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What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

John Houck's visual trickery; Svenja Deininger's "Crescendo" paintings; Didier William's eye-catching mixed-media works; and the poet John Ashbery's demure treasures.



Didier William's "M mache toupatou ave I," from 2018, wood carving, collage, ink, acrylic on panel. via James Fuentes LLC

Didier William

Nov. 14, 2018

Through Nov. 25 at James Fuentes, 55 Delancey Street, Manhattan; 212-577-1201, jamesfuentes.com. Through Nov. 24 at Anna Zorina Gallery, 533 West 23rd Street, Manhattan; 212-243-2100, annazorinagallery.com.

Didier William's works are often called paintings because they are rectangular, mounted on the wall and approximate the size of traditional easel paintings. The works in "[Curtains, Stages, and Shadows, Act 1](#)" at [James Fuentes](#) and "[Curtains, Stages and Shadows, Act 2](#)" at [Anna Zorina](#), however, are barely painted at all. Instead, Mr. William's method is a clever mix of different two-dimensional mediums: He carves directly into birch panels and arranges his own patterned prints on the surface, using ink and the occasional dash of acrylic paint for emphasis.

This approach, through appearance and illusion, also suits the subject matter of Mr. William, who was born in Haiti. Drawn from the country's history and folklore, as well as his experience of growing up in Miami, his works also probe the idea of having to perform blackness or any kind of identity. Shadowy figures — built from hundreds of tiny eyes that carved into the panels like pixels and return the viewer's gaze — represent family members, Voodoo spirits or leaders in the Haitian Revolution. (Mr. William shifted

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from abstract painting to representing black bodies after Trayvon Martin, an unarmed teenager, was shot to death in 2012.) And machetes suggest violent massacre as well as “tire machet,” the traditional Haitian martial art.

Mr. William’s crafty, enigmatic and sometimes cryptic oeuvre is underscored by his titles, which are in untranslated Haitian Kreyòl, and include proverbs, family expressions and crude street slang. None of theatrical effects would matter, though, if Mr. William’s paintings didn’t grab your attention and hold it, building a sense of tension — even anticipation for Act 3. MARTHA SCHWENDENER