

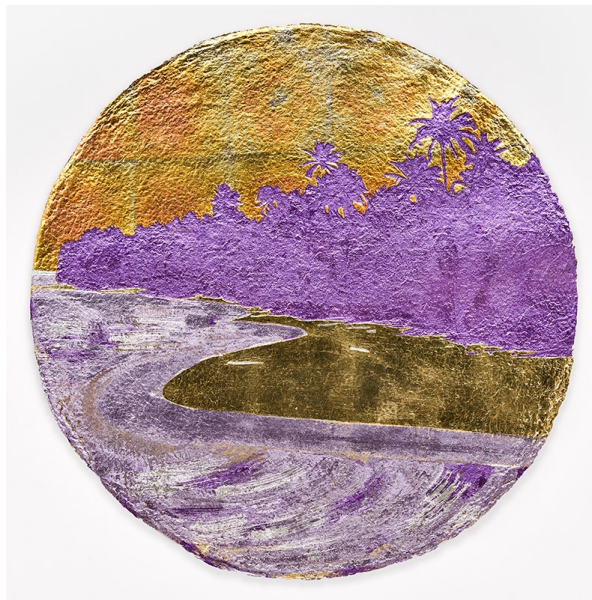
## Stacy Lynn Waddell: *light takes time to reach us*

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A waterline curves along a narrow stretch of sand. Beyond it, palm trees rise from a tangle of vegetation. The picture repeats in nine circular works of gold, silver, and metal leaf layered on hand-made paper, each iteration a distinct amalgamation of the precious metals that form its glittering surface. Lining the walls of Candice Madey gallery, the series is the centerpiece of *light takes time to reach us*, an exhibition of fourteen new works (all 2023) by Stacy Lynn Waddell, who transposes the art historical narratives of nineteenth-century American painting and midcentury photography into gilded compositions that speak to contemporary issues of climate change, inequity, and race.

Winslow Homer's *After the Hurricane, Bahamas*, is the principal inspiration of the show. This 1899 watercolor shows a lone figure washed ashore on a deserted beach, his small boat smashed in pieces around him while dark clouds recede towards the horizon. As in many of the pictures Homer painted during his stay in the Caribbean, the erratic storms of the tropics play a crucial role in the fate of his subject, a solitary Black man. It is difficult, some century and a quarter after it was painted, not to see the work as prophetic of the increase in extreme weather conditions that have become a global norm, and this prescience becomes part of the riff on which Waddell builds her series. In *Untitled #9 (awakening after the Gulf Stream and the Hurricane)* (2023), she echoes Homer's colors—a gunmetal sky hangs over aqua



Stacy Lynn Waddell, *Untitled #7 (awakening after the Gulf Stream and the Hurricane)*, 2023. Composition gold leaf, variegated metal leaf, silver leaf and Japanese colored silver leaf on handmade cotton/abaca paper, 29 inches (paper diameter). Courtesy the artist and Candice Madey, New York.

waves—but more than documenting a scene real or imagined, the gleam of metals in her picture suggests the flash of an over-exposed memory.

Waddell repeats her template with new combinations of metals yielding variations in color and mood in every version. The sum total of her series builds into a disturbing uncanniness. Purple trees and water are offset by a gold and orange hued sky in *Untitled #7 (awakening after the Gulf Stream and the Hurricane)*, recalling the inverted colors of a photo negative. In *Untitled #2*

CANDICE MADEY

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(*awakening after the Gulf Stream and the Hurricane*), layers of silver and aluminum convert Waddell's shoreline into a duotone image that reads like a nuclear winter. The landscape turns to black in *Untitled #5 (awakening after the Gulf Stream and the Hurricane)*, with tiny hints of light framing palm trees and molten red waves rising in the water to the left. While the crumpled figure of a Black man is absent in Waddell's composition, this omission seems tied to the parenthetical phrase in her title, *awakening after the Gulf Stream and Hurricane*. Are the Caribbean men and women who survive even the harshest storms in Homer's painted reportage a dream of the past? And to what are we awakening?

A trio of vertical silver leaf works on paper reproduce images of hummingbirds sourced from John James Audubon's *The Birds of America*. Compared to other birds, Audubon found the diminutive species lackluster, a judgment Waddell suggests is endemic of a history in which classifications and value systems were applied just as liberally to people as to birds and animals. With this in mind, Waddell's hummingbirds seem wistful, almost sad, as they perch on delicate branches or hover around enormous flower blossoms.

Turning to the twentieth century, Waddell creates an homage to the work of Malian photographer Malick Sidibé, reproducing his 1964 photo of a meringue dancer in *DANCER WALKING AND DANCING ABOVE & BELOW THE HORIZON LINE (For M.S.)*, (1964/2023). Applying 22-karat gold leaf to a circular canvas, she replicates Sidibé's image of an ebullient man who throws an arm above his head as he bends his knees. A neat two feet in diameter, the work resembles a giant gold coin on which the dancer becomes a ruler or god, the angles of his posture echoing figures in Egyptian carvings.



Installation view: Stacy Lynn Waddell, *light takes time to reach us*, Candice Madey, New York, 2023. Courtesy the artist and Candice Madey, New York. Photo: Kunning Huang.



Stacy Lynn Waddell, *light takes time to reach us*, 2023. Neon, 10 x 40 x 7 inches. Courtesy the artist and Candice Madey, New York. Photo: Kunning Huang.

The titular work of the show, *light takes time to reach us*, is the artist's first neon creation. Situated on a brick wall by the reception desk of the gallery, it calls to mind Jenny Holzer's aphorisms and Glenn Ligon's sculptural installations. I noticed the white-glowing message written in looping cursive just as I was leaving the gallery. The words made me think of the James Webb Space Telescope, tasked to capture in images the Big Bang and the origin of the cosmos. There is a way that Waddell, too, is traveling back in time, finding her way along a thread of images that lead to today, as if learning that pathway might explain where we are, as if we can make sense of that.

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