

PRESS RELEASE:

CHRISTOPHER BLAY: *SpLaVCe Ship*

September 10th – October 15th, 2020

Opening Reception: September 10th, 1-3pm



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Blueprint for America and SpLaVCe Ship, 2022

Cyanotype on hahnemuhle paper

24 x 20 inches

With his newest and slyly powerful exhibition, Christopher Blay brings together threads in his work dating back for well over a decade. His through-lines are both apparent and subtle, but if you know his art, you intrinsically understand how what he's making now is a culmination of years of delving into consistent themes around history, time, space, place, grief, constriction, and freedom. What's so breathtaking about this newest work is its confidence to ask questions, and leave the narrative open-ended. As we get older and wiser, we start asking more questions than ever before.

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Here, Blay pulls from both his Liberian roots and his endless love of science fiction to create a new sort of speculative fiction that may not be as fictional as it seems. He's turned the slave ship into a spaceship—a fateful vessel he calls a “SpLaVCe” that may spell doom for its packed-in passengers, or perhaps a new path to freedom, or even both—a fresh-yet-familiar trajectory of hopelessness turned defiance and self-determination. The artist and the viewers share the experience of not knowing what happens next in this outer space, just as no one can know what's going to happen next here, on our own Pale Blue Dot.



Power Lines #12, 2022
Twisted afro picks, on organic roofing felt
11 x 8 ½ inches

Blay takes a look at what's taken place in the last ten years, as well as the last four hundred years, and this long view grants him a perspective that's seated in a philosophy that's knowing, but leaves room for the beauty of speculation: “We are creating our own futures,” he says.

He pulls on Liberian mythologies grounded in the idea of unseen guardians and protectors of the people, as well as the histories of Liberian tribes who defied all forms of enslavement, and he also gives nod to the forced teaming of people from different regions during the slave trade. Blay, in a way, re-imagines a past into a very different future, or even sees into an alternate universe where “diaspronauts” are thrust into a space-time continuum with no easy solutions to permanent displacement—and yet maybe something unexpectedly rich can arise from the crisis. Via this narrative, Blay creates something like self-portraits, and shapes these mythologies into forms that are deeply personal. He's lived through so much, and yet still has so much more to experience.

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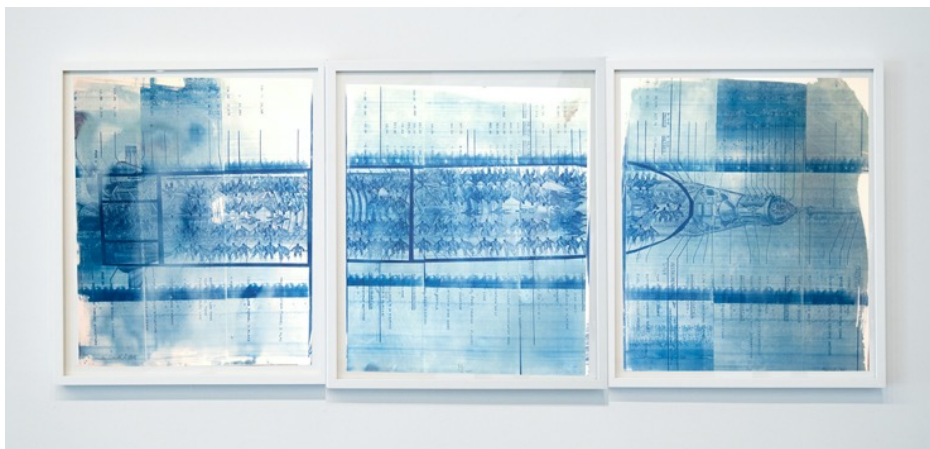


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SpLaVCe Kru[Neegee Order-Sedjibo Order]#1, 2022
Acrylic on roofing felt
48 x 36 inches

For viewers, there's a gorgeous universality in this realization. What is being human about anymore? And what is "community" now? Because now more than ever, as lost in space as we are, we're getting the sense that our humanity is grounded in our sense of community: shared spaces, shared histories, and shared futures.

In fact, Blay writes: "My work isn't as reactive to the reality of being Black in America as much as it has been in the past. I think making art that way is playing the same game that plays out in our 2020s politics. You are so engaged with the terror and threats that you have no energy to build, inspire, and connect with your community. We stop growing because we are following the bullshit. So resilience, future building, and hope is baked into the SpLaVCe I'm creating."



SpLaVCeShip, 2022
Cyanotype on hahnemuhle paper
Set of three
24 x 20 inches, each

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Blay explains, the exhibition's titled, *SpLaVCe Ship*, (pronounced Splace-vee-ship) combines Space Ship and Slave Ship, proposing a departure from where we've been as Black people, to where we could be in the future. Blay stresses that black escapism is at the root of the exhibition's attitude; noting other examples like "Space Program" by A Tribe Called Quest, "Space Ship" by Kanye West, and most profoundly Nikki Giovanni's "Quilting the Black Eyed-Pea (We're Going to Mars)"



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The work featured is a nod to Afrofuturists that come before black. Simply put, Blay asserts that "*SpLaVCe Ship*" is a way to unpack where we've been, how we are connected to the past (for both descendents of enslaved Africans and Africans, like myself, who came on an airplane) and how we get to the future"

SpLaVCe Ship features cyanotypes, drawings, paintings, and a 30-foot-long spaceship in the main gallery. The exhibition opens September 10th, 1-3 pm.

Additional information and images available upon request.

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