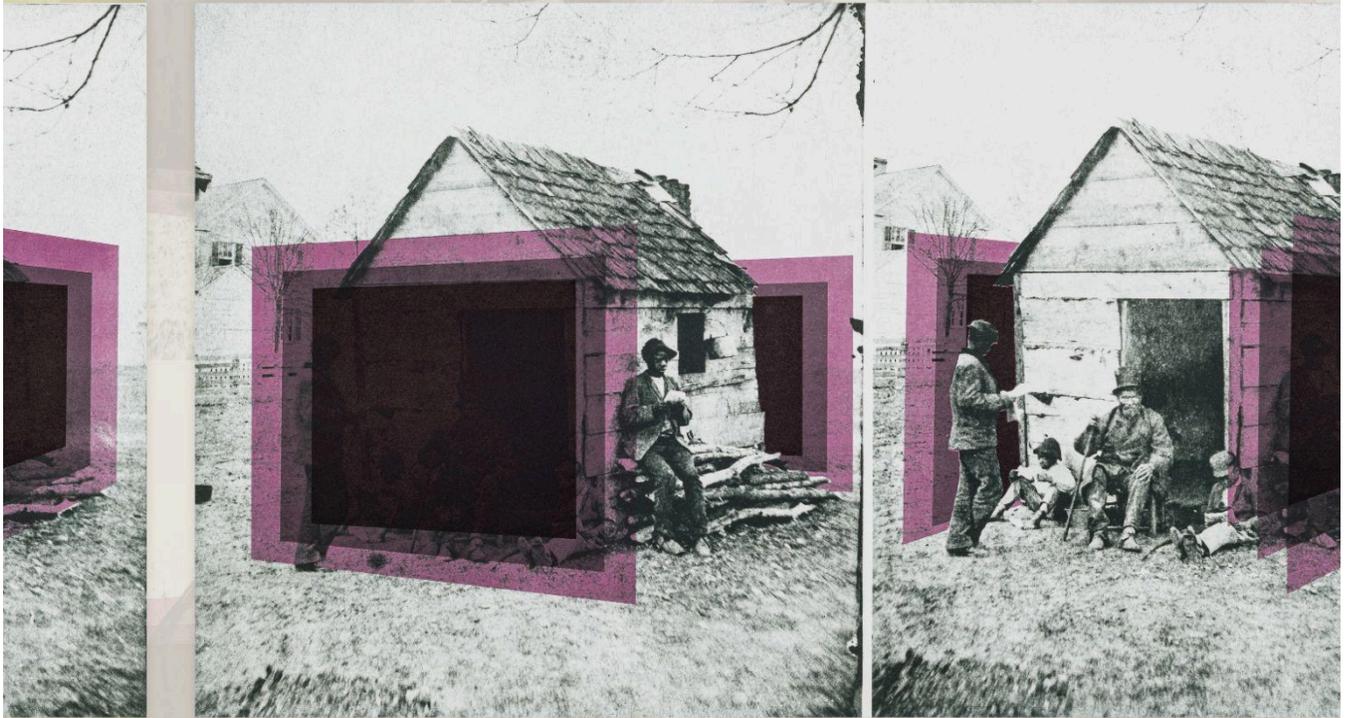


EAST HAWAI'I CULTURAL CENTER



THIS INNOCENT COUNTRY

Jeremy Dean

Opening Reception: February 2, 2024 at 6:00 PM
Exhibition Dates: February 3–March 29

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Artist Statement

America is not what it seems and never has been.

No matter one's position, America feels transformed, unrecognizable. The fabric of society has frayed, our foundations fractured and we live in a split screen of dueling facts and realities. It's hard to know if this is a last gasp of outdated beliefs, or the beginning of something new.

It feels like I have been at this a long time. I have dedicated my life to unraveling the tangled mythology of American identity I inherited from the privileged majority. My work reorders cyclical histories to question linear progress and seeks to make visible the architecture of whiteness and expose its foundational flaws.

Situated within two decades of research, community engagement and artmaking in the small Southern town of St. Augustine FL, the work presented here is a carefully considered response to this moment.

By systematically unweaving American flags thread by thread and then reweaving the strings into new compositions, the *Rended* series explores the complexity and fragility of democracy and the American social fabric.

Excavating foundation fragments from Confederate monuments to uncover the unseen, unacknowledged structure supporting a self-perpetuating system, the *Fundament* series exposes America's foundational truth of white supremacy and proposes that real progress comes when we move beyond the symbolic, to the foundational.

A large-scale stereo print series explores how intentional barriers to physical mobility – through housing, banking, redlining, highway construction, and policing - maintain barriers to social mobility, and when seen through a viewing device, merge diffident perspectives into a new reality.

