



salt.

For the preservation of Black diasporic
visual histories

Pour la préservation des récits
historiques visuels des diasporas noires

RACAR

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The current issue of *RACAR* explores Black diasporic visual histories, an underrepresented topic in critical publications, major exhibitions, and institutional collections in Canada. The issue contains not only critical writing on a broad range of subjects from contemporary art to strawcraft but also a creative practices section, an interview with interdisciplinary artist Deanna Bowen, and reviews of recent exhibitions and books on Black visual culture. We would like to thank the guest editors, Joana Joachim and Pamela Edmonds, for their hard work and for collecting such a wide array of stimulating voices and perspectives.

The *RACAR* editorial team is undergoing a change. Lora Senechal Carney is stepping down as English Reviews Editor. Lora has been an invaluable member of the *RACAR* team since 2010, when she became an editor of the journal after she co-edited the special issue "Landscape, Cultural Spaces, Ecology" (Spring 2010). Since 2016, Lora has worked tirelessly as our English Reviews Editor. We want to thank Lora for her devotion to the journal, her kind and compassionate collegiality, and her service to the Canadian arts community, which was acknowledged with the 2017 Universities Art Association of Canada Recognition Award. Devon Smither will take on the role of *RACAR* English Reviews Editor. Devon, whose research focuses on gender, modernity, and Canadian art historiography, is Associate Professor at the University of Lethbridge. We warmly welcome Devon to the *RACAR* editorial team. ¶

Le présent numéro de *RACAR* explore les histoires visuelles de la diaspora noire, un sujet sous-représenté dans les publications importantes, les grandes expositions et les collections institutionnelles au Canada. En plus de textes critiques abordant des sujets aussi variés que l'art contemporain ou le travail artisanal de la paille, ce numéro propose également une section sur les pratiques créatives, une entrevue avec l'artiste interdisciplinaire Deanna Bowen, ainsi que des comptes rendus d'expositions et de livres récents sur la culture visuelle noire. Nous remercions les rédactrices invitées, Joana Joachim et Pamela Edmonds, dont le travail assidu a permis de réunir un éventail de voix et de perspectives enthousiasmantes.

Du changement s'annonce à la rédaction de *RACAR* : Lora Senechal Carney quitte son poste de rédactrice des recensions en anglais. Membre inestimable de l'équipe de *RACAR*, Lora est devenue l'une des rédactrices de la revue en 2010, après avoir codirigé le numéro spécial « Landscape, Cultural Spaces, Ecology » (printemps 2010). Puis, en 2016, elle accepte le poste de rédactrice des recensions en anglais, un rôle qu'elle assume avec brio. Nous remercions Lora pour son dévouement à la revue, sa collégialité, sa bienveillance et son affabilité, ainsi que pour le service rendu à la communauté artistique canadienne; cet engagement de Lora a été souligné en 2017 par le prix de reconnaissance de l'Association d'art des universités du Canada. Devon Smither prend la relève à titre de rédacteur des recensions en anglais de *RACAR*. Devon, dont les recherches portent sur le genre, la modernité et l'historiographie de l'art canadien, est professeur agrégé à l'Université de Lethbridge. Nous accueillons chaleureusement Devon au sein de l'équipe de rédaction de *RACAR*. ¶

salt. For the preservation of Black diasporic visual histories

Pamela Edmonds and Joana Joachim

Salting is an age-old method of curing perishable food items, common long before modern refrigeration. During the early parts of the ongoing settler colonial period, ships from Canada would travel to the Caribbean laden with items like salted cod to trade for goods produced through the forced labour of enslaved Africans.¹ To this day, salt fish remains a staple food item in Black diasporic cuisine. The central role played by salted cod reflects the myriad ways that Canada is imbricated in Black diasporic lives within and beyond its borders.²

Acts of preservation such as salting involve forethought and provide safeguards for the future. Much in the same way, preserving histories through archival practices works to ensure that collective memory functions as a form of future-proofing. As Marcus Wood states in his study of visual culture of slavery, “What we remember is defined by what we choose to forget, and how we choose to remember is defined by how we choose to ignore.”³ Archival research into Black diasporic histories confronts obstacles due to deep-seated institutional barriers and long-standing exclusions and erasures. Many factors come in to play within this issue, including the historical and continuing institutional oversight in the collecting and preserving of Black histories as well as the issue of opacity. Black archives—Black histories—are not recognized or legible in the same way as Western archives and histories in white supremacist contexts. Black archives are oppositional in many ways. They are an extension of the ontological nature of Blackness—rooted in fugitive and rhizomatic networks across time

and space which cannot always be contained or contended with within the limited frameworks of Western academia.⁴ This is compounded by the fact that in the Canadian context, there exists no dedicated Black archive at the national level.⁵ This lack effectively locates Black histories on this land as necessarily outside of the larger narrative of the place currently referred to as Canada.

In the discipline of Western art history, these exclusions have translated into a marked underrepresentation of Black diasporic culture in critical publications, major exhibitions and institutional collections. These gaps perpetuate the cycle of non-preservation and, by extension, the marginalization of African Canadian art histories.⁶ The lack of critical writing and public acquisitions of the work of Black diasporic artists particularly in Canada, is a key contributor to the dearth of knowledge on the overall historical trajectories of Black diasporic aesthetics, as well as their formal and conceptual sensibilities. While there has been some recent critical examination of these issues in this country, for example in *Canadian Journal of History/Annales canadiennes d'histoire* (“Black Canadian Creativity, Expressive Cultures, and Narratives of Space and Place,” December 2021), and specific issues of *C magazine* (Issue 144, “Déjà Vu” and Issue 145, “Criticism, Again”), *Canadian Art* (“Chroma,” Fall 2020) and in the book *Towards an African Canadian Art History: Art, Memory, and Resistance* (2018), there continues to be a need for engagement with and care for the art produced by Black creators. The engagements with Black art in Canada that have occurred have historically emerged predominantly from Black

communities and led by Black women working within the field.⁷ Indeed, Black women were key players in most of the above publications.

Black diasporic art histories more broadly are documented inconsistently, leaving gaps in knowledge. In Europe, for example, much of the scholarship around Black histories disproportionately represents artists operating in the United Kingdom while, in the Americas, the hypervisibility of the United States leaves Black art in Canada, South America, and the Caribbean critically under-discussed.⁸ These gaps take a variety of forms which go beyond mere underrepresentation in exhibition and collecting practices. They often result in superficial and incomplete analyses of Black artists' work, which "[...] engenders a critical misreading of some art as more of a form of social advocacy and de-emphasizes the aesthetic and/or conceptual tools at work," to borrow from Naomi Beckwith's thoughts around the errant form.⁹ This lack of deep critical writing leads to a diminished understanding of these artistic practices within a larger art historical context across time and space. *salt. For the preservation of Black diasporic visual histories* aims to locate these artistic practices in both Canadian and international art historical discourses, as part of the ongoing dual process of historical recuperation and future-proofing, that is, the simultaneous work of recording Black art histories and practices which have been omitted previously and the documentation of the current work of Black cultural producers.

This special issue of *RACAR* features a series of texts that critically engage with the stakes of preserving and archiving Black histories in Canada and throughout the diaspora by seriously examining the works of Black diasporic artists and situating them within the larger discourses of global art histories. These texts contend with the ongoing institutional failures to memorialize Black diasporic art practices by documenting and rigorously engaging with the practices of artists, including Sylvia D. Hamilton, Kamissa Ma Koita, Charlotte Henay, Mark Stoddart, Deanna Bowen, Elicser Elliott, María Magdalena Campos-Pons,

Thelma E. Cambridge, Kendra Frorup, Anina Major, Averia Wright, and Nicolas Premier. *salt*, then, is a collection of writings which record and elucidate Black artists and practices in their multiplicities. This issue aims not only to reflect further on the issues at stake, but also to carve out the space for this necessary work to take place.

Some of the key themes being discussed in the texts include archival methodologies and sensibilities which go against and beyond the ascribed Western meanings, strategies, and roles of "the archive." Hamilton, Henay, and Campbell each present a reformulation of what the archive can be and what it could do in the realm of visual art and Black cultural production. **Sylvia D. Hamilton**, in her illustrated essay, "Uncoupling the Archive," considers the central role that public and private archives have played in her artistic practice and methodology. Separating her archival findings from their restrictive physical form, she recasts them through documentary films, multi-media installations, public lectures, teaching, poetry, and essays. In this text, Hamilton draws on her artist's statements, journal notes, installation images and preparation maps from various iterations of her work to illustrate how she uncouples the archive in an effort to tell the truth about historic Black communities in Canada.

In "The House That Rosette Built," **Charlotte Henay** reflects on ways to read into gaps inherited and passed on in the archive. Challenging and refuting academic writing, this portfolio-piece foregrounds dreaming and visioning as legitimate spaces of knowing using imagination, empathy, and dreaming to conceive of futures of freedom. Henay presents the technique of what she calls "mash-up methodology," as she considers the impacts of experimentation and modified methodologies as themselves valid academic ventures. In many ways, this methodology echoes the works of Elizabeth Alexander, Saidiya Hartman, and Katherine McKittrick, among other Black scholars aiming to dismantle constrictive conceptions of archival research in order to widen the breadth of what constitutes so-called legitimate

research as well as cultural and knowledge production.¹⁰ Henay's approach uncovers fundamental silences in representations of Black women's sensibilities, thereby contributing to a growing disruptive space that challenges the colonial gatekeeping of Black diasporic women's stories. Through the lens of her own archival research and using a multitude of voices, this work presents relationality in Black diasporic feminist work as part and parcel of imagining futures. In his article "More Life: Beyond the Archival & the Algorithmic," **Mark V. Campbell** examines Black methods of living beyond institutional archival relations. Campbell investigates what it might mean for curatorial projects, mentorship relationships, and the art practices of Black artists to incorporate archival approaches and sensibilities. What might this unlock in Black cultural production? Relating works by Deanna Bowen, Mark Stoddart, and Elicser Elliott to Black archival methods, the author sets out to uncover the potentials of a Black archival sensibility within the realm of cultural production in visual, aural, and written forms.

In their contributions to this special issue, David Hart and Simone Cambridge each cast a glance towards historic moments in Black diasporic artists' lives, examining the impacts that they have had on contemporary artistic practices. **David Hart** presents an analysis of María Magdalena Campos-Pons' work in his text "*Spoken Softly with Mama: Memory, Monuments, and Black Women's Spaces in Cuba.*" Working in the 1990s, artist Campos-Pons produced a series of three complex multimedia installations titled *The History of People Who Were Not Heroes*. These artworks function as conceptual monuments which, Hart contends, uncover the exclusion of poor, Black Cubans from public monuments and historical narratives. Hart elucidates the ways in which Campos-Pons' installations call into question accepted notions of domestic and public spaces; fixed national, racial, and gender identities as well as the systems which are used to recall the past and to trace paths of migration; and global artistic production as well as collecting practices. Hart foregrounds *Spoken Softly with Mama* (1997),

a work held in the collection of National Gallery of Canada which he touts as emblematic of these very issues. Campos-Pons's work presents an embodied experience spanning the Black Atlantic spatially, temporally and metaphysically. In her text, "It has just begun": Strawcraft in Bahamian Visual Culture," **Simone Cambridge** explores the visual culture and literature surrounding Bahamian straw work and its relationship to the archive and national narratives. Using the contemporary art practices of Kendra Frorup, Anina Major, and Averia Wright as an entry point, Cambridge presents Thelma E. Cambridge's thesis, "Growing functional arts in the Bahamas," focusing on her discussion of Bahamian strawcraft, investigating her techniques, and considering how they translate to this day as well as how they shifted with the advent of white colonial presence in the Caribbean. With these texts, Hart and Cambridge tug at another key thread within the issue of preservation, that is, the fundamental need to locate Black histories across both time and space within global narratives and to bear witness to the ways in which Black peoples continue to be moved.

