

Lyles & King

Kiyan Williams

Un/earthing

May 12 - June 25, 2022

Opening Reception: Thursday, May 12, 6-8pm

Lyles & King is pleased to present *Un/earthing*, the first solo exhibition of New-York based artist Kiyan Williams.

Upon entering the gallery, viewers are confronted by a row of battered, seasoned, and fried American flags previously flown over the U.S. Capitol Building. In this ongoing project, Williams transforms the symbol of national identity into a bubbling, charred, and delectable object using a range of regionally-specific seasonings. In their practice Williams often draws on quotidian materials and processes that reflect the social, ecological, and political conditions that shape everyday life.

In the main exhibition space are six slightly-larger-than human scale forms composed primarily of earth, and steel. The forms gesture towards human bodies and exist somewhere between figures, geological ruins, and trees. Reflecting on themes of transformation and decay, this new body of work furthers the artist's conceptual and material exploration of the relationship between Blackness, land, and trans/gressive subjectivity.

The contrast between earth and light is inspired by the sublime landscape of Lake Drummond at the heart of the Great Dismal Swamp in southeastern Virginia. As early as the 1600s, The Great Dismal Swamp was a refuge for formerly enslaved people who emancipated themselves from the regime of chattel slavery and forged maroon communities within the difficult and inaccessible terrain of the swamp. Williams often visits and draws inspiration from fugitive landscapes that hold obscured and hidden histories. For Williams, fugitive landscapes serve as an allegory for the capacity of subjugated life to emerge in conditions that are inhospitable and hostile.

The additive way that Williams layers earth on top of itself is related to historical processes and the way the soil simultaneously reveals and obscures. In their ongoing use of soil as a primary medium, bodies are not fixed but always in process, as suggested by the title *Un/earthing*. As their sculptures dry—forming cracks and fissures—they appear fragile when they are in fact rigid and sturdy. Like the layers of history embedded within them, Williams's sculptures are an assemblage and entanglement of fragmented matter that exist in states of ruination, oscillating in and out of legibility, enduring, transforming, decaying, and regenerating amidst social, historical, and environmental shifts.

Kiyan Williams (b. 1991, Newark, NJ) has forthcoming exhibitions at Public Art Fund, Brooklyn, NY; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA; Aldrich Museum, Ridgefield, CT; MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, MA; and Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, D.C. They have exhibited work at SculptureCenter, New York, NY; Jewish Museum, New York, NY; Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY; Socrates Sculpture Park, New York, NY; Recess Art, New York, NY; Lyles & King, New York, NY; David Kordansky, Los Angeles, CA; The Shed, New York, NY; among others. They earned an MFA from Columbia University. They have given talks and lectures at Hirshhorn Museum, Studio Museum in Harlem, Princeton University, Stanford University, Portland State University, Guggenheim, and Pratt Institute. Their work is held in the collection of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. Williams lives and works in Brooklyn, NY.