

Professor Lazevnick

Exhibition Critique

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Ashley Coleman: *Hold Nothing Back*; Gallery Critique

Ashley Coleman's photography exhibition, *Hold Nothing Back*, is a personal favorite and a favorite of many others. Her collection that was chosen for Converse's Milliken Gallery is a cohesive and immersive unit as a whole. While Milliken Gallery may present itself as a "white cube" gallery, the sides of the gallery are walled in with large glass panels, leaving most of the work to be displayed on large pillars throughout the gallery space. During Coleman's occupation of Milliken Gallery, every available plastered wall had a photograph framed and hung. Some photographic prints were as large as three feet tall and some were as small as an average piece of printer paper. Coleman's vibrant print of "*Scooter Bike Scates*" faced any passerby as they came towards the gallery, drawing them in, promising stories of childhood and the south. Every print throughout the exhibition carried through this theme, and has rich brick red tones contrasted by cool tones of sage green that make it feel warm and summer-like.

Coleman's body of work is a very emotional one. It's hard to not have an emotional connection to most of the work. Not only is it visually appealing in its composition and color palette, but the subject matter is divisive in its language. For me the images of her children and their life remind me of a lack of childhood experience and a desire to heal an inner child, and to others it may invoke feelings of nostalgia from a similar childhood to theirs. Some may simply be intrigued to know the story behind a dead racoon in a tonka truck toy or how her daughter bruised her knees. And all of these interpretations may be different from Coleman's feelings

towards her own work. But I think that's what makes it an incredible exhibition and body of work. It's immersive and a world of its own for anyone who steps into it and everyone who leaves the gallery may leave with a different world built in their head.

Coleman's body of work as a whole offers something reminiscent of Southern Gothic photographer, Sally Mann. Coleman credits Mann as a large inspiration for her work and this inspiration rings clear. Sally Mann is famously known for controversially photographing her children, sometimes nude. She raised a question over the consent of children in art and where the line between art and law lies. Coleman's body of work plays with this idea of photographing home life and her children. She hails from Mississippi, and *Hold Nothing Back* has a heavy focus on capturing the chaos of being a mother in a rural southern town.

When speaking to Coleman at the gallery about her creative process for *Hold Nothing Back*, she told me something that changed my approach to photography and creative development in general. She talked about how she was feeling a lack of control in her life, and how she was having trouble coping with that. So she wrote down everything she could think of that was the antithesis of control. And that's what she photographed. Dead animals, her children and their messy creations, and cats. And that really intrigued me, because I never thought that showing the opposite of your emotions would be a helpful concept in art, however, it truly leads your mind to examine why you are wanting to create on a certain subject and what it is that evokes certain feelings and emotions.