Along similar lines, Didier Morelli and Cécilia Bracmort, for their part, highlight how contemporary Black artists insert Black stories into the exclusionary narratives of both art historical pasts and futures. **Didier Morelli**, in his profile of Kamissa Ma Koïta, a Quebec City-born visual and performance artist, cultural worker, curator, and trans activist, discusses Ma Koïta's use of digital photomontage, live dialogic events, diachronic installations, and the embodied remixing of local and international art histories. Morelli considers the ways in which Ma Koïta celebrates queer Black life by decentering the white patriarchal monolith of the western canon with agency. Morelli discusses a range of mediums by considering three recent pieces by the artist. Drawing on performance theory and Black studies, including notions of disidentification (José Esteban Muñoz), on the historicity of race in constituting trans worlds (C. Riley Snorton), and on the memory of racial violence in stillness (Harvey Young), Morelli

presents a reflection on *Reenactment, Nous serons universels*.le.s (2018), *N*gre d'Amérique: Affichage et rectifications* (2018), and *TransFormation* (2019). **Cécilia Bracmort**, in her contribution to the volume, takes the reader through the multifarious layers of French-Congolese artist Nicolas Premier's film *Africa is the Future* (2020–ongoing), which is broadcast exclusively during each new moon. Bracmort offers an overview of the work's pan-African odyssey of intertwined temporalities and considers the ways that Premier's work-ritual examines the repeated violence suffered by Black communities over centuries and the ingenuity, resilience, spirituality, and arts which have endured since. Bracmort's analysis further reflects on the evolution of the project and proposes different readings of this meaningful work.

Salting, like archiving, is a vital practice of preservation which this journal issue aims to enact through the selected texts. It is the ongoing act of remembering and future-proofing histories and practices such as the ones included within this special issue. With these texts, salt. *For the preservation of Black diasporic visual histories* takes another crucial step in the expansion of discourses around Black diasporic artistic practices and cultural production. The special issue seeks to carve out space for an increasingly complex and layered understanding of these artists' work and for a more rigorous engagement with Black Canada within the larger context of Black Atlantic art. As we enter the third cultural season since the explosion of institutional responses to Black Lives Matter protests in the wake of George Floyd's murder, it is all the more crucial to be wary of the tendency toward "ethnic envy," as Amelia Jones puts it—that is, the institutional habit of "incorporat[ing] works by artists of colour in order to raise the status of the institution as culturally aware and politically on point" without sustained and substantial support of these same communities.¹¹ Jones uses the phrase "ethnic envy" as a way of describing a tendency that emerged in the 1990s wherein major art organizations would "include" BIPOC artists to appear politically aligned with them, while making no institutional changes

to support this claim. This same issue is also addressed by the conceptions of "blips" in time, per Andrea Fatona, or the "special effect" of Blackness in Canada, per Idil Abdillahi and Rinaldo Walcott, both of which name the particular ebb and flow of Black visibility in Canadian cultural spaces.¹² This trend is often par for the course when it comes to relationships between Black art makers/writers/workers and cultural institutions in this country.¹³ *salt*, then, is also a reminder of the commitments made and the need to continue to stretch this significant work across time and space, beyond and beyond. ¶

Pamela Edmonds is the Director and Curator at Dalhousie Art Gallery in Halifax. She holds an MA in Art History from Concordia University.
—pamela.edmonds@dal.ca

Joana Joachim is Assistant professor of Black studies in art education, art history and social justice at Concordia University. She holds a PhD in Art History and Gender, Sexuality and Feminist Studies from McGill University.
—joana.joachim@concordia.ca

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2. Andrea Fatona, Deanna Bowen, Peter James Hudson, Rinaldo Walcott, and Alison Kenzie, *Reading the Image: Poetics of the Black Diaspora: Deanna Bowen, Christopher Cozier, Michael Fernandes, Maud Sulter* (Chatham, ON: Thames Art Gallery, 2006), n.p.
3. Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America, 1780–1865* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 45.
4. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (Port Watson, NY: Minor Compositions, 2013); Fred Moten, "The Case of Blackness," *Criticism* 50, no. 2 (2008): 177–218; Fred Moten, *Stolen Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018); Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019); Katherine McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021).
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salt. Pour la préservation des récits historiques visuels des diasporas noires

Pamela Edmonds et Joana Joachim

La salaison est un procédé très ancien de conservation des aliments, courant avant la réfrigération moderne. Au début de la période coloniale, les navires en provenance du Canada se rendaient dans les Caraïbes chargés de denrées, comme la morue salée, pour les échanger contre des marchandises produites par le travail forcé de personnes africaines réduites en esclavage¹. Le poisson salé est encore aujourd'hui un aliment de base dans la cuisine des diasporas noires. Le rôle central joué par la morue salée reflète les multiples façons dont le Canada est étroitement relié à la vie des diasporas noires, que ce soit à l'intérieur ou à l'extérieur de ses frontières².

Les actes de conservation tels que la salaison impliquent une certaine prévoyance dans le but de faire face à des besoins futurs. De la même manière, la préservation des récits historiques par la pratique archivistique veille à assurer la pérennité de la mémoire collective. Comme l'explique Marcus Wood dans son étude sur la culture visuelle de l'esclavage : « Ce dont nous nous souvenons est défini par ce que nous choisissons d'oublier, et la façon dont nous choisissons de nous souvenir est définie par la façon dont nous choisissons d'ignorer³. » La recherche archivistique sur les récits historiques des diasporas noires se heurte à des obstacles dus à des barrières institutionnelles profondément ancrées et à des exclusions et suppressions qui existent depuis longtemps. De nombreux facteurs sont en cause, notamment la perte d'information en raison d'omissions ou d'opacité lors de la collecte ou de la préservation des récits historiques noirs. Les archives noires – les histoires noires –

ne sont pas reconnues ou déchiffrables de la même manière que les archives et les histoires occidentales dans les contextes de suprématie blanche. Les archives noires sont oppositionnelles à bien des égards. Elles sont une extension de la nature ontologique de la noireté – enracinée dans des réseaux fugitifs et rhizomatiques qui transcendent le temps et l'espace et qui ne peuvent pas toujours être contenus ou combattus dans les cadres limités du monde universitaire occidental⁴. Cette situation est aggravée par le fait que, dans le contexte canadien, il n'existe pas d'archives consacrées aux communautés noires à l'échelle nationale⁵. Cette absence a pour effet de situer l'histoire noire sur ce territoire comme étant nécessairement à l'extérieur du récit plus vaste de l'endroit que l'on appelle actuellement le Canada.

Dans la discipline de l'histoire de l'art occidentale, ces exclusions se sont traduites par une sous-représentation marquée de la culture des diasporas noires dans les publications critiques, les grandes expositions et les collections institutionnelles. Ces lacunes perpétuent le cycle de la non-préservation et, par extension, de la marginalisation des histoires de l'art canadiennes noires⁶. Le manque d'écrits critiques et d'acquisitions publiques d'œuvres d'artistes des diasporas noires, particulièrement au Canada, contribue de façon importante à la pénurie de connaissances sur les trajectoires historiques globales de l'esthétique des diasporas noires et sur ses sensibilités formelles et conceptuelles. Un examen critique de ces questions a récemment été mené au Canada, par exemple dans *Canadian Journal of*

History/Annales canadiennes d'histoire (« Black Canadian Creativity, Expressive Cultures, and Narratives of Space and Place », décembre 2021), et dans des numéros particuliers de *C Magazine* (le numéro 144, « Déjà Vu », et le numéro 145, « Criticism, Again »), et *Canadian Art* (« Chroma », automne 2020), ainsi que dans le livre *Towards an African Canadian Art History: Art, Memory, and Resistance* (2018), et malgré cette avancée, il demeure nécessaire de s'investir et de porter attention à l'art des communautés noires. Les engagements pris envers l'art noir au Canada ont historiquement et en bonne partie émergé des communautés noires et ont été dirigés par des femmes noires travaillant dans ce milieu⁷. En effet, celles-ci ont joué un rôle clé dans la plupart des publications mentionnées ci-dessus.

De façon plus générale, les histoires de l'art des diasporas noires sont documentées de manière sporadique, donnant lieu à des lacunes dans les savoirs. En Europe, par exemple, une grande partie de la recherche sur l'histoire noire représente de manière disproportionnée les artistes opérant au Royaume-Uni, tandis qu'en Amérique, l'hypervisibilité des États-Unis laisse l'art noir du Canada, de l'Amérique du Sud et des Caraïbes largement sous-étudié⁸. Ces lacunes prennent diverses formes qui vont au-delà de la simple sous-représentation dans les pratiques d'exposition et de collection. Elles se traduisent souvent par des analyses superficielles et incomplètes de l'œuvre des artistes de la communauté noire, ce qui « [...] engendre une lecture critique erronée de certains arts comme étant davantage une forme de plaidoyer social et réduit l'importance accordée aux outils esthétiques et/ou conceptuels à l'œuvre », pour reprendre les réflexions de Naomi Beckwith sur la forme errante⁹. Ce manque d'écriture critique approfondie conduit à une diminution de la compréhension de ces pratiques artistiques dans un contexte historique de l'art plus général qui transcende le temps et l'espace. *salt. Pour la préservation des récits historiques visuels des diasporas noires* cherche à situer ces pratiques artistiques dans les discours sur l'histoire de l'art au Canada et à l'étranger, dans le cadre d'un double processus

continu de récupération historique et de pérennisation, c'est-à-dire le travail simultané de la documentation des pratiques et des histoires de l'art noir qui ont été omises auparavant et la documentation de la production culturelle noire actuelle.

Ce numéro spécial de RACAR présente une série de textes qui abordent de manière critique les enjeux de la préservation et de l'archivage de l'histoire noire au Canada et dans la diaspora en examinant soigneusement les œuvres des artistes des diasporas noires et en les situant dans les discours plus larges de l'histoire mondiale de l'art. Ces textes se penchent sur l'actuel échec des institutions à commémorer les pratiques artistiques des diasporas noires, en documentant et en se concentrant sur les pratiques d'artistes comme Sylvia D. Hamilton, Kamissa Ma Koïta, Charlotte Henay, Mark Stoddart, Deanna Bowen, Elicser Elliott, María Magdalena Campos-Pons, Thelma E. Cambridge, Kendra Frorup, Anina Major, Averia Wright et Nicolas Premier. Ainsi, *salt* est une collection d'écrits qui documentent et font connaître, dans toute leur multiplicité, les artistes de la communauté noire et leurs pratiques. Ce numéro vise non seulement à approfondir la réflexion sur les questions en jeu, mais aussi à créer l'espace nécessaire à la réalisation de cette entreprise essentielle.

