

Havens, Sarah., "Latest 21c Museum exhibit examines the blurred lines between pop culture and art, secular and sacred," *Insider Louisville*, July 16 2017.



## Latest 21c Museum exhibit examines the blurred lines between pop culture and art, secular and sacred

By SARA HAVENS July 16, 2017 7:00 am



"Elvis/Marilyn" by David Scheinmann | Photo by Sara Havens

Cultural icons have always dominated the canvases of art. After all, a painter usually chooses a subject he knows well, wants to honor or is fascinated with — whether that's Jesus Christ or Britney Spears.

Times have certainly changed since saints and saviors were the heroes of the day, and now, our culture places much of its worship — for better or worse — on celebrities and sports figures. The latest 21c Museum Hotel exhibit focuses on this topic and explores the imagery of manufactured fantasy as it relates to the past and present.

"Pop Stars! Popular Culture and Contemporary Art" is one of 21c's largest shows to date and includes more than 90 pieces by 53 internationally acclaimed and emerging artists — from Frances Goodman and Mickalene Thomas to Nick Cave and Kehinde Wiley. The show is so grandiose, it inhabits just about every gallery and hallway in the museum.

A portion of the exhibit first debuted at the grand opening of 21c Durham (N.C.) two years ago, but dozens of pieces have been added for this installation in Louisville.

While at first glance, the pieces seem accessible and familiar, there is much more purpose and meaning bubbling just below the surface. Insider met up with 21c's chief curator Alice Gray Stites for a brief tour and explanation of what it all means.

Stites explains that in art, the popular is now the dominant, and there are no longer distinctive categories like fine art. She reiterates the theme she quoted in the exhibit's original press release:

"As the real and the virtual increasingly collide, boundaries between art and media further blur, inspiring new mythologies realized in new materials — stars of stage, screen and sport are re-envisioned, offering insight into how desire shapes identity. Appropriating images and practices from commerce, science, politics, religion, sports and technology, these artists illuminate recent shifts in how culture is being created and consumed."

Although we'd love to go into detail about many more pieces in the exhibit, we want to save some of the mystery.

But we will mention a few more highlights: R. Luke DuBois' "(Pop) Icon: Britney" is a video featuring the singer from all her music videos morphing around her, but her eyes remain locked in one position, evoking a Greek icon; a live video portrait of Lady Gaga, by artist Robert Wilson, posing as the subject of J.A.D. Ingres' 1806 painting "Mademoiselle Caroline Riviere," a 15-year-old sitter who died shortly after the painting was made; and Dietrich Wegner's "Cumulous Brand, Bill" showing a fetus with advertising logos all over its body.



"(Pop) Icon: Britney" by R. Luke DuBois | Photo by Sara Havens