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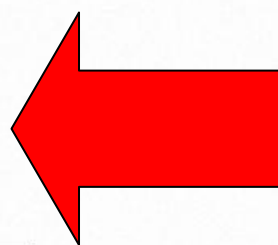
The Other Side: Slaveholder and the enslaved

Lois Alosser | Features | January 11, 2015 | 0 Comment | 0



The Other Side is a photographic exhibit created by former Weir Farm artist-in-residence Xiomáro in which he introduces General William Floyd (1734-1821), a slave owner whose signature is on the Declaration of Independence, who lived temporarily in Connecticut during the Revolutionary War. Gen. ...

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The Other Side is a photographic exhibit created by former Weir Farm artist-in-residence Xiomáro in which he introduces General William Floyd (1734-1821), a slave owner whose signature is on the Declaration of Independence, who lived temporarily in Connecticut during the Revolutionary War.

Gen. Floyd fled to Middletown after the British occupied his Long Island plantation. He was one of the less celebrated signers of the Declaration, and this exhibit will give him much deserved notice while also exploring the lives of the enslaved people and their descendants on his estate. His plantation is now a National Park unit of Fire Island National Seashore and thus connected through the National Park Service with Weir Farm, also a National Park site.

Xiomáro's photographs of the Floyd estate reveal generations of Floyd tombstones in the family cemetery, which is separated by a fence ("The Other Side") where there are plain wooden crosses, each with a the name of a slave.

The crosses date back to 1870, when someone (perhaps a member of the Floyd family) placed the crosses as memorials to the laborers, enslaved and paid house servants of color, who worked on the estate. The contrast between the family's elaborate tombstones and the slaves' plain crosses is somber. Are slaves actually buried beneath the crosses? Are those their names? Part of slavery was taking a person's genealogy away and replacing it with a new one-word name. No one knows for sure, but the memorial message is stunning. The crosses represent in part the Floyd family's evolution from slave ownership to active military service in the Union army during the Civil War.



Xiomáro is the photographer, and former Weir Farm artist-in-residence, who created 'The Other Side.'

The photographer, Xiomáro (pronounced See-oh-mah-ro), was an artist-in-residence at Weir Farm National Park Site in March 2011. “The way it all started was almost accidental. There was a bleak period for me during the recession and I found comfort taking pictures of the national parks. I displayed the photos at the coffee concerts I was running and people wanted to buy them. When my wife’s family had a reunion in Utah, I went to Arches National Park and took lots of pictures. When the photos started selling, I thought, maybe this is the direction to go.

“When Weir Farm accepted me as an artist-in-residence, I felt like I was walking on a cloud. The Weir Farm residency changed my life.” The photographs he took during his residency were exhibited at Weir Farm and were so impressive that he was made a Visiting Artist by the National Park Service and commissioned to photograph the William Floyd estate. He says that his time at Weir Farm made photography the core of his creative life. He does lots of research before, during and after he takes a picture. “I always find out as much as I can. It’s like an actor given a role to play. The more you know about your subject, the better the performance of the photograph.”

As his website indicates, Xiomáro’s work has been exhibited all over the country. His National Park Service commissions include Theodore Roosevelt’s Sagamore Hill and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s home in Massachusetts. He will soon be living in a Florida swamp for a month documenting the fragile ecosystem of the Everglades.

It’s almost impossible not to wonder about his name. “I’ve been an entertainment lawyer, led a rock band, written songs and I still run coffee concerts, but when I realized that photography would occupy most of my creative life, I decided I needed a pseudonym, a short, attention-getting name.” (Think Mark Twain/Samuel Clemens.)

“My father was Cuban, my mother is from Puerto Rico. I wanted something that reflected my background. I came upon the name Xiomára, and changed it to the masculine version. It means ‘ready for battle’ and that convinced me it was right.”

In just a few years, Xiomáro has become a nationally exhibited artist, covered by The New York Times, News 12 and The Huffington Post. He will be featured in a London photography magazine, *Aspect Ratio*. Weir Farm commissioned him to take pictures of the J. Alden Weir house and studios, before and after the recent renovation.

" *The Other Side* isn't just a sentimental exhibit. Generations have romanticized slavery but I'm hoping that this exhibit will provoke questions and discussion. It's certainly a good topic for a school project." The exhibit will be on view January 11 to March 29 at the Oyster Bay Historical Society, 20 Summit Street, Oyster Bay, N.Y.; 516-922-5032. A free limited edition photo e-book can be downloaded at www.xiomaro.com