Parmi les thèmes majeurs abordés dans les textes figurent les méthodologies et sensibilités archivistiques, qui vont à l'encontre et au-delà des significations, des stratégies et des fonctions occidentales attribuées aux « archives ». Hamilton, Henay et Campbell exposent tour à tour une reformulation de ce que les archives peuvent être et de ce qu'elles pourraient faire dans le domaine des arts visuels et de la production culturelle noire. Dans son essai illustré intitulé « Uncoupling the Archive », **Sylvia D. Hamilton** se penche sur le rôle central qu'occupent les archives publiques et privées dans sa pratique et sa méthodologie artistiques. Dissociant ses découvertes archivistiques de leur forme physique restrictive, elle les refond par le truchement de films documentaires, d'installations multimédias, de

conférences publiques, de l'enseignement, de la poésie et de l'écriture d'essais. Dans ce texte, Hamilton s'appuie sur ses déclarations d'artiste, ses notes de journal, ses images d'installation et ses cartes de préparation des différentes itérations de son travail pour illustrer la façon dont elle découple les archives dans le but de dire la vérité sur les communautés noires historiques au Canada.

Dans son texte « The House That Rosette Built », Charlotte Henay réfléchit aux moyens de déchiffrer les lacunes héritées et transmises dans les archives. Contestant et réfutant les écrits universitaires, ce portfolio met en avant le rêve et la vision en tant qu'espaces légitimes de connaissance en recourant à l'imagination, l'empathie et le rêve pour concevoir des futurs de liberté. Henay définit la technique qu'elle appelle la « méthodologie composite », car elle considère les impacts de l'expérimentation et des méthodologies modifiées comme des entreprises académiques légitimes. À bien des égards, cette méthodologie fait écho aux travaux d'autres spécialistes de la communauté noire, notamment Elizabeth Alexander, Saidiya Hartman et Katherine McKittrick, qui visent à démanteler les conceptions restrictives de la recherche archivistique pour élargir la portée de ce qui constitue la recherche dite légitime ainsi que la production de culture et de connaissances¹⁰. L'approche d'Henay révèle des silences déterminants dans les représentations des sensibilités des femmes noires, contribuant ainsi à l'émergence d'un espace perturbateur qui remet en question le contrôle colonial des récits historiques des femmes noires de la diaspora. À travers le prisme de sa recherche archivistique et en exploitant une multitude de voix, ce travail présente la relationalité dans l'œuvre féministe des diasporas noires comme faisant partie intégrante de l'imagination des futurs. Dans son article « More Life : Beyond the Archival & the Algorithmic », **Mark V. Campbell** s'intéresse aux modes de vie noirs au-delà des relations archivistiques institutionnelles. Campbell réfléchit à ce que l'intégration des approches et des sensibilités archivistiques pourrait signifier pour les

projets de conservation, les relations de mentorat et les pratiques artistiques noires. Qu'est-ce que cela pourrait faire émerger dans la production culturelle noire? En établissant un rapport entre les œuvres de Deanna Bowen, Mark Stoddart et Elicser Elliott et les méthodes d'archivage noires, l'auteur cherche à découvrir le potentiel d'une sensibilité archivistique noire dans le domaine de la production culturelle, sous forme visuelle, sonore et écrite.

Dans leurs contributions à ce numéro spécial, David Hart et Simone Cambridge jettent un regard sur les moments historiques de la vie d'artistes des diasporas noires, en mesurant leur impact sur les pratiques artistiques contemporaines. Dans son texte intitulé « Spoken Softly with Mama: Memory, Monuments, and Black Women's Spaces in Cuba », **David Hart** développe une analyse de la production de María Magdalena Campos-Pons. Dans les années 1990, Campos-Pons a réalisé une série de trois installations multimédias complexes intitulées *The History of People Who Were Not Heroes*. Ces œuvres fonctionnent comme des monuments conceptuels qui, selon Hart, révèlent l'exclusion de la communauté cubaine noire et pauvre des monuments publics et des récits historiques. Hart montre en quoi les installations de Campos-Pons s'opposent aux notions convenues d'espaces domestiques et publics, d'identités nationales, raciales et de genre fixes, ainsi qu'aux systèmes utilisés pour rappeler le passé et tracer les voies de la migration, de la production artistique mondiale et des pratiques de collection. Hart met en avant *Spoken Softly with Mama* [À voix basse maman], 1997, une œuvre conservée dans la collection du Musée des beaux-arts du Canada qu'il analyse comme un symbole de ces questions. L'œuvre de Campos-Pons propose une expérience incarnée qui traverse l'Atlantique noir dans l'espace, le temps et la métaphysique. Dans son texte, « 'It has just begun': Strawcraft in Bahamian Visual Culture », **Simone Cambridge** explore la culture visuelle et la littérature entourant le travail de la paille aux Bahamas et sa relation avec les archives et les récits nationaux. Les pratiques artistiques contemporaines de Kendra

Frörup, Anina Major et Averia Wright lui servent de point de départ pour présenter la thèse de Thelma E. Cambridge, « Growing functional arts in the Bahamas », en se penchant sur sa discussion du travail artisanal de la paille au Bahamas, en étudiant ses techniques et la manière dont celles-ci se traduisent aujourd’hui, ainsi que leur évolution au-delà de la présence coloniale blanche dans les Caraïbes. Avec ces textes, Hart et Cambridge s’attaquent à un enjeu de la préservation, à savoir la nécessité fondamentale de situer l’histoire noire dans le temps et dans l’espace, au sein des récits mondiaux, en même temps que de témoigner de la manière dont les peuples noirs continuent à se déplacer.

Dans la même foulée, Didier Morelli et Cécilia Bracmort soulignent comment les artistes des communautés noires contemporaines insèrent des histoires noires dans les récits d’exclusion des histoires de l’art passées et futures. **Didier Morelli** dresse le portrait de l’artiste, commissaire et activiste transgenre, impliqué dans le milieu culturel et originaire de la ville de Québec, Kamissa Ma Koïta, dont la pratique exploite l’image et la performance. Son usage du photomontage numérique, des événements dialogiques en direct, des installations diachroniques et du remixage incarné des histoires de l’art locales et internationales est explicité par Morelli. Plus encore, ce dernier analyse les stratégies par lesquelles Ma Koïta célèbre la vie des personnes noires queers en décentrant, par l’action, le monolithe patriarcal blanc du canon occidental. Morelli discute d’une variété de moyens d’expression en s’appuyant sur trois pièces récentes de l’artiste. *Reenactment*, *Nous serons universel.le.s*, 2018, *N*gre d’Amérique : Affichage et rectifications*, 2018, et *TransFormation*, 2019, sont étudiées par Morelli qui tire profit de la théorie de la performance et des études noires, notamment les notions de désidentification (José Esteban Muñoz), d’historicité de la race dans la constitution des mondes trans (C. Riley Snorton) et de mémoire de la violence raciale dans l’immobilité (Harvey Young). **Cécilia Bracmort**, dans sa contribution au numéro, guide le lectorat à travers les multiples sens

du film de l’artiste franco-congolais Nicolas Premier, *Africa is the Future* (2020-en cours), une œuvre diffusée exclusivement lors de la nouvelle lune. Bracmort offre une vue d’ensemble de l’odyssée panafricaine des temporalités entrelacées du projet et examine les façons dont l’œuvre-rituel de Premier aborde la violence répétée subie par les communautés noires au cours des siècles et l’ingéniosité, la résilience, la spiritualité et les arts qui perdurent depuis. L’analyse de Bracmort s’attache en outre à l’évolution du projet et propose différentes lectures de cette œuvre significative.

La salaison, tout comme l’archivage, est une pratique essentielle de préservation que ce numéro de la revue vise à mettre en œuvre au moyen des textes sélectionnés. Il s’agit de l’acte continu de se souvenir et de pérenniser des histoires et des pratiques, comme celles qui figurent dans ce numéro spécial. Avec ces textes, *salt. Pour la préservation des récits historiques visuels des diasporas noires* franchit une nouvelle étape déterminante dans l’expansion des discours sur les pratiques artistiques et la production culturelle des diasporas noire. Sa mission est de créer un espace pour une compréhension de plus en plus complexe, sur plusieurs plans, de la création de ces artistes, et pour un engagement plus rigoureux envers le Canada noir dans le contexte plus large de l’art de l’Atlantique noir. Alors que nous entrons dans la troisième saison culturelle depuis l’explosion des réponses institutionnelles aux grandes manifestations de Black Lives Matter déclenchées par le meurtre de George Floyd, il est d’autant plus important de se méfier de la tendance à « l’envie ethnique », comme l’exprime Amelia Jones, c’est-à-dire l’habitude institutionnelle « d’inclure des œuvres d’artistes de couleur dans le but de rehausser le statut de l’institution en la faisant paraître sensible à la diversité culturelle et politiquement dans le vent », sans apporter un soutien durable et substantiel à ces mêmes communautés¹¹. Jones utilise l’expression « envie ethnique » pour décrire une tendance qui a émergé dans les années 1990, voulant que les grandes organisations artistiques saupoudrent ici et là des artistes PANDC dans leurs expositions pour sembler

solidaires avec leurs points de vue politiques sans toutefois faire de changement institutionnel qui soutienne ce parti pris. Cette même question est également abordée par les concepts de « soupirs dans le temps », selon Andrea Fatona, ou « d'effets spéciaux » de la noïreté au Canada, selon Idil Abdillahi et Rinaldo Walcott, expressions qui dénotent toutes deux les fluctuations caractéristiques de la visibilité des personnes noires dans les espaces culturels canadiens¹². Cette tendance tient souvent de la norme dans les relations entre les personnes noires – artistes, écrivaines ou professionnelles de la culture – et les institutions culturelles du pays¹³. *salt*, donc, est aussi un rappel des engagements pris et de la nécessité de continuer à développer cette entreprise significative de par le temps et l'espace, et au-delà encore. ¶

Pamela Edmonds est directrice et conservatrice de la Dalhousie Art Gallery à Halifax. Elle est titulaire d'une maîtrise en histoire de l'art de l'Université Concordia.
—pamela.edmonds@dal.ca

Joana Joachim est professeure adjointe en études noires spécialisée en éducation artistique, en histoire de l'art et en justice sociale à l'Université Concordia. Elle détient un doctorat en histoire de l'art et en études sur le genre, la sexualité et le féminisme de l'Université McGill.
—joana.joachim@concordia.ca

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Africa is the Future : un film de Nicolas Premier

Aux confluences des expériences africaines et afrodescendantes qui transcendent l'espace-temps – ou comment guérir de traumatismes répétés?

Cécilia Bracmort

This article offers an analysis of the film *Africa is the Future* by the French-Congolese artist Nicolas Premier. Mixing historical elements and popular culture by assembling and reassembling archival material ranging from literary and cinematic references to television shows and advertising, *Africa is the Future* highlights the plurality and complexity of the pan-African Black experience. With this work, Premier demonstrates the ongoing connection between the African continent and its diaspora as well as the importance of connecting these different spaces, temporalities, and communities in order to begin a process of healing the many separations and breaks that have occurred over the past centuries. Offering a history of the project as well as a reading of this poetic and compelling work, this text elucidates Premier's focus on ritual, community, and healing.

