

# H.C. Porter

## Backyards & Beyond: Mississippians and Their Stories



FOREWORD BY NATASHA TRETHEWEY

There is Healing in the Telling ... And the Being Heard

*“I believe that H.C.’s work as an artist is among the most distinctive work that Mississippi has to offer.*

*Not only is her work vibrant, but it is inspiring – far beyond the visual value.”*

— Myrna Colley-Lee, Costume Designer, Co-Founder SonEdna Foundation, Inc.

*“Backyards & Beyond is a national treasure and a gift not only to the people who told their stories,*

*but to the rest of the world who will do so because of H.C. Porter. Her vision, her sacrifices,*

*and her heart will make this an indelible experience in the lives of our country.”*

— Lesley Silver, The Attic Gallery, Vicksburg, Mississippi

*“Much like artists and writers of the past who have struggled to speak in a new voice,*

*Porter’s work compels attention. Since art speaks in an inner language, Porter’s presentation is universal*

*in empathy while very specific in context. Backyards & Beyond... provides a total approach,*

*like a mammoth seine that pulls in multiple sensibilities.”*

— Patti Carr Black, Author, Curator, Cultural Historian

*“H.C. Porter and Backyards & Beyond speak volumes about the character*

*and grace of the magnificent people of this state.”*

— Marsha Barbour, First Lady of Mississippi



H.C. Porter grew up in Jackson, Mississippi, where she returned to live and work after receiving a BFA from the University of Alabama in 1984. She started her printmaking studio at the age of 23 in her grandmother’s basement, but the fumes soon overcame the weekly ladies club meetings upstairs.

Porter then became a charter member of Jackson’s young, tight-knit enclave of artists working in what became known as the Millsaps Avenue Arts District. During this time her distinctive style evolved. Well known as a social realist, Porter has traveled extensively, exhibiting her work in nearly every major city in the United States; her collectors span the globe. In 2006 she moved to Vicksburg, Mississippi, where she lives and works above the H.C. Porter Signature Gallery located in the quaint historic downtown district. Porter was awarded a fellowship from the Mississippi Arts Commission and the National Endowment for the Arts for her work on the *Backyards & Beyond* project. This is her first book.



Karole Sessums has always possessed a passion for people, travel, and the outdoors. She has toured the Southeast as a singer-songwriter, worked as a traveling nurse, and lived on her bicycle as a roving Christian missionary. She and H.C. Porter have worked together for more than 20 years.

Sessums conducted the live field interviews and field recordings, served as the overall project manager and exhibition curator, and created a short documentary film about the making of the *Backyards & Beyond* exhibition. Sessums earned a bachelor of science degree in nursing from the University of Mississippi Medical Center. When asked how she juggles interests ranging from the creative to the analytical, she replies, “My left brain is constantly telling my right brain to take a break, but my heart always seems to take over in the end!”



Natasha Trethewey was born in Gulfport, Mississippi, in 1966. She is author of three collections of poetry, *Domestic Work* (Graywolf, 2000), *Belloq’s Ophelia* (Graywolf, 2002), and *Native Guard* (Houghton Mifflin, 2006) for which she won the Pulitzer Prize. At Emory University she is Professor of English and holds the Phillis Wheatley Distinguished Chair in Poetry.



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