

Didier William, *Gesture to Home*, 2024

ARTSY



Didier William, installation view of *Gesture to Home*, 2024 at Prospect New Orleans 2024, "The Future Is Present, The Harbinger Is Home". Photo by Amber Shields, HNOG. Courtesy of Prospect.6.

While most artists' works are shown in groups at venues such as Ogden Museum of Southern Art and the Contemporary Arts Center, a few participants have sites entirely dedicated to their work. Didier William occupies a gallery at The Historic New Orleans Collection, in the heart of the city's bustling historic French Quarter. There, the artist's installation features larger-than-life epoxy resin sculptures of bodies similar to figures that are usually found on William's canvases. Covered with meticulously hand-carved eyes, the bodies seem to have crept out of the accompanying paintings, which instead depict bald cypress trees, the state tree of Louisiana. "I wanted them to confront and create a circuitry of looking between themselves and the viewer," said William.

William, who settled on the idea after a trip to the Atchafalaya Basin to research bald cypresses, is fascinated by the trees' resistance to erosion and decay thanks to their large bodies.



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On the visual side, William is mesmerized by the short protrusions at the trees' bases, commonly called "knees." In William's work, these trees' resemblance to the human form is undeniable. "Their bodily accents remind me that there is a flamboyance about the cypresses that I find incredibly powerful," William explained.

Overall, the paintings, guarded by the human figures in front of them, radiate a sense of otherworldliness: the cypresses silently submerged in swamps with scorching sunsets behind them. Against a human understanding of time's pace, these centuries-old trees function as "a historical archive, as well as an ancestral and geological archive," according to William.