Cécilia Bracmort est une artiste et une commissaire franco-canadienne vivant à Montréal.
—ccbracmort@gmail.com

Surnommée le « berceau de l'humanité », l'Afrique renvoie à l'enfance de l'homme, à son état premier. Malgré cette dénomination qui pourrait suggérer un droit d'aînesse, force est de constater que le monde occidental porté par le « vieux continent » s'entête à percevoir l'Afrique comme une éternelle enfant, ne reconnaissant aucunement son apport considérable aux richesses du monde (que ce soit hier ou aujourd'hui). Dans notre imaginaire, l'Afrique est réduite à un passé immuable proche de l'État de Nature si cher à Jean-Jacques Rousseau¹. Ce continent est perçu comme un point de départ dans la course à l'évolution linéaire alors qu'il est le territoire vers lequel le monde s'est constamment tourné pour progresser et se réinventer. Par exemple, au XX^e siècle, le renouveau de l'art dit moderne est dû aux rencontres des artistes européens avec la statuaire africaine². Au XXI^e siècle, les outils technologiques de notre quotidien sont des prouesses rendues possibles grâce à l'ajout de métaux millénaires grandement présents dans le sol d'Afrique centrale, à quelques centimètres de nos doigts sans que nous en ayons conscience.

L'association des termes « Afrique » et « futur » peut surprendre, car dans l'imaginaire collectif eurocentré, fondé sur l'idée de progrès, le temps suivrait un modèle linéaire partant d'un stade obscur et primaire allant vers un développement indéfini. Ainsi, comment l'éternel passé peut-il incarner le futur? Ce pourrait-il que le temps soit plus malléable qu'on ne le pense? Dans un passage du roman d'Édouard Glissant, *Tout-Monde*, la notion éponyme montre la possibilité que des histoires diverses puissent se répéter : les notions de temps, de destinée et d'histoire se « croisent, se rencontrent et se repoussent³ ». Le temps et l'espace semblent converger et la perception du temps et de l'expérience est ainsi plus cyclique.

Dans son œuvre multimédia *Africa is the Future*, l'artiste franco-congolais Nicolas Premier joue sur ces deux temporalités, cyclique et linéaire, mais également sur d'autres notions liées au temps : celles du deuil et de la résilience. Le film *Africa is the Future* est sorti en pleine période de profonds bouleversements, pendant la pandémie mondiale de coronavirus et les manifestations Black Life Matter à la suite du meurtre de George Floyd. Il traite des répétitions de l'histoire et des traumatismes incessants vécus au sein de la communauté noire. Dans sa structure, ses messages et son évolution, l'œuvre croise le temps présent à d'autres temporalités qui influencent

notre histoire personnelle et collective, mais interrogent aussi les traumatismes et le processus de deuil qui en résultent. Comment guérir lorsque les violences physiques et psychologiques se répètent inlassablement?

Créé entre 2001 et 2020, *Africa is the Future* a emprunté de nombreuses formes, mais son fondement tient en une phrase, que l'on pourrait considérer d'abord comme une boutade ou une provocation. Au fil du temps, l'œuvre a évolué pour devenir ce rituel-vidéo de trente minutes, accessible uniquement à chaque renouveau du cycle lunaire, c'est-à-dire à la nouvelle lune. À travers l'histoire et l'analyse de cette œuvre complexe et poétique, nous en constaterons les différentes lectures et verrons émerger les stratégies utilisées par Premier pour affirmer que l'Afrique est bel est bien le futur.

1. Les nombreuses amorces et formes du projet

La création d'*Africa is the Future* a connu plusieurs étapes et l'œuvre a été de nombreuses fois réinventée avant de prendre sa forme actuelle. Attardons-nous un moment sur l'évolution du projet pour en comprendre les intentions profondes et constater les multiples directions qu'il a pu prendre en presque vingt années de développement.

La création de l'œuvre s'ouvre lors du premier voyage de Nicolas Premier à Congo-Brazzaville⁴, en 2001, marqué par sa reconnexion avec ses origines et l'expérience d'un territoire en guerre. En effet, depuis un coup d'État en 1997 permettant à l'actuel président, surnommé « l'Empereur », Denis Sassou Nguesso, de reprendre le pouvoir perdu en 1992 face à Pascal Lissouba, le pays connaît une guerre civile qui va durer plusieurs années. En quatre⁵ années de conflit, lié à des affrontements entre armées et milices défendant les intérêts des différentes parties au combat, le résultat est un nombre important de morts, la disparition de certaines de personnes et la fuite de nombreuses autres vers les pays voisins⁶. Toutes ces atrocités se sont passées dans l'indifférence de la communauté internationale, malgré les appels de certains membres de la communauté congolaise en exil⁷. Le voyage de Nicolas Premier prend place alors que cela fait quatre années que dure la guerre civile. Arrive le 11 septembre 2001 avec la chute du World Trade Center. Ce choc international a suscité une dissonance cognitive chez l'artiste qui se trouvait alors dans un espace en pleine guerre. Il s'est interrogé sur l'immédiateté de la sympathie de la population locale pour cette catastrophe alors qu'elle-même vivait des heures sombres dans une indifférence consternante. Ce conflit et ses conséquences restent toujours peu connus et compris de la population mondiale.

De retour en France, une exposition d'arts visuels en lien avec ce voyage constitue la seconde étape de création. C'est à ce moment-là que l'expression *Africa is the Future* apparaît pour la première fois. Les peintures réalisées par l'artiste sont des portraits de gens rencontrés durant son séjour. Envisagée dans un premier temps uniquement comme titre pour l'exposition, la phrase devient rapidement un slogan qui, imprimé sur des t-shirts lors du vernissage, rencontre un grand succès. C'est ainsi que la troisième

1. Dans son *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (1755), Rousseau développe le concept d'« État de nature » et le « mythe du Bon Sauvage ».

2. Colin Rhodes, *Primitivism and modern art*, Londres, Thames and Hudson, 1994, p. 107.

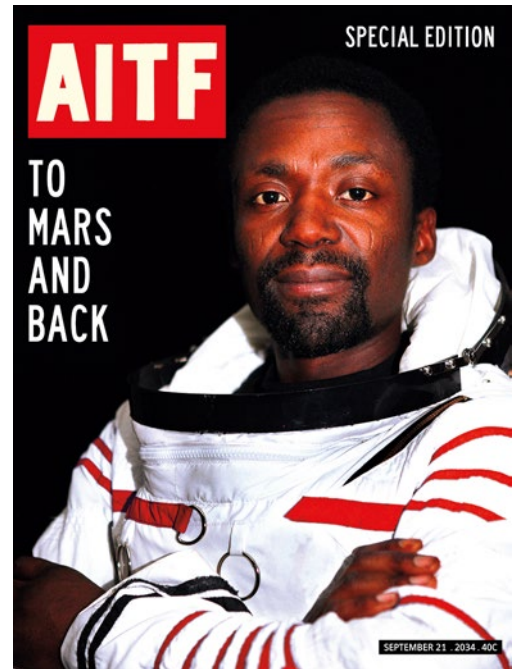
3. Édouard Glissant, *Le Tout-Monde*, Paris, Gallimard, 1993 p. 52.

4. Anciennement, le Congo-Brazzaville faisait partie de Afrique-Équatoriale française (AEF). Pour distinguer de quel Congo on parle, on se réfère à la capitale : Congo-Brazzaville pour la République du Congo et le Congo-Kinshasa pour la RDC ou République Démocratique du Congo.

5. Les dates de cette guerre fluctuent entre 1997 et 2002, ainsi qu'entre 1993 et 2003, dépendamment si on considère les conflits plus localisés qui ont eu lieu en 1993.

6. Selon Patrice Yenga, le bilan de guerre compte plus de 30 000 morts, près de 200 000 blessés, 4000 habitations détruites, 800 00 déplacés et près de 100 000 femmes violées. Voir *La guerre civile au Congo-Brazzaville 1993-2002 chacun aura sa part*, Paris, Éditions Karthala, 2006, p. 387.

7. Jean-Claude Mayima-Mbemba, *La violence politique au Congo-Brazzaville, devoir de mémoire contre l'impunité*, Paris, Éditions L'Harmattan, 2008, p. 40-41.



Figures 1 et 2 : Nicolas Premier, couverture du magazine *AITF*, *AITF Covers* ©2015. Avec l'aimable autorisation de l'artiste.

phase s'opère avec la création de la marque du même nom. Associé à son acolyte, l'artiste Patrick Ayamam, Nicolas Premier développe une ligne de T-shirt arborant le fameux slogan. L'avant-dernière étape prend la forme d'un projet de journal pour célébrer les dix ans de la marque de vêtement, en 2014. Premier crée les unes du magazine imaginaire *AITF* et projette l'Afrique comme la première puissance mondiale dans les années 2030. Par cette initiative, le projet revêt clairement un aspect afrofuturiste, en ce qu'il offre une vision de ce que pourrait être le continent dans un futur éventuel et remet en question les représentations que le monde occidental donne du continent. Le projet joue avec les codes du photojournalisme, particulièrement du magazine *Life*, qui pose les bases de ce genre de revue dans toute sa complexité et son imaginaire. Les retournements symboliques sont cinquants et mettent en échec l'imaginaire erroné que le monde entretient sur le continent africain. Les sujets choisis s'éloignent des images misérabilistes peuplées de sauveurs blancs; le créateur met en scène une société africaine triomphante et bien inscrite dans le futur. Ainsi, les photos annoncent notamment le retour de l'obélisque de Paris à Louxor | fig. 1 |, faisant ainsi référence aux nombreux monuments et objets venant d'Afrique, offerts ou pillés durant les années 1880 et occupant les musées occidentaux. Dans une autre mesure, on voit le portrait d'un cosmonaute africain qui souligne son retour de la planète Mars | fig. 2 | ou encore de docteurs africains qui prodiguent une aide humanitaire aux pays européens. Dans cette phase du projet, les publications d'*AITF* prônent une récupération (*reclaim*) de l'histoire et de la représentation des communautés noires africaines. Elles effectuent un

retournement narratif et, par la même occasion, contestent le bien-fondé des images originelles. Ce procédé s'inscrit pleinement dans une esthétique afrofuturiste semblable aux réflexions de l'auteur Reynaldo Anderson, dans son texte « Afrofuturism 2.0 & the Black Speculative Art Movement : Notes on a Manifesto » :

Afrofuturism 2.0 is the beginning of both a move away and an answer to the Eurocentric perspective of the 20th century's early formulation of Afrofuturism that wondered if the history of African peoples, especially in North America, had been deliberately erased. Or to put it more plainly, future-looking Black scholars, artists, and activists are not only reclaiming their right to tell their own stories, but also to critique the European/American digerati class of their narratives about cultural others, past, present and future and, challenging their presumed authority to be the sole interpreters of Black lives and Black futures⁸.

Dans son essai, Anderson tend à démontrer que la notion d'afrofuturisme fait également partie d'un terme parapluie, le Black Speculative Art Movement (BSAM), qui englobe d'autres sensibilités de mouvements africanistes⁹. Ainsi, la vidéo *Africa is the Future*, bien que liée par son titre à l'afrofuturisme, pourrait bien exprimer d'autres formes de catégorisation du BSAM.

2. « Autrefois et maintenant c'est pareil... », ou la reconnaissance de l'aspect cyclique de l'histoire et du temps

Les premiers instants du film nous plongent dans un vortex bleu infini dans lequel notre regard vogue. Viennent ensuite les premières phrases d'introduction qui confirment que les cloisons étanches entre le passé, le présent et le futur sont ici inexistantes :

The future is already there.

It has always been.

It precedes and begets the reality.

Les images qui suivent mettent l'accent sur la répétition d'expériences traumatiques vécues au sein des communautés noires. Une référence contemporaine avec une vue rapprochée sur un bateau de personnes migrantes voguant sur la mer Méditerranée conduit à une histoire datant du XVI^e siècle, qui est racontée en parallèle, celle d'un bateau négrier, ironiquement nommé le Misericordia, partant de l'île de Sao Tomé¹⁰. Ainsi, Premier connecte deux histoires de migration.

