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Julie Ledet: Morning Honey for Beb

BY DELIASOFIA ZACARIAS | OCTOBER 3, 2019

"I was the type of child that questioned everything. I guess my intuition was stronger than what people were telling me and so I questioned everything. I questioned every aspect of religion. I questioned every aspect of being a young woman."

Born and raised in Thibodaux, LA, the parish seat of Lafourche, Julie Ledet spent much of her youth traversing the physical and social landscapes of Southern Louisiana. That child-like curiosity helped the artist question everything in her formative years. And that's how it should be! In her solo exhibition *Morning Honey for Beb* curated by Liz Paris at Freight Gallery and Studios, Ledet examines the undeniable allure surrounding Louisiana's culture, superstitions, and people. "Working from these sources is both a comfort and a means for understanding the complexities of the artist's upbringing."



Installation image of Julie Ledet's solo exhibition Morning Honey for Beb, 2019.

In *Morning Honey for Beb*, Julie Ledet creates photographic collage prints, sculptures, and installations grounded in southern culture and tradition. But who is Beb? According to Ledet, “the mystical character “Beb” is the personification of the struggle between living a life of virtue and vice surrounded by temptation and decadence occurring in everyday life in Southern Louisiana.” She shared that especially as a young woman growing up in a Catholic household there was a constant struggle between knowing what was actually a vice and what was a virtue. “Growing up within the Catholic superstitious space, feeling always like I was being watched, and being told not the best advice—skewed to someone who they thought I was or thought I could potentially be,” stated Ledet. So maybe *Beb* is a mystical character that lives in each and every girl growing up in a conservative family and learning what it means to be a woman. Or so I can definitely say for myself.



Installation image of Julie Ledet's solo exhibition

Ledet recalled that when she reached the age of puberty, “there were such mixed feelings from the older women in the family because that also meant I was of age to make questionable decisions.” But what does that entail? Is it indulging in

Morning Honey for Beb, 2019.

temptations? Ledet describes it as everything that feels good but has been taught to be bad (trust me on this one, Catholic guilt is real). In this instance, the artist uses honey to represent this indulgence. “Morning Honey” in the title is Ledet’s way of saying “wake up Beb, it’s time to drink honey” reassuring us that a societal and a physical awakening occurs during puberty that encourages these indulgences.



Installation image of Julie Ledet's solo exhibition Morning Honey for Beb, 2019.

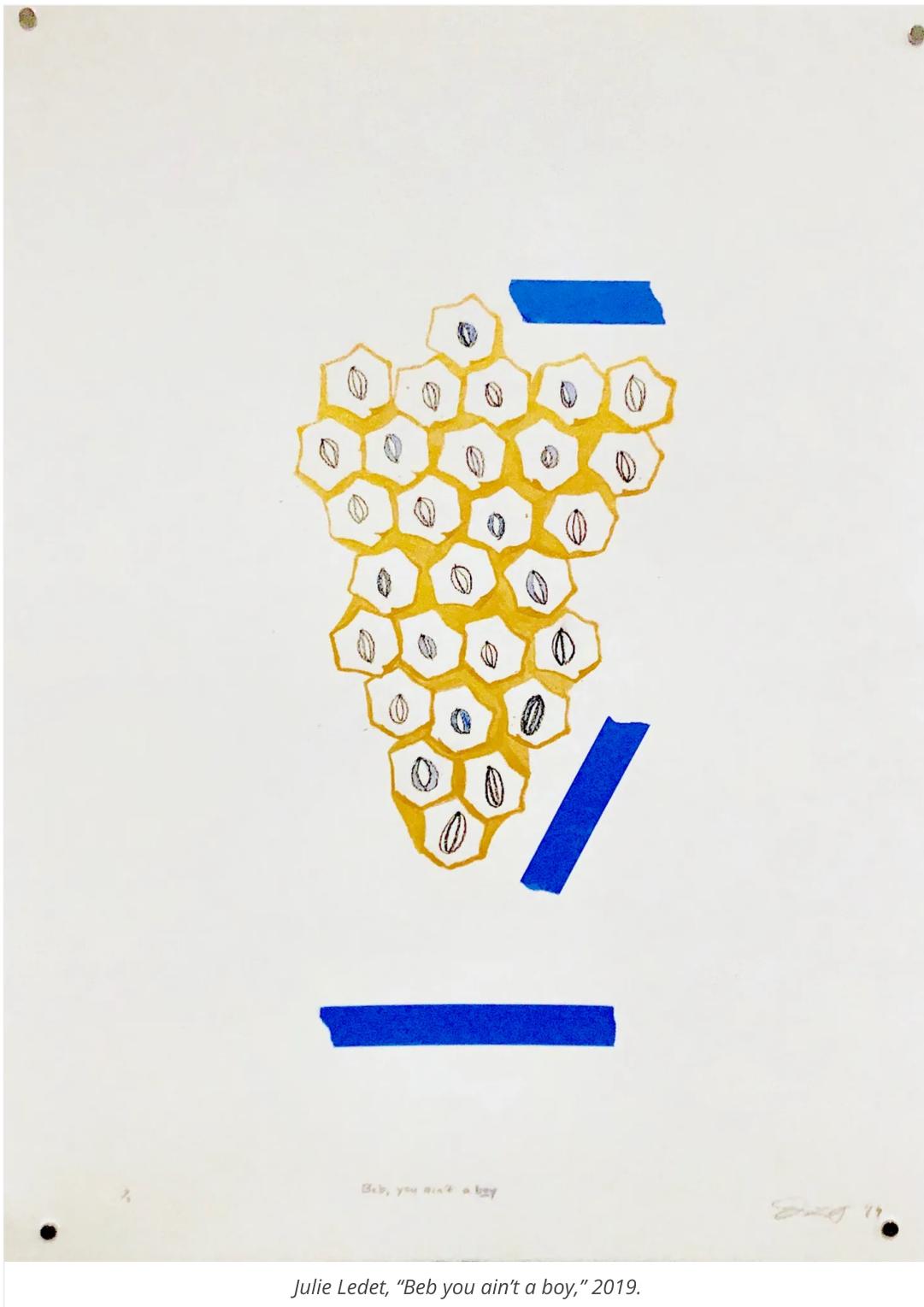
In her work on paper, *Morning honey soak prayer*, Ledet depicts an aerial view of a twin-sized bed with a gold half circle at its side. The composition is completed with an illustrated vagina on the footboard and two pieces of virgin-blue tape. Ledet said, “a bed is the most comfortable, personal space you have, but it is also when [as a] teenager, you can get in trouble. It’s a conflicting space to have as a young woman because what would *they* think I am doing.” By having an illustrated vagina on the footboard and a golden halo engulfing the bed, there is this dichotomy of innocence and risque. Ledet invites the viewer to join her in trying to discern what is good and bad.



