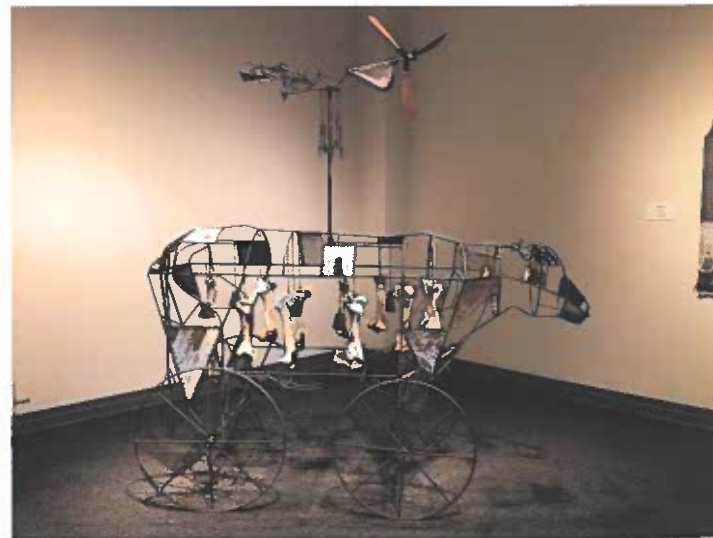
Conceived by Mosaicultures Internationales de Montreal, the sculptures began as steel frames shipped last January to Atlanta. These were then covered with mesh fabric and filled with 155,000 tons of soil by horticulturists, who inserted into the structures almost 200,000 plants, mostly annuals. Analogous to tesserae inserted into wet cement to fashion a mosaic, the plants and the soil lend the craft its name. Internal irrigation systems keep the works moistened in the southern heat, and teams of gardeners trim plants regularly with sheep shears to maintain the surfaces. Known popularly as Joseph's coat because of its



Ted Whisenhunt, Whitetail Jangle, 2017, mixed media, 57 x 48 x 21 in. Collection of Ted Whisenhunt.



Ted Whisenhunt, Cultivated, 2015, mixed media, 72 x 36 x 96 in. Collection of the Huntsville Museum of Art, Huntsville, AL.



Ted Whisenhunt, Bone Dangle, 2018, mixed media, 100 x 96 x 33 in. Collection of Ted Whisenhunt.



Above left: Ted Whisenhunt, Keep the Devil Pinned Down, 2008, wood, nails, 17 x 20 x 20 in. Collection of Ted Whisenhunt. **Above right: Ted Whisenhunt, Keep the Devil Pinned Down**, 2016 [wall piece], mixed media, 108 x 32 x 6 in. Collection of Ted Whisenhunt.

