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Back Home: Tina Girouard at the Acadiana Center for the Arts
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"Louisiana on Parade", c.1980

Tina Girouard was born in DeQuincy, Louisiana, in 1946 and graduated with a BFA from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette in 1968. She then left for New York City and became part of a group of post-modernist artists, among them Keith Sonnier, Lynda Benglis, Dickie Landry who shared her Southern roots. She was involved in films, videos, installations, performances, and her creativity was mainly aimed at "out of the gallery" projects focused on the artists' community like 112 Greene Street, FOOD or PS1. Following the destruction of her studio by fire, she moved back to Louisiana in the eighties. While pursuing her activism, she joined the Pattern and Decoration movement. In the early nineties, she traveled to Haiti and established a studio in Port-au-Prince. She describes her deep connection to her second home in a short statement: "I lost my head and my heart in Haiti."

Parts Known and Unknown curated by Brian Guidry and Mary Beyt at the Acadiana Center for the Arts focuses on the twenty years that followed Girouard's return to the South and features acrylics on canvas and sequins works.

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At the start of the show, two black and white video recordings of Girouard's performances at NOMA in 1977 and Graz, Austria, in 1978, accompanied by a short wall text summing up the artist's contribution before the eighties, emphasize the radical turn of her practice following her move back to the South. Stepping further in the gallery, the visitor discovers her paintings and sequins works intermingled along the walls. The dozen acrylics made in the eighties are mostly about Louisiana. Weightless objects represented by stenciled images appear to drift on monochrome backgrounds, resulting in lively compositions like *Saturday Night Special*, c.1980, a medley of accordions (for the music), shoes (for the dance) and ...guns (for the brawl!), *Louisiana on Parade*, c.1980, with giant ants, lizards, saws, saxophones, or *Road Kill*, c.1980. A subtle humor emanates from most. On a serious note, "OK, I Hope", 1982, refers to space exploration and "Louisiana: Through the Windshield", c.1980, (hung in the hall) the oil industry. It seems that Girouard's Pattern and Decoration period ends abruptly at the start of the next decade. In *Tools* 1992, 1992, she applies her new skills to represent her pop imagery with sequins, but the result appears contrived and dull compared to her lively compositions of flora, fauna, tropical paradise, including a risqué love scene. Her "Iwa series" reaches mythical dimensions. Fifteen pieces hung next to each other shimmer in the light with their delicate highly symbolic designs. Each tells a story described in a short wall text. This represents Girouard's tribute to her masters, the flag-makers from Haiti who she also honors in her book "Sequin Artists of Haiti".

The exhibition includes a center piece *Lie-No*, 1972, which, with the two grainy videos, reminds of the artist's pioneering work. Early on in the seventies, surrounded by the male crowd of the New York art scene, she participated in projects that have now become part of art history but her name is too often omitted. "We were all activists, we were just expressing our ideas and our beliefs with whatever materials we could." And she never ceased to be an activist along her career. The display by mixing two periods, each lasting a decade, avoids monotony and underlines her very personal quest. It also focuses on the artist, whose work is often featured in group shows like "The Five from Louisiana" in 1977 and "Robert Rauschenberg and the Five from Louisiana" in 2015 at NOMA or "Patterns and Prototypes" in 2011 at the Contemporary Art Center.

Thanks to the solo show, Tina Girouard is back home: "I wandered away from the art world over the past twenty years to the Louisiana swamps and Vodoo societies in Haiti."