Par ces assemblages, *Africa is the Future* rend visible les injustices répétées dans l'histoire, tout en mettant l'accent sur les nombreuses formes de résistance face à ces injustices. Les différents mouvements du film distillent ces preuves de résistance, afin de faire face au racisme structurel¹¹ qui cherche discrètement à les effacer. En cela, on y trouve également des points communs avec le projet de l'artiste canadienne Camille Turner, *Afronautic Research Lab*, qui a notamment été présenté à Montréal¹² et dans d'autres villes canadiennes. Cette installation, mêlée à une performance où les Afronautes reviennent sur terre après 10 000 ans d'absence, démontre

8. Reynaldo Anderson, « Afrofuturism 2.0 & the Black Speculative Arts Movement: Notes on a Manifesto », *Obsidian*, vol. 42, n° 1-2, 2016, p. 230.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 234-235.

10. Eric Robert Taylor, *If We Must Die: Shipboard Insurrections in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, 2006, p. 180.

11. Reni Eddo-Lodge, *Le racisme est un problème de Blancs*, Paris, édition Autrement, 2018, p. 86-87.

12. Présentation de la performance *Afronautic Research Lab* de Camille Turner à Artex, Montréal, le 10 novembre 2018.

par l'accumulation d'archives à la lueur de la loupe l'aspect répétitif des violences, que ce soit au Canada ou à l'international. Turner rassemble ainsi les preuves pour mieux combattre les violences silencieuses du système.

Contrairement à la conception de l'afrofuturisme davantage tournée sur le futur, la technologie et l'imaginaire (spéculation), dans la séquence de Premier, un événement réel présent et un événement réel passé se superposent pour créer un instant surréel rappelant l'idée du *Tout Monde* de Glissant, où s'opère « une transformation réelle de l'esprit et de la sensibilité [...] une mise en relation¹³ ». En revanche, la notion d'afrosurréalisme a davantage sa place pour définir l'expérience qui débute. Dans son manifeste, D. Scot Miller distingue l'afrofuturisme de l'afrosurréalisme¹⁴ en comparant leur angle d'action : d'un côté, il présente l'afrofuturisme comme un mouvement (« [...] diaspora intellectual and artistic movement that turns to science, technology, and science fiction to speculate on black possibilities in the future¹⁵ »), tandis qu'il définit l'afrosurréalisme comme le questionnement de la notion de futur et l'associe au temps de l'instant (*Right Now*), car les atrocités imaginées dans un futur possible sont finalement déjà arrivées¹⁶. Un glissement entre le projet éditorial AITF et la Vidéo *Africa is the Future* est à constater ici. Le premier projet se concentre sur un futur possible tandis que l'œuvre vidéo souligne la notion de *future-past* constitutive du manifeste afrosurréaliste. Le pire est déjà arrivé et il ne fait que réapparaître comme un fantôme.

La référence à la mythologie kongo, particulièrement son cosmogramme | fig. 3 | dans la structure de l'œuvre, renforce l'aspect cyclique de la vie humaine que Premier met de l'avant, mais également la relation poreuse entre le monde des morts et celui des vivants. L'œuvre retrace « une société de morts et de vivants », où les histoires s'entrecroisent et se font écho. Divisé en quatre grandes parties ou mouvements¹⁷, le film reprend visuellement, par ses nombreux montages, le principe du *call-response*, important dans les cultures africaines et afrodescendantes. Mêlant faits historiques, extraits de films, images d'archives et références populaires, comme des clips musicaux, des publicités et des reproductions d'œuvres d'art, le film présente un caractère composite qui suit les principes d'hybridation et de surnaturel chers au manifeste, mais donne surtout à voir toute la richesse de l'expérience diasporique africaine, qui ne demande qu'à être vue.

L'ironie tient une grande place dans *Africa is the Future*, dans lequel une voix stipule : « Autrefois et maintenant, c'est pareil, le temps n'a rien à faire avec le bonheur ». On peut alors estimer qu'il en va de même avec la douleur et le deuil, en lien avec la traite de l'esclavage et ses conséquences jusqu'à nos jours. En plus de l'aventure du réalisateur dans l'élaboration de AITF depuis 2004, l'ouvrage *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* de Christina Sharpe¹⁸ a beaucoup apporté au développement du projet. Dans *In the Wake*, Sharpe réfléchit à l'expérience noire et travaille sur les nombreux sens du terme *wake*. En Anglais, il fait référence au deuil, donc à la prévalence de la mort, à la trace laissée par un navire sur la mer et à la notion d'éveil ou de prise de conscience¹⁹. Nicolas Premier se sert de la polysémie de ce mot pour éveiller

13. Glissant, op. cit., p. 54.

14. D. Scot Miller, « Close-Up: Afrosurrealism: AFROSURREAL MANIFESTO Black Is the New black—a 21st-Century Manifesto », *Black Camera, An International Film Journal*, vol. 5, n° 1, automne 2013, p. 113-117.

15. [Notre traduction] [...] un mouvement artistique qui se tourne vers la science, la technologie et la science-fiction pour imaginer les possibilités [des personnes] noires dans le futur. Ibid., p. 114.

16. « What is the future? The future has been around so long it is now the past. Afrosurrealists expose this from a "future-past" called RIGHT NOW ». Ibid.

17. Les œuvres ont été diffusées en quatre parties, entre juin et août 2020. L'œuvre finale rassemble les quatre mouvements en un seul film.

18. Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2016.

19. Ibid., p. 21.

notre conscience sur cette mémoire ancienne, toujours vivante à travers son assemblage d'images. Dans le troisième mouvement du film, une citation de *In the Wake* fait surface et introduit la notion de *residence time*, qui indique le temps nécessaire à un élément chimique pour se disloquer et disparaître :

Human blood is salty, and sodium [...] has a residence time of 260 million years. And what happens to the energy that is produced in the waters? It continues cycling like atoms in residence time. We, black people, exist in the residence time of the wake. The time in which "everything is now, It is all now"²⁰.

Toujours dans *In the Wake*, l'autrice fait référence au massacre du Zong, un navire négrier du XVIII^e siècle également en partance de Sao Tomé et à destination de la Jamaïque. Cette tragédie fait l'objet de textes, notamment de la part de l'écrivaine M. NourbeSe Philip qui, dans son recueil de poèmes *Zong!* (2008), revendique la défense des morts. Celle d'une centaine d'individus que l'équipage a simplement jetés à la mer à cause d'une mauvaise gestion des vivres et de l'incompétence du capitaine à arriver à destination. Bien qu'il n'y ait plus de corps à réclamer à l'océan²¹, ces ancêtres sont bel et bien toujours là par le sel présent dans l'eau. Par l'assemblage de ces références, il se produit un effet choral où les histoires, les idées et les mots s'amplifient les uns les autres pour donner une présence aux invisibles, honorer leur mémoire, mettre en lumière les violences qu'ils ont subies et exposer les relations que ces douloureuses histoires entretiennent avec notre temporalité.

3. Corps et terre, sites de nombreux traumatismes

Les violences infligées aux corps et à la terre sont intimement liées. Ce constat est très bien mis en exergue dans le premier mouvement du film, notamment par des séquences qui présentent les différentes étapes de fabrication de globes terrestres. Ces images ont une charge particulière, car l'association de mains blanches qui découpent et assemblent les cartes de l'Afrique | **fig. 4** | fait rapidement penser à la construction du *white gaze* et à la diffusion de la vision occidentalisation du monde. Dans le film, l'allusion à la projection de Mercator, connue pour réduire les dimensions du continent africain aux profits des territoires européens, renforce l'idée de distorsion de la réalité, laquelle constitue une forme de violence d'ordre psychologique et assoit les rapports inégaux entre le continent africain et le Nord Global.

Le second mouvement du film met l'accent sur les violences faites à la terre par l'extraction abusive des mines et autres ressources naturelles. La succession de plans rapprochés sur des mains montre l'utilisation des corps noirs qui constituent la précieuse main d'œuvres, ou « l'énergie humaine » qui répond aux besoins voraces de la colonisation. Ces besoins insatiables épuisent les corps qui veillent à l'extraction, à leur risque et péril, des minéraux dont se nourrit le marché mondial.

20. Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, 1987, cité par Christina Sharpe, *ibid.*, p. 41.

21. En référence à l'expression employée par Christina Sharpe : « But there is no retrieving bone from its watery wake ». *Ibid.*, p. 38.

Une séquence de quelques secondes dans le troisième mouvement du film renforce cette idée de prédation par la présentation de vues satellites de la terre. Progressivement, les effets de l'extraction intensive des sols transforment cet environnement naturel d'un vert profond en un patchwork de verts indiquant la division progressive du terrain pour différentes cultures. La séquence se termine par le glissement de cet environnement naturel vers un environnement électronique avec la vue d'une carte mère d'ordinateur contenant les fameux minéraux. Dans l'ouvrage *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, l'autrice Kathryn Yusoff conteste la neutralité de la géologie, science étudiant la terre et ses composantes, et veut faire reconnaître les considérations raciales qui teintent la discipline pour démontrer la connexion entre les violences faites à la terre à celles faites aux corps noirs et racisés dans l'extraction des minéraux²².

À travers l'étude de Yusoff, on peut clairement associer les propriétés des minéraux à celles des corps recherchés et exploités, et ce, en raison de leurs propriétés fongibles, c'est-à-dire de leur capacité à être remplacés par une autre valeur, autrement dit, une marchandise interchangeable²³. Selon Yusoff, le corps noir devient aussi « inhumain » ou inerte que les minéraux qu'il aurait extraits de ses propres mains²⁴. Cette analyse nous fait réaliser à quel point le manque de sympathie ou de compassion envers les personnes noires brutalisées semble inévitable en raison de la constitution du système capitaliste intrinsèquement négrophobe semble inévitable en raison de la constitution du système capitaliste intrinsèquement négrophobe, qui voit le corps noir et le continent africain comme la ressource principale de matière première et une grande source de profits.

4. Révolutions de la Terre, révolution des corps

Révolution \ʁe.vɔ̃. ly.sjɔ̃\ n. f. Du latin *revolutio*, 'cycle, retour', famille de *volvere* 'faire rouler' et accomplir en roulant

I – Mouvement en courbe fermée

- a. Retour périodique d'un astre à un point de son orbite; marche, mouvement d'un tel astre.
- b. Rotation complète d'un corps mobile autour de son axe (axe de révolution).

II – Changement soudain

- a. Changement brusque et important dans l'ordre social, moral; transformation complète.
- b. Coup d'État.

