

DAWOUD BEY: NIGHT COMING

TENDERLY, BLACK

Regarded as one of the most important photographers working today, Dawoud Bey (b. 1953) is recognized for his compelling, large-scale portraits and street photographs of marginalized people and communities. Inspired by artist Roy DeCarava (1919—2009), Bey has been photographing the Black community in Harlem where he was born, and in Queens where he grew up, for over four decades.

In *Night Coming Tenderly, Black* Bey imagines the flight of enslaved African American fugitives in the mid-nineteenth

century traveling along the last part of an Underground Railroad network. He shot these landscapes in Ohio moving northward towards Lake Erie, on the other side of which lay Canada and freedom. The large scale of the works as well as Bey's approach in printing them to evoke nocturnal scenes convey, as Bey has said "a feeling of intimate connection to the landscape as it might have been seen and experienced by those fugitive Black bodies moving through that landscape." He creates a sense of vulnerability as the traveler encounters tangled trees and brush, exposed bodies of water, and glimpses of

fences and dark houses—the only other signifiers of human presence.

The title of the series was inspired by the last line in Langston Hughes's poem, *Dream Variations* (first published in 1926). Bey notes "The cover of darkness is meant to create not only a dangerous or intimidating landscape, but also a space of tender embrace, a beautiful black space through which fugitive slaves moved towards their self-liberation."

Dawoud Bey

Night Coming Tenderly, Black

Untitled #3 (Cozad-Bates House), 2017

Gelatin silver print

Bill and Christy Gautreaux Collection,

Kansas City, MO



Dawoud Bey

Night Coming Tenderly, Black

Untitled #8 (Leaves and House), 2017

Gelatin silver print

Rennie Collection, Vancouver



Dawoud Bey

Night Coming Tenderly, Black

Untitled #11 (Bent Branches), 2017

Gelatin silver print

Rennie Collection, Vancouver



Dawoud Bey

Night Coming Tenderly, Black

Untitled #13 (Trees and Reflections), 2017

Gelatin silver print

Bill and Christy Gautreaux Collection,

Kansas City, MO



Dawoud Bey

Night Coming Tenderly, Black

Untitled #17 (Forest), 2017

Gelatin silver print

Rennie Collection, Vancouver



Dawoud Bey

Night Coming Tenderly, Black

Untitled #18 (Creek and House), 2017

Gelatin silver print

Bill and Christy Gautreaux Collection,

Kansas City, MO



Dawoud Bey

Night Coming Tenderly, Black

Untitled #20 (Farmhouse and Picket Fence I), 2017

Gelatin silver print

Rennie Collection, Vancouver



Dawoud Bey

Night Coming Tenderly, Black

*Untitled #21 (Farmhouse and Picket Fence
II), 2017*

Gelatin silver print

Rennie Collection, Vancouver



Dawoud Bey

Night Coming Tenderly, Black

Untitled #22 (Farmhouse), 2017

Gelatin silver print

Rennie Collection, Vancouver



Dawoud Bey

Night Coming Tenderly, Black

Untitled #24 (At Lake Erie), 2017

Gelatin silver print

Brandywine River Museum of Art

Museum Purchase, 2022

