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Dawoud Bey

Stony the Road

Sean Kelly, New York

January 10 – February 22, 2025

Opening reception: Thursday, January 9, 6-8pm

Sean Kelly is delighted to announce the exhibition, *Dawoud Bey: Stony the Road*, the gallery's third exhibition with the artist. The exhibition will feature the artist's newest photographic series, *Stony the Road*, (2023), and his related film, *350,000*, (2023) which center on Richmond, Virginia, as the historical terrain where African captives first arrived in the United States and were marched into enslavement.

Commissioned and first exhibited by the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in 2023, Bey's *Stony the Road* series is the third chapter in the artist's ongoing exploration of the deep connections between African American history, the American landscape and the traumas embedded in those landscapes. *Dawoud Bey: Stony the Road* marks the series New York debut, opening at Sean Kelly with a reception for the artist on Thursday, January 9, from 6-8pm.

Bey's landscape trilogy began with *Night Coming Tenderly, Black*, (2017) a series which depicted both real and imagined locations in northeast Ohio tied to the Underground Railroad. Bey's exploration continued with *In This Here Place*, (2019) which documented the landscapes of plantations in Louisiana. With *Stony the Road*, Bey turns his lens to the beginning of the African American experience in America: the arrival of enslaved Africans and their first steps on an unfamiliar and unforgiving land.

In an intimate, visual dialogue with the past, Bey's series captures the historical and emotional texture of the Richmond Slave Trail—a well-trodden path of leaves, branches, and waterways that reveal the lingering imprints of the history of enslavement in America. "The ground is still holding its memory and its shape," describes Bey, emphasizing the spirit and tangible presence of the past. "This is ancestor work. Stepping outside the art context, the project context, this is the work of keeping our ancestors present in the contemporary conversation."

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Central to the photographic series, the exhibition also features the artist's film *350,000*, which recalls the estimated 350,000 men, women, and children sold from Richmond's auction blocks between 1830 and 1860. Projected on two large, back-to-back screens, the film takes the viewer on a journey along the Richmond Slave Trail, imagining that landscape as if through the eyes of the 350,000 enslaved Africans. Shot in black-and-white by cinematographer Bron Moyi, the film's visual intensity is amplified by a soundtrack featuring staccato breaths and body percussion, created in collaboration with choreographer and Virginia Commonwealth University Professor E. Gaynell Sherrod. The subtle, rhythmic soundscape, echoes the weight of the journey, resulting in a psychologically poignant sonic landscape that resonates with the sense of history and memory.

Together, Bey's film and photographic works offer a reflection into the psychic and physical landscapes of enslavement in America, and the enduring legacies these sites hold within the American consciousness and social fabric. Through this work, Bey contributes essential Black perspectives and experiences into contemporary discourse about landscape. Bey's ability to re-envision key historical sites through photography and film offers viewers space for reflection and remembrance.

Groundbreaking artist and MacArthur Fellow Dawoud Bey examines the Black past and present. His photographs and film installations have been exhibited in museums and galleries throughout the United States and Europe. Bey's work has been the subject of numerous solo museum exhibitions, including *Dawoud Bey: Street Portraits* (2024-2025) at the Denver Art Museum, *Dawoud Bey: An American Project* organized by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art (2020-2022), and *Elegy* at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (2023-2024) and New Orleans Museum of Art (2026). He has been the subject of several monographs, including *Elegy* (Aperture/VMFA, 2023), which chronicles Bey's history projects and landscape-based work. Bey is the recipient of numerous awards including five honorary doctorates, and in 2024, the artist was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. His forthcoming solo exhibition, *Dawoud Bey: Street Portraits*, opens at the Denver Art Museum in November 2024.

Bey lives and works in Chicago and New York. He is currently a Critic at Yale University, where he received his Masters in Fine Arts, and is Professor Emeritus at Columbia College, Chicago.

For additional information about Dawoud Bey, please visit skny.com

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Image: Dawoud Bey, *Untitled (Crooked Trees)*, 2022, gelatin silver print mounted to Dibond, framed: 48 5/16 x 59 5/16 x 2 inches, edition of 6 with 2 APs © Dawoud Bey Courtesy: the artist and Sean Kelly, New York/Los Angeles