

ADLER GUERRIER DISCUSSES CAPTURING THE SWEETNESS OF THE SOUTH

By Adler Guerrier
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Adler Guerrier, *Untitled (Wander and Errancies—memories within; citrus in Saint Augustine)*, 2021, archival pigment print
COURTESY THE ARTIST

The artist discusses his “Wander and Errancies” photographs. One work from the series is included as a print in our November/December issue.

I developed this series, “Wander and Errancies,” during a 2020 residency at Flagler College in St. Augustine, Florida. I took photographs of the St. Augustine landscape—it’s the oldest city in the United States, and it has been part of both colonial Spain and colonial England. It’s also, arguably, part of the Caribbean, and Florida borders the former slave states of Georgia and Alabama. This junction is rich with a sense of openness and wildness and possibility.

For a long time, I’ve wanted to make work responding to my “Flâneur” (1999–2001) series, a group of photographs in which I embody a character. The series starts with the body, then considers the spaces that it inhabits. I wanted to flip that idea, and create work in which the setting for wandering defines everything. That’s why the series takes on this very specific place. The project developed around the question, What would it mean to use the mythology of the flâneur to walk around in this place, to try to find traces that are connected to other histories or new poetics?

The photograph included as a print in this issue (*Wander and Errancies—memories within; citrus in Saint Augustine*), 2021, shows vibrant Florida oranges with rich green leaves against a dark, dark sky. I was

thinking about how traveling at night was part of the experience of runaway slaves who were seeking freedom. They didn't escape only north, but also south—to the wilds of Florida or to Latin America. The Spanish had announced that they would embrace any formerly enslaved people, provided they became Catholic. Others went south to Cuba or the Bahamas. I was thinking of the oranges as this signal that we're getting closer to freedom—there are almost no orange groves north of Florida, so when you see them on your journey south, it's a symbol that you've entered another land. The work is about finding that sweetness, that possibility.

Another image from the series, *Untitled (Path on the Matanzas, Underground)*, 2020, shows grass along Florida's Matanzas River. At low tide, the riverbanks may have been used as a safe route for people to travel on. I was thinking about how we are constantly on this path toward greater and greater freedom—the river's general path is the same as it was five hundred years ago, and it precedes all the highways.

You often hear about Southern artists who moved north to find other opportunities. Florida offers proof that the American South is far from monolithic. The state is often considered exceptional for a number of reasons. It's a resort land for much of America, and it's vibrant with immigrant life. For me, culture and art and poetry help us express why we care about a place or a thing. I want the work to speak about the sweetness of being in the South.

—as told to Emily Watlington