Blood Money

Artist’s Commentary
This piece is made from blood donated by friends and colleagues who are descendants of African slaves. As a "son of the south" I grew up listening to apologists for the Antebellum Era who focused their attention on the Neo-Classical aesthetics rather than upon the central issue of Slavery. The Antebellum South identified with and copied the style of Ancient Greece and Rome because they knew that these cultures were also buttressed with human slavery. Many classical historians exalt the Corinthian Capital as the height of Classicism and Western Civilization.

The intent of this piece is to tarnish all Classical aesthetics, especially the Antebellum South’s, because none of their exalted “beauty” would have existed were it not for the forced labor of enslaved peoples. In the case of the Antebellum South, the production of these top seven slave crops by the African slaves.

Plate 38
_Dramatis Personae, 50% Descendant of Slaves and 50% Descendant of Slave Owners' Blood on Paper, 32” x 36”, 2010_

The title refers to the characters in a drama. In this case, the uncomfortable coexistence of blacks and whites in America caused by their troubled histories and respective mythological underpinnings. Since the picture represents a duality I painted it with equal amounts of blood from a descendant of slaves and from a descendant of slave owners.

A bulging bale of cotton (appropriated from a Confederate $50. bill) sits atop a colonial parchment (one of my family’s plantation land grants). On top of the cotton rests a skep (also appropriated from Confederate currency). The top of it has been removed to stir the nest with two large flowers: the King Protea and the Magnolia Grandiflora, representing the two conflicting races. The King
Plate 39
_Civil Unrest_, African-American Blood Silkscreen on Paper, 20.5” x 23.5”, 2012

The man-made beehive, called a skep, appears repeatedly on Confederate currency. It was originally intended to represent productivity but it has become for me the ultimate symbol of the institution of slavery. It is a man-made environment wherein the workers are not allowed to benefit from the products of their labor.

In this picture the agitated swarm represents the Civil Rights Movement and revolution. During times of social unrest and protests in my youth I remember hearing people say, “Those blacks are stirred-up again down in Montgomery, and a swarm of them took to the state capital.”

Plate 40

The American Civil War was not fought solely over the issue of slavery. In this picture taken from Confederate currency we see the agrarian south and the industrial north. I divided the scene with the Mason-Dixon Line to reveal that there was a division but that the scene remained the same. Many blacks went from being slaves in the fields of the south to being slaves in the factories of the north.
Confederate currency was not the same throughout the south—each state printed their own designs. Images of human slavery frequently appear on the currency, undoubtedly as reminders of why the south was engaged in war.

The slaves are depicted as happily engaged in a variety of forced labors. The designers were apparently proud of what they should have been ashamed of.

A murderous vignette from the Confederate $2.00 bill showing ‘southern liberty striking down the Union’. It is very interesting that the designer chose women for this typically male activity. The predatorial bird does not seem to know which side to be on in this conflict.
Plate 44

One afternoon while studying digital scans of the currency I became emotionally overwhelmed by the idea of blood money. In an effort to escape it I isolated a swirling detail and attempted to enjoy it simply for its formal qualities. Instead, it only made me angrier because I realized that if I were a slave and saw this over-wrought neo-classical decoration—knowing that none of it would exist were it not for the abduction and forced labor of my people—I would be obliged to all manner of subversive activity.

Plate 45

A cacophony of various symbols representing the number ‘five’ taken from Confederate currency. This piece, derived from Charles Demuth’s “I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold”, is also an unconventional portrait of a person. But, the subject of this portrait knows from the shouting bids that his life has a monetary value.

Plate 46

The Jewish statesman Judah P. Benjamin appears on the Confederate $2.00 bill. He held three different appointments within the Confederacy: he was the Attorney General, Secretary of War and Secretary of State. Because the Hebrews were purportedly enslaved in Egypt, Jewish law strictly forbids slave ownership. Benjamin’s support of the Confederate cause is profoundly hypocritical.
ROBERT SHERER
Artist’s Biography

EDUCATION

1989–1992 Master of Fine Arts (MFA) degree, Painting
Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, Edinboro, PA

Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI

1982–1986 Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) degree, Drawing and Painting
Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA

Atlanta College of Art, Atlanta, GA

1976–1978 Arts and Science (AS) degree, Visual Art
Walker College, Jasper, AL

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

2014
- Art, AIDS, America, Tacoma Art Museum, Tacoma, WA. (invitational)

2013
- Head, Shoulders, Genes, and Toes, FSU Museum of Fine Arts, Tallahassee, FL. (invitational)

2012
- Selected Blood Works: Robert Sherer, Lyman-Eyer Gallery, Provincetown, MA. (solo)
Blood Works: The Sanguineous Art of Robert Sherer

