

MIAMI RAIL

ADLER GUERRIER: DEPLOYED, CONDITIONAL, AND LIMITED UTOPIA

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Adler Guerrier Untitled (Enveloped in newly deployed conditions). Courtesy David Castillo Gallery 2017.

DAVID CASTILLO GALLERY, September 28 – November 18, 2017

Adler Guerrier embraces the concept of the flaneur, that quietly observant figure known for wandering Parisian boulevards and later, city streets anywhere. It's apt that this artist, born in the former colony of Haiti and based in polyglot Miami, defines his art with a term from the French language. Flaneur alludes to a literary and artistic concept popularized by Charles Baudelaire in the 19th Century and Walter Benjamin in the 20th. Certainly this word is imbued with the perspective of a privileged white male, distinct from Guerrier's own aesthetic. Particularly in this current show, Guerrier's photographs of subtropical vegetation are worlds apart from the cosmopolitan arcades that so fascinated Benjamin. Many of these images, devoid of familiar urban landmarks like buildings and streets, seem a direct affront to the conventional idea of a brick-and-mortar city. Guerrier develops his art from

oddly detailed photographic records of his lush urban surroundings, expanding them into an ambitious variety of media. His show at David Castillo presents 51 works, mostly from 2017. There's photography, and other inventive works on paper, and a video.

Guerrier's fascination with this wandering figure was solidified in "Formulating a Plot," his 2014 solo show at Pérez Art Museum Miami. Incorporating 70 plus works produced over 15 years, it included photographs of Miami and New York, exploring a legacy of racial tension with references to poet and civil rights activist Amiri Bakara. That show in turn reprised Guerrier's 2008 Whitney Biennial installation, Untitled (BLCK-We Wear the mask), which tells a story Guerrier invented about BLCK, a fictional radical African American group based in Miami, underscoring his focus the social and political history embedded in urban sites.

Particularly memorable in this show was Guerrier's layered depiction of Miami's African-American history. This history informs his own poetic take on the flaneur. Combining exquisite printing techniques with photographic images, his series Orchids and Boutonnieres referred not only to the 1960s society section in the African American newspaper, Miami Times, but also to the built environment of specific Miami locations, blurring the past with the present. His art reverberates with subtle reminders of how Miami neighborhoods evolve during the city's notorious boom-and-bust real estate cycles. Residents relocate yet persist as a presence even as addresses change.

Consider that striking title at Castillo: "Deployed, Conditional and Limited Utopia." This title, ingenious, if pretentious, delivers semantic twists on an all too familiar moniker for Miami, paradise lost, thanks in part to the 1981 Time magazine cover story and the city's cascading scandals.

The substantially limited utopia explored in Guerrier's exhibit, given the lush and leafy look of many images, evokes fragmented glimpses of not only Miami but the Caribbean region. These places, ripe with utopian potential are, we know, severely at risk in the wake of over-development and rising seas, not to the mention this year's hyper-active hurricane season.

Guerrier's curiously cropped, intermittently blurred photos of palms, bromeliads and other vegetation shot against beguiling skies, are intimate scraps of tragically vulnerable beauty. Without knowing his prolonged focus on Miami, it's rarely apparent that these are urban scenes, evidence of his ongoing challenge to the flaneur's historic context. That's the case with two archival prints, both titled

Untitled (Enveloped in newly deployed conditions). One shows a close-up of a small cluster of leaves, another offers a shot of perhaps the same leaves but from a slight distance so that tiny pink flowers are visible. It's never clear whether this vegetation belongs to up-scale properties, modest yards, public parks, or even a Caribbean locale. The pictures deliberately resist identification.



Yet, mapping is a constant theme, surely evoking the slippery nature of setting hard-and-fast boundaries within evolving cities and regions. Some of the works on paper ease into globe-like abstractions or suggest constellations. These have been folded and unfolded in neat geometric patterns, in the matter of precisely folded paper maps, now another form

of limitation, considering the current ubiquity of GPS devices.

It's noteworthy that the word deployed is derived from the French for unfolded. Guerrier unfolds or explains the nuances of an at-risk utopia or paradise. Some works employ BLCK from the PAMM exhibit, but with lower-case letters, as in Untitled(blck longevity – utopia)i, signifying determined persistence.

In Untitled (Place marked with an impulse, livid peach), he juxtaposes a photographed jungle-like scene with a smaller, abstracted segment placed over that photograph. The inset suggests a map for a Caribbean archipelago, apparently expanding the boundaries for Guerrier's urban wanderer.

The title for this work resembles a line of poetry, as do many titles here, highlighting the artist's fierce commitment to interweaving his art with visual metaphors. His grand approach to metaphorical thinking widens the reach of the flaneur, compelling us to locate and "map" the wider, historic, and Caribbean context of black Miami.

(Both photographs courtesy David Castillo Gallery, 2017.)