



# Najee Dorsey

Somewhere South

July 2018



Crossroads Blues  
acrylic and collage elements on canvas, 45 x 30 "  
\$18,500





The G.O.A.T.  
acrylic and collage elements on canvas, 40 x 30 "  
\$9,500



Parlor Room  
acrylic and collage elements on canvas, 60 x 48 "  
\$18,500





William "Slim" Tucker Discovering the Crossroads  
acrylic and collage elements on canvas, 60 x 36 "  
\$26,000

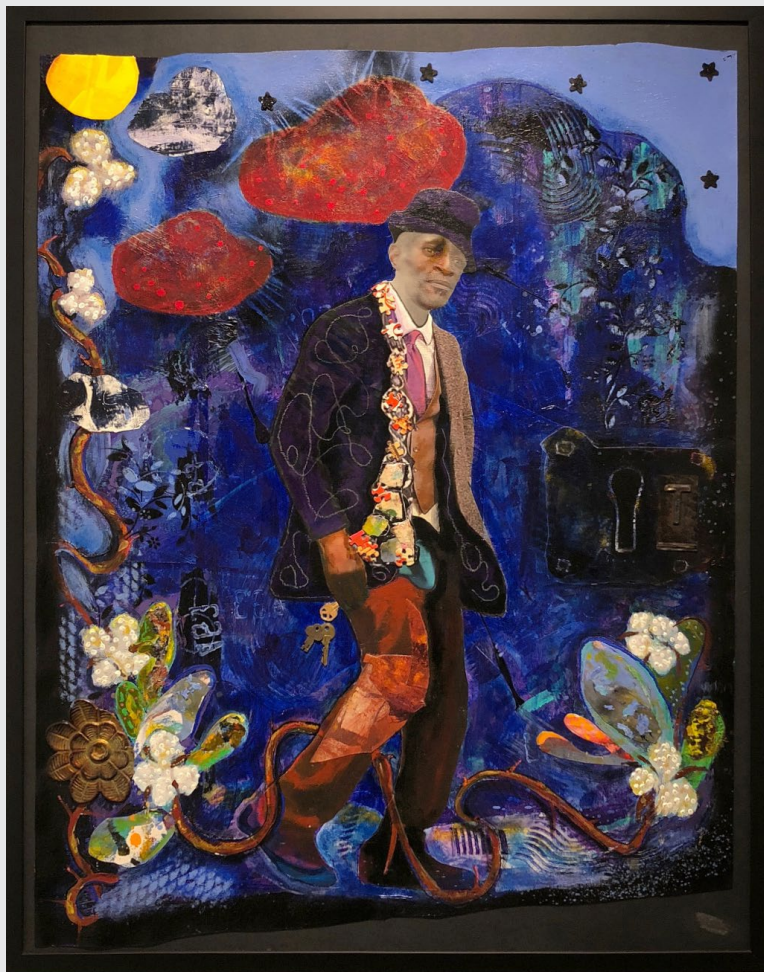


Family Hour  
acrylic and collage elements on canvas, 20 x 16 "  
\$6,500





Road Less Traveled  
acrylic and collage elements, 36 x 48 "  
\$16,500



My Lonely Heart Escapes Its Southern Blues 2

acrylic and collage elements, 48 x 36 "

\$9,500





Outta New Orleans  
acrylic and collage elements, framed 70 x 42 "  
\$22,000



Center Stage  
acrylic and collage elements, 47 x 36 "  
\$8,500





My Lonely Heart Escapes Its Southern Blues 1  
acrylic and collage elements, 46 x 36 "  
\$9,500



Up South  
acrylic and collage elements, 47 x 42 "  
\$16,500





Cool Papa Bell  
acrylic and collage elements, 24 x 24 "  
\$6,800



Watchful Eye 4  
acrylic and collage elements, 30 x 15 "  
\$6,500



Slow down and don't miss it. "Somewhere South," Najee Dorsey's latest exhibition, is the artist at his best, offering transporting scenes of southern life.

By Tom Ingram  
Black Arts In America art editor

A common misconception about life in the south is that it's slow-paced because not much is going on down here. Never mind metropolises like Houston, home of the Nicole Longnecker Gallery where Najee Dorsey's "Somewhere South" exhibition will be on display from June 30 to Aug. 31—the stereotypical southern lethargy has less to do with boredom or humidity, much less stupidity, than any caricature admits. If we take our time, it's because so much is going on, and the only way to absorb the manifold contours and movements of southern life is to slow the pace of our steps and look, and look again.

Since devoting himself full-time to art in 2005, Najee Dorsey has cut a trail entirely his own through the art world. His work returns again and again to scenes of domestic and rural southern life, transporting the mundane into the mythological, and thereby encapsulating stories too rarely told. Born in Blytheville, Arkansas, Najee knows these stories first-hand. Museums from Dallas to Detroit have featured his mixed-medium visual narratives. "Somewhere South" is an-other deep-dive into those uniquely southern stories Najee tells so well.

As with any art worth seeing, Najee's work compels even the most casual observer to slow down and stop. Some of his most well-known, earlier pieces achieve this in part by being so busy. The works in "Somewhere South" are generally more focused, and more than retaining their power to captivate, Najee's focus makes them all the more spellbinding.

