A Song from the Field
America’s Music

This body of work is the product of a physical and spiritual journey into the Deep South. We explored the DNA of Mississippi . . . Clarksdale, Cleveland, Mound Bayou, Greenville, and Indianola. There we found a rich cache of artifacts that inspired this series.

In my constant quest to discover subjects that generate the emotional power that permeates my creative process I rediscovered the Blues. The Blues are a rare musical art form that is completely transparent, obscenely pure and unmistakably original. Every song has an emotional power and tell a story that only a privileged few share.

The Blues originated in the Mississippi Delta region, in the cotton fields, in the churches, in the “jook joints” in the pain and power of a people. It flows from the very soul of the artist blessed with the expressive talent to interpret it. It is as American as apple pie. As an artist listening to the Blues, I hear the words as they are sung, I feel the licks played with callous, tobacco stained fingers. I embraced the struggle and sacrifices made by a fellow artist.

I create with paint, glass beads, photographs and a brush and they create harmonically with tightly strung guitars and raspy, passionate, pain-filled voices. As a son of the Deep South, this journey was inevitable.

The works of art are mixed medium, prepared and presented in three and two-dimensional visual form. These best support my passion and help me to eloquently express the emotional aspects of the movement. In some works texture is used to reinforce a particular shape that brands vivid the hardship field workers endured. Critical to the whole, is the aesthetically and metaphorically suffused colors that frequently carry me through these heart-felt sentiments that sometimes escape capture. My interest lies in energizing and charging the space and shape with unexpected and contrasting color.
During the formation of this artwork, the music of these pioneers filled the gallery and beckoned me to create and respond to their call of passion. Sometimes exaggerated, I applied every passage of paint demanded. Other times, I choose to placate my strokes diminishing the contrast. From the blackness of Sister Odessa’s face to the whiteness of the baptismal gowns, the tints and shades of color are laid in with symbolic intent and historical reference.

The information gathered during the trip, the photographs, video, and interviews are from people who have lived their entire lives in the Delta. People like “Rat” Ratcliff, owner of the Riverside Hotel in Clarksdale, Mississippi who conveyed sagas of the musicians who rambled through the halls of his storied establishment. “Red”, owner of “Red’s Place” had many other stories along with advisories and warnings of dead ends coming to past researchers. In the end, this journey yielded many legends and tales of unknown legends that blazed the Blues trail. Ongoing dispute between towns people still incite heated quarrels as to which town gave birth to the blues. However, one thing is undisputed, the “Blues are the Delta and the Delta is the Blues.”

Robert A. Ketchens