

THE SUBVERSIVE NOSTALGIA OF CEDRIC SMITH

His grandmother ran a country store in Thomaston, Georgia. Though the store burned before Smith can remember, he recalls playing in the woods behind the tumbledown remains, riffling through junked advertising signs. Like art, advertisements carry embedded messages, Smith realized. Through art, he has recognized the complement.

Much of Smith's work is rooted in Thomaston, where his grandmother raised chickens and stitched quilts. His fabric usage pays tribute to her talent with thread. And he honors her service as a church usher by sketching a line drawing of a church on the back of each painting, as part of his signature.

Layering paint, photographs, scraps of paper, and strips of fabric, Smith sells the viewer on ideas both overt and subliminal. Back in the 1970s, when Smith came of age and awareness, few blacks appeared in advertising campaigns. When they did appear, the portrayals were often based on stereotypes of the Aunt Jemima and Uncle Ben sort. Smith took those sins of visual omission as a challenge. His first exhibit was a series of paintings inspired by a lyric from the 1989 Public Enemy anthem "Fight the Power": "Most of my heroes don't appear on no stamps."

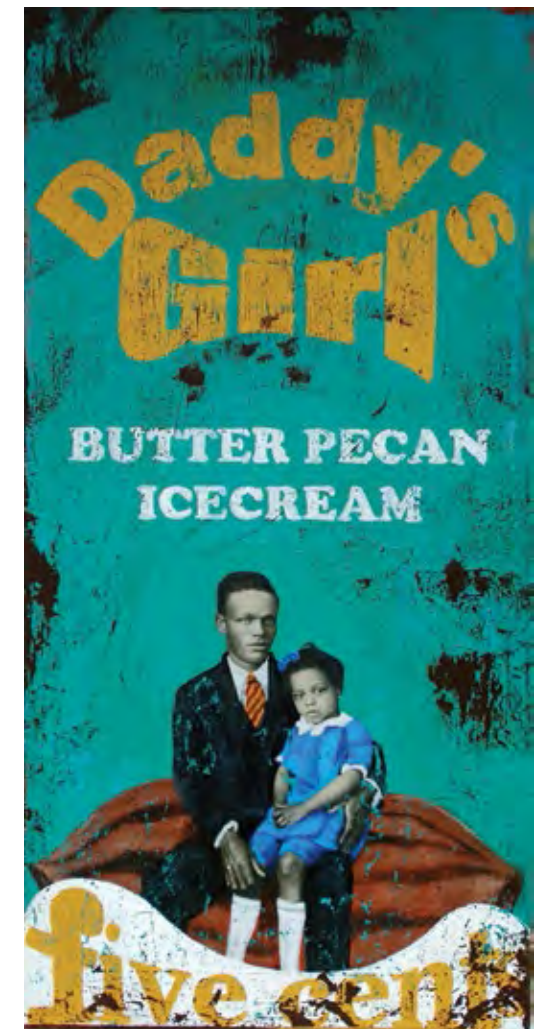
With commercial advertising and photography as inspiration, Smith attempts a sort of projected inclusion. When Smith and *Gravy* editor Sara Camp Arnold were working to select the images that follow, he told her that he works to portray black life as "just as American" and "just as salable."

Smith practices a subversive nostalgia, sampling and elaborating the romantic advertising imagery used to sell Southern products both inside and outside the region.