"In Big Mama's Kitchen" is Najee at his domestic best. A woman with hair up, her face and shawl rendered in shades of cool blue, gazes upward into the distance. Her countenance is collected, hopeful and contemplative. Perhaps she is reflecting on a passage from the book she holds in her lap. Against the wall behind her is a woodburning stove, which emits red heat that suffuses the wood floor in front of it. The figure here dominates her kitchen, but she is not bound to it. She is both of and transcendent apart from this domestic world. Her story, as I consider the window mostly obscured by her face and the mountain in the distance, is the sort of story in which a young adult son might come in from the cold to ask for a cup off coffee from the percolator on the stove. I see mother gazing on her son, proud to have raised him, and content with having sacrificed other dreams in order to do so. By finding this grandmother alone in her kitchen, Najee has also found the essential, even mythological bravery in this most mundane setting.

Najee's connection with history is profound and bold, yet his sense of history is subtle and complicated. In another domestic setting, "My Grandfather's Home," Najee gives us an older man in his over-stuffed green chair—we all know the chair, it's granddad's and only granddad's—posing as if for a photograph with his grandson. Whether you know Najee's oeuvre, the rest of the show is more than sufficient to inform this piece's relationship to the whole of his work. The red doll in the boy's hand is Robert Johnson, of whom we'll say more in a moment, and the boy's expression screams, "let me go run and play." The world they inhabit is cozy. On a windowsill sits a potted yellow flower framed by a white balance. The wall behind the figures is replete with what, at first glance anyway, feel like family photos. In "Somewhere South," the bluesman Robert Johnson and actor Mahershala Ali take prominent roles, and at least some of the people depicted in "My Grandfather's Home" are likely identifiable figures with histories of their own. Here they overlook a scene which, in the piece's careful narrative, will some day also hang on the wall, part of the family photo

album on display. Here is a temporal continuity, a process by which family is preserved and passed to the next generation, and thereby transported into the eternal. In this sacred space even the faintest childhood memories become the bed-rock of family identity. These scenes build a sense of self buttressed by aunts and uncles, cousins and friends. The old man, roused from napping in his favorite chair, and the young grandson, whose Robert Johnson doll carries a guitar case and is, like the boy, crossroads-bound, in this brief moment pose for a snapshot in the vast array of family life. I imagine this piece as a snapshot on the wall with the other photos, and I imagine what future scenes unfold in this lively room.

Some of Najee's best works feature his Robert Johnson figure. He occurs as one of the rare portraits of the famed bluesman with cocked hat and incredulous gaze atop a pinstripe suit. In one hand he holds a cigar, and in the other a guitar case. Always stolid, his mere presence, bringing with it the enormous weight of blues mythology, suggests not only trial and tribulation, but also transcendent artistic mastery. Johnson, who appears in the history as a young man who can hardly play a chord and reappears later as a player profound enough to floor the likes of Willie Dixon, appears in Najee's "Crossroad blues" as a figure beyond time. Stories of the historical Johnson vary wildly, and Najee's figure needs no corroboration. The world he inhabits in this work contains no artificial context. Najee gives us a cloudy night sky, with full moon unobscured, bright stars here and there, and streaking across the expanse a meteor as fast and bright as Johnson's short life. Though we find Johnson in a night scene, bright foliage surrounds his path, foliage which might as well be from another planet, or a massive Chihuly glass installation. If there is an apt phrase for this piece, a genre under which we might organize this and many other of Najee's works, it's the artist's phrase: blues futurism. Such a magical, multicolored mystery land must be slowly wandered; otherwise, the space would overwhelm us. Step back and stay a while.

"Somewhere South" is Najee at his best. When his works embrace his frenetic impulse to cover every space with suggestive artifacts, as in "American Juke Joint Lounge," we enter a world both contemporary and timeless. It's a mythological melding of places we could visit today with places shuttered when Robert Johnson still played the circuit. Most impressive to me are the several night scenes. The full moon rising in indigo skies with foliage illumined in a way only seen on southern summer nights is always inviting. I do not like them for any moonlight-through-magnolias sentimentality, which Najee's work rejects. I love them because the works provide a glimpse into these spaces while drawing us out of them. They signal everywhere the way the roads upon which his figures travel, whether on foot or as with "Life's a Journey" a young boy on a red tricycle, lead farther than we imagined. Slow down, take a salubrious stroll through "Somewhere South," and get to know a thing or two about why we who live here like to take our time.





Nicole Longnecker Gallery is located in the heart of Houston's Gallery Row near the intersection of Kirby and Richmond. Our gallery offers a wide range of contemporary works in various media by artists on both a national and international level. We are committed to presenting the finest work possible from established and emerging artists.

As a space for viewing fine contemporary art, Nicole Longnecker Gallery is devoted to the representation of emerging and established artists through an active program of exhibitions displaying mostly abstract expressions in drawing, painting, printmaking, and sculpture. Through innovative marketing, our solo & group exhibitions will aid in placing our artists work in a wide range of private and public collections. Nicole Longnecker Gallery is dedicated to promoting visual art in our community by supporting local educational efforts and various non-profit organizations along with engaging new collectors and educating the community about art.