



MILES CLEVELAND GOODWIN (b. 1980), *Beautiful Dying Man*, 2023, oil on linen, 24 x 18 in., Valley House Gallery (Dallas)

Few artists have the gumption to explore such weighty topics as death, destitution, and decay, but these are concepts about which Georgia-based painter **MILES CLEVELAND GOODWIN** (b. 1980) has much to say. With a B.F.A. in painting and printmaking from Portland's Pacific Northwest College of Art, and many years of additional self-education and practice, Goodwin paints in a contemporary realist manner sometimes compared to Southern Gothic, the literary genre focused on the shadowy, scarred side of Southern culture and history. He brings a heightened level of awareness and philosophical pondering to subjects some artists are afraid to touch.

Born and raised in the South, Goodwin can also put pen to paper to create another kind of artistry; we can detect a preoccupation with darkness and death even in his poetic descriptions of his upbringing. "My painting was born in the cypress swamps of Mississippi, where I was conceived, under a white heron's wing and a drunken parade," his artist's statement declares. "The stories of slaves and farming, the seasons burning with colors and feelings, that resignation to the idea

we were different. I found it later on the bottom of the Chattahoochee River, floating by a bible and a dream. Those brown waters against the warmth of fall leaves would ignite my love for expressionism and poetry."

He continues, "The American South is hauntingly beautiful; it could supply a person novels, paintings, and songs for eternity. In winter the mountains were on fire with white. White against dark wiry cedars, against the black of my paint. And in the summer endless patches of Queen Anne's lace, chimney swifts flying just below the old train bridges, the shimmer of brown trout at the surface of the cold river waters. In fall the maples melted between the old brick and wood of abandoned churches. I could start to hear mice in the walls, horses in their stalls

fattening up, a whisper of death."

One of Goodwin's most recent paintings is the eerily compelling *Beautiful Dying Man*. Many of his works explore old age and isolation, and here an elderly man figures prominently, this time — we gather from the title — on the brink of death. In Goodwin's depictions, passing on is a struggle and strain, one that strips us of dignity and humanity. The man here is naked, and his posture suggests resignation and dejection. To his left is a dog, likely a longtime companion, who seems to be sleeping or dead, and there is a shadowy man lurking in the mirror; one would assume the spirit of death. Why then does Goodwin call him a beautiful dying man if no indication of hope is entertained? As in many of his creations, there is thought-provoking irony in the dichotomy and parallels he sets up and asks us to consider.

GOODWIN is represented by Valley House Gallery (Dallas) and Anima Mundi Gallery (Cornwall, UK).