



Scirocco - Arifi: Where the Sand Meets the Sea

Derrick Woods-Morrow

Conceptual artist Derrick Woods-Morrow sews together cross-continental histories in his upcoming solo exhibition at ENGAGE Projects, *Scirocco – Arifi: Where the Sand Meets the Sea*. Best known for his interests in desire and labor, Woods-Morrow creates photographs, moving images, performance, and sculpture concerning alternative futures for Black people seeking sexual freedom. In this photo-forward exhibition, leisure scenes float atop the gallery walls, evidencing Woods-Morrow's recent 3Arts Camargo Foundation residency in the coastal town of Cassis, France. The small town's proximity to the larger Marseille, a historically critical trade hub and France's largest port of commerce, inspired Woods-Morrow's research to link a variety of labored upon and traded materials prevalent in contemporary culture to global Black migratory histories. Broadening his scope of discussion to a global scale, Woods-Morrow conjoins histories branching from North Africa, where he shares a lineage with the nomadic Tuareg peoples, across the Mediterranean Sea to southern France, the rural American South, and Providence, Rhode Island where he teaches at Rhode Island School of Design.

A trade tool and migratory metaphor, the term scirocco has many different names in maritime mythology; known as the North African 'Arifi,' this powerful atmospheric formation is defined as a hot wind blowing from North Africa to Southern Europe, reaching places like Marseille with its dust and sometimes heavy rainfall. These winds have both impeded and aided in centuries of maritime transport, including a long history of oceanic slave trade. In his exhibition, Woods- Morrow extends Scirocco as a symbol of migration, an agent of the Atlantic Ocean, and a tool for considering the placement and displacement of bodies that arrive by water to new lands. Like migration, Woods-Morrow explores image-making as simultaneously participatory and voyeuristic through the insertion of a personal lens onto geographical places, communities, and cultures outside of his home. Woods-Morrow's photographs are both portraits and non-portraits, sometimes featuring a body, and other times only the suggestion of one—a scribbled blue figure, a crouching blur, a bedroom trinket; Woods-Morrow investigates the body as a stand-in to discuss the ways larger stories of political movement and geographical transience affect Black sexual freedoms. For Woods-Morrow, this gesture underscores poet Audre Lorde's assertion that the erotic is a source of power, and that all materials hold the potentiality for eroticism. In turn, Woods-Morrow's exhibition Scirocco - Arifi: Where the Sand Meets the Sea comes full circle to posit that all material holds the ability to create social change.

A recipient of the Creative Visionary Award from the Black Artist and Designers Guild (2023), Derrick Woods-Morrow received his MFA in Photography from the School of Art Institute of Chicago in 2016, and currently is a Schiller Family Assistant Professor of Race, Art & Design at the Rhode Island School of Design. His exhibition highlights include international exhibitions in Germany, Stockholm, and the Netherlands, as well as, national exhibitions and screenings of his work at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Museum of Sex (New York), Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, and the Museum of Modern Art. In Winter of 2019, a new film, much handled things are always soft (2019) debuted in collaboration with the VISUAL AIDS 30th Annual Day With(out) ART programming at over a hundred institutions worldwide. Much handled things are always soft would later be independently screened in the social media POC cruising App Jack'd, reaching an audience of over 3 million Black and Brown folx in Canada and the US. Woods-Morrow has received numerous awards and grants including the Artadia Award (2018), 3Arts Visual Arts Award (2020), Sundance Uprise Grant (2021), and MacColl Johnson Fellowship (2022) among others. He splits his time between Chicago and Providence.

