

ARTNEWS

City Slickers: Cleveland's First Front International Triennial Explores American Metropolises—Without a Local Perspective

By [Alex Greenberger](#) Posted 08/08/18 11:48 am

[EXCERPT]



Dawoud Bey, *Night Coming Tenderly, Black*, 2017, installation view.

FIELD STUDIO/COURTESY THE ARTIST, RENA BRANSTEN GALLERY, AND STEPHEN DAITER GALLERY

A few other pieces in Front overtly referenced Cleveland's history with migrants, but none of them haunted me in the same way as Dawoud Bey's photo installation *Night Coming Tenderly, Black* (2017). It was displayed in St. John's Episcopal Church, once the final stop on the Underground Railroad before fugitive slaves crossed Lake Erie into Canada, and Bey drew on that history, offering a series of images tracing the 460-mile distance from Hudson, Ohio, to Cleveland as those slaves would have traveled it mostly by foot. Bey's photographs depict branches, lakes, and fences that he edited to make just barely visible amid the night-dark landscape. Mounted atop the church's pews, as though meant to be worshipped, they invite viewers into an empathic connection with people on a treacherous journey.

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Hot in Cleveland: Front International Triennial Kicks Off in Ohio with Promising First Edition

By [Alex Greenberger](#) Posted 07/17/18 1:04 pm

[EXCERPT]



Dawoud Bey, *Night Coming Tenderly, Black*, 2017, at St. John's Church.

COURTESY THE ARTIST, RENA BRANSTEN GALLERY, AND STEPHEN DAITER GALLERY/FIELD STUDIO

One of the most-discussed works during the opening festivities was Dawoud Bey's elegant photo installation *Night Coming Tenderly, Black* (2017), which was on view a few minutes from Bidwell's Transformer Station, at St. John's Episcopal Church. Above the church's pews hang a set of dark black images of branches, trees, and fences. They refer to the history of the Underground Railroad, which had stops in Cleveland and Hudson, Ohio, where Bey took these pictures. But they are not documentary photographs, Bey cautioned. "I didn't want to do a documentary project, just document Underground Railroad sites—that kind of work has already been done," he said. "I wanted to make . . . something that would be a reimagining of that history." In doing the project, Bey said he was "trying to imagine the experience of navigating these spaces and making photographs that were analogies to that experience, and also printing them to give a sense of this movement under cover of darkness through the landscape."