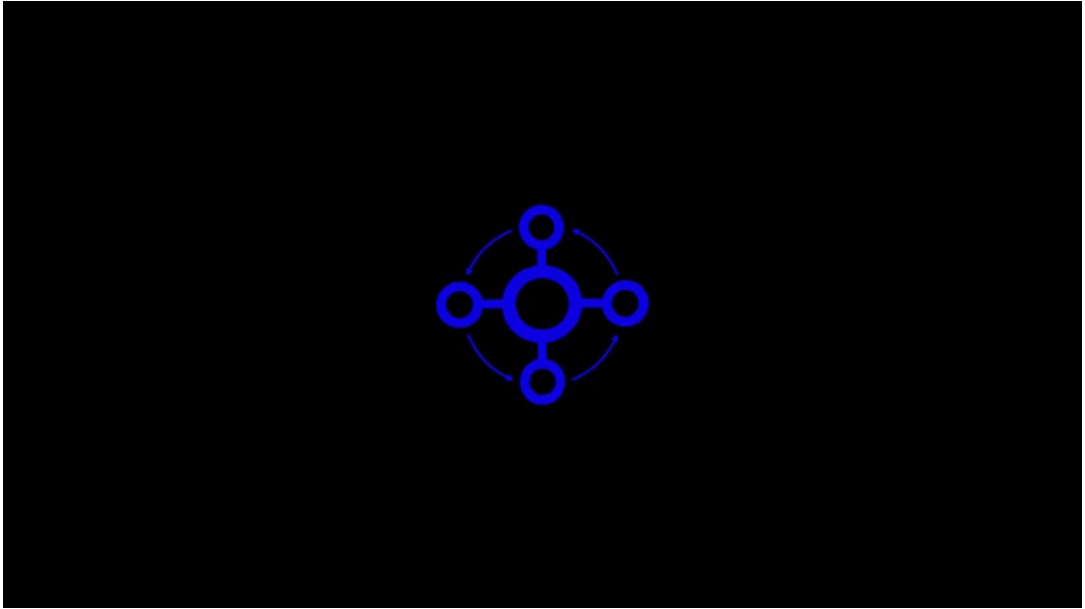
*Le Petit Robert de la langue française*²⁵

22. Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, University of Minnesota Press, 2018.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

25. *Le Petit Robert de la langue française*, Paris, Le Robert, 2011.



Figures 3 et 4 : Nicolas Premier, *AFRICA IS THE FUTURE* © 2020.
Photographie de film. Avec l'aimable autorisation de l'artiste.



Figure 5 : Nicolas Premier, *AFRICA IS THE FUTURE* © 2020. Photographie de film. Avec l'aimable autorisation de l'artiste. Référence à l'œuvre originale ici représentée : attribuée à Annibal Carrache (1560-1609), *Portrait d'une femme africaine portant une pendule*, v. 1580, huile sur toile, 60 × 39,5 cm (détail), Tomasso Brothers (Leeds). **Figure 6 :** Nicolas Premier, *AFRICA IS THE FUTURE* © 2020. Photographie de film. Avec l'aimable autorisation de l'artiste.

A. Le cercle et la ligne

La notion polysémique de révolution est très présente et s'intègre dans chaque mouvement d'*Africa is the Future*. Premièrement, le cercle est omniprésent et revient fréquemment, d'abord, dans la forme du cosmogramme, mais aussi dans divers éléments ou courtes séquences, comme dans la forme sphérique des astres tels que la terre, le soleil, ou la lune. Le cercle s'inscrit également dans certains éléments culturels, comme des boucles d'oreilles dites créoles ou des plans de danse rassemblant les danseurs et danseuses en cercle ou encore les faisant tourner sur elleux-mêmes.

Dans ces extraits, le cercle fait parfois opposition à la ligne droite et montre une certaine conflictualité entre deux visions du monde. D'un côté, la vision linéaire et tranchée, fait référence aux notions de contrôle et de pouvoir inhérentes à la conception occidentale du progrès. De l'autre, le cercle renvoie aux notions de relation et d'appartenance, à la communauté et au fonctionnement du vivant en lien avec les traditions africaines. Ainsi, la ligne évoque l'extraction, la coupure et la séparation, que l'on observe notamment dans les extraits présentant des lignes de chemin de fer, la ligne d'extraction du caoutchouc ou encore la coupe d'un arbre. Le cercle en appelle au vivant, à l'organique, comme la forme cylindrique d'un ouragan ou d'une cellule, raccordant la vie et la mort à un même processus qui se renouvelle continuellement, tandis que la ligne fait référence à la destruction, le siphonnement des ressources sans partage.

B. La fin des illusions

La deuxième signification de révolution fait référence à l'idée d'un changement brutal en réaction à un système menant à un nouvel ordre social ou représentatif. Ainsi, nous revenons à la chute des tours jumelles du World Trade Center, qui marque au fer rouge les consciences et ébranle le sentiment d'invulnérabilité des États-Unis, et ce, particulièrement sur son propre territoire²⁶. Ainsi, le 11 septembre 2001 marque un point de bascule où les États-Unis, et bon nombre de pays alliés dont la France et le Canada, vont également subir une série d'attaques terroristes fragilisant aussi leur sentiment de puissance et entraînant, au fil des années, une montée de la violence à l'échelle mondiale. Un sentiment de fin du monde se répand dans le Nord Global qui répond à cette crainte du changement par une méfiance accrue envers les corps racisés, particulièrement arabes et musulmans depuis cette date.

Cette méfiance a donné lieu à une sorte de chasse aux sorcières et à la création de politiques déterminant qui est légitimement liée, ou non, à une certaine conception de l'identité nationale²⁷. Finalement, la montée de l'extrême droite et d'autres mouvements populistes dans bon nombre de pays (en Europe, en Amérique du Nord ou du Sud) est une autre preuve de la peur de voir disparaître une civilisation²⁸. Un mode de vie idéalisé est mis en péril, d'un côté par des violences mortifères d'attaques terroristes et de l'autre, par la crainte irrationnelle de voir venir par milliers une horde de migrants sur des radeaux de fortune qui – dans un imaginaire étriqué –

26. Jacques Beltran et Guillaume Parmentier, « Les États-Unis à l'épreuve de la vulnérabilité », *Politique Étrangère*, vol. 66, n° 4, Institut Français des Relations Internationales, 2001, p. 777-792, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42675696> (le 24 février 2022).

27. Léa Villalba, « Laïcité française et québécoise, même combat? », *Maudit Français*, <https://mauditsfrancais.ca/laicite-francaise-et-quebecoise-meme-combat/> (le 25 février 2022).

28. Frédéric Joignot, « Le fantasme du « grand remplacement » démographique », *Le Monde*, le 23 janvier 2014. https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2014/01/23/le-grand-boniment_4353499_823448.html (le 24 février 2022).

mettrait en péril l'intégrité de la culture occidentalisée et mondialisée; sans pour autant reconnaître à aucun moment les responsabilités de l'Occident dans les instabilités politiques et sociales à l'origine même du départ de ces individus. Comme l'indique Yusoff : « The Anthropocene might seem to offer a dystopic future that laments the end of the world, but imperialism and ongoing (settler) colonialisms have been ending worlds for as long as they have been in existence²⁹ ». Présentée dans le film, la phrase de l'autrice franco-camerounaise Léonora Miano fait magnifiquement écho à la citation de Yusoff à propos de la fin du monde tant redoutée : « On ne dit jamais que d'autres l'ont vécu avant. Et ces autres qui l'ont vécu avant, ils ont une bonne nouvelle pour vous : on n'en meurt pas de la disparition du monde connu, on invente autre chose. »

Ainsi s'amorce dans le film un reversement spatio-temporel, qui « pirate le flux des images³⁰ » et mêle l'expérience de la révolte du Misericordia du XVI^e siècle à une expérience plus contemporaine d'un capitaine qui contacte par radio les secours en raison d'un naufrage près de Sao Tomé. Ici, l'artiste amalgame différentes temporalités qui s'entrechoquent et joue sur la superposition de différentes couches historiques du même espace. Une tension se dégage de cette séquence qui montre des images tournées à rebours et associées à des scènes de destruction. La fin semble proche, mais l'allusion simultanée aux deux navires montre que cette notion de fin du monde peut prendre une forme somme toute relative et renvoie à l'aspect cyclique des choses.

D'un point vu culturel, le film présente ses héros et met fin à certaines illusions quant à l'inexistence de l'influence africaine et afrodescendante dans l'humanité. En opposition à l'idée que « l'homme africain n'est pas assez entré dans l'histoire³¹ », des figures importantes apparaissent pour démontrer le contraire. En passant par des activistes pour les droits civiques des États-Unis, comme Kathleen Cleaver et Malcom X ou le rappeur Tupac Shakur, l'assemblage de ces personnalités résiste à toute forme d'étanchéité³², qu'elle soit sociale ou encore historique. D'autres étoiles noires³³, reconnues hors du continent américain, sont également mises en lumière. Tout d'abord, la légendaire patineuse française Surya Bonaly, qui a révolutionné la discipline du patinage artistique féminin, et que l'on voit dans le film alternant pirouettes et spirales sur son axe de rotation. Un autre plan du film montre ensuite l'historien sénégalais Cheikh Anta Diop qui, par ses travaux, a effectué une contre-attaque psychologique envers les imaginaires occidentaux par ses thèses et ses travaux sur les civilisations africaines précoloniales, montrant leur contribution aux développements culturels de l'Europe et du monde et affirmant leurs places dans l'histoire³⁴. Enfin, d'autres étoiles noires à des années-lumière plus lointaines posent devant nous et affirment leur présence dans l'Europe de l'époque moderne | fig. 5 |, cassant ainsi l'idée que l'arrivée des Noirs-es en Europe remonte seulement au temps de l'après-indépendance. Un fragment de tableau des années 1580, attribué à l'artiste italien Annibal Carrache, présente une femme noire au regard perçant et au sourire énigmatique avec une si grande présence qu'on oublierait

29. [Notre traduction] L'Anthropocène semble offrir un futur dystopique qui conduit à la fin du monde, mais l'impérialisme et les colonialismes continus mettent fin à des mondes depuis qu'ils existent. Kathryn Yusoff, op. cit., p. xiii.

30. Nicolas Premier, dans un entretien en visioconférence avec l'autrice, le 21 mai 2021.

31. « Le discours de Dakar de Nicolas Sarkozy, l'intégralité du discours du président de la République, prononcé le 26 juillet 2007 », *Le Monde*, 9 novembre 2007, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2007/11/09/le-discours-de-dakar_976786_3212.html (août 2021).

32. Édouard Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation, Poétique III*, Paris, Gallimard, 1990, p. 80.

33. En référence à l'ouvrage de Lilian Thuram, *Mes étoiles noires, de Lucy à Barack Obama*, Paris, Éditions Philrely, 2011.

34. Je pense notamment aux ouvrages suivants : Cheikh Anta Diop, *Nations nègres et Culture*, 1^{re} éd. 1954, Paris, éditions Présence Africaine, 1999 et Cheikh Anta Diop, *L'Afrique noire précoloniale*, 1^{re} éd. 1960, Paris, éditions Présence Africaine, 2000.

presque qu'elle n'est pas le sujet principal du tableau. À sa droite, une autre personne plus richement vêtue la devance; sans doute une femme dont on voit le bras habillé d'un vêtement noir. On soupçonne que notre inconnue soit une personne importante dans la maison, son regard assuré révèle une personne au statut honorable, sans doute une couturière par les épingles fixées à son vêtement noir. Cette couleur appelle au respect, car elle est chère à obtenir et signifie par là le pouvoir³⁵. On est en présence d'une personne qui était sans doute libre ou du moins possédait une bonne situation dans la société de l'époque. Cette image témoigne de la présence d'une personne noire à la Renaissance italienne, ce qui constitue une autre narration que celle de la violence et de la souffrance³⁶.

5. Idées de vengeance, de réclamation de justice et d'apaisement par le rituel

À plusieurs reprises, la question « Is that a twisted idea of revenge or something? » revient dans le film. Cette question semble centraliser la réflexion sur une dichotomie noir et blanc, pourtant, comme dans le poème de Maya Angelou *Still I rise* (1978), les propos d'*Africa is the Future* s'élèvent bien au-delà de cela. Plus que de vengeance, il y a ici une idée de justice et de reconnaissance. La vengeance se concentrerait uniquement sur l'envie de voir souffrir l'autre, responsable de notre malheur. Ce que l'on ressent ici, c'est le besoin de réclamer « justice et égalité » pour les morts, comme le clame M. NourbeSe Philip avec l'expression *defending the death*, mais aussi pour les vivants présents et à venir.