The visceral three-channel film *This Innocent Country* simultaneously shows the same locations from three vantage points through time, juxtaposing civil rights footage with 60's era tourism promotional films and contemporary documentation.

Part I show the historical echo of a resurgent right willing to shatter democracy in an attempted return to an America that never was.

Part II explores the legacy of segregation and the connection between ignorance and innocence.

Fundament series



Fundament VI, 2021; stereograph and foundation fragment; 14 x 14 x 4 inches.



Fundament VII, 2021; stereograph and foundation fragment; 12 x 16 x 4 inches.

“The mid- to late 19th century photographs in Dean’s Fundament series show freedmen and freedwomen establishing independence, despite unjust conditions, and the open-air pavilion in St. Augustine, Florida, where enslaved people were publicly sold prior to the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863. The stereoscopic pictures, double images from slightly different angles, are upheld by foundation fragments taken from the city’s 1879 Confederate monument, which was removed in 2020 along with many others across the United States. Dean’s work suggests that government orders, such as the Emancipation Proclamation and monument removals, are often symbolic gestures that fall short of affecting real change and do not fully address this country’s problematic foundation.”

- Lauren O’Connell, Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art

“One of the wonderful tensions in this exhibition is this tension between the durability and permanence of the stone monument which carves history in a

certain way and privileges it by raising it up upon this pedestal, held against the lives of people whose names are forgotten, whose homes no longer exist, which were ephemeral to begin with. The stories that attach to photographs, a photograph mounted to cardboard, this fragile document and record of an unremembered past, gives us a new kind of monument - a monument to the ordinary, a monument to the individual a monument to the forgotten.”

- *Monumental Thinking* lecture by Peter Brown, PHD Professor of Art History UNF at Jacksonville Museum of Contemporary Art

This Innocent Country video



This Innocent Country Part I, 2021; three Channel Video (color, sound); 1 minute, 58 seconds.



This Innocent Country Part II, 2021; three channel video (color, sound); 3 minutes, 15 seconds.

“Dean’s three-channel video shows various representations of white supremacy in St. Augustine, Florida, at different points in time: a 1960s tourism film promoting suburbia, a 1964 film of an anti-civil rights gathering with the Ku Klux Klan, and a 2020 video of a far-right rally with neo-Confederates, Proud Boys, and Oath Keepers. This video compilation exposes the false pretense of

innocence in a country where hatred and racism of the past continues in the present, blurring the notion of linear progress and provoking social awareness.”

- Lauren O’Connell, Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art

This Innocent Country print series



Codified II - Photogravure and monoprint on paper, 30"x40"

Using 19th century stereographs and Joseph Albers color theory as source material, *This Innocent Country* is a photogravure and lithographic print series that attempts to make visible the hidden architecture of inequality.

Investigating how barriers to physical mobility become barriers to social mobility, this series considers how modernity codified white racial preference into a cohesive housing policy - through, redlining, highway construction, and banking - into a system of control and how past decisions of infrastructure continue to echo, ripple and repeat.

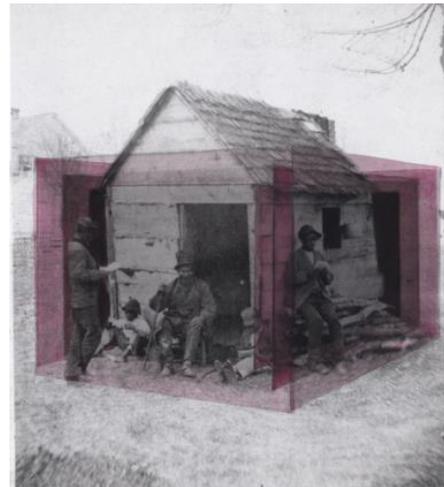
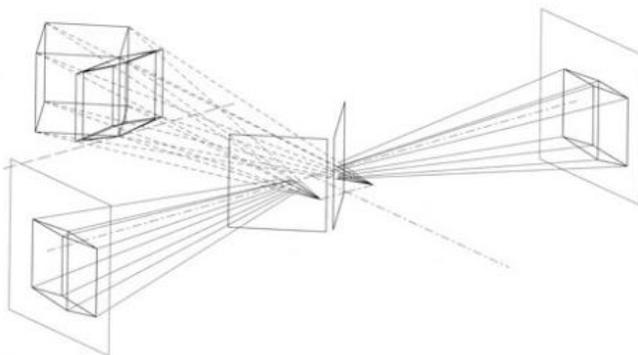
Like an optical illusion – one in which the embedded image is impossible to see until its outline is defined – a new caste system lurks invisibly within the maze of rationalizations we have developed for persistent racial inequality. 1

Invisible walls have been erected by the white society, and by those who have power, both to confine those who have no power and to perpetuate their powerlessness. 2

