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Coloneobaroque: Didier William at Tiger Strikes Asteroid

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The baroque was seen as a decadent deviation from the rational purity of classicism that preceded it during the Renaissance and followed it as neo-classicism. As the classical decayed it sprouted strange new forms of painting, sculpture, architecture, and writing that were inspired by more than just the Greco-Roman tradition: The baroque was a global style that, while influential for about a century



in Europe, retained its presence in the colonial New World for significantly longer. It was the first style that could be seen as pluralistic, and many colonized peoples created their own versions of it, referred to by theorist William Egginton as *Coloneobaroque*. These include varieties of the baroque that exist between eras and cultures and manifest to this day in such forms as the literature of Magic Realism and other post-colonial manifestations that twist and distort the classical forms imposed by the colonizers. In Haitian-American artist Didier William's exhibition at Tiger Strikes Asteroid, *We Will Win*, this distortion is put on display in a series of materially-diverse paintings. The figures that inhabit them are wriggling conglomerations of cellular eyes carved into the paintings' inky black surfaces, never totally whole but held in some fragile stasis that keeps them from falling apart.

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One large horizontal painting, inhabiting its own wall in the back of the gallery, depicts four such figures side-by-side. The left two stand in *contrapposto* with their gazes locked towards the viewer (at least, from the eyes on their faces). The rightmost two figures are locked in combat or a dance or some combination thereof, pushing the other's head away. Each contorts in an effort to repel the other, but in the process the boundaries between their bodies become ambiguous as their cells mingle together.

Hanging around the corner from this piece are two colorful paintings, one large and one small. The larger one depicts two figures—vibrantly dressed in identical striped shirts and orange patterned pants—standing behind a stage-like wooden platform. A veil of blue dots floats before them at waist-level, with strands of blue paint dripping down onto the stage, abstract expressionist-

style. These seemingly accidental splatters are given a sense of intentionality and dimensionality with the inclusion of their delicate smoky shadows on the surface of the wooden planks: The blue strings float and dance in three dimensions, not as marks on the surface but within the picture's diegetic space. The smaller painting hanging to its left similarly plays with shadows: A figure, with its body and face completely covered with carved-out eyes, peers out from behind a blue patterned curtain. A shadow is cast behind the figure: Is it his/hers, or is it from someone else standing outside the frame? The curtains cast no shadows next to it, leaving its identity ambiguous.

Less ambiguous is an overt reference to Jacques-Louis David's masterpiece *Death of Marat* in which the central figure is presented not as a martyr to the French Revolution but emerging victoriously from the bathtub. Rather than an assassin's dagger, the figure clutches a machete, a distinctively new-world weapon/implement in a neo-classical space. Its foot squirms out of the bathtub and onto Marat's makeshift writing desk, with the tip of the silver machete resting behind its heel. This new figure is a shadow of Marat: Black, not white; emerging rather than submerging; alive instead of dead. Even its head is tilted in the opposite direction, moving forward, not sinking back into the bath. France's revolution may have been dead in the water, so to speak, but the slave uprising it helped inspire in Haiti continued into the reign of Napoleon and ended with the French being driven off the island in a historically unique example of slaves overthrowing their captors and establishing an independent state: *We Will Win*, indeed.