Au contraire, la notion de violence sert ici à Philip pour renverser les violences de déshumanisation abordées plus haut avec Yusoff, où le corps noir est déshumanisé et réduit à l'état de matière interchangeable à extraire, en l'occurrence à jeter pour des questions d'assurance. Dans son processus, elle cherche à : « [...] literally cut it into pieces, castrating verbs [...] throwing articles, prepositions, conjunctions, overboard...³⁷ », pour rendre justice aux esprits et leur redonner une humanité, elle contourne la violence originelle. Philip renforce ce processus avec la notion d'hantologie (*hauntology*), qui signifie que, par des notes de bas de page fantomatiques, elle réintroduit les ancêtres dans l'histoire, leur redonne une identité, une individualité disparue avec les archives du bateau³⁸ et redonne aux morts de la dignité³⁹.

Il est intéressant de constater l'idée de rituel, qui lie l'œuvre de Philip à celle de Premier. *Zong!* est un recueil de poèmes qui effectue un travail d'apaisement par l'enquête que mène Philip⁴⁰. Au début du quatrième mouvement d'*Africa is the Future*, la musique se fait plus douce, aérienne, sereine, comme une sorte d'apaisement. Une succession de personnages noirs se tiennent la main ou s'enlacent, montrant sans doute la possibilité d'un futur où les corps noirs seront libérés du poids de siècles de traumatismes. Les mains ne servent pas ici à des tâches éreintantes, elles touchent, se mettent en relation avec autrui et avec la nature | **fig. 6** |. Il se dégage de cette séquence un sentiment d'amour, une énergie si forte et profonde qu'elle pourrait porter n'importe quelle résistance ou révolution.

35. Voir Annibale Carracci, *Portrait of A Woman Holding A Clock*, 1583-1585, sur le blog Fashion History Timeline, <https://fashionhistory.fitnyc.edu/1583-5-carracci-african-woman-clock/> (le 23 février 2022).

36. Beaucoup de doute subsiste au sujet de cette femme. J'ai trouvé le titre de son portrait en français : *Portrait d'une esclave africaine*. Or, sur le site de la galerie Tomasso, où est notamment présentée l'œuvre, les différents titres sont donnés dans la partie provenance de la notice. Pour la décrire, à aucun moment le terme « esclave » n'est utilisé, ni en 1658 ni en 1712, mais uniquement « femme noire portant une horloge ». Donc, le mystère subsiste. Galerie Tomasso, <https://www.tomasso.art/artwork-detail/781241/18036/portrait-of-an-african-woman-holding> (le 24 février 2022).

37. [Notre traduction] [...] mutiler le texte, à le couper en pièce littéralement, à castrer les verbes [...] à jeter par-dessus bord les adjectifs, prépositions, et conjonctions. M. NourbeSe Philip, *Zong!*, Wesleyan University Press, 2008, p. 193.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 200-201.

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

Il serait bien naïf de penser que l'idée de revanche est complètement évacuée du film. On ressent d'ailleurs une ambivalence à ce sujet. Lorsqu'une voix répond à la question sur la vengeance par « No, revenge is useless », un « Yes, maybe you're right » s'ensuit. On voit d'ailleurs que cette ambivalence est présente également dans le processus créatif de M. NourbeSe Philip dans *Zong!*

Dans ce travail d'hantologie qui habite autant l'œuvre de Philip que de Premier, le rituel prend son sens car il permet, par sa répétition, de reconnaître l'histoire des personnes qui nous ont précédés et, par extension, la nôtre. Dans une autre mesure, par son aspect rituel, *Africa is the Future* est comme *Zong!*, un « wake » dans tous les sens du terme, soit un moyen d'être en relation avec les ancêtres afin de les garder vivants dans notre mémoire, mais aussi de rester conscients des répétitions de l'histoire dans un esprit de sauvegarde.

Les derniers instants du film indiquent rapidement que les émotions se concentrent ailleurs, sur l'amour porté à nos ancêtres et aux liens que nous établissons avec eux, malgré les tentatives d'effacement de nos récits face à la violence d'un système anti-noir. La séparation entre le monde des vivants et des morts n'est pas hermétique, nous les ressentons, de même que l'amour et la protection qu'ils nous portent de leur côté du rivage et nous leur répondons par notre reconnexion et notre quête d'égalité et de justice. Apaisée, la musique se ressent comme une dispersion d'énergie, comme celle des ancêtres qui s'en vont après nous avoir délivré leurs messages.

Conclusion

Africa is the Future est une œuvre complexe possédant une multitude de significations. À l'instar de M. NourbeSe Philip, Nicolas Premier effectue un travail de détective en décortiquant culture populaire et archives pour créer un contre-discours qui nous débarrasse des stéréotypes et des représentations erronées sur les communautés noires.

À partir de l'assemblage et du remontage d'archives touchant aussi bien aux références littéraires et cinématographiques qu'aux archives d'émissions télévisées ou à la publicité, *Africa is the Future* met en avant la pluralité et la complexité de l'expérience noire panafricaine – qui n'est pas uniquement concentrée sur l'expérience afro-américaine, mais aussi sur les expériences congolaises, afro-brésiliennes, afro-européennes et caribéennes. Cela souligne et démontre la connexion continue entre le continent africain et sa diaspora, mais aussi l'importance d'une mise en relation de ces différents espaces et communautés pour amorcer un processus de guérison des nombreuses séparations et cassures qui se sont opérées au cours des derniers siècles.

En référence à Christina Sharpe dans son ouvrage *In the Wake* et au manifeste afrosurréaliste de D. Scot Miller, le détachement de la temporalité linéaire liée à une certaine philosophie occidentale pour une vision

temporelle plus poreuse (*future-past*), permet de mettre l'accent sur les faits et événements historiques connus et expérimentés. Cela favorise la perception et la reconnaissance des mécanismes d'un système capitaliste et négrophobe à bout de souffle. Ainsi le rituel effectue une sorte de purification des imaginaires et encourage une forme de communion, en raison de sa récurrence à chaque nouvelle lune. Il permet en outre de développer concrètement (dans un espace réel) ou virtuellement (par l'entremise du site internet) un sens de la communauté et d'accroître un sentiment d'amour envers soi et envers la collectivité, contribuant, un cycle à la fois, à la guérison de nos blessures transgénérationnelles. ¶

Le film est diffusé à chaque nouvelle lune seulement, pour une période de 24 heures : <https://africaisthefuture.com/>.

“It has just begun”: Strawcraft in Bahamian Visual Culture

Simone Cambridge

Dans le contexte de la production culturelle de la diaspora noire, l'artisanat continue d'être une source souvent négligée qui peut offrir une compréhension plus holistique des histoires nationales et individuelles. Cet article traite de la thèse « Growing functional arts in the Bahamas » de Thelma Eula Cambridge et plus précisément de sa présentation du travail de la paille aux Bahamas. C'est en tant que petit-enfant de Thelma Eula Cambridge que l'auteur de ces pages appréhende son œuvre. En examinant d'abord l'art contemporain qui considère le travail de la paille comme fondement esthétique, cet article traite également des techniques utilisées par Cambridge pour décrire cet artisanat, en analysant les exemples matériels dont elle se sert, mais aussi son design, les images incluses dans la thèse et l'attention qu'elle porte au travail et à l'industrie qui entourent cette pratique. Cet article aborde la culture visuelle et la littérature entourant le travail de la paille aux Bahamas, ainsi que la relation qu'il entretient avec le tourisme, les archives et les récits nationaux.

Simone Cambridge is a Bahamian curator, researcher, and art writer. She is currently pursuing her MA in the History of Art and Architecture at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.
—scambridge@umass.edu

In December 2019, I encountered my grandmother's handwritten thesis by accident, in a glass showcase in the lobby of the National Archives of The Bahamas. After coming into the archives to look at material for an unrelated project, I studied the lobby display cases after a research session. In one of the cases, I found my grandmother's name, “Thelma Eula Cambridge,” labelled in bold letters above yellowing pages bound in burlap.

The text, “Growing functional arts in the Bahamas,” is a hand-bound volume written in calligraphy, which academically investigates the “The Steel-Pan” and “Strawcraft.”¹ Thelma Eula Cambridge, my grandmother, wrote the text in 1968 as a final project necessary for the completion of her program at Bahamas Teachers' Training College. She explores the techniques and origins of each practice, while creating her own archive through defining, cataloguing, and documenting. Throughout the text are hand-drawn illustrations, samples, and straw work examples reproduced by my grandmother herself.² The book also, therefore, functions as an artwork.

The majority of the text, titled “Strawcraft in the Bahamas,” focuses on the weaving of palm fronds to create “straw,” a material used to make a variety of items including bags, mats, hats, and shoes.³ This process is commonly referred to as “straw,” “straw work,” and “strawcraft” interchangeably. My grandmother writes about her subjects from a historical and scholarly standpoint, documenting the gathering of raw materials and their processing, design, use, and origin. She praises strawcraft as an industry, citing the labour of vendors, and the complexity of the practice.

This article is an attempt to situate my grandmother's text within a larger body of discourse within Black diasporic folk art and craft. “Growing functional arts in the Bahamas” has been lost to contemporary discourse surrounding strawcraft and Black diasporic art practices, despite straw work continuing to be a prominent part of Bahamian visual culture. I therefore ground this discussion in contemporary artwork that uses strawcraft as its aesthetic foundation and starting point of discussion. I discuss the content of my grandmother's text and briefly explore historical strawcraft iconography. I seek to raise my grandmother's text as an important archival landmark which documents the state of strawcraft in the 1960s and the history that precedes it. “Growing functional arts in the Bahamas” is the first text focused solely on Bahamian craft of its kind. A subsequent treatise on straw

1. Thelma Eula Cambridge, "Growing Functional Arts in the Bahamas," Thesis, Bahamas Teachers' Training College, 1968, The National Archives of The Bahamas.

2. In 1968, at the time the text was written, my grandmother had given birth to two of her three children. My aunt, Sythela Cambridge, was six years old, while my father, Sidney Cambridge Jr., was four years old. Both as children contributed to my grandmother's work by assisting with illustrations. My grandmother goes so far as to include a primary school project inspired by strawcraft, completed by my aunt and her classmates, in the text as an example.

3. The first quarter of the text discusses "The Steel-Pan," a popular instrument used in West Indian music, originating in post-WWII Trinidad. Oil drums from American military bases were cut, heated, and shaped into the base of the steel-pan drum. Like strawcraft, the history of the steel pan is rooted in Indigenous and African creative expression as the instrument emerged after multiple colonial laws restricted the use of traditional instruments after the emancipation of slavery in 1834. See also Percival Borde, "The Sounds of Trinidad; The Development of the Steel-Drum Bands," in *The Black Perspective in Music* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1973): 45–49; Peter Seeger, "The Steel Drum: A New Folk Instrument," in *The Journal of American Folklore* 71, no. 279 (January–March 1958): 52–57. For the purposes of this article, I will focus on the "Strawcraft" section of the text because it not only includes hand-drawn illustrations but also samples of strawcraft woven by her hands, situating my grandmother as one of the strawcraft artisans she describes. I consider myself, as an art history scholar working in the fields of transatlantic slavery studies and Black diasporic art, to also be implicated in this process of archival production that contributes to a wider literature about Caribbean art, Black diasporic folk art, and related fields. I am further connected to this portion of the text through past work as a mixed media textile artist.

