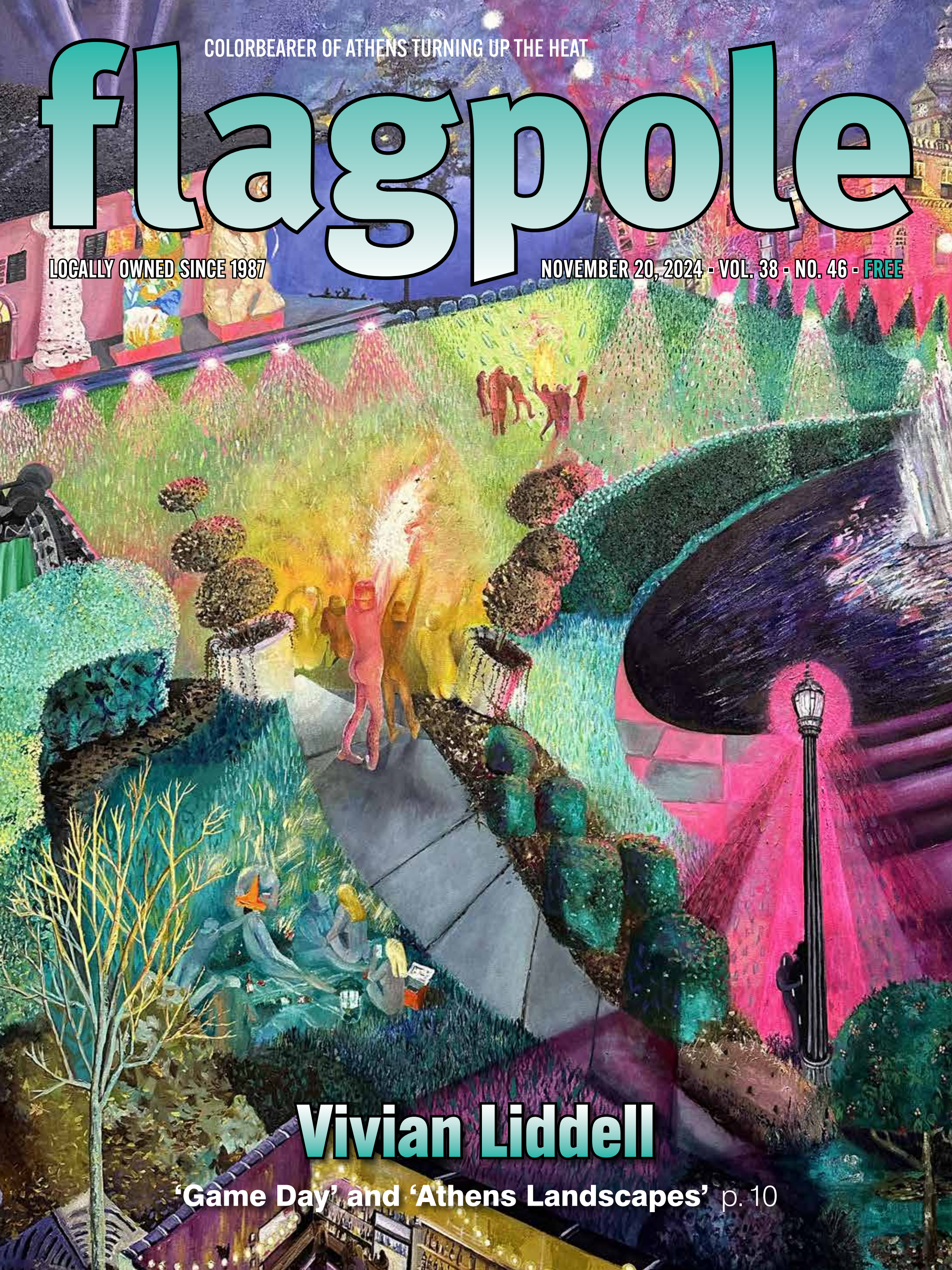


COLORBEARER OF ATHENS TURNING UP THE HEAT

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Vivian Liddell

‘Game Day’ and ‘Athens Landscapes’ p. 10

Vivian Liddell

'GAME DAY' AND 'ATHENS LANDSCAPES'

By Jessica Smith arts@flagpole.com

An interdisciplinary artist in the truest sense of the word, Vivian Liddell moves among painting, fiber and craft techniques, sculpture, printmaking, photography, animation and sound to create works that are playful and often subversive in nature. Two different exhibitions currently on view at ATHICA@Ciné Gallery and the ArtWall@Hotel Indigo Athens offer windows into her imaginative and vibrant world.