- 30x30 No.10, Gruppenaustellung, Galerie Kunstbehandlung. KG, Munich, Germany. (group)
- Hidden and Forbidden Identities, ArtExpo International, Palazzo Albrizzi, Venice, Italy (juried)

2011

- 30 x 30 No. 9, Gruppenaustellung, Galerie Kunstbehandlung. KG, Munich, Germany. (group)
- A Very Private View, Art Section Magazine, George Hornbein residence, Atlanta, GA.
- What Not to Speak About, Visual Arts Gallery, Emory University, Atlanta, GA. (invitational)
- Recent Acquisitions, Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA-GA), Atlanta, GA. (collection)
- 16th Annual Hambidge Center Gala, Bradford Galleries, Atlanta, GA. (invitational)
- 100 Artists’ Book Promotion Exhibition, Outwrite Bookstore and Coffeehouse, Atlanta, GA. (duo)

2010

- 20th Anniversary Exhibition, Leslie-Lohman Gay Art Foundation Museum, NYC, NY. (collection)
- Robert Sherer: American Pyrographs, Lyman-Eyer Gallery, Provincetown, MA. (solo)
- Recent Acquisitions, Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA-GA), Atlanta, GA. (collection)
- Embracing Differences, Oglethorpe University Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA. (invitational)
- Coming Out and Living Authentically, Feinstein Gallery (URI), Providence, RI. (invitational)
- Gallery Artists, Kathleen Cullen Fine Arts, Chelsea, New York City, NY. (group)
- What Not to Speak About, Space One-Eleven, Birmingham, AL. (invitational)
2009

- Robert Sherer: American Pyrographs, Lyman-Eyer Gallery, Provincetown, MA. (solo)
- Puppy Love, Outwrite Bookstore and Coffeehouse, Atlanta, GA. (solo)
- New Artists, Kathleen Cullen Fine Arts, Chelsea, New York City, NY. (group)
- Evening for Equality, Equality Foundation of Georgia, W Hotel, Atlanta, GA. (invitational)
- Georgia Lawyers for the Arts—34th Annual Gala, Mason Murer Gallery, Atlanta, GA. (invitational)

2008

- Blood Works, Fine Arts Gallery, Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, GA. (solo)
- Robert Sherer: American Pyrographs, Lyman-Eyer Gallery, Provincetown, MA. (solo)
- Plugged In 35, Atlanta Contemporary Art Center, Atlanta, GA. (invitational)
- New England International Erotic Art Festival, Provincetown, MA. (juried)

2007

- Biennale Internazionale dell’Arte Contemporanea, Florence, Italy. (juried)
- Robert Sherer: American Pyrographs, Lyman-Eyer Gallery, Provincetown, MA. (solo)
- New England International Erotic Art Festival, Provincetown, MA. (group)
- Mondo Homo: The Dirty South, My Sister’s Room, Atlanta, GA. (group)

2006

- Black Bird on My Shoulder, Dalton Gallery, Agnes Scott College, Decatur, GA. (invitational)
- Robert Sherer: American Pyrographs, Lyman-Eyer Gallery, Provincetown, MA. (solo)
- The Art of Dining, (Elton John AIDS Foundation) The Lowe Gallery, Atlanta, GA.
- Looks Good on Paper, The Spruill Art Center Gallery, Atlanta, GA. (invitational)
- Georgia Artists, Board of Regents, University System of Georgia, Atlanta, GA. (invitational)
2005

- Heavenly Bodies—Images of Men, The Garden Gallery, Provincetown, MA. (group)
- The Last Taboo, The Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia, Atlanta (invitational)
- Group Show, Anthem Gallery, New York City, NY. (group)
- The Art of Dining, (Elton John Aids Foundation auction,) The Lowe Gallery, Atlanta, GA.

2004

- In-Appropriate, Momus Gallery, Atlanta, GA. (invitational)
- Artexpo Atlanta, Georgia World Congress Center, Atlanta, GA. (group)
- Flower Power, Anthem Gallery, New York City, NY. (group)
- The Art of Healing, Brenau University Gallery, Gainesville, GA. (invitational)
- The Art of Dining, (charity auction,) Momus Gallery, Atlanta, GA. (invitational)

2003

- Southern Fried, Anthem Gallery, New York City, NY. (invitational)
- Postures, Matre Gallery, Atlanta, GA. (invitational)
- A Sense of Place, Gertrude Herbert Institute of Art, Augusta, GA. (group.)
- The Art of Dining, (charity auction,) Momus Gallery, Atlanta, (invitational)
- Georgia Legislative Exhibition, Jolley Lodge, Kennesaw State Univ., (invitational)

