

ALTMAN SIEGEL

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Didier William

Siklon

September 17 – October 30, 2021

Opening reception September 17, 4-7 pm

Altman Siegel is pleased to announce *Siklon*, Didier William's first solo exhibition in San Francisco and his first with the gallery. William's most recent body of work draws largely on his memories of growing up in Miami after immigrating from Port-au-Prince, Haiti as a young boy. William pulls from Haitian history, mythology, and his personal experiences to explore the legacies of colonialism, resistance and the struggle for agency and identity. Presented is a new series of powerful compositions that combine both painting and printmaking techniques and push the limits of figuration, abstraction and legibility. The exhibition takes its title from the Haitian Kreyòl translation for Hurricane.

Hurricanes are a common occurrence in the Caribbean, where William was born and in South Florida, where he grew up. Hurricanes and the consequences of natural disasters have often been cited among the reasons why Haiti is in the complex political and economic condition that it has been in for much of the last 200 years. A more critical historical analysis reveals of course that much of this class "condition" that has plagued Haiti for so long is actually an effect of deliberate interference from an international community seeking to penalize Haiti for killing its French and Spanish colonizers and achieving Black self-actualization in 1804.

In the eponymous paintings, *Siklon* and *Siklon 2*, a storm is brewing. Lightening is striking in the space of the composition, but the figures seem not only unfazed by it, they appear energized. William wonders if the Hurricane could serve as a possible symbol for resilience, survival and even renewal and redefinition within the Black Atlantic broadly and Haiti specifically. The ever-increasing presence and ferocity of tropical cyclones aggressively reshapes geography and discourse and as such becomes a powerful space-making force in the region.

Within his practice, William has developed a distinct and ever-morphing visual language through bold patternmaking and use of vivid color. In these new works about South Florida, the finely worked surfaces hold a great deal of paint, and create spaces that feel lush and dense. Throughout the paintings in the exhibition, otherworldly bodies are composed of hundreds of tiny carved eyes that manifest the authoritative tensions of being looked at and looking back, intrepidly shifting the subject/object power dynamic.

The mango becomes a strong icon in this body of work. Featured within the show are four paintings with different scenes anchored by mangoes somewhere in the composition. Growing up in Miami, it was

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common to have mango trees in one's yard, or to hop a fence to pick the fruit from a neighbor's tree. The mango is a symbol of generosity for the artist. This tropical stone fruit represents the cultural fecundity of a space like South Florida, of people transplanted and relocated having to rebuild their geography and the fruits that it might bare, a recolonizing of sorts.

Didier William 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 at the Bronx Museum of Art, The Museum of Latin American Art in Long Beach, The Museum at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, The Carnegie Museum, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art and The Figge Museum Art Museum. 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 and a 2020 recipient of the Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters & Sculptors Grants. He has taught at several institutions including Yale School of Art, Vassar College, Columbia University, UPenn, and SUNY Purchase. He is currently Assistant Professor of Expanded Print at Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University.

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