

ENTERTAINMENT

Artists reflect on Confederate flag controversy

CHARLESTON, S.C. (AP) — In the city where the Civil War began, in a state that after much anguish and debate will lower the Confederate flag from atop its Statehouse, a new exhibit gives artists a chance to reflect on race, the South and the Confederacy.

"In the Shadow of the Flag" features works inspired by the flag controversy along with others created decades ago by artists including Jasper Johns and Faith Ringgold.

"Charleston needs to bring in work that will make a difference without saying anything," said Tippy Stern Brickman, president of the Tippy Stern gallery, where the exhibit opened Friday.

"People will walk in and look and feel — especially with this Confederate flag issue," she said. "It's not all flags by any means."

Five of the 23 works on display do represent flags, including Ringgold's famous oil painting "Flag for the Moon: Die Nigger

1967-1969," an oil of the American flag in which the word "DIE" can be seen dimly against the stars and the silver stripes spell out the slur.

The Johns work, a lithograph from the 1960s featuring a white map of the United States on black paper, is on loan for the exhibit.

The Ringgold work, the most expensive in the show, sells for \$150,000.

"Shadow of the Flag" runs through June 30, the day before the Confederate flag is scheduled to be lowered from the Capitol.

The flag controversy drew national attention as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People called for a tourism boycott of the state.

Opponents of the flag call it a racist symbol that was raised atop the Statehouse in defiance of the civil rights movement. Supporters argue that it represents their Southern

heritage and honors Confederate dead.

South Carolina is the only state that flies the flag.

After several demonstrations and months of debate, the Legislature decided the flag would be lowered and a similar one placed at a nearby Confederate soldiers monument. The NAACP said the flag's display still is too prominent, and the boycott will continue.

Some of the works in the exhibit reflect the controversy.

"The Whole World is Watching," by Charleston photographer John Duckworth, shows four photographs of a pro-flag rally and two of Confederate re-enactors.

Other pieces are more abstract.

New York artist Les LeVeque took D.W. Griffith's silent three-hour film "Birth of a Nation," recorded it backward and condensed it to 13 minutes. Amid the video's flashing images, viewers can make out impressions of

the Ku Klux Klan and of slave auctions.

"It's kind of like unwinding history. Racism can function subconsciously," said LeVeque. "The signs of racism rise to the surface freed of the narrative rationalization."

An oil painting by a local surgeon entitled "We Are All Americans," features the American flag and the faint impression of the blue "X" of the Confederate banner. Small figures also carry the tiny flags of other nations.

"The challenge to us is to be Americans first and then celebrate our ethnic differences," said Dr. Richard Hagerty. As a final touch, he fired a shotgun into the canvas to rip small holes — a comment on the long debate about the flag.

"It was not a simply intellectual decision," he said. "There is so much emotion. And in the South we settle our emotional problems with shotguns."

Martin Lawrence 'nutty' in 'Tootsie'-type role

Kam Williams

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Original? No. Entertaining? Yes. "Big Momma's House" is a cross-dressing comedy which will certainly find its audience in lovers of the drag genre. Martin Lawrence, the rich man's Eddie Murphy, rips a hem right out of his mentor's girdle to keep us in stitches as an overweight granny with an overactive mouth.

Like Murphy in The Nutty Professor I & II, Mr. Lawrence plays several characters, including an FBI agent and an aged Asian dog dealer.

Directed by Raja Gosnell (Home Alone 3), Big Momma's House co-stars Nia Long (recently of the horrid movie, Held Up) as Sherry, Big Momma's prodigal granddaughter on the run from the law. Rounding out the talented cast which pumps considerable energy into the — been there, done that — storyline are the Oscar-overlooked Terrence Howard (The Best Man), funny fat man Anthony Anderson (Romeo Must Die) and character actor Paul Giamatti (Private Parts and Saving Private

Ryan), son of the late baseball commissioner, Bart.

While Big Momma's flabianche of silicone make-up undoubtedly conjures up comparisons to Eddie Murphy's fatso Klumps, the plot here is actually more like "Tootsie" where transvestite Dustin Hoffman harbored a secret crush on gal pal Jessica Lange.