2002

- Triennale Internationale d’Art Contemporain, Toit de la Grande Arche, Paris, France. (juried)
- Blood Works, Center for AIDS and Humanity, Atlanta, GA. (nine-month solo)
- The Red Clay Survey, Huntsville Museum of Art, Huntsville, AL. (juried)
- Software: The Vagina Show, Art Spot Gallery, Atlanta, GA. (invitational)
- Georgia Lawyers for the Arts—27th Annual Gala, The Lowe Gallery, Atlanta, (invitational)
- Hungry Souls, Lower Evans Gallery, Agnes Scott College, Decatur, GA. (invitational)
2001

- Biennale Internazionale dellArte’ Contemporanea, Fortezza da Basso, Florence, Italy. (juried)
- The ShedSpace Exhibition, a two-person show with Larry Anderson, Atlanta, GA. (invitational)
- American Institute of Architects Show, GA. World Congress Center, Atlanta, GA. (group)
- Cream: an Erotic Art Show, 1181 Gallery, Atlanta, GA. (invitational)
- Art Papers Auction, Soho Myriad Gallery, Atlanta, GA. (invitational)

2000

- Robert Sherer: New Works, Robert Kidd Gallery, Birmingham, MI. (solo)
- Art Party 2000, The Atlanta Contemporary Art Center, Atlanta, GA. (invitational)
- CUTE, Lamar Dodd Art Center, University of Georgia, Athens, GA. (invitational)
- Innuendo, Gallery Eleven 50, Atlanta, GA. (invitational)
- Hairdos and Tractor Pulls, Trinity Gallery, Atlanta, GA. (invitational)
- Precious: The Pathos, Pleasures of Kitsch, The Contemporary, Atlanta, GA. (invitational)

1999

- Vanitas, Agnes Scott College, Decatur, GA. (invitational)
- Body As Commodity, Nexus Contemporary Art Center, Atlanta, GA. (invitational)
- Four Atlantans, Eastern Shore Arts Center, Fairhope, AL. (group)
- Requiem, Nexus Contemporary Art Center, Atlanta, GA. (invitational)

1998

- Corporate Art Sources, The Business Center of Alabama, Montgomery, AL. (group)
- The Salon Show, Sylvia Schmidt Gallery, New Orleans, LA. (group)
- ArtCare Auction, AIDS Benefit, Swishotel, Atlanta, GA. (group)
- Union/Reunion, Nexus Contemporary Art Center, Atlanta, GA. (invitational)
- Testosterone, Vaknin Schwartz Gallery, Atlanta, GA. (invitational)
1997
- *Robert Sherer*, The Lowe Gallery, Atlanta, GA. (solo)
- *CenterSpace*, Woodruff Arts Center, Atlanta, GA. (invitational)
- *Art Party*, Nexus Contemporary Arts Center, Atlanta, GA. (group)
- *The Magic Mirror*, Kennesaw State Univ., Kennesaw, GA. (group)
- *ArtCare Auction*, AIDS Benefit, Swishotel, Atlanta, GA. (group)
- *ArtFest ’97*, Project Open Hand Art Auction, Burkhardt’s, Atlanta, GA. (group)
- *ARCA Charity Auction*, Georgian Terrace Hotel, Atlanta, GA. (group)

1996
- *New Male Nudes Redux*, The Barnwell County Museum, Barnwell, SC. (solo)
- *Six Censored Paintings*, Outwrite Bookstore Gallery, Atlanta, GA. (solo)
- *An American Renaissance*, The Lowe Gallery, Atlanta, GA. (group)
- *ArtCare Auction*, AIDS Benefit, Swishotel, Atlanta, GA. (invitational)
- *ArtFest ’96*, Project Open Hand Art Auction, Burkhardt’s, Atlanta, GA. (group)
- *Birmingham AIDS Outreach Auction*, Terrific New Theater, Birmingham, AL. (group)

1995
- *ArtCare Auction*, AIDS Benefit, Swishotel, Atlanta, GA. (invitational)
- *Graffiti II*, Nexus Contemporary Art Center, Atlanta, GA. (invitational)
- *Confessions, A Taboo Show*, ACA Gallery, Atlanta, GA. (invitational)
- *New Male Nudes*, Barnwell County Museum, Barnwell, SC. (solo)
  CENSORED.