Now, solidly institutionalized and frozen in concrete, 3

The modern city enthroned the automobile, not human beings, as the arbiter of urban spatial design, and its planners claimed the authority of reason and science, promising to rescue humanity from its self-destructive attachments to history, community and identity. 4

1. Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 2010
2. Kenneth B. Clark, 1965
3. Douglas S. Massey & Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid*, 1993
4. Eric Avila, *Folklore Of The Freeway – Race and Revolt In The Modernist City*, 2014



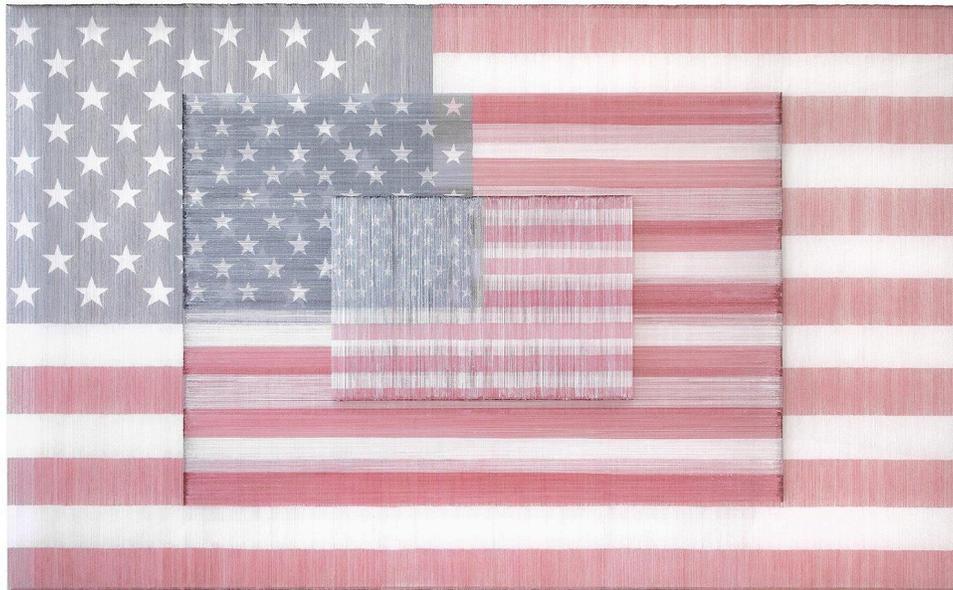
An approximation of how the image changes when seen through a viewing device. Through a viewer, the image becomes a single, three-dimensional image.

For many years I have search through archives for 19th century stereoviews from the South, especially St. Augustine Fl. These Reconstruction era images are from a “brief moment in the sun” in American history when the institution of slavery was being torn down, and just before Jim Crow was established. I am particularly drawn to stereoviews of former slave cabins, turned share cropper dwellings, as a way to understand the relationship between housing (the gateway to the middle class), infrastructure and economics. Using images from places and communities I intimately know, these obscure 1870’s stereoviews have become the basis for a large-scale prints series.

Stereoscopes work through the proximity of two nearly identical images taken from slightly different perspectives. When seen through a viewer the optical effect creates a single three-dimensional image. From a conceptual standpoint, stereoviews function the same way we as individuals relate to the world- looking at the same thing but seeing something different depending on one's perspective. So they create a natural visual conflict. In an effort to construct meaning, the eye unconsciously moves between each image to detect the difference. This desire to resolve the image allows for artistic intervention - By visually manipulating each of the double images differently and reordering where on histories timeline the new images fall, these prints question American myths of equality - creating parallel histories that illuminate repeated cycles of disparity and barriers to social mobility.

The prints are intended to be viewed two ways: as an object where one is free to derive comparative and narrative inferences, and through a stereoscopic device. When seen through a viewer, the images cross-dissolve into shifting forms - time is reordered, and matter co-exists, merging into a new paradigm that invites the viewer to imagine an alternative perspective of the historical document.

Three White Flags (From *Rended* series)



Three White Flags, 2023; Unwoven American flags, encaustic wax, needles; 48 x 70 inches.

“For more than 20 years, Dean has been deconstructing and rebuilding American flags as part of his artistic practice in order to emphasize the fragility of democracy and reconsider patriotic values. His new work, Three White Flags, references two Jasper Johns paintings—White Flag (1955) and Three Flags (1958)—to visualize the dwindling, yet potent, white American population and the practice of whitewashing U.S. history that aims to make our diverse country more white-friendly. For this work, each unwoven string was hand dipped in encaustic wax and tied to needles of different lengths, creating three layers of flags. During this laborious process, each layer becomes progressively smaller and whiter, leaving a ghostly hint of what lies beneath.”

- Lauren O’Connell, Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art

◇ ***None of the artworks are for sale*** ◇



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