

Curtis Talwst Santiago: Can't I Alter

February 20 – May 10, 2020



For press inquiries and images, contact:
Allison Underwood,
Director of Communications
212 219 2166 x119
aunderwood@drawingcenter.org

The Drawing Center
35 Wooster Street
New York, NY 10013
drawingcenter.org

Wednesday: 12–6pm
Thursday: 12–8pm
Friday–Sunday: 12–6pm

New York... This winter, The Drawing Center presents *Curtis Talwst Santiago: Can't I Alter*, the first exhibition devoted to the Canadian-Trinidadian artist's drawing practice, which has expanded significantly in recent years. Throughout his work, Santiago grapples with “genetic imagination,” or the ability to access generational knowledge through imaginative recollection and projection. For the artist, this method serves as a means of wading through histories lost, hidden, and often tangled. In *Can't I Alter*, Santiago creates a multi-faceted narrative in an immersive, drawing-filled installation that explores the theme of ancestry and the necessity of preserving the past while acknowledging the fallacies implicit in historical recollection. As viewers explore the space, they join Santiago and his alter ego, the J'ouvert Knight, in an attempt to locate a diasporic ancestor whose existence cannot ever be fully grasped. A newly commissioned film will accompany the installation, as well as performances organized by Santiago.

Over the past year, Santiago lived and worked in Lisbon, Portugal, where he created a series of new works centered on his own ancestry, as well as representations of Moorish knights. Many of these works draw inspiration from seventeenth-century *capriccios*—landscape paintings where the real and the imaginary, the contemporary and the anachronistic, share the same fantastical space. The installation is a three-dimensional *capriccio*, a home of sorts for the J'ouvert Knight. Its walls are fashioned after medieval-style porticos and are constructed from casts of stones from Brooklyn brownstones, contemporary construction, and Santiago's own rough-hewn nineteenth-century studio wall. Each of these cast-paper walls holds layers of pigment that are applied, sanded, and re-saturated, as well as embellished with hand-drawn motifs, resulting in drawn palimpsests that reflect muddled histories. Stand-alone drawings and paintings, as well as fabricated artifacts, scattered throughout the installation, provide further opportunities for discovery of an ever-shifting history both real and fictional.

As the exhibition title suggests, Santiago himself engages in altering and warping history, mirroring the way that real-life historical narratives are repeatedly written and rewritten. *Can't I Alter* contemplates this representational dichotomy and how it shadows our interpretations of the past as well as our historical conditioning in the present. Indeed, for Santiago, the *capriccio* possesses an ability to overturn colonial narrativization in favor of multiple temporalities.

Curtis Talwst Santiago: Can't I Alter is organized by Claire Gilman, Chief Curator, with Isabella Kapur, Curatorial Assistant.

About the Artist

The first time Canadian-Trinidadian artist Curtis Talwst Santiago (b. Toronto, 1979) visited Trinidad as a child was during the annual J'Ouvert celebration. He vividly recalls the tradition of applying red clay to the faces of family members. Years later, as an artist working in New York, he began using spray paint to draw radiating red faces on portraits of imagined ancestors on paper, canvas, and stone. Morphing into a vibrant indicator of the figures' uncertain identities, this trope has become a central element in Santiago's drawing practice. Santiago is also known for his *Infinity Series*, an ongoing series of miniature dioramas built in reliquary-like containers, and he is an accomplished musician. Santiago's work has been included in exhibitions in New York at New Museum and the Studio Museum in Harlem, as well as at SITE Santa Fe; the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; the Institute of Contemporary Art at the Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond; the Pérez Art Museum, Miami; and numerous gallery exhibitions in the United States, Canada, and South Africa. He shows with Rachel Uffner Gallery in New York.

Publication

Can't I Alter is accompanied by a softcover catalog, which includes full-color installation views of the exhibition and an essay by Chief Curator Claire Gilman, as well as an interview with Curtis Talwst Santiago by Kenneth Montague, and a selection of poems from *Zong!* by M. NourbeSe Philip. The publication will be available for purchase at The Drawing Center and in its online bookstore at drawingcenter.org. As with every publication produced by The Drawing Center, *Can't I Alter* will also be available to read in a digital format, free of charge on issuu.com.

Public Programs

DrawNow! SaturdayMornings! Offered in American Sign Language

Saturday, February 22, 2020, 10:30am-12:00pm, \$5

Guided by teaching artist Ada Pilar Cruz with an American Sign Language interpreter, this interactive drawing workshop will explore themes of ancestry and generational knowledge.

DrawNow! DibujoAhora! Presented in Spanish and English

Thursday, March 5, 2020, 6:00-7:30pm, Free

Presented in English and Spanish, and guided by teaching artist Ada Pilar Cruz, this interactive drawing workshop will explore themes of ancestry and generational knowledge.

Diorama Workshops with Curtis Talwst Santiago

Saturday, March 21, 2020 and Saturday, April 18, 2020, 10:00am-2:00pm, \$5

Join Curtis Talwst Santiago for a hands-on workshop in which participants will create small-scale dioramas, similar to the artist's well-known *Infinity Series*, an ongoing series of miniature dioramas built in reliquary-like containers. Adults and teens 12+ welcome. Materials will be provided. A 30-minute break will take place from 12:00-12:30.

A Night of Performances with Curtis Talwst Santiago

Wednesday, April 8, 2020, 6:30-8:00pm, \$5

Actor Anthony Santiago will activate the exhibition space by performing as nineteenth-century stage actor Ira Aldridge, who rose to popularity for his portrayal of Othello at Convent Garden in 1833. Following this multilayered performance of excerpts from Shakespeare's play, Curtis Talwst Santiago and his bandmates will perform in the central courtyard space of the installation.

Walkthrough with Curtis Talwst Santiago and Curator Claire Gilman

Thursday, May 7, 2020, 6:30-8:00pm, Free

Join Curtis Talwst Santiago and Chief Curator Claire Gilman for a walkthrough of the exhibition, and learn more about the creation of the site-specific installation.

Credits

Curtis Talwst Santiago: Can't I Alter is made possible by the Canada Council for the Arts. Generous support is provided by Rachel Uffner Gallery, William A. and Pamela K. Royall, Maxine Granovsky Gluskin, and the Consulate General of Canada in New York. Additional support is provided by Cathy and Jonathan Miller; Barbara Polla; Carol Saper; Carla Shen and Christopher Schott; Isabel Stainow Wilcox; Anonymous; Cooper Cole, Toronto; Rashid Johnson and Sheree Hovsepian; Ruth Roberts; Liz Dimmitt and Piers Davies; Susan and Randolph Randolph; and Tiffany Hott.