

HAWKINS HQ

Press Release:

Isaac Mehki

The King & The Great Whitewasher

On view: July 12 - August 31, 2025.

Opening Reception: Saturday, July 12th, 6 - 9 PM.

Atlanta, Georgia — Hawkins Headquarters is pleased to present the first solo exhibition of interdisciplinary performance artist Isaac Mehki.

The King & The Great Whitewasher is the second chapter of a long-term film project that reimagines the legend of St. George and the Dragon through a contemporary lens. Drawing on the cultural, political, and spiritual narratives of the American South, the work juxtaposes these forces in ways that unsettle and provoke, offering space for reflection and cathartic healing.

While rooted in cinema, the project branches into painting, photography, performance, and sculpture each chapter staged as a live public event that blurs the line between ritual and spectacle. Costumes, objects, and photographs become vessels for myth, history, and autobiography, woven into a surreal and symbol-laden lexicon. Christian iconography, Southern folklore, and critiques of both historical conservatism and modern alt-right ideologies collide in a deeply personal narrative that interrogates the role of the artist within Western tradition.

This chapter overlays two thematically linked figures: the King of the crusader myth and Elvis Presley—the so-called King of Rock & Roll. The first narrative centers on the King, who, in legend, sacrifices children—including his own daughter—to appease the dragon. Though brief in the original tale, his moral ambiguity is profound: a ruler caught between power and sacrifice. My own upbringing in the church—as the child of pastors and missionaries—forms the basis for this thread, abstracting the binary of good and evil into a framework for contemporary critique.

The second figure, Elvis, embodies a different but equally fraught mythology. Once a symbol of rebellion and sexual vitality, his image has since been co-opted into

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the mainstream, recast as a beacon of white Southern conservatism. His legacy is riddled with contradictions: innovator and appropriator, icon and product, gender-fluid performer and misogynist. Like the King, Elvis occupies a liminal space—his image constantly reshaped by public memory and political climate.

The negative space between these figures becomes fertile ground for a multidisciplinary investigation. Materials like guitar enamel, hair wax, memorabilia, leather, and sound are transformed into relics of performance and identity. I inhabit the persona of Elvis in daily life—in parks, bars, and clubs—embedding the work in lived experience. The project is fueled by self-interrogation and doubt: Is this all I am capable of? Are fame, power, and sacrifice gifts or burdens?

By tracing how mythic figures evolve over time, the work reflects on our own potential for transformation. Public memory is fluid. Identity is never fixed. After all, something else will come.

Isaac Mehki Biography:

Isaac Mehki is an American social practice installation and performance artist working out of Atlanta. He was born and raised in Villa Rica, a small railroad town on the western edge of Georgia. He was raised by a family of pastors and worship leaders, and it was here that he inherited an interest in history, mythology, politics, teaching and performance. As a teenager, Isaac played organized basketball, and his experiences as an athlete informs his work. Isaac graduated from Georgia State University with a BFA in Drawing & Painting, and has since participated in exhibitions and residencies in both Atlanta and New York. He creates work that disrupts the spiritual, historical, and political framework of American Exceptionalism. His work derives from his upbringing as a child of a preacher in the American south, and from a suspicion of his own inheritance within the Western tradition. He generates a self-embodied practice of cultural translation, creating work that orients towards direct social action by being a public catalyst for comparative practices rooted in historical institutionalism, social disidentification, and spatial aesthetics, exposing American identity as actually fully unexceptional, and thus subject to universal demands for justice.