

James Benning

ALABAMA

30758 San Martinez Road, Val Verde, CA 90384

March 12-13th, 19th-20th, and 26th-27th, 2022

Photography by Evan Walsh.
Full details included in checklist.

Kitchen:



Alabama-Coushatta arrowheads, circa 1830s | Alabama map, 1856



Installation view of *ALABAMA* by James Benning. Val Verde, California. Photo by Evan Walsh.



Stop the Runaway, 1804 | *Andrew Jackson*, 1844 | *Civil War bullets*, circa 1860s



Special Election | Nathan Meier, Nathan Bedford Forrest | The Central Bank of Alabama, 1856 | WOODWARD IRON COMPANY | CAMDEN HOME & FARM



Video Loop (14:14): *The Birth of a Nation*, 2:33 minutes | *Inaugural Address, George C. Wallace*, 1963, 3:18 minutes | *Selma, March 7, 1965*, 1:22 minutes | *Angela Davis, California State Prison*, sound only, 4:00 minutes | *The Outlaw Josey Wales*, 3:01 minutes



Jimmy Lee Sudduth, *Red Shirt Fellow*, 1984 | *Scottsboro Boys* | *Victoria Price and Ruby Bates*, 1931 | *Door Text*

But, at it, we miss the wolf by the ear, and we can neither hold him nor catch his tail. — Thomas Jefferson, 1800

The South, the life, and the machinery being to the South. All the work they do goes for the market a mere footstep. It is the labor of the poor and ignorant that makes wheat, rice, and cotton. It is a shame that we do not see it and that we are so on we support the rebellion. — Walter Kelly, 1813

It was when Odey died, I was about seventeen, eighteen, the day I got about eight months and passed on. Mama says I going to be in my coffin, black man and a suit to accompany him, and cover us under it for days. She told me to go to my room and wear it, but we were to be well, just enough to make that suit, and I kept a bare time to be up. Bottom of the pants to narrow, top to wide, and one feature to cutting the top part out and to shape them up in another. — George Kennedy, 1892

I have almost reached the negative conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Council or the Ku Klux Klan, but it is the white moderate who is more devoted to order than to justice; who consistently sides with the Negro to all with a more government action. — Martin Luther King, Jr., 1955

Freedom of speech is not what the white man's freedom is. Freedom, we need government. We need more right about this. — Jimmie Lee, 1955

Now, then, in order to understand white supremacy, we must notice the historical reason that white people can get anybody their freedom. — Henry Clay, 1850

Now every time the black people come out of those white cells and see the white people in sign of the green, you say, "Go back, where you came from." You're not going to be in a situation as a group in a white condition, and you say, "I'm not here to stay." — Father James Brown, 1966

The reason people here it's important to see white's that they think it's important and it's black. — James Baldwin, 1971

Instead of thinking that you and people together that will end up by a whole, I think you have to start with the premise that Negro already together and you try to keep from separating by by separating it, and organizing it and documenting it. — Huey P. Newton, 1967

God said the world coming to a end. — William Carlos Williams, 1938



Child's KKK robe and hood | Bank, 1896 | Inmate Handbook (Male), 2013 | Alabama 8th grade history text, 1957



Nathan Meier, *In memory of*



Tree along the Trail of Tears (Bankhead Forest, Alabama)
Shotgun house with me and Morgan, 1968

Books:

Klansman's Manual, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, 1924

Stars Fell on Alabama, Carl Cramer, 1934

Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880, W.E.B. DuBois, 1935

Scottsboro Boy, Haywood Patterson and Earl Conrad, 1950

The Strange Career of Jim Crow, C. Vann Woodward, 1955

Know Alabama, Lawrence Owsley, John Craig Stewart and Gordon T. Chappell, 1957

Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, James Agee and Walker Evans, 1960

The American Revolution, James Boggs, 1963

Down Home: Camden, Alabama, Bob Adelman, 1972

The Rebel Outlaw: Josey Wales, Forrest Carter, 1973

McIntosh and Weatherford, Creek Indian Leaders, Benjamin W. Griffith, Jr., 1988

And Their Children After Them, Dale Maharidge and Michael Williamson, 1989

Poor But Proud, Alabama's Poor Whites, Wayne Flynt, 1989

Hammer and Hoe, Robin D.G. Kelley, 1990

From Selma to Sorrow, The Life and Death of Viola Liuzzo, Mary Stanton, 1998

BREACH OF PEACE, Eric Etheridge, 2008

Searching for Freedom after the Civil War, G. Ward Hubbs, 2015



Rosa Parks, 1955 | *FREEDOM NOW*, 1960 | *Waiting Room*, 1937



Booker T. Washington | After Traylor

Hallway:



Prison shirt (Limestone Correctional Facility)

Bedroom:



After Maggie Louise Gudger | After Missouri Pettway



Mose Tolliver, *Self-portrait*, 1985 | *Red Dirt Girl* | *GEES BEND*



Two mules from Gee's Bend, 1968 | Nathan Meier, Yellowhammer Woodpecker | Helen Keller, 1920



Mose Tolliver, *Self-portrait*, 1985

Out Building:



Nathan Meier, *Jim Crow* | *Go Home Negro* | *GIVE US AMERICAN RIGHTS* | *NOTICE!*



After Evans (Lucille Burroughs) | Winonah Margaret Beamer, 1961 | Work Boots



Cotton sack, circa 1930



Work Boots | Cotton sack, circa 1930 | GOD SAID THE WORLD COME TO A END, 2018



Charlie Lucas, *Track*, 1986

Press Release:

Installed throughout the artist's home at 30758 San Martinez Road, Val Verde, California, James Benning's *ALABAMA* (2017-2022) is a multi-faceted work exploring the state of Alabama and its pivotal role in American history, societal dynamics, civil rights and art history.

