

Congregation

Cottle Church, Nevis
May 3 – June 7, 2025

Cyle Warner presents *Congregation*, a site-specific installation at the Cottle Church located on the island of Nevis. Built in 1824, Cottle Church was one of the first integrated Anglican churches in the Caribbean that brought enslaved Africans and plantation owners together in worship. Yet, the church's structure embodies a

profound contradiction, symbolizing both unity and sanctity alongside the legacies of systematic violence. This historic ruin, made of stone walls, now stands without window panes, while the floating beams above are the only remnants of a roof. Unlike most chapels, which have wooden floors, Cottle Church's base consists of a grass field, placing it in direct conversation with the Earth and sky. This installation marks the first time Warner, a New York-based artist, will debut artwork in his ancestral homeland.



Within the church, Warner arranges thirteen assemblage quilts, each coated in black sand and mounted on shipping pallets. The sand, sourced from the island's beach deposits, brings a literal piece of the landscape into the installation. The fabric of each quilt features vibrant floral patterns sourced from St. Kitts, as well as from his mother and grandmother. His use of tropical fabrics acts as a visual mask, evoking dual imagery: the sensational gaze imposed upon the Caribbean by the West and the reclamation of Afro-diasporic folk practices through craft and ornamentation. Beneath each quilt lie fragments of the church's rubble, subtly altering the installation's topographical surface. The underside of each quilt is reinforced with burlap before being affixed to the pallets. These pallets reference global commerce while grounding the installation, providing stability and spatial rootedness. The burlap backing further reflects Warner's engagement with domestic and labor-based materials; its coarse texture contrasts with the delicate nature of quilt-making.

This environmental collaboration continues Warner's exploration of how built spaces and materials hold memory. Here, he reflects on how time and natural forces shape not only the land but our perception of it. The island's surface beauty—lush, tropical, idyllic—is often consumed through an

idealized, external gaze. But beneath that image lies a more complex geology: one formed by erosion, sedimentation, extraction, and human labor. Though each quilt is initially cloaked in black sand, the elements—wind, rain, sunlight, animal movement—gradually wear away the surface, revealing bright fabrics beneath. This slow, natural erosion mirrors the process of unearthing what has been buried: the cultural histories, domestic labor, and ancestral practices that shape the Caribbean. As the surface gives way to what lies underneath, the work becomes a meditation on touch, time, and transformation.

Congregation is both a gesture of acknowledgment and a physical intervention. By placing these forms at the center of the church's architecture, Warner reshapes how visitors engage with the space, creating an immersive experience that prompts them to move around, between, and in relation to the installation. While the names of the 131 enslaved individuals are inscribed on a plaque within the church, the thirteen quilts invoke their presence through a collective form and spatial gathering rather than individual identification. The installation offers a memorial that extends across the landscape, tracing evidence of people throughout time. Here, Warner activates the Cottle Church as a living site—one that holds layered histories and ongoing energy—opening up new ways to listen to, reflect on, and engage with the past.

This project was supported, in part, by a Foundation for Contemporary Arts Emergency Grant.

Cyle Warner (b. New York, NY) earned a BFA in Photography and Video from the School of Visual Arts in 2023 and attended the Yale Norfolk Summer School of Art in 2022. He has participated in the Vermont Studio Center with a fellowship in 2024 and is currently a 2024-2026 Van Lier Fellow at Abrons Arts Center as well as a 2025 Bronx AIM Fellow. Warner's work has been exhibited at Regular Normal, New York (2020, 2021); Oolite Arts, Miami (2022); Bradley Ertaskiran, Montréal (2022); Welancora Gallery, Brooklyn (2022, 2023); and the Brooklyn Museum (2024).

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