

Mr. Rives

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

H.C. Porter

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Class/Block: \_\_\_\_\_

## Telling Mississippi's Story through Mixed Media



For over 30 years, H.C. Porter has captured the human spirit of the neighbors & everyday Mississippians using a unique mixed media process.

### Early Years

H.C. Porter was born in Jackson, Mississippi in 1963. She developed a love for painting as a child. When she was 15 years old, her mother was given a new Olympus camera. Her mother thought H.C. would get better use of the gift since she was such a creative child. After taking a community photography course at Millsaps College, she developed a serious passion for photography. Porter soon became the photographer for the yearbook at Madison Ridgeland Academy, where she graduated from high school. During her senior year, she submitted a portfolio of artwork into the Scholastics competition. She was recognized nationally for her work. H.C. was offered a scholarship to the University of Alabama, where she earned a degree in both photography and painting in 1984.



## Process

Combining her passion for both photography and painting, H.C. Porter developed a process where she would begin with a camera to capture a composition. She would make a high contrast black and white image that would be then made into a silk screen. Her silk screen would allow her to print in bold black ink the image that she had photographed on paper. She would then paint bright colors on the top of her silk-screened image. H.C. has gotten a lot of attention worldwide for her striking images that she has been able to achieve with this process. The product that is born from her process is not photography, it is not printmaking, and it is not even a painting. It is something greater than any of these mediums alone. The sum of the whole is far greater than the individual parts.

## Message

H.C. Porter has been quoted saying, "My work is a question of identifying with my characters. You must respond to their realness. To what they bring to you and what you can bring to them". She is called a social realist artist. The photography in her



work keeps it honest and very much anchored in reality. The painting portion allows her to really push the emotions and feelings that may have been present for her but would normally be lost in the context of a normal color photograph. Some of her first images were of disadvantaged inner city children playing outside of her studio on Millsaps Street in Jackson.

The following is Porter's artist statement:

"Because my characters exert their own power and individuality with such force, each piece is charged with emotion. That emotion becomes apparent the moment you seek it out. You realize my characters have gone through a volume of experiences. The emotionality, enthusiasm and Southern experience apparent in the expression of my



characters; sometimes bleak and passive eyes; others, direct and questioning stares are a reflection of myself and my relationship to that person.”

Since 1987, she has been documenting the lives and struggles of people living in Mississippi. She has had several very successful series of images that have garnered the support of collectors around the globe. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, she couldn't sit idly by and watch the devastation, destruction, and suffering of the people in her state who were not getting the same coverage as others in Louisiana. She packed up her camera and went south to record the sights, emotions, and experiences of the people she would find. The 81 pieces that came out of that trip were paired with the real life stories that accompanied each of her pieces. The proceeds from the sales of this work went back into the communities that were so devastated.

There is a sobering realness to her imagery that some have found off-putting. In one such image from her Katrina photographs, a young boy is standing on an overturned air conditioner in the aftermath of the storm. He is holding a BB gun surrounded by devastation. Porter captured an honest moment that seems to offend some. It is uncertain if the inclusion of the gun in the piece, or the fact that it was a child holding the gun in the piece that garnered so much criticism, but H.C. Porter received a great deal of criticism for this image. Maybe it was simply the fact the it wasn't presenting Mississippi in the best light. The little protector in the image was obviously really vulnerable, yet he seems to have an indomitable spirit. Regardless of what her critics had to say, H.C. was going to tell the boy's family's story.



H.C. Porter has also had a very successful series that tells the story of Mississippi Blues Legends. Mostly in the Mississippi Delta, these musicians are a dying group. They are largely the products of bouts of homelessness, orphaning, continual injustice, and a whole host of incredibly difficult and isolating experiences. Blues is the moaning and anguish from this lifestyle made into music. It's an art form and one that is fleeting. Their audience is dying and their music is

being replaced by rap and pop. While their influences still live on, their stories would be lost forever if it were not for their documentation being made by people like H.C. Porter. In 2014, a traveling show of over 30 large pieces featuring different living blues legends begin to travel from Oxford to the B.B King Museum in Indianola and then to the National Blues Museum in St. Louis, Missouri.

Whether she is making images of children playing, advocating for those affected in ground zero of a devastating hurricane, or documenting the last surviving blues musicians, H.C. Porter is giving a voice to her subjects and recording the human experience that is happening all around her with a amazingly unique process.

1. When and where was H.C. Porter born?
2. How did H.C. Porter first find photography?
3. Where did Porter attend High School?
4. When and where did Porter graduate college? What degree(s) did she earn?
5. How was she able to combine her love for photography and painting?
6. H.C. Porter has said that her work is a question of identifying with her characters. What do you feel she means by that?
7. What is her style of art called? Do you feel that it is an accurate description?

