

# HYPERALLERGIC

ART

## In Miami, a Fair for Artists from Africa and the African Diaspora Shines Again

The Prizm Art Fair, which consistently shows great work, has finally been given the room to breathe.



Monica Uszerowicz December 7, 2018



Charo Oquet, "Like an arrow, like a tree, like a mountain" (2018), mixed media-installation (image courtesy the artist)

MIAMI — Construction of the Alfred I. duPont Building was completed in 1939, when its primary tenant was the Florida National Bank. I have been there three times in the last two years — once to see Trina perform on an old vault for a Borscht Film Festival party, then for an anticlimactic ghost tour, and last night, for Prizm Art Fair. The space is sweeping and beautiful and very appropriate for Prizm — a

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fair that consistently shows great work in spaces that never did it justice. It always shone through, but here, in this building, with all its breadth and light, the feeling was a sigh of relief. Work like this needs space. Room to breathe.



Left: Patrick Quarm, "Dada," oil paint, African print, 33 x 34 1/4 inches; Right: "Mama ba," oil paint, African print fabric on canvas, 42 x 32 1/2 inches (photo by the author for Hyperallergic)

Now in its sixth edition, Prizm features talks, performances, and 63 artists across several participating galleries and three specifically curated sections. Dr. Jeffrey M. Hayes's section, *The Diaspora Currency: Black Women*, focuses on work by or featuring black women, a means of centering their voices as valuable, actual currency. That's a real through-line in the fair: reparations, or that which is *reparative*. Curative. Transforming the forces of capitalism

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and white supremacy into systems and imaginaries that empower those forced to live under it. “Renegotiation,” says Mikhaile Solomon, Prizm’s founder.

Solomon has curated her own section, *The Dark Horse*, which refers to the archetype of the same name — the unforeseen visitor, or here, powerful retaliation. She’s included work like Dáreece J. Walker’s charcoal drawings of die-ins, entitled “The Die-Ins: Can I live” (2018), and a video of Dread Scott’s 2010 performance, “Money to Burn,” in which he burned \$250 on Wall Street and invited traders to do the same. Nearby, in the gallery section, Tahir Carl Karmali’s draped raffia robes shine with inlaid cobalt — your phone battery is probably made with it, and a child might’ve mined it. There’s a cost to these hard truths, and one for learning them: willful suspension of disbelief. But knowledge can be reclamation, too.

The work at Prizm also channels the spirit of embodiment — the literal, manifested act of being fully inside one’s body. Presence, people call it. Reimagining the self is some form of transformation as well; it’s everywhere at Prizm: Osi Audu’s graphite self-portraits that look like voids, their sheen a suggestion of what’s inside. Amber Robles-Gordon’s works that look like mandalas, decorated with her belongings — cowrie shells, jewels — and entrail-like snakes. Adriana Farmiga’s watercolor acrylic nails, painted rainbow-pastel. Jamele Wright’s big, gorgeous tapestries of fabric, repeated patterns — a reference to the mingling of identities, recycling, even in hip-hop — and red dirt from the earth.

The artist William Cordova curated the third section: *Transceivers: channels, outlets and forces*. It’s the first you see, and the one I went to last. Experiencing Prizm in a circle — in a cycle — feels right, because the works speak to each other, and the conversation is continuous. Ritual is prominent in Cordova’s section, specifically the ritual of transmitting history, maybe rewriting it. Khaulah Naima Nuruddin’s

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graphite drawings of Eatonville homes, intimate and distant from the very paper they're portrayed on, reference the formerly all-black town in Orlando.

Prizm's video works were my favorite of all. Ezra Wube's animated video, "Hidirtina/ Sisters" (2018), in Solomon's section, is part of a story collection Wube started in 2004, when he sent out an open call for folklore to a Habesha diaspora community in New York City. His animation is based on a volunteer's short story, which centers on a group of seven immortal sisters, one of who falls in love with a hunter. Against the sisters' warning, he murders a deer, whose sudden listlessness is rendered slowly; his beloved instructs him to climb a tree to protect himself from subsequent cosmic retaliation. Onajide Shabaka's one-minute "Henry Meade Leighton 1881" (2018), located in Cordova's section, tells the story of a man's body, discovered in a river, covered in the muck of swamps. Though his pockets were "officially said to be empty," says the narrator, "a woven knot of long, black hair was found ... inside one pocket of his overalls. Some said, a naked woman of light complexion with long black hair, had been seen swimming in the area. But every search for her ended with no evidence of the woman being found."

The body of the earth is, I think, another thread in Prizm — its ills and treasures, its destruction, the way its losses mirror human loss, the way it grows, enchants, and flourishes anyway.

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