

August 6 - December 9, 2019
2019 Friends of the Beach Museum of Art Gift Print Artist



LOUISIANA TRAIL RIDERS

Jeremiah Ariaz

MARIANNA KISTLER
BEACH
MUSEUM OF ART

KANSAS STATE
UNIVERSITY



Young Riders (Opelousas), 2017



Latoya (Jeanerette), 2015

There are so many stereotypes about who we—people of the African Diaspora in America—are and are not.

Like many people of my generation (born 1958), I grew up watching Westerns: *Bonanza*, *Gunsmoke*, *The Big Valley*, *The Virginian*, *The Magnificent Seven*, *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*, *True Grit*, *One Eyed Jacks*, I could go on. No black cowboys there.

Fleeting hints at the possibility that such people existed were unsatisfactory. My first elementary school, on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, was across the street from the Claremont Riding Academy, where my mom mentioned having taken lessons as a girl, though I never saw her ride. New York City has had mounted police since the mid-nineteenth century, and I’ve seen a few black mounted officers in my day, but none held the mythical, magical power of a “black cowboy” (or girl). I had a passing knowledge of the Buffalo Soldiers, but they were historic. And opening shots of *Half Past Autumn*, with Gordon Parks cantering through Kansas grasses, only reinforced his “specialness” rather than illustrated a living culture of black people on horseback.

But that culture did, and does still, exist.

Louisiana Trail Riders crossed my desk as an entrant to the 2016 Center for Documentary Studies Documentary Essay Prize in Photography. I was moved by how comfortable the folks in these images seem—with their horses, in their bodies, and with the camera. Several generations of black men, women, and children celebrating a part of their rich culture. A beautiful unfolding of story and witness, Jeremiah Ariaz has frozen intimate details of mastery and the bonds of relationship—human to human to horse to landscape. Fathers and sons sit in one saddle, teaching and learning a legacy; a young couple rides their single mount bareback—her with a shy/sly downward glance, him with a strong, direct gaze. There are horseshoes and cellphones; cowboy hats and baseball caps; big silver buckles and sagging jeans; boots and flip-flops; guitars and a turntable. Beautiful men and badass women—and horses. This isn’t about working or rodeo riding, this is about tradition, a slice of life, of deep culture. This isn’t nostalgia, it’s real and now. It’s the mixture of romance and real that makes this work sing to me.

That Ariaz is able to hold so many tensions in these evocative black-and-white images, though he is not part of this culture, is a testament to his gifts as an artist and a human being.

Courtney Reid-Eaton, Exhibitions Director

Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina

This essay first appeared in the June 25, 2018, issue of Duke Today, a publication of the Duke University Office of News & Communications.

The African-American trail riding clubs of Southwest Louisiana are a part of a Creole culture that has its roots in the population of free people of color, American Indians, and French settlers who lived in the region during the eighteenth century. Today, trail rides are an opportunity for generations from rural parts of the state to gather and celebrate.

Louisiana trail riding clubs number in the dozens and bear distinctive names such as the “5 Star Fillies,” “Steady Steppin’ Riders,” and “Crazy Hat Riders.” Club members gather on weekends and move through parish communities and prairie grasslands, listening to Zydeco music from a sound system or by live bands in tow.

Jeremiah Ariaz first encountered the clubs in 2014 while riding his motorcycle. When he pulled over for the riders to pass, he retrieved his camera and took a few photographs. He was soon waved into the line, and, in the years that followed, Ariaz became a fixture among the clubs, parlaying his views of their gatherings into the 2018 book *Louisiana Trail Riders*.

In articulating his thoughts about the series, Ariaz has cited the folklorist Connie Castille: “[F]or many of Louisiana’s black men, the horse is still associated with freedom, independence, work and respect.” The photographer adds that in the current context of increased racial strife in the United States, he wishes the work to “assert joy, pride, and family bonds, particularly between fathers and their sons, who are taught to care for and ride horses from an early age.”

Louisiana Trail Riders follows other photographic essays that ask us to think anew about this country’s expansionist history and contemporary Western culture. They include *Tucumcari [New Mexico]* (Vanderbilt, Fine Arts Gallery, Nashville, Tennessee); *Fact and Fiction: Imagining the West* (Bitsy Irby Visual Arts and Dance Center, Belhaven University, Jackson, Mississippi); and *Staging the West* (The Volland Store, Alma, Kansas).

Ariaz’s next project stays on the trail, focusing on central Kansas, including his hometown of Great Bend. Its name derives from its position at a bend of the Arkansas River in a former Kiowa Nation region of cropland, shortgrass prairie, and wetlands. In its settlement history, the town was a shipping point for Texas longhorns, a stop on the Santa Fe Trail, and a hub for oil and gas workers. Photographs made on the farmstead settled by Ariaz’s ancestors, as well as of family and friends, contextualize contemporary agrarian existence and small town communities within the history of the region.

Elizabeth G. Seaton, Curator
Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art

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DJ (River Road, Iberville Parish), 2015



Father and Son (Cecilia), 2015

Biography

Jeremiah Ariaz was raised in Kansas and is now a professor of art at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. He received his bachelor of fine arts from the Kansas City Art Institute and master of fine arts from the State University of New York at Buffalo. For his *Louisiana Trail Riders* series, Ariaz was named the 2018 Louisiana State Fellow and awarded the Southern Arts Finalist Prize from South Arts. Three other prizes have supported exhibitions of the work in various cities: the 2018 Michael P. Smith Award for Documentary Photography from the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities; a Community Partnership Grant from the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Foundation; and a 2018 ATLAS (Awards to Louisiana Artists and Scholars) grant from the Louisiana Board of Regents.



Ariaz in the Flint Hills of Kansas



Jeremiah Ariaz (born 1976, Hutchinson, Kansas), *Gavin (front) and Jock (rear) Saddle Horses, Ride or Die Club (Opelousas, LA)*, 2016 (printed 2019), ed. 15, inkjet print, 10 x 15 in. (image), 13 x 19 in. (sheet)

Friends of the Beach Museum of Art Gift Print

The Friends of the Beach Museum of Art commissions a limited-edition print by a recognized Kansas artist for sale to Friends and the public each year. Kansas State University's Friends of Art started the gift print program in 1934.

The 2019 gift print is *Gavin (front) and Jock (rear) Saddle Horses, Ride or Die Club (Opelousas, LA)* by Jeremiah Ariaz. The photograph shows Gavin Sinegal and Jock Chambers preparing their horses for an afternoon trail ride. Gavin, pictured here at seven years old, has been riding since he was three, when he received his first horse, Sugar. He and his family are members of the "Ride or Die Club" of Opelousas, Louisiana. They are one of the many trail riding clubs in southwest Louisiana. The approximately ten adult club members along with their many junior members have been riding together for a decade.

For more information about becoming a Friend or purchasing a gift print, call 785-532-7718 or go to beach.k-state.edu.

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