

ALTMAN SIEGEL

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Didier William

Beyond the Bodies' Edge

September 5 – October 12, 2024

Altman Siegel is excited to announce *Beyond the Bodies' Edge*, Didier William's second solo show in San Francisco. This exhibition shows three copper-etched prints of cypress trees native to the Southeastern and Gulf Coastal Plains. In his artwork, William unpacks the systems, codes, and traditions that mark cultural identity. For this project, William took several research trips to the Atchafalaya Basin in Louisiana to better understand the direct ancestral relationship between Haiti and New Orleans through the eyes of its unique ecological terrain.

The *Taxodium distichum*, also known as the “wood eternal” or bald cypress, is naturally resistant to erosion and decay and can adapt to various soil conditions. As a species with a lifespan of 600 - 1,200 years, the bald cypress bore witness to significant historical events, including the Haitian emigration to the United States and Louisiana following the Haitian Revolution around the turn of the 19th century. The Haitian Revolution, the largest slave uprising since Spartacus' revolt against the Roman Republic (73-71 BCE), challenged entrenched European beliefs about alleged Black inferiority and enslaved peoples' ability to achieve and maintain their freedom. The organizational scope and tenacity of the revolt significantly impacted slave owners globally. Further, the Revolution substantially weakened France's financial resources, leading to Napoleon's sale of the Louisiana Territory to the United States in 1803. The Louisiana Purchase nearly doubled the size of the country at the time, extending the United States sovereignty across the Mississippi River and adding the bald cypress to our country's ecological dominion.

The resilience of the bald cypress in the face of adverse conditions directly echoes the immigrant experience in the southern United States and resonates with William's own experience growing up in Miami after immigrating from Port-au-Prince, Haiti, as a young boy. Most cypress trees will remain tall and straight even when they appear to be hanging on by mere threads. The texture of tree bark has long been a point of fascination for William. His carved paintings use wooden substrates that become integral to the work's composition. These intimate etched portraits present a more subdued side of the artist's oeuvre. They pay homage to the trees as silent, though not indifferent, observers of humanity's many follies.

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William's exploration of the cypress is not limited to this exhibition. He is expanding his interest into a series of large-scale paintings and sculptures for Prospect New Orleans and a forthcoming body of work for Altman Siegel, which will be shown in 2025.

Didier William (b. 1983) lives and works in Philadelphia and is originally from Port-au-Prince, Haiti. He earned a BFA in painting from The Maryland Institute College of Art and an MFA in Painting and Printmaking from Yale University School of Art. His work has been exhibited in the Bronx Museum of Art, Museum of Contemporary Art North Miami, Museum of Latin American Art, Frist Art Museum, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Carnegie Museum of Art, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Rudolph Tegnors Museum and Statue Park, Figge Art Museum, and in the Prospect.6 Biennial. William was an artist-in-residence at the Marie Walsh Sharpe Art Foundation in Brooklyn, NY, a 2018 recipient of the Rosenthal Family Foundation Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a 2020 recipient of the Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters & Sculptors Grant, a 2021 recipient of Pew Fellowship from the Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, and a 2023 recipient of a Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Biennial Grant. He has taught at several institutions, including Yale School of Art, Vassar College, Columbia University, UPenn, and SUNY Purchase. He is currently an Assistant Professor of Expanded Print at Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University.

For more information, please contact Altman Siegel at info@altmansiegel.com or 415-576-9300.