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## Xavier Daniels' first solo show with Almine Rech opens in Paris

By Charles Moore, May 17, 2022.



Xavier Daniels, *Honesty*, 2022. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 182.9 x 121.9 cm, 72 x 48 in /  
© Xavier Daniels. Courtesy of the Artist and Almine Rech. Photo: Nicolas Brasseur.

Atlanta, Georgia-based artist Xavier Daniels showcases his multihued perspective of brotherhood and unity in an upcoming Paris show *Ties that Bind*, scheduled to open on May 13 at Almine Rech. Touching on his experiences at Morehouse College, as a firefighter, and in his own family, Daniels features his painted Black male figures to create dialogue surrounding stereotypes, mental health, and other themes. Throughout, he incorporates a range of colors symbolizing different facets of the Black male experience.

The artist's portraits of Black men are large and mystical, rife with washes of color, in an effort to symbolically reaffirm the Black male experience on earth and on a metaphysical level. Daniels explains that many of the conversations taking place in popular culture leave Black males invisible and quite often lost in discussions about themselves. To address this, the exhibition features works of varying sizes, exploring shapes and colors and symbols, with the goal of expanding the dialogue of the Black male experience—portraying these men far beyond the stereotypes of athletes, sex symbols, and absentee fathers.

The works that comprise *Ties that Bind* features a mystical quality that viewers are encouraged to experience in person. Exploring themes like the passage of time, memory, and fraternity (not unlike Daniels's 12-work show *In Search of the Fraternal* (2021), the majority exist in pairs, as diptychs, with each canvas representing an individual subject

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connecting with another. Together, these Black males form a larger work, calling into question the themes so integral to the artist's work. The negative space offers an abstract take on the mental health challenges many Black men experience—a sense of not feeling whole, of there being gaps between a person's identity and the stereotypes they confront in the world each day—paired with color symbolism to add a spiritual layer.

Among the centerpieces of the show is a diptych which emphasizes the connection between shape and color, and which features two winged male figures who are related but separated experientially—perhaps by age. They could be father and son, the artist explains, or two brothers with a significant age gap not unlike the one Daniels and his own brother share (Daniels's brother Zerrick is 17 years his junior). The color purple is applied to the wings depicted on the artist's canvas—serves to deliver a spiritual sensation, bringing to light the power of the relationships that bind us. The beauty of the connection between these two Black men is palpable.

Daniels's color selections are nuanced yet intentional. Frequently, Daniels applies purple alongside gray, the latter symbolizing sophistication and intelligence. The former is devotional and mysterious, an emblem of royalty, serving to uplift the masses while conveying devotion. Purple dye, once worth more than its weight in gold, was something only the royal family could afford at one point; in this way, it presents an escape from reality—exuding self-knowledge, while conveying a deeper understanding of a person's own thoughts. Dark and rich, the artist acknowledges that the color offers guidance in one's personal pursuits, harmonizing the mind, body, and soul in a unique form of introspection. He hopes the viewer will experience their own spiritual enlightenment—finding comfort in a place of focused insight.

Another color Daniels explores in the exhibition is blue. An essential color in the Bible, blue symbolizes heaven, while also representing the law and the commandments, grace and revelation, and ultimately, the Holy Spirit. Additional connotations include loyalty and trust, tranquility and relaxation, and then trust and responsibility. The artist's careful application of blue paint evokes wisdom and calm, serenity and healing. Then there is white: another Biblical color symbolic of innocence, purity, and redemption.

This paint selection highlights an overarching sense of vulnerability, inviting the Black male community to anchor themselves in freedom and dignity. There is solace in that, just as viewers are bound to find comfort in Daniels's Almine Rech show.