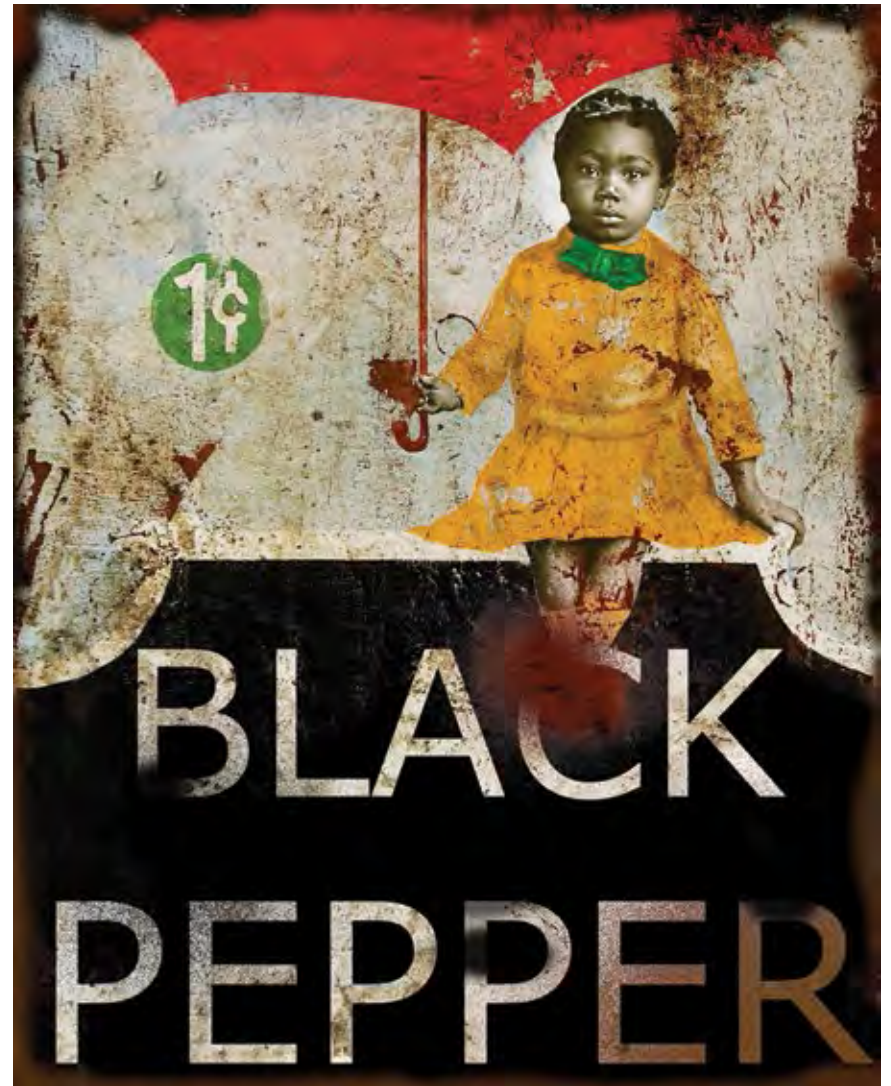
—John T. Edge



▲ *Carrot Cake*, pigment print on paper



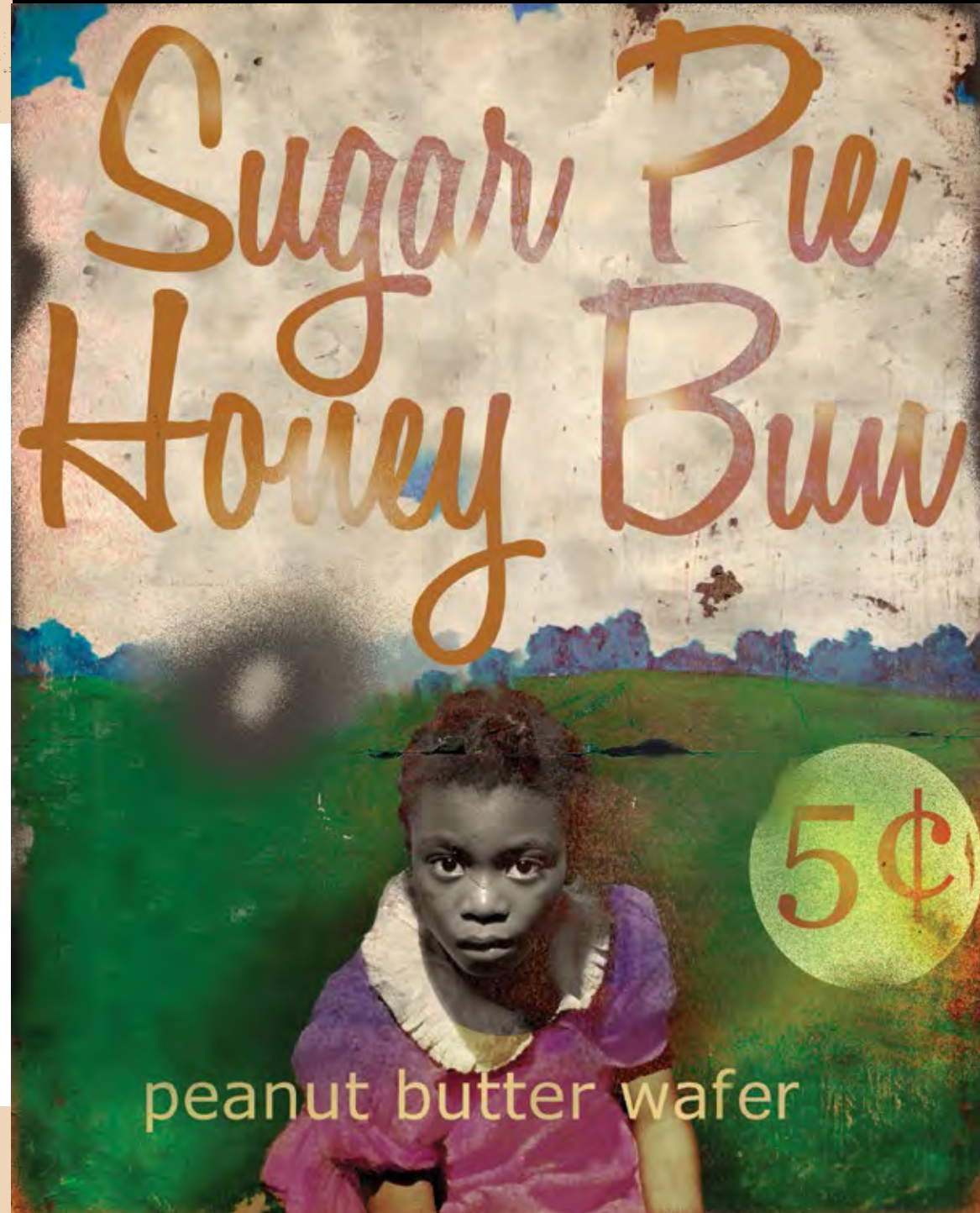
- ▲ *Daddy's Girl*, mixed media on canvas
- ◀ *Sugarland*, pigment print on paper



