

Ashlyn Lee
Catfish Fence, 2019
Barbed wire from Sanger, TX, steel, and concrete
15'L x 10'' W x 4'H

Artist Statement

We were surrounded. You couldn't see the sky looking out or up. I was riding with my dad and sister through east Texas yet again, nauseated from tree after tree passing by the window. It's pitch dark, and I can only decipher the blurry shadows of trees. I imagined Bigfoot or the Goatman watching and waiting for us to pass by at just the right moment. Continually, I look out the back window, imagining that the Goatman stands in the middle of the road, lit by the tail lights, shaking his fist at the Lee's narrowly escaping death again. On occasion, my dad would stop the truck in the middle of the road, secretly shift into neutral, and cut the lights. We'd sit in silence, waiting. I'd reached for my little sister's hand, and she'd shake it off. Just when we began to make out the lines of trees, my dad would rev the engine and belt out goat noises. Maddie and I would scream and scream over his hillbilly laugh--that high pitched, almost horse-neighing screech.

As I got older, I was less afraid of the Goatman waiting behind a tree. What frightened me more were the isolated families, living in derelict farmhouses resembling the chicken coops in their front yard. Even the dogs lived as wild animals, without assistance from the family, as a worker on the farm. There are rows of mailboxes, all different colors and sizes, united by bullet holes. Shoes, beer cans, tires, and mattresses in the grass, tossed out, laying exposed beside the road. It was this landscape where I first saw the catfish heads. They were like monsters, not Bigfoot or the Goatman, but real monsters. In the heads I saw my own future of decay, bones stuck out and skin rotting in the sun -- unrecognizable and stinky. It felt strange to notice these catfish heads, almost like they knew me. Typically, a fence line whirring past the window wouldn't cause any attention. I'd look, just like I did for the Goatman, through the rear window of the truck, at the catfish heads. Recently, I asked my friend and fellow Texan, David Searcy, why people do this and why they live this way the further you get in the woods. He replied, "Well, why the hell not?"