In *ALABAMA*, a selection of archival objects, works on paper, photography, painting, textile work and a film installation trace narratives of self-determination amidst imposed power dynamics. The events that it outlines unfold over centuries, beginning with the region's occupation by white settlers and the expulsion of the land's native peoples, continuing through the subjugation of Black populations, and extending to the area's present-day social climate. *ALABAMA*'s point of departure is Benning's continued engagement with so-called "outsider artists" - self-taught artists, often from marginalized communities. In the mid 2000s, Benning endeavored to expand his filmmaking practice to include painting, and first did so by creating copies of these artists' works based on reproductions found in catalogs. Tracing the origins of these artists would time and again lead Benning back to Alabama, prompting him to assemble artifacts and create pieces that broadened his focus to the history and significance of the state and its inhabitants, ultimately shaping a record of activism, expression, resistance, homage, strife and reverence. The presentation's domestic setting locates Benning's work in a context that suggests a happenstance encounter and intimates the ongoing relevance and living nature of the project's pieces and their legacies. Displayed non-chronologically throughout the home's rooms, amidst the trappings of the artist's own life, the work complicates the linear narratives often assigned to history, highlighting the delicate intricacies embedded within the work's component parts. Consisting of both found and reproduced elements, *ALABAMA* points to Benning's own nuanced deconstruction of the past and brings into question hierarchies dictated by authenticity. Shown in Val Verde, geographically removed from traditional exhibition spaces, Benning conflates notions of public and private by inviting visitors to a deeply personal encounter.

James Benning (b. 1942) has created over 30 feature-length films in the past 50 years. Beginning his experimental film practice in the 1970s, Benning developed a distinct visual language associated with long, real-time, single-shot frames, and the use of landscape to convey deeper themes. Exploring topics of politics, marginalization of peoples, ecology and technology, Benning often returns to the grand narratives of the US and their hidden undersides. In recent decades, his practice has expanded to include photography, printmaking and large-scale installation work that continue and complement his filmic practice.

Selected Solo Exhibitions:

- 2021 *PLACE*, neugerriemschneider, Berlin, DE
- 2020 *Down the Rabbit Hole: JB in JT*, O-Town House, Los Angeles, US
- 2018 *Found Fragments*, neugerriemschneider, Berlin, DE
31 Friends (October), O-Town House, Los Angeles, US
- 2016 *measuring change*, neugerriemschneider, Berlin, DE
- 2015 »Silent« *Cinema*, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Stuttgart, DE
Decoding Fear, Kunstverein in Hamburg, Hamburg, DE
- 2014 *James Benning*, VOX Centre de l'image contemporaine, Montreal, CA
natural history, Museum of Natural History, Vienna, AT
Decoding Fear, Kunsthaus Graz, Universalmuseum Joanneum, Graz, AT
- 2012 *One Way Boogie Woogie 2012*, Argos Centre for Art and Media, Brussels, BE
Two Cabins, neugerriemschneider, Berlin, DE
Milwaukee/Duisburg, Platform A Gallery, Newcastle, GB
One Way Boogie Woogie 2012, NGCA Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art, Sunderland, GB
- 1981 *James Benning*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, US
- 1978 *Four Oil Wells*, Artpark, Lewiston, US

Selected Group Exhibitions:

- 2018 *Outliers and American Vanguard Art*, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., US
- 2016 *presently*, neugerriemschneider, Berlin, DE
The Promise of Total Automation, Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, AT
- 2015 *Fictitious Tales about the History of Earth*, MAK Center for Art and Architecture, Los Angeles, US
- 2014 *Die Unberechenbarkeit komplexer und offener Systeme. James Benning, Lutz Dambeck*, Fridericianum, Kassel, DE
The 2014 Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, US
- 2013 *Tell It To My Heart: Collected by Julie Ault*, Kunstmuseum Basel, Basel, CH
Looking Back/The 7th White Columns Annual, White Columns, New York, US
- 2011 *41. Internationales Forum des Jungen Films/Forum Expanded*, Berlin, DE
- 2007 *documenta 12*, Kassel, DE
- 1996 *Cineprobe*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, US
- 1987 *Biennial Exhibition*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, US
- 1979 *Eight Artists: The Elusive Image*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, US
- 1977 *documenta 6*, Kassel, DE

For further press information and imagery, please contact Jan Salewski at neugerriemschneider: +49 30 288 77277, jan@neugerriemschneider.com; or Scott Cameron Weaver at O-Town House: +1 213 263 9428, home@o-townhouse.art.