

# BENRIMON CONTEMPORARY

PRESS RELEASE

*RED COUNTRY PICTURES*

Benrimon Contemporary

May 14 - June 11, 2011  
*For immediate release*



Benrimon Contemporary is pleased to announce a group exhibition that examines the impact of a small liberal arts college on the contemporary art world. *RED COUNTRY PICTURES* is curated by Bradley Jessop and Justin Irvin. This exhibition will feature works on paper, paintings and sculptures from eleven artists who are all linked to East Central University in Ada, Oklahoma.

Founded in 1909 as a Normal School to serve the former Indian Territories, East Central University transitioned into a liberal arts college in the late 1910's and early 1920's. As part of a liberal education an art department was created and staffed by Columbia University graduate Ida Hoover. She was joined in the late 1930's by another Columbia graduate, Emma Box, who brought to ECU the teachings of Hans Hoffman. The result was the first significant graduate from East Central, Leon Polk Smith. Early in his career he distanced himself from his Oklahoma and Native American roots, but later in life, Leon Polk Smith admitted that he was highly influenced by both. Leon Polk Smith has joined the art historical canon as one of the founders of hard edged painting from the 1940's through the 1980's.

As time progressed Ms. Hoover and Ms. Box were joined by Kenneth Campbell and DJ "Pete" Lafon. In 1964, Lafon became chair of the art department and led it until 1984. Under Lafon, the faculty exhibited widely throughout the Southwest and was collectively known as the Ada Trio. In his work, DJ was able to combine classical realism and social commentary. Deloss McGraw attended ECU during this period and picked up on DJ's lyricism and wit. While McGraw attended a number of other institutions this lyrical quality is still a part of his complex, literate, and intensely colorful oeuvre.

From the 1990's to the present, the artists from East Central University have gone on to teach at over a dozen different colleges. Artists from this period are represented by California-based Gerald Clarke, who explores concepts of native sovereignty and legacy. Bradley Jessop, current director of ECU's art program, who biographically records his life with art as a vehicle for nexus. Kate Rivers assembles the debris of our culture to create a personal anchor in collage. Aaron Hauck's work encompasses his fascination and annoyance with consumerism and how the resulting energy waste, material consumption, transportation methods, and litter affect our culture and the environment. Four recent ECU graduates join them. They are Vance Wingate, who manipulates a self-imposed set of rules to investigate the tension between rigid systems and intuitive intervention. Justin Irvin's collages offer something recognizable yet unfamiliar and are the whimsical results of an interest in Surrealism, religion and astronomy. Mark Hatley's work ranges in style, yet is consistently modern, focusing primarily on manifestations of physical and chemical energy as subject and nature as the source. Blake Morgan, whose deep, almost Baroque surfaces add new dimensions to the landscapes and figures that populate his work.

*RED COUNTRY PICTURES* includes artists who are at different points in their careers; established artists such as Polk Smith and McGraw, mid-career artists currently on staff at ECU and elsewhere who are showing in the Midwest and on the West coast, as well as emerging artists who are just beginning their professional careers. This exhibition is a glimpse at the art of East Central University over several generations.

*Benrimon Contemporary is located at 514 West 24<sup>th</sup> Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, New York, NY 10011, between 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Avenues. Our hours are Monday to Saturday 10am to 8pm and Sunday 12pm to 6pm.*

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