So, while the fat jokes get old after 10 minutes, what holds this picture together is the slow-developing love story between an FBI agent and his suspect turned sweet-heart.

At our point of departure, Lester (Mr. Howard), a brutal bank robber, escapes from prison. The authorities expect him to contact his ex-girlfriend, Sherry. Single-mom Sherry just happens to be headed south with her young son Trent (Jascha Washington) to visit the grandmother (Ella Mitchell) she, quite conveniently, hasn't seen since childhood. FBI agent Malcolm Turner (Lawrence), a fast-talking, slow change-artist is assigned to stake out grandma's house with his bumbling, bug-eyed

partner, John (Giamatti). They set up shop in the house across the street, taking note of the senior citizen's activities.

But when the real grandma unexpectedly leaves town, Malcolm seizes on the idea of transforming himself into Big Momma in order to keep the closest of tabs on Sherry after her arrival.

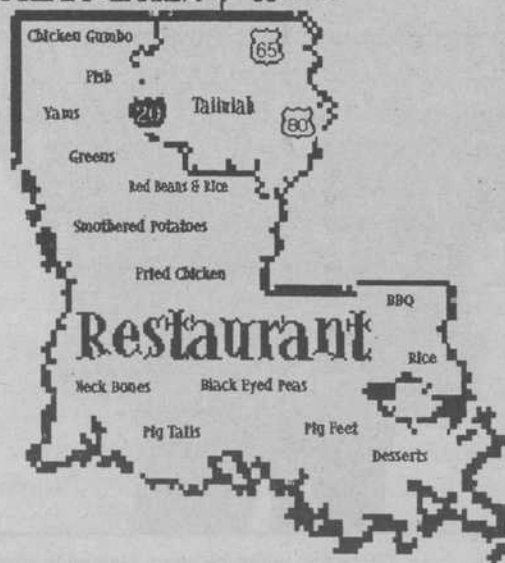
The ghoulish makeover doesn't fool the audience for a second, but Sherry and son move in, unaware of anything amiss about their next of kin. Then, Malcolm soon discovers that there's a lot more to impersonating a sassy, 70-year-old than gobs of make-up. And he suddenly has ev-

ery opportunity to act a fool: cooking, delivering a baby, testifying in church, even innocently cuddling in bed.

With Sherry's ex-con, ex-lover Lester closing in, Malcolm discovers her to be more of an unwilling victim than an unindicted co-conspirator in the bank robbery. Allegiances shift just in time for the big showdown, which is swiftly followed by a bigger romantic resolution.

I couldn't have just spoiled a thing for those of you with a sixth grader's sense of humor who know that getting there is half the fun, especially when it's filled with fat and fart jokes.

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Snipes' camp plan hits snag

EATONTON, Ga. (AP) — Wesley Snipes' plan to convert a 300-acre farm into a training camp for security guards has hit a snag.

The Putnam County Planning and Zoning Board upheld an inspector's rejection of an application to build a training camp on the farm, which is now owned by local contractor Stanley Bishop and zoned for agricultural use.

Bishop's attorney said Friday he would appeal the decision to the County Commission, saying his client's application should be judged on its own merit, not on the plans of a potential buyer.

"Wesley Snipes' involvement is irrelevant with regard to these proceedings," David Cooper said.

Spokesmen for Snipes have confirmed that the actor is negotiating with Bishop to buy the land. Snipes' half brother, Rudy Snipes, attended Thursday's appeal hearing but did not participate, Tanner said.

Victor McGauley, vice president of the actor's Los Angeles-based film production company, Amen Ra Films, said Snipes wants to reassure people that "this is a good company and a good project."

Prince name switch party

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The artist formerly known as an unpronounceable symbol is holding a weeklong party to celebrate his switch back to the name Prince. The party began Wednesday at his Paisley Park studio in Chanhassen, and he will perform June 13 in Minneapolis.

"Paisley Park is pretty much representative of everything I am musically," he told KMSP-TV on Thursday. "I love Minnesota. I've lived here all my life, and I plan to stay." Prince said he kept his local studio so that he wouldn't have to run back and forth to Los Angeles or New York.

"I've found that you tend to reflect whatever it is that's around you," he said. "I wanted peace around me, so I stayed here so I could reflect peace. I needed a place like this to create."

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