On view in the ATHICA@Ciné Gallery through Dec. 25, "Game Day (2nd Natty's Celebration)" is a monumental diptych that swallows viewers into a chaotic, abstracted landscape loosely depicting the revelry that followed the UGA football team's second consecutive national championship victory in 2023. Identifiable campus landmarks—such as the UGA Chapel bell tower, a statue from the Founders Memorial Garden and the Herty Field fountain—interlock into a surreal patchwork of mini-scenes populated by clusters of nude figures engaged in all sorts of humorous and spirited behavior. Funky, patterned columns reference Liddell's fiber sculptures, while other Easter eggs are hidden for art history lovers to discover.

An Athens resident who has boomeranged in and out of town over the past 34 years, Liddell is an associate professor at the University of North Georgia, specializing in drawing and painting, craft media and feminist theory in contemporary art. Since 2017, she has been working with the male figure, challenging gender imbalances that remain prevalent throughout art history.

"There aren't many women painters historically that work with male nudes, and there are a whole lot of folks that still aren't comfortable with it," says Liddell. "That's something I want viewers to think about. If you're comfortable with hundreds of years of paintings of nude women, or with men painting nude men, or with porn even, but you are squeamish when a woman artist paints a penis—what's up with that? This work is a continuation of some

complicated narratives that I've built up over the years that revolve around gender and power, really bringing those narratives home. And home is Athens. And when you look at gender and power here, you have to look at football culture and, more particularly, Greek life."

Before embarking on "Game Day," Liddell had been creating very small paintings primarily using egg tempera—homemade with the help of her own chickens—a medium that requires tiny brushstrokes and a rigid support. After working on such a small scale for several years, she felt antsy to make something larger.

"The crazy thing is that I didn't really scale up," says Liddell. "I brought that little painting energy into this big canvas, so it's essentially 100 little oil paintings in one."

Liddell estimates that it took about a year and a half to finish "Game Day." After a few months of sketching out ideas for a basic composition, she began filling in the tiny scenes using photographic references as well as her imagination. She also made little clay figures to use as models to paint from, which has led to creating two different stop-motion animations so far, one of which was screened

Currently on view on the ArtWall@Hotel Indigo Athens, "Athens Landscapes" consists of black-and-white monotypes depicting scenes around town, such as the iconic Tree That Owns Itself, that were based off of photographs Liddell captured over the years and compiled into a digital album of source material for inspiration. Curated by Tatiana Veneruso, the collection was specifically scaled with the gallery's dimensions in mind. A cocktail hour with the artist will be held Sunday, Dec. 1 from 4–6 p.m.

Fast and loose in comparison to "Game Day," the process for creating these one-of-a-kind prints involves painting a piece of glass, adding and removing pigment as desired, then pressing paper onto the wet surface to transfer the design. Liddell then draws details onto the monotypes with ink, with the intention that these works may serve as "warm-ups" for future paintings in oil or egg tempera.

Before receiving a BFA in photographic design from UGA and an MFA in painting from the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, Liddell started off as an architecture major at Georgia Tech. She has continued to have an interest in architecture and landscaping, particularly heavily manicured landscapes that involve topiaries, boxwoods and arborvitae.

"It could be a certain artificial light coming through the trees from a streetlamp, or a piece of trash that seems to have a particular presence or suggestion of a past lived life—I never take pictures with people," says Liddell. "I'm interested in what the architecture, landscaping and even trash tell us about the people that live and work in those spaces. I want to capture the smells and the sounds and the heaviness of the humidity in the air—things that you just know as Athens."

In addition to her own artistic pursuits, Liddell runs ARTS + ATHLETICS, a salon-style gallery exhibiting small-scale works by local and regional artists in a guest space that's available for short-term rental. Named after the text chiseled on the base of Jean Westmacott's Athena statue located outside of the Classic Center, ARTS + ATHLETICS launched in

2021 and is open to the public during receptions and by appointment. Currently, the space is hosting a solo exhibition of works on paper and sculpture objects by Sara Hess, with a closing reception planned for Feb. 22 from 4–6 p.m.

Previously, Liddell hosted a podcast called Peachy Keen that, as an extension of her own art practice, interviewed women about art in the South. To explore more of Liddell's artwork, find out about future ARTS+ATHLETIC events and listen to the Peachy Keen archive, go to vivianliddell.com.

JASON THRASHER



at the Tennessee International Indie Film Festival last week. She says the animations influenced the way she uses color in painting, demonstrated by a shift to darker backgrounds and bright neon lights.

"I've always loved the crowd paintings of Bruegel and Bosch, and I was wanting to make something epic that was more even handed than my usual work—a crowd painting lets you show the big picture," says Liddell. "There can be transgressions and joy at the same time."

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Submit your stories (600 words max), comics (one page), poems, humor, recipes & photos to slackpole@flagpole.com.

Deadline is Tuesday, Dec. 3rd!