

Press Release

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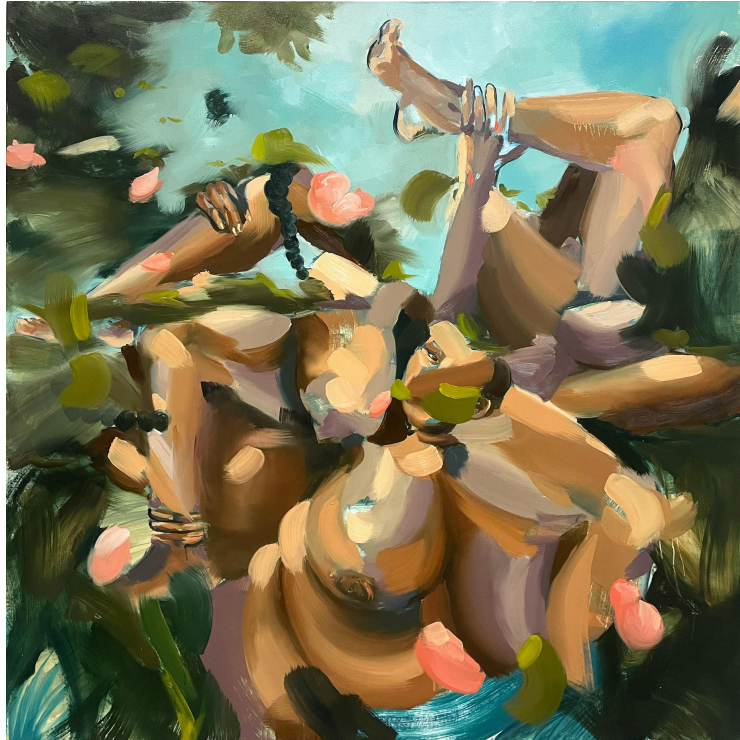
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Bodies of Water: Black Geographies and Maternal Legacies

Opening reception: Thursday, January 23, 2025

6:00pm-9:00pm



Anacostia, 2024. Oil on canvas

Welancora Gallery is pleased to present Debra Cartwright's first solo exhibition at the gallery, *Bodies of Water: Black Geographies and Maternal Legacies*. This exhibition consists of new oil paintings and watercolors that build upon an ongoing project examining the intricate and interconnected narratives of the Black female body, geography, and medical history. The opening will take place on January 23, 2025 at Welancora Gallery from 6:00 to 9:00pm.

With a focus on Cartwright's maternal lineage, which spans from Virginia to New York and the landscapes in between, the works layer waterscapes, family stories, historical accounts, and personal reflections. This approach creates a textured exploration of migration, selfhood, and the intersections of violence and resilience in Black American experiences. Drawing on J.T. Roane's *Dark Agoras* and the concept of "Black radical spatial ecology," the exhibition explores how waterways in Virginia served as sites of survival and resistance.

Memory is embedded in Cartwright's paintings; her waterways connect generations of Black women who, while navigating systemic violence, forged spaces of healing, care, and self-determination. The intimate experiences of Black women are central, illustrating how maternal narratives mirror broader histories of migration and the transformation of rural practices into urban lifeways. Reflecting upon her own upbringing and maternal lineage, Cartwright centers the Anacostia River as a site of radical communal living. Honoring practices of sustenance and living off the land, the work pays tribute to these underground communities that have been paved over by modern day commercial development. This practice is also reminiscent of 19th century *Manifest Destiny*, the history of which lingers throughout the work.

Cartwright's figures hang in a seemingly weightless expanse of incoherent disembodiment as she plays with abstraction and gestural brushstrokes. Her "psychological spaces of memory, emotion, and experience" evoke the landscapes of Tom Cole and Robert S. Duncanson while toying with political satire in the vein of Francisco Goya. Cartwright's works conjure themes of birth, caregiving, and the hidden rituals that sustained Black women – from her own familial line and throughout the country – across generations. Each piece traces the unspoken ways women shaped spaces of self-creation, from Virginia's rivers to the urban landscapes of New York, revealing how these stories resonate within larger Black geographies.

About the Artist

Debra Cartwright (b. 1988. Annapolis, Maryland) is an artist interested in depicting the relationship between the Black female body and American medical history. She uses paint and mixed media to explore selfhood and her own positioning as the daughter of a gynecologist. Themes around her work include re-embodiment, myth creation, violence, theft and intimacy. She explores a critical understanding of the past while also proposing an examination of the present American healthcare system.

Cartwright received her BA in Art History from the University of Virginia in 2010; she received her MFA in Painting from Rutgers University Mason Gross School of the Arts in 2023. She has held solo exhibitions at Frieze LA (2024), Montclair Art Museum (2024), and BODE Projects (Berlin, 2023). She has participated in group exhibitions at TERN Gallery (Nassau, Bahamas, 2024); Swivel Gallery (New York, 2024); Fridman Gallery (New York, 2024), Untitled Art Fair Miami (2023); New York Academy of Art (2023); Sotheby's (New York, 2023); Westbeth Gallery (New York, 2023); forMAH Gallery (New York, 2023); Allouche Gallery (New York; 2023), and CFHILL (Stockholm, Sweden, 2020). In 2024, Cartwright was a resident at the Wassaic Project.