- ▲ *Black Pepper*, pigment print on paper
- ◀ *Cornbread Muffins*, mixed media on canvas



- ▲ *Cabbage*, mixed media on canvas
- ▶ *Peanut Butter Wafer*, pigment print on paper



THE ALL-AMERICAN

SMITHFIELD* HOT DOG

(*NC, NOT SMITHFIELD FOODS!)

ONE HALLOWEEN,
A FRIEND SUGGESTED WE
DRESS UP AS ICONIC FOODS
FROM OUR HOMETOWNS.



SO...
ME
AS A
HOT
DOG



WHERE I LIVE NOW, MOST FOLKS ROOT FOR THE
HOME TEAM, BUT I ROOT FOR SMITHFIELD!



HIT BULL-WINSTEAK!
HIT GRASS-WIN SALAD!

CAROLINA PACKERS



(A DIFFERENT YEAR* MY
DOG DRESSED UP IN A
SIMILAR SUIT.)
*SURELY
THIS
MAKES IT
TOTALLY
OK!



MY NATIVE SMITHFIELD,
NC HAS BEEN CALLED
"GROUND ZERO" FOR BRIGHT
RED HOT DOGS.



THEY'RE
BEAUTIFUL!
↑ A PRESENT AS RED AS
SANTA'S SUIT



AND DELICIOUS!
CAROLINA-STYLE WITH
CHILI, SLAW, & ONIONS



FOR US, THEY ARE EVERYWHERE & EVERYTHING.
WE HAVE...



STEVEN'S SAUSAGES
(SINCE 1948) & CAROLINA PACKERS' ↑
(SINCE 1941)

MILLIE'S HOT DOGS
TAKE OUT - 989-7863

← AT →

ESPECIALLY

LESS
THAN
ONE
MILE
APART!



BOTH OF WHICH YOU
CAN BUY IN BAGS*
REALLY!



*GREAT
PARTY
BANTER

IS THAT A
BAG OF
HOT
DOGS?

TWO!!



THEY'RE EVERY DOG'S DREAM.



SMITHFIELD
GIRLS!
TOO!

WHATEVER.



EARL'S ART SHOP AND CAFÉ

by Sara Camp Arnold



AT THE INTERSECTION OF POP CULTURE and vernacular art, Mississippi artist Earl Wayne Simmons works. Born in 1956, Simmons has lived and labored for most of his life in Bovina, a few miles east of Vicksburg. As a child he fashioned toys from found objects and developed a grade-school passion for drawing and painting. By the time Simmons dropped out of twelfth grade, he was selling his creations to teachers.

Simmons left Mississippi for Job Corps training in Louisville, Kentucky, where he continued to build the sculptures of cars, motorcycles, airplanes, jukeboxes, and animals that he collectively refers to as his toys. By the late 1970s, he was back in Bovina, constructing a multi-use building he called Earl's Art Shop. Between construction, landscaping, and sawmill jobs, Simmons designed, built, and expanded the rambling structure, using reclaimed or repurposed materials. Eventually, Earl's Art Shop encompassed a studio, gallery, café, and souvenir shop. Visitors could tour the property, sip a drink at the café, peruse the gallery, and make a purchase at the souvenir shop, literally taking a piece of Earl's Art Shop home with them.

In 1994, the Mississippi Arts Commission awarded Simmons a fellowship. The recognition brought a new wave of visitors to Earl's Art Shop, and he used the fellowship funding to add multiple wings to the building. Over the 1990s, Simmons turned his focus from sculpture to painting. His paintings focus on Mississippi pop culture icons like hot tamales, juke joints, and Highway 61. Often they riff on images from mass-market advertisements, calling out brand names Budweiser, Coca-Cola, or Kool cigarettes.

Earl's Art Shop was gutted by fire in 2002 and again in 2012. Today Simmons lives in a FEMA trailer and works outdoors; Earl's Art Shop is under construction yet again. Lesley Silver, owner of The Attic gallery in Vicksburg, serves as Simmons's primary retail outlet. Over the past thirty-five years, Simmons has achieved something rare for a vernacular artist. Through his idiosyncratic rendering of popular culture, he has become a pop culture icon. 🍷



Art courtesy of Earl Simmons and the Attic Gallery, Vicksburg, MS, photographed by Kaitlyn Silver Boerner.