

TILTON GALLERY PRESENTS

Simone Leigh: *Moulting*
March 3 – April 25, 2015
Reception March 2, 6 – 8 pm



Simone Leigh, *Moulting* installation view.

Tilton Gallery is pleased to present *Moulting*, Simone Leigh's second exhibition with the gallery, from March 3rd to April 25th, 2015. A reception for the artist will take place Monday, March 2nd, 6 – 8 pm.

In this exhibition, Simone Leigh expands her exploration of ceramic-based and multimedia sculpture to fill the gallery with majestic installations that celebrate the woman's role in African and African American history. Long concerned with making manifest the role of women's work in object-making as a vehicle to investigate questions of history, tradition, race and identity, Leigh's current exhibition expands the possibilities both in her use of materials and in her approach to sculpture as performance.

Ceramic glazed cowrie shells, formed from watermelon molds, often stand-alone works or combined in hanging installations, here become more direct stand ins for the female body, and, as Leigh has written, for her "ongoing exploration of black female subjectivity." These shells are perched on and anchored by voluptuous fabric-covered cage-like armatures shaped like the bustles or "panniers" of 17th and 18th century hoop skirts. These refer at once to dresses worn across European and African and South American cultures -- from Spain and Victorian England to the present day dress of the Herero in

Namibia and other African countries, across the Caribbean, and in Brazil. A nod to the colonization of African cultures, where African women adapt the Western European woman's standard of dress, it also harks back to the dresses of American Southern mammies during slavery as well as to a specific giant architectural sculpture, a pancake house entered through the figure's skirt, in Mississippi. As always, Leigh accesses multiple memories, while creating her own specific identities. A group of these "figures," spread through one gallery, interact in a performative way, like dancers in an open space. Down the hall, one similar, but larger structure, where the armature is exposed, resembles a hut more than a skirt, and can be entered by viewers.

Another gallery space is filled with women's ceramic busts: heads with abstracted faces and formidable hair-dos fashioned out of Leigh's signature ceramic, individually formed, rose petals. Each sculpture exhibits a proud personality from the position of the head, held high, to their unique sculptured dos. Again, these silent, yet forceful women speak to each other across the room.

Elsewhere a belt with hanging black ceramic banana-shaped objects recreates Josephine Baker's skirt. And a totem pole topped by a large cowrie shell covered in gold leaf stands tall, like a tree of life, but also taking on the stature of a regal standing figure.

Throughout her work, Leigh evokes the history of ideas, ethnographic memories and postcolonial legacies through form and symbolism, transforming sociopolitical content into poetic semi-abstract contemporary sculptures that speak very much to the present.

Born in Chicago to Jamaican parents, Simone Leigh has shown at museums including the Contemporary Art Museum, Houston, the Studio Museum in Harlem, where she was an artist in Residence in 2010-2011, and the Atlanta Contemporary Art Center, where she recently completed her first one person museum exhibition. She is a recipient of the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Biennial Award, the Joan Mitchell Foundation Award, and the Creative Capital Grant, among others. She participated in the 2011 Biennial of Contemporary African Art in Dakar, Senegal and has lectured widely at Universities such as Columbia and NYU. Leigh lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

Tilton Gallery is located at 8 East 76th Street, between Madison and Fifth Avenues. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday 10 – 6 and Monday by appointment. For more information, please visit our Web site at www.jacktiltongallery.com, or call 212-737-2221.