

Weathering, and other ways to surviveⁱ

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They give all kinds of storms names now—not just hurricanes. Meteorologists are like parents. They go alphabetically. If you haven't shared your name with a cyclone or blizzard yet, just wait. Your time is coming.

Soon, they say, it will all be underwater.

Miami is just one of many coastal cities around the world facing down the precarities of climate change, the risk of floods that may render it uninhabitable—for humans, at least. But its distinctive cultural mix, picturesque beaches, and colorful architecture continue to draw sellers and buyers into the dream of owning some paradise. Still others go there because it offers new beginnings; it's their first destination for getting free and that liberation engenders loyalty. And so, for now, people continue to flock to the edge of southern Florida—to insist on the “Sunshine State”—even as insurance agencies pull out of the region refusing to pay for the storms to come.ⁱⁱ

The storms are nothing new, though. They're just one element of the range of natural phenomena that the Martinican writer and educator Suzanne Césaire identified as essential to the unpredictability and vitality of the Caribbean.ⁱⁱⁱ Addressing the “absence of equilibrium” that a man might experience upon a burst of lightning in Haiti, Césaire wrote, “This sudden access to terrestrial madness illuminates his heart: he begins to think about the other Caribbean islands, their volcanoes, their earthquakes, their hurricanes.”^{iv} These words about feeling the Caribbean—about experiencing the extreme capabilities of such an environment—serve as an epigraph to Adler Guerrier's *wanders a never fixed nor dormant landscape*, a project that navigates the tensions between what we can control and the forces to which we are beholden, natural and humanmade. In an especially mercurial geography, changeability is the norm. But more than exploring the capacities for change, Guerrier's work pushes viewers towards the evidence of endurance, methods of preparedness, the stuff of survival.

A far more contained bright flash than a lightning bolt helped produce *Untitled (This is the place where, with a resonant clarity, we fathom for fortitude)* i-ii. In these photographic works, made in the artist's backyard at night, the camera's flash emits a burst of light that hits the flowers as everything else necessarily falls away into darkness. The specificity of place and terms that do the work of aggregation like “landscape” and “garden” and “yard” give way to radical individualization. Here, we spy flowers as if awakened protagonists, independent of their role in a “scenic” and “idyllic” place. In the dark, they are only themselves.

These two photographs are presented next to one another against a yellow background, which sits above a layer of pink. In the poetics of Sherwin-Williams, these colors go by the names of “Lemon Meringue” and “Rosy Outlook” respectively, a pairing of dessert and optimism. But for Guerrier, they harken to daytime and the colorful facades so strongly associated with Miami's kaleidoscopic urbanism. He sees the assertive use of colors of single-family homes there, in particular, as expressions of pride, presence, and ownership. And it is onto that color, directly on the wall, where small-scale vinyl words and symbols offer another layer of language and association. A poem by bell hooks, for instance, lends the words: “calling away despair.”^v Hooks' *Appalachian Elegy* carries into the Caribbean's pasts and forecasts.

To the left of the two photographs is a large-scale work on paper that extends across the yellow and pink fields of color on the wall. Creased into a grid by having been precisely folded at some point along the way, *Untitled (...whispered intelligence lurking in the leaves; Painted Bunting)* (2020-2024) features two re-photographed images turned 90°. These black-and-white images, which were made in bright sunlight that produced strong

shadows, show the fences and trees that divide the road from private property. Presented sideways, these divisions in the neighborhood become ceilings.

In *Untitled (...whispered intelligence lurking in the leaves; Painted Bunting)*, the photographs converge at the center of the page as if now one continuous scene. Into this doubled-landscape, Guerrier's now familiar language of marks and cut-out geometrical forms create a rhythm and forge connections across the layered elements. Contrasting those more consistent and contained marks and cut shapes are moments where paint splatters, thin pieces of paper hang down, and folds cannot be smoothed. Guerrier re-orders the landscape to make it newly flexible, even if these are views of the divides between private and public spaces. This allows him to explore a space "between here located in some form of the present and there in a further away, elsewhere, fully imagined, and partly charted geography."^{vi} This approach is an invitation to carry that flexibility into the space where the work is presented, onto the walls and into our ways of relating to the world.

A line from Rita Dove in the work's two-part parenthetical title suggests one of the means through which we might learn from our environments: "...whispered intelligence lurking in the leaves."^{vii} But in Dove's poem that "whispered intelligence" is not available. It exists only as a possibility unrealized. The other part of the title, "Painted Bunting," refers to the type of bird that appears on a found page in the upper left of the work. A talkative, brightly-hued flyer, the Painted Bunting makes parts of the Caribbean, including Miami, their sometimes home. They follow the seasons. In this work, the lyricism applied to the natural world joins with the poetry that informs Guerrier's wanderings.^{viii} While enfolded in parentheses, these words are openings, too.

Untitled (a notion of the possible whose outlines were fuzzy and amorphous) (2023) sends viewers looking into the background for clarity. This parenthetical title draws from Saidiya Hartman's meditations on waywardness, on the ways that Black women created conditions for their freedom in everyday life.^{ix} Hartman finds radical gestures in daily refusals, gaps, sighs, escapes—in going other ways. Guerrier is interested in how waywardness "reframes, leverages, parenthesizes, spatializes, and lays claims."^x *Untitled (a notion of the possible whose outlines were fuzzy and amorphous)* places viewers amidst foliage, bringing flowers so close that we cannot see them well. Instead, in black-and-white, the dense, entangled leaves are in focus, but largely as silhouettes. This is an image for being in the thick of things, for breathing in density. There is nothing to resolve here, no distance to travel to see it better. This view from where it is hard to see is a site of possibility.

After so many storms, it's in a space like this one where we might recognize that all of this is still here, and so are we.

i Adler Guerrier has invoked survival directly, drawing on Laura Kaschishke's poem "Palm" in titling a series of photographs *Remember this is how the small survive*. Laura Kaschishke, "Palm," *Poetry* (February 1991): 262.

ii Here, I'm thinking especially of the in-depth exploration of Miami's environmental future in the second season of the urgently titled podcast "How We Survive" hosted by Amy Scott.

iii Madeleine Hunt-Ehrlich's excellent film *Too Bright to See* (2023) also foregrounds the environmental personality of the Caribbean as it considers the life and archive of Suzanne Césaire. *Too Bright to See* places Césaire in Miami, as she reflects on the intersections of her literary and political work with her personal biography.

iv Suzanne Césaire, "The Great Camouflage," in *The Great Camouflage: Writings of Dissent (1941-1945)*, ed. Daniel Maximin, trans. Keith L. Walker (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2012), 39-46. First published in *Tropiques* 13-14, 1945.

v bell hooks, *Appalachian Elegy: Poetry and Place* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2012).

vi Personal communication with the artist, June 2024.

vii Rita Dove, "I Have Been a Stranger in a Strange Land," *Poetry* (October 2002): 24.

viii For Guerrier, wandering is a highly intentional practice as he has taken on the role of "flâneur" for an early project that connected New York and Miami. For more on that work, see: Huey Copeland, "Sinuous Coordination: On the Photography of Adler Guerrier," in *Adler Guerrier: Formulating a Plot* (Miami: Pérez Art Museum Miami), 42-49.

ix Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019).

^x Personal communication with the artist, June 2024.