

## **Artist Radcliffe Bailey's new show at Atlanta's Solomon Projects**

by Catherine Fox | Oct 1, 2009

Radcliffe Bailey explores new materials and mines old themes in "Looking for Light, Traveling at Night," his solo show at Solomon Projects.



Radcliffe Bailey, "Windward Coast" (detail)

As a participant in the Toledo Museum of Art's Guest Artist Pavilion Project, the Atlanta artist was able to experiment with glass. In the foyer gallery are drawings made with molten glass and a branding implement and "Travel by Night," a sculpture in the shape of a five-foot-tall lantern.

Viewers who know Bailey's art will recognize him in this new work. The boat shape in a drawing, for instance, is a familiar symbol, referring to larger themes of journeys as part of the African-American experience, particularly the Middle Passage. The lantern, whose interior contains a photo and candelabrum, is a variation on the object as altar to memory, another recurring theme.

This imagery is elaborated in a different way in “Windward Coast,” a poetic and visually compelling installation in the main gallery. Bailey fills the room with a flotsam of wooden piano keys. He plants a lone head, a plaster sculpture with Negroid features sheathed in black glitter, toward the back of the 22-by-23-foot expanse.

Bailey has adjusted the keys to mimic the roll of the ocean. The spot he has chosen for the head accentuates feelings of isolation and vulnerability. The piece embodies the physical and psychological rupture of the Middle Passage, not to mention the danger. Ambiguity adds to the dramatic tension: Is the figure drowning or surviving?



“Windward Coast” — a variation on “Storm at Sea,” now traveling in the Menil Collection’s “NeoHooDoo: Art for a Forgotten Faith” – makes brilliant use of materials. The old keys are effective visually and symbolically. Ditto the black glitter. Used to stunning effect in “In the Returnal” in 2007, the sparkly covering imparts an iconic aura, with references to race, ritual, death and improbable glamour.

The glass works represent the artist finding his way in a new medium. In “Windward Coast,” he is in full control.

Through Oct. 17.