

ARTnews

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Gina Phillips

Jonathan Ferrara

New Orleans

Gina Phillips's new mixed-media series, "Heroes and Villains," explores the 16th-century clash between European and Native American cultures with tongue-in-cheek humor and a sense of comic tragedy. The cleverly constructed images are composed of an acrylic underpainting on canvas or muslin with built up layers of sewn appliqué of fabric and thread.

For fanciful but gruesome works such as *Limbs* (2010), *Let's Split!* (2011), and *Cat Island Encounter...Macaroni Meets Jean-Baptiste* (2010), among others, the Kentucky-born, New Orleans-based artist took inspiration from the 16th-

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century engraver Theodorus de Bry's depictions of Native Americans, first published in the 1590 illustrated edition of Thomas Harriot's *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia*. Another source was Richard Campanella's 2002 book *Time and Place in New Orleans*, which describes late 17th-century French Canadian encounters with Native Americans in the lower Mississippi River Valley.

In *Adam and Eve* (2010), Phillips seems to imply that pre-Columbian North America was a paradise in its natural state, but an endangered paradise. The figures lurking in the trees behind Adam and Eve are vultures, not snakes. In *Score!* (2010), a bald eagle flies off, clutching in its talons the severed head of a Native American man.

In the timeless words of Brian Wilson, "Heroes and villains, Just see what you've done."
—John R. Kemp



Gina Phillips, *Adam and Eve*, 2010, fabric, thread, ink, paint, and synthetic hair, 109" x 222". Jonathan Ferrara.