

ARTFORUM

AUSTIN - TAMMIE RUBIN

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Tammie Rubin, *Always & Forever (Forever Ever Ever) No. 1* (detail), 2016, porcelain, underglaze, pigmented clay, 12 x 47 x 16".

Millions fled Jim Crow South during the Great Migration, yet the disproportionate abuse of black bodies continues, as does hope for its end. Prompted by Black Lives Matter, we lament institutionalized injustices even as we venerate our first black president; we are reminded, via the outcry in St. Louis over artist Kelly Walker's treatment of black bodies appropriated from the media, that white-dominated culture industries continue to exploit "blackness." These currents charge this solo show by ceramicist Tammie Rubin, suggesting that even abstraction is always already personal, and political.

"Before I Knew You, I Missed You," at Austin's newest artist-run gallery, includes two of Rubin's earlier, biomorphic pieces. Black glazed spheres emerge from an inky puddle in *Saartjie Maraj*, 2014. Yet even these appear heavy-tarred bodies?—in the company of four works from this year, each a family of forms arranged on a shelf. *For Illinois Central 57/59*, 2016, the artist, whose own people left the South, to which she has returned, presents more than two dozen variously sized glass beakers etched with ghostly signifiers, such as the word Memphis or an image of newlyweds. Three other pieces, composed of funnel-like ceramic forms—one black, one blue, and one white—are even more haunting, but hopeful. Placed upside down, each is incised and adorned with the outlines of state borders and migration trails, and punctured with a pair of slits, for eyes. *Always & Forever (Forever Ever Ever) 3*, 2016, is the most effective of the three: The porcelain white forms here are overtaken by dark dots of pigmented clay, summoning Klan hoods yet also individuals carrying on. Rubin's work is a reminder that black lives continue to flourish, despite efforts to stop them.

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