

# FORT GANSEVOORT

## BURNAWAY

### Dawn Williams Boyd at Atlanta Contemporary

By Leia Genis January 22, 2021



Dawn Williams Boyd, *Hark the Herald Angels Sing*, 2005. Courtesy the artist and Atlanta Contemporary.

Dawn Williams Boyd's solo exhibition *Death Is Swallowed Up by Victory* presents a story in three acts: heralding, transformation, and renewal. Told across three cloth paintings, this visual narrative is symbolic of larger cultural transition.

*Hark, the Herald Angels Sing* (2005) presents a group of angels singing and trumpeting against a velvety black background as one from their group reaches down to present a lamb to a figure rising from the bottom of the composition. This human figure is the only character that appears in all three paintings and, as the title and angels entail, the painting announces the coming of change for the figure. *The Middle Passage* (2007) shows two male figures standing side-by-side with a skeleton, which is only partially visible against the edge of the cloth. Rendered in flat black, poised against the grinning skeleton, these grim figures evoke the often fatal stage of the triangular

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trade as enslaved Africans were transported across the Atlantic. *I Corinthians 15:51-54*(2006) is composed of a large angel trumpeting above a skeleton while a smaller male and female figures ascend. Rendered again in naturalistic color, the nude figures are indicative of rebirth as death folds beneath them.

Although the religion was originally imposed upon them, Christianity was adopted and reinterpreted by enslaved Africans who found power and community in its stories of resurrection and deliverance from suffering. The use of Christian iconography throughout Boyd's cloth paintings and appearance of people of color as angels and allegorical figures creates a tableaux that evokes the historical importance of Christianity in Black culture while simultaneously calling for reevaluation of whitewashed allegorical narratives.

Although they also contain elements of despair and trauma, these visual stories heralding hope and transformation help us imagine a future where death is swallowed up in victory.

Curated by Dianna Settles, Dawn Williams Boyd: *Death Is Swallowed Up By Victory* is on view at the Atlanta Contemporary through January 31, 2021.