1994
- *New Male Nudes*, Gallery 2030, Birmingham, AL. (solo) CENSORED.
- *Love, Sex, and Death*, Nexus Contemporary Arts Center, Atlanta, GA. (juried)
- *ArtFest ’94*, Project Open Hand Art Auction, Burkhardt’s, Atlanta, GA. (group)
- *The AIDS Cure Project*, King Plow Arts Center, Atlanta, GA. (juried)
- *ArtCare Auction*, AIDS Benefit, Swishotel, Atlanta, GA. (invitational)
- *The Atlanta Detention Center Public Arts Project*, Atlanta, GA. (juried)
1993
- The Cheekwood National Painting Exhibition, Nashville, TN. (juried)
- An American Renaissance, The Lowe Gallery, Atlanta, GA. (invitational)
- The Acetate Show, The Paladium, New York, NY. (invitational)
- ArtCare Auction, AIDS Benefit, Swishotel, Atlanta, GA. (invitational)
- Gallery Artists, The Lowe Gallery, Atlanta, GA. (group)
- ArtFest ’93, Project Open Hand Art Auction, Burkhardt’s, Atlanta, GA. (group)

1992
- Re-Presentations, Bruce Gallery, Edinboro Univ. of PA. (solo) CENSORED.
- Three Rivers Art Festival, Festival Gallery, Pittsburgh, PA. (juried)
- 6th Annual Watercolor Exhibition, Glass Growers Gallery, Erie, PA. (juried)
- Survivor’s Parade, The Ellen James Society, Daemon Records, Atlanta, GA. (CD Cover Art)

1991
- 55th National, The Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, OH. (juried)
- Experience Censorship, Installation/Performance, Bruce Gallery, Edinboro, PA. (solo)
- The Gulf War, Bates Gallery, Edinboro, PA. (invitational)

1990
- 5 X Figurative, BK Smith Gallery, L.Erie College, Painesville, OH. (group) CENSORED.

1988
- RISDOIDS, Bankhaus Gallery, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI. (juried)

1987
- Student Art Exhibition, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI. (juried)
- The Great Mattress Factory Show, Mattress Factory Gallery, Atlanta, GA. (juried)
1986

- *72nd Exhibition*, National Arts Club Gallery, New York, NY. (juried)
- *Feminist Figurations*, Jesse James Gallery, Atlanta, GA. (invitational)
- *Georgia Artists Show*, Junior League of Dekalb, Decatur, GA. (juried)
- *Student Exhibition*, GSU Gallery, Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA. (juried)
- *The Great Mattress Factory Show*, The Mattress Factory, Atlanta, GA. (juried)

1985

- *15th Works on Paper Exhibition*, SW Texas State Univ. Gallery, San Marcos, TX. (juried)
- *The Annual Exhibition*, Salmagundi Gallery, New York, NY. (juried)
- *Miniaturist’s Show*, Alias Gallery, Atlanta, GA. (invitational)
- *The Last Great Mattress Factory Show*, Mattress Factory Gallery, Atlanta, GA. (juried)

1984

- *Valentine Show*, Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham, AL. (invitational)
- *The Human Body and Its Functions*, Nexus Art Center, Atlanta, GA. (juried)
- *Student Exhibition*, GSU Gallery, Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA. (juried)
- *Destroy All Music*, Pillowtex Gallery, Atlanta, GA. (invitational)
- *Georgia Artists Show*, Mary Gay House, Junior League of Dekalb, Decatur, GA. (juried)

1983

- *Rat Attack!,* The Blue Rat Gallery, Atlanta, GA. (invitational)
- *Art Of The New*, Birmingham Museum Of Art, Birmingham, AL. (invitational)
- *Student Exhibition*, GSU Gallery, Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA. (juried)

1982

- *Rat Attack!,* The Blue Rat Gallery, Atlanta, GA. (invitational)
1981

- *Rat Attack!*, The Blue Rat Gallery, Atlanta, GA. (invitational)

1980

- *Student Exhibition*, ACA Gallery, Atlanta College of Art, Atlanta, GA. (juried)

1979

- *Summer Show*, London Bridges Gallery, Birmingham, AL. (invitational)

*(A complete listing of Exhibitions is available upon request at www.robertsherer.com)*

**SELECTED BLOOD WORKS PUBLICATIONS**


Feaster, Felecia. *Let it Bleed, KSU Prof’s Art is Colored Crimson*, Creative Loafing Online, Atlanta, GA. (1 February. 2008.)