Julie Ledet, "Morning honey soak prayer," 2019.

Receiving mixed messages of “good” and “bad” at such a formative age was confusing for Ledet. She was told to reach for the stars but was constantly taught the societal constraints women had to face. A quick conversation that has stuck with Julie Ledet many years later and incited her to create artwork reflective of how we grow mentally and physically

depending on gender, she shared a vivid memory of her younger self asking her father if she could go down the street to the local hangout: “and he said no, that’s too dangerous. I kept asking him why because he knew I could hold my own. And his answer was ‘Bee, you are not a boy.’ With all the sweetness and innocence of my father, I know he didn’t mean that in any other way other than to protect me. I also felt very much my gender because of this idea of what I can and can’t do.” Written in Louisiana slang, *Beb, you ain’t a boy*, speaks to the limitations put on Ledet growing up. The artist simulated a hive, replacing the way larvae would be formed in beehives with vaginas.



Julie Ledet, "Beb you ain't a boy," 2019.

Despite her gender that caused limitations in the conservative South, she acknowledges her overall privilege of having a positive upbringing and happy memories of the sugar canes in Louisiana. Remembering running through the fields with her sister and taking in the smell of molasses, she knew she had to incorporate it into one of her pieces. Every harvest season, Ledet goes back to Louisiana and brings back sugar cane by the pound to her home in San Antonio, Texas. In her piece, *Gris-gris for a*

Good Girl, she includes rose petals and Louisiana cane sugar in glass dishes. Gris-gris is a voodoo amulet originating in Africa and is believed to protect the wearer from evil or bring luck. In some West African countries it is used as a method of birth control. Perceived to have powers, “gris-gris is an idea that if you do this, then this will happen.” shared Ledet. “Because it is used as a form of birth control, it speaks to the idea that you have to be a good girl.” Ledet combines the rose petals and sugar cane to “symbolize the place and land—that is the fertility of the land—but also sweetness, perfume, and beauty of being a woman. A spell of being a good woman.” Or at least, what appears to be a good woman!



Julie Ledet, “Gris-gris for a Good Girl,” 2019.

Julie Ledet adds, “one thing about Catholicism in Louisiana is that it’s draped in superstition. A lot of people who practice it don’t recognize it.” It was really interesting to hear her explain how Louisianians often find themselves making concessions and situations fit within their views. “What do we gather and what do we put into a space in order to be seen like this?”

Alluding to her Catholic upbringing, religion is a big theme throughout her exhibition, most noticeably in her saint series. In this body of work,

she combines animals native to the Bayou with saint-like statues and golden halos on a fleur-de-lis background. Recognizing the history of her home state and incorporating the symbol of French colonization, Ledet touches on the heaviness of the history in Louisiana. She observes, “defining moments of Louisiana culture and history comes from that slave time, come from the land, come from forced assimilation within catholicism. All of that convergence within these saints.” Saints themselves also represent virtue and vice. Ledet adds, “the heads are revered animals because they become food, leather, and part of the economy. They are monetized. They have become a modern-day version of saints and worship idols in Louisiana.” The artist creates these photo collage prints and adorns them in a regal manner, creating what some might call misplaced idols.



Exploring the ritualistic behavior specific to her native Southern Louisiana, Ledet examines the undeniable allure surrounding its culture, superstitions, people, and history. In *Morning Honey for Beb*, Ledet uses a muted color palette and a variety of mediums to share a powerful story of growth, acceptance, and reflection. The artist invites the viewer to learn about the tribulations and beauty she saw and experienced growing up in the South. Julie Ledet left us saying she had to “come to terms that not everyone is going to [change] at the same pace as you and the best thing you can do is have those conversations and just talk and know where you are. Part of that is finding my space within it all.” Well said, Julie! It is important to have those tough conversations and find ways to change outdated cultural norms. If you haven’t seen it yet, I encourage you to stop by Freight Gallery and Studios for the Closing Reception on Friday, October 4, 2019, at 7 pm.

Freight Gallery
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POSTED IN EXHIBITIONS, IN CONVERSATION

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