4. Karen Knowles, *Straw! A Short Account of the Straw Industry in The Bahamas* (Nassau: Media Publishing, 1998); Cambridge, "Growing Functional Arts in the Bahamas."

5. This article and reflection on my personal family history is also influenced by bell hooks's discussion of her grandmother's artwork in *Aesthetic Inheritances* and Sherry

work, *Straw! A Short Account of the Straw Industry of The Bahamas*, was written in 1998 by Karen Knowles.⁴ My personal experiences working in post-colonial archives as an art history scholar interested in transatlantic slavery studies, colonialism, and Caribbean art also influence this article, as well as my experiences as witness growing up in a post-colonial, independent Bahamas.⁵ I note my position as a non-participant in the industry of strawcraft and the tension that occurs between engaging with strawcraft as an art practice that simultaneously exists within vernacular craft and formal "high art" spaces such as museums and galleries. As a "craft" and a "folk art," strawcraft has received little attention within scholarly discourse because of the practice's perceived inferiority. This article pushes against this polarizing categorization, highlighting the use of strawcraft by artists and Thelma Eula Cambridge to present complex narratives that are relevant to the past and present.

Today, strawcraft remains a popular industry in The Bahamas. Although consumed by locals and visitors alike, much of the hats, bags, mats, and baskets sold are exported as tourist objects. It has continued to support a notable livelihood for many, as my grandmother suggested in 1968. Bahamian fashion houses, such as Harl Taylor BAG, David Rolle, and Haus of Assembly have branded straw items to elevate their products from their market-vendor sold counterparts, with designs by the late Harl Taylor entering luxury retailers such as Bergdorf Goodman.⁶

A surge in exhibitions and artwork using straw work as their foundation for aesthetic and intersectional analysis was my own cue to examine themes in "Growing Functional Arts in the Bahamas." *Inherited Values* (2020), curated by Jodi Minnis in Nassau, conceptualized strawcraft as a vehicle for memory and therefore necessary to understand the contemporary realities of micro-economy and to imagine Caribbean futures.⁷ Minnis sought to highlight the "sustainability and longevity of our ancestral micro-economies," shedding light on local business and industry.⁸ The featured artists Kendra Frorup and Anina Major used strawcraft weaving patterns in non-traditional mediums of wood and clay.⁹ As descendants of straw vendors, both artists abstract and reconstruct the nostalgia, while suggesting the repercussions of industry within contemporary memory and the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁰

Frorup uses found materials and recreates local objects to collage patterns and textures that reflect Bahamian visual culture, referencing architecture and domestic life. In *Addition of It* (2020), Frorup layers sculpted resin, rough brushstrokes, and screen-printed textures, creating the effect of a layered blueprint construction plan. The centre collage is framed by angled wooden boards that reference traditional "clapboard" Bahamian homes and the straw work that fills the Bahamian domestic interior. This strawcraft pattern is echoed in other works by Frorup featured in the exhibition including *Another Direction* (2020), *So Much Meaning* (2020), *Obscured by the Veil of Security* (2020), and *Across the Pond* (2020). In *Endanger of Becoming Useless* (2020) Frorup again uses the patterns of strawcraft, further referencing strawcraft's materiality through the image of an unfinished woven straw item printed

Farrell Racette's *I Want to Call Their Names in Resistance*, in which she honours the Indigenous craftswomen excluded from larger artistic narratives. bell hooks, "Aesthetic Inheritances," in *Belonging: A Culture of Place* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 9; Sherry Farrell Racette, "I Want to Call Their Names in Resistance": Writing Aboriginal Women into Canadian Art History, 1880–1970," in *Rethinking Professionalism: Women and Art in Canada, 1850–1970*, ed. Kristina Huneault and Janice Anderson (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012), 285–326.

6. "Welcome to Haus of Assembly!" Haus of Assembly, <https://hausofassembly.com/blogs/haus-of-assembly/shopping-in-nassau-bahamas>.

7. Jodi Minnis, *Inherited Values*, TERN Gallery, Nassau, Bahamas, December 7, 2020 – February 8, 2021, <https://www.terngallery.com/exhibitions/inherited-values>.

8. Minnis, "Inherited Values Statement."

9. Minnis, "Inherited Values Statement."

10. Personal interview with Anina Major, Zoom Meeting, November 8, 2021; Minnis, "Inherited Values Statement"; Personal correspondence with Averia Wright.

11. Cambridge, "Growing Functional Arts in the Bahamas."

12. Personal interview with Anina Major.

13. Personal interview with Anina Major.

14. Natalie Willis, *Floating Rib – Audio Guide*, mp3 (The National Art Gallery of The Bahamas, Nassau, Bahamas, 2021), <https://nagb.org.bs/floatingrib?rq=floating%20rib>.

15. Natalie Willis, *Floating Rib*, The National Art Gallery of The Bahamas, Nassau, Bahamas, April 15 – August 15, 2021.

16. Krista A. Thompson, *Developing the Tropics, The Politics of the Picturesque in the Bahamas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Personal correspondence with Anina Major.

17. Susannah Elisabeth Fulcher, "Anina Major Finds 'No Vacancy in Paradise,'" *The Provincetown Independent*, February 6, 2020, <https://provincetownindependent.org/arts-minds/2020/02/06/anina-major-finds-no-vacancy-in-paradise/>; Patricia Ginton-Meicholas, *No Vacancy in Paradise: A Collection of Poems* (Nassau: Guanima Press, 2001).

18. Thompson, *Developing the Tropics*.

19. *Your Country Your Name II* (2020) is a follow-up performance to *Your Country Name Here* (2016),

in layered primary colours. The straw work item unravels through the composition, contrasting an enlarged image of wooden boards. This work continues themes of home and domesticity while questioning strawcraft's future.

Anina Major's work recreates patterns of strawcraft in clay, giving new expression to the motif of interlapping and interwoven palm fronds, or "strings."¹¹ In works such as *Seasoned Rice Pot* (2020) and *Celadon Rice Pot* (2020), the vessels formed from "plaited" clay forms are organic, misshapen, and imperfect.¹² Major suggests through shaping the body and the sculpture's holes that the uneven textures and irregularities in glazed colour become metaphors for Bahamian tourism, domestic life, and women's labour as understood in contemporary society. The surfaces of Major's sculptures become marked through the inclusion of sea glass, shells, and other items associated with the Bahamas in the porcelain's atmospheric firing process. In *Ponder* (2015) | **fig. 1** | and *Daughter Series* (2015), Major disrupts the functionality of the traditional Bahamian straw doll. By rendering straw dolls in scorched clay to recreate a strawcraft plait, the toy designed as a tourist object no longer functions as a lightweight, children's souvenir that is convenient for travel. Major, inspired by a seemingly out-of-place straw doll found in Brooklyn, New York, sought to create a straw doll that could not as easily be discarded.¹³ Instead, the weighted objects suggest permanence, displacement, immobility, tension within the strawcraft industry, and act as points for mediation and reflection.

Floating Rib, a 2021 exhibition curated by Natalie Willis, sought to highlight Black Bahamian women who have lived in the diaspora in relation to issues of sexuality, nationalism, and historical visual cultures.¹⁴ Several of the artworks in the exhibition also reference straw work. Anina Major in *(No) Vacancy* (2020) references the visual culture of strawcraft by invoking its materiality and connections to tourism through a wall installation of palm fronds behind a blinking fluorescent neon sign reading "No Vacancy in Paradise."¹⁵ Major situates the viewer in a modern recreation of the background used by photographer Jacob Frank Coonley to frame vendor Lizzie Anderson.¹⁶ Replacing the Black Market Woman trope in the centre of the work is the neon sign, referencing the hotel and resort industry in Bahamian tourism. The phrase "No Vacancy in Paradise" refers to the title of a poem written by Bahamian cultural critic Patricia Ginton-Meicholas which reads: "No there's no vacancy in paradise/ we are claiming all the rooms/ willing only to lend space/ to those who take with due respect/ the role of the gracious guest."¹⁷ Major is therefore rejecting the invitation extended by the appropriated straw background which was used to tropicalize and exotify the Bahamian landscape and its residents and instead (re)claims territorial occupancy.¹⁸

Artist Averia Wright in her video performance *Your Country Your Name II* (2020) "cocooned [her] body" in straw armour as she walked through tourist sites in downtown Nassau that have been made desolate by the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁹ Wright sports a plaited straw helmet with a woven raffia train,



Figure 1. Anina Major, *Ponder*, 2015. Porcelain, 12.7 × 30.5 × 22.9 cm. Personal Collection of Anina Major. Photo: TERN Gallery, Nassau, Bahamas.

Figure 2. Averia Wright, detail from *Your Country Your Name II*, 2020, in *Floating Rib*, The National Art Gallery of The Bahamas. Photo: Simone Cambridge.



which was performed by the artist during the 2016 Caribbean Linked Artist Residency Program. Personal correspondence with Averia Wright; "Katherine Kennedy," *Caribbean Linked*, September 12, 2018, <https://caribbeanlinked.com/editions/caribbean-linked-v/critical-writing/katherine-kennedy/>.

20. Personal correspondence with Averia Wright.

21. Personal interview with Averia Wright, Google Meetings, July 12, 2021.

22. Suffragette House was the family home of Mary Ingraham, the leader of the Women's Suffrage movement. After multiple protests, Bahamian women were allowed the right to vote in 1962. Pompey Square is a public space commemorating a former site of the auction and sale of enslaved people and an 1830 plantation revolt led by an enslaved man named Pompey.

23. "Nassau | Creative Cities Network," <https://en.unesco.org/creative-cities/nassau>.

24. Personal interview with Averia Wright.

25. Royston Jr. Jones, "Straw Vendors Struggling to Make Ends Meet amid Market Closure for More than a Year," *Eye Witness News*, June 10, 2021, <https://ewnews.com/straw-vendors-struggling-to-make-ends-meet-amid-market-closure-for-more-than-a-year>; Sloan Smith, "PLAYING POLITICS: Straw Market Vendors Demand More Social Assistance until Market Reopens," *Eye Witness News*, July 15, 2021, <https://ewnews.com/playing-politics-straw-market-vendors-demand-more-social-assistance-until-market-reopens>; Sloan Smith, "SAFETY FIRST: Govt Wants to Open Straw Market but Concerned about Outbreak, Says DPM," *Eye Witness News*, July 22, 2021, <https://ewnews.com/safety-first-govt-wants-to-open-straw-market-but-concerned-about-outbreak-says-dpm>; Natario McKenzie, "RECALIBRATING: Govt to Undertake 6-Year Review of Straw Market Operations before Allowing It to Reopen," *Eye Witness News*, November 4, 2021, sec. Business, <https://ewnews.com/recalibrating-bahamas-government-to-undertake-six-year-review-of-straw-market-operations-before-allowing-it-to-reopen-after-covid>.

26. Personal interview with Averia Wright.

27. Several of the fabrics used in the work are exclusively locally produced by Bahama Hand Prints, see <https://bahamahandprints.com>.

straw torso plate, straw shoes, and a bright blue bodysuit spray-painted to mimic traditional Bahamian Androsia print batik fabric | fig. 2 |.²⁰ Her helmet doubles as a mask that anonymizes and costumes the artist as a hero-like, life-