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An Artist's Reimagining of Immigrant Identity

By Gisela Williams

One of the most noteworthy exhibitions taking place during Miami Art Week is a solo show of work — more than 40 figurative paintings and drawings, as well as a monumental sculpture — from the Philadelphia-based artist Didier William, called “Nou Kite Tout Sa Dèyè” (“We’ve Left That All Behind”) at the Museum of Contemporary Art North Miami. After immigrating to the United States from Haiti with his family as a young child, William grew up near the museum, but he doesn’t call this a homecoming. “Within the context of immigration, I don’t know that a homecoming is possible,” he said. “The idea of home means less to me. It gives me a nervous itch.” But the experience of being a queer Haitian immigrant in Miami has inspired his work, from the architecture of his youth — in one painting, a rendering of his childhood home is buoyed up by several abstract bodies — to more conceptual questions. How, William wondered, could he take the “racist idea of an ‘alien’ and turn it into a superpower. How would it evolve and take shape? That was the simple premise.” That idea is possibly most evident in William’s site-specific totem-like sculpture: a 12-foot male body cut out of wood that stretches from floor to ceiling.

“Didier William: Nou Kite Tout Sa Dèyè” is on view from Nov. 2 to Apr. 16, 2023, mocanomi.org.



Left: Didier William's "Twa Manman, twa kouwon" ("Three Mothers, Three Crowns") (2020). Right: "Just Us Three" (2021). Left: Jason Mandella. Right: Constance Mensch. Courtesy of the artist