

# Earthseed

Tiffany Smith

May 26, 2022 - June 26, 2022

**Earthseed** is a solo exhibition of recent work by Tiffany Smith. Working across various media, the site-specific and self-reflexive installation critically engages with strategies for survival sourced from inherited ancestral knowledge, specifically from the Caribbean and its diaspora. Using concepts set forth in Octavia Butler's prophetic novel *Parable of the Sower* as a guide, the exhibition presents a collection of observations and research on various nature allies and traditional practices that provide care, contribute to survival, and provide resources for moving forward through physically, emotionally, and spiritually challenging realities.

Operating within the framework that you can't build what you can't imagine, the collected work operates as a form of visionary fiction, asserting the power to shape a future outside of the imagining of oppressive forces. The exhibition features a collection of recent self portraits from the series "For Tropical Girls...", a body of work that challenges historical representations of Black women, from the Caribbean diaspora in particular, through nuanced restaging of personal narratives informed by common cultural practices, tropes, and symbolism. Moving through feelings of longing and desire to be enveloped by the sun, sand, and sea "back home" to feelings of empowered resilience summoned from a recognition that the necessary resources for survival are ingrained in our ancestral knowledge, this collection of portraits represents a journey through stillness and solitary reflection to unlocking channels through which to access generational wisdom.

The custom-designed wallpaper anchoring the space features botanical illustrations of plant species that are native to the Caribbean and are commonly used for medicinal purposes. This 'bush medicine' includes cerasee (bitter melon), soursop, noni, life leaf, comfrey, jackass bitters, gumbo limbo, and nettles - all commonly used for a variety of medicinal applications including immunity support, relief of respiratory ailments, treating viral and fungal infections, and relief of stress and anxiety.

Central to the exhibition is an interactive meditation space designed to resemble both temporary architectural structures commonly found in the islands and temporary dining structures that became commonplace in urban environments during the recent pandemic. The structure is appointed with architectural and decor details typically found in Caribbean homes and contains a high back wicker peacock chair that has been hand embellished with healing crystals, an enveloping collection of artificial plants, and a soundscape of nature sounds captured by the artist in different locations throughout the U.S. and the Caribbean. Informed by the methodology behind structures that are constructed out of necessity for survival and designed to provide protection from the natural elements, "Semi Permanent Space" is a physical manifestation of the metaphorical structures that are necessary to help us feel grounded, safe, and protected and reminds us of the impermanence, fragility, and inequities attached to those feelings of comfort.

When communities are left unprotected from oppressive forces, strategies for survival and growth will always emerge. The prophecies contained in Butler's writings and throughout the 'Parables' series remind us that by accessing ancestral knowledge, we can build new strategies for creating alternate futures and empower collective change and reimagining.

*All that you touch  
You Change.  
All that you Change  
Changes you.  
The only lasting truth  
Is Change.  
God  
Is Change.*

From Earthseed: The Books of the Living