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True history of the South comes to New York state

Group show in Beacon addresses hot-button issues dividing America

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The US artist Nari Ward's Breathing Flag, which includes the Congolese Cosmogram, a diamond-pattern representing birth, life, death and rebirth, has been flying over New York City thanks to Creative Time. The New York-based, Jamaican-born artist found the pattern drilled into the floorboards of one of the oldest African-American churches in the US in Savannah, Georgia. They are thought to have been breathing holes for escaped slaves hiding in the church. Now, in upstate New York, Ward is showing Hole Nation (2017). He has drilled the same pattern into a hardback volume of US history, which is also studded with nails. The assemblage is in Leaving Home, a group exhibition held in an empty, grungy warehouse-space in Beacon, upstate New York (until 10 September), a short walk from Dia: Beacon. Organised by former Brooklyn-based Cathouse Funeral (styled FUNeral), the gallery's summer-long migration up the Hudson Valley addresses the USA's hot-button issues of immigration, national borders and racial politics. Organised by artist-curator-gallerist David Dixon, he has appropriated an especially loaded symbol from the South: the Confederate battle flag. Dixon's blood-batik work, Twins, which is part of an ongoing series, takes the stars and diagonal cross of the Confederate flag and flips it into a positive, diamond-shaped image, or "the dialectical opposite", he says. The battle flag has 13 stars even though only 11 States succeeded the Union, Dixon points out. "Typical of the South: they always get things wrong," he says, adding, "I can say that, I'm from down there."