- Picteaza cu sperma si sange contaminat cu HIV, Cancan, Romania (12 Jan. 2008)
- Lavori di Sangue, Virtual Blog, Italy (11 Jan. 2008)
- Blood Paintings by Georgia Artist Shown, Daily India (English Version), India (10 Jan. 2008)
- Blood Paintings by Georgia Artist Shown, PoliticalGateway.com, USA (10 Jan. 2008)
- Blood Paintings by Georgia Artist Shown, BigBlog.com, USA (10 Jan. 2008)
- Blood Paintings by Georgia Artist Shown, EarthTimes.org, USA (10 Jan. 2008)
- Blood Paintings by Georgia Artist Shown, Moldova.org, Moldavia, Romania (10 Jan. 2008)
- Blood Paintings by Georgia Artist Shown, Apria.com, Apria Healthcare, USA (10 Jan. 2008)
- Blood Paintings by Georgia Artist Shown, Portrayer.net, USA. (10 Jan. 2008)
- Artist Uses Blood in Paintings, AmericaRu (Russian Version), USA. (10 Jan. 2008)
- Artist Uses Real Blood in Paintings, Plime, Atlanta, GA. (9 Jan. 2008)


Writer, Staff. *Blood Paintings by Georgia Artist Shown*, Moldova.org, Moldova Foundation, Moldova, Romania (10 Jan, 2008)


Writer, Staff. *It’s Bloody Work*, David Magazine, Atlanta, GA. (2 Jan. 2008, pg. 30)


LeBow, Ellen. *One Artist, Intimately Interested, Visits Another's Show*, Cape Cod Voice, Provincetown, MA. (6 October, 2005, pg. 20-21.)


Writer, Staff. *Sherer Uses Blood in Paintings to Make a Point in Exhibition*, Provincetown Banner, Provincetown, MA. (8 September, 2005, A&E, pg. 53.)


Brown, Cheryl. *Sherer Gives Himself to his Work*, Flourish Magazine, Kennesaw, GA. (Spring, 2003, pg. 23.)


Byrd, Cathy. Requiem, Creative Loafing, Atlanta, GA. (30 Jan. 1999, pg. 35)


Boswell, David. Art is a Love Thing, Southern Voice, Atlanta, GA. (24 Sept. 1998, pg. 43)


Byrd, Cathy. Love, Lust and Romance, Creative Loafing, Atlanta, GA. (12 Sept. 1998, pg. 45)
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Collection: Robert Sherer Studio

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H” x W”: 21.5” x 28”
Collection: Robert Sherer Studio
Acknowledgments

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Holly S. Miller, Cover and Book Design
Matt Haffner, Photography of Artwork
Sandi Hill, Photography of the Artist’s Studio
William Cash, Photography of the Artist
Diana McClintock, Book Essay
Helena Reckitt, Artist Interview

(Left) Daddy’s Little Princess, 2009
Accolades for Blood Works

“The Blood Works paintings are romantic, heady, creepy cautionary tales about contemporary love and lust. Sherer’s work speaks to the sacrificial dimension of art-making. The process of using blood to create the works alludes to how a lifetime of emotional bloodletting of one’s feelings, relationships and experience in the act of making art can take its own toll.”

—Felicia Feaster
Art Critic

“Sherer continues his use of subversive decorative imagery in his Blood Works series. In using HIV positive and HIV negative blood as a painting medium, but without ever revealing their sources or where they appear in the works, Sherer plays on our curiosity, creating achingly beautiful images of banality, flowers and bunnies, in which illness and health are materially and conceptually embedded.”

—Jesse M. Kahn
Queer Caucus for Art, College Art Association

“Sherer’s work is on the vanguard of where contemporary art is inexorably headed. It is rare for a contemporary artist to have Sherer’s measure of both discipline, which results in virtuosity, and intellectual rigor, which results in the high ideals of conceptual art.”

—Stephen Smith
The Birmingham Free Press
“Sherer is stunningly brilliant at appropriating the styles of neo-classical masters such as Boucher, David, Ingres, Jerome, and Bougereau, which has brought about censorship charges from the religious right who claim that Sherer perverts God’s natural order by placing men in women’s positions. Not unexpectedly, they are completely missing the point. It is astounding that an artist of this caliber should be subjected to criticism, but the infamy, in itself, has provoked a far greater awareness of his work. They are simply, beautiful.”

—Randy Dunbar
Planet Homo

“Robert Sherer’s drawings done with his own blood symbolize a crisis he has contemplated deeply. Though Sherer himself is HIV-negative, such emblems as a dying flower in a Greek vase refer to the AIDS that has cut short the lives of many friends. The exacting style and rust-red color suggest neoclassical art: the concerns are completely contemporary.”

—Jerry Cullum
Atlanta Journal-Constitution

“Sherer’s work has a sometimes funny but generally sorrowing, romantic beauty. One wonders why more artists haven’t naturally turned to blood as ink considering its obvious raw and intimate power.”

—Ellen LeBow
Cape Cod Voice