

# BROOKLYN RAIL

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### ALVARO BARRINGTON & DAVID WEISS: A DIFFERENT WORLD

by Gabriella Nugent



Installation View, Condo 2018, Emalin showing Alvaro Barrington and hosting Weiss Falk, showing David Weiss.

In the American sitcom *A Different World*, *The Cosby Show*'s Denise Huxtable goes to college. The series, which aired on NBC from September 24, 1987 to July 9, 1992, centered on students at the fictional historically black Hillman College in Virginia. The series is often cited for encouraging African American students to view college as a viable goal. It is from this sitcom that Brooklyn-based artist Alvaro Barrington's series of vintage postcards of European landmarks, sewn and tied with several types of thick yarn, takes its title.

Matted chestnut-colored thread wraps around Munich's Cathedral of Our Dear Lady. Beige strings descend from the sky overlooking The Statue of the Crowned Virgin in Lourdes. Brown yarn conceals our view of the church tower submerged in Lake Reschen, while curled shades of copper twine similarly covers Fountains Abbey. The Paris Opera emerges through tightly woven yarn, and the Norwich Cathedral, through grey and orange strings.

Working chronologically through the sitcom, every exhibition of Barrington's series employs a supplemental title taken from an episode of *A Different World*. His show at the London gallery Emalin takes its name from season 1, episode 8—*If Chosen I May Not Run*. Here, Barrington's work is shown alongside the early drawings of the late Swiss artist David Weiss in collaboration with the Basel-based gallery Weiss Falk for CONDO, a program that stages gallery shares across London. (This is the first exhibition of Weiss's work in the United Kingdom that is separate from the collective Fischli/Weiss.)

In *A Different World*, Barrington alters voyages already taken. Situated on the windowsills of the gallery, the series constructs an alternative vision onto the world. Through the act of weaving, Barrington engages an extended tradition of women's work, from the Greek myth of Penelope to the textiles made by the artist's own aunts in Grenada. Barrington inscribes the labor of women in empty vistas, church crevices, and tower walls across Europe. Furthermore, the series simultaneously speaks to the 1960s slogan on the afterlives of colonialism in the United Kingdom, "*we are here, because you were there.*" Barrington challenges the deceptively easy, whitewashed world conveyed in the photographs: a world enabled by the work of others, expropriated wealth, and the endless expansions of capital. This is the same world in which Denise Huxtable had already intervened—the one that is erected on the remnants of slavery, that wilfully operates through violence, oppression, and exclusion.

In Weiss's *Wandlungen* drawings from the 1970s, the artist creates a series that expands over several sheets of paper. Entire scenarios—even a city—emerge from a circle, a curlicue or an arrow. Ink stains serve as the origins for anamorphic expressions. This generative capacity is echoed in Barrington's work, which likewise operates serially whether through an ongoing motif or a collection of photographs. Situated on the ground against the wall of the gallery, Barrington's series of small paintings take their titles arbitrarily from the year 1947 onwards and when they were executed (*1947-2017* to *1960-2017*). Hibiscus flowers rendered in pastel pink are layered onto swirls and smears of earth hues. Their stamens seem to explode from the ground in vivid colours and woven yarn, conveying a sense of fecundity.

Weiss and Barrington's generative capacity speaks to their shared ability to create endless worlds and to envision and struggle for other existences beyond *the here and now*. This capacity is echoed across the exhibition's multiple temporalities, from Weiss's work in the 1970s to Barrington's timeworn postcards and hyphenate date ranges. Furthermore, the call for "a different world" is reiterated in the curatorial mandate of CONDO, which attempts to engender connections across Europe against the background of Brexit and the growth of xenophobia. This situation is emphasised in *A Different World—If Chosen I May Not Run 5*, where woven yarn obstructs the entryway through the Fence of Gibraltar. We could therefore say that the supplemental title to the series, *If Chosen I May Not Run*, enacts a call to arms or a refusal to escape. Indeed, it is about staying with, in, and of the world yet simultaneously clamouring for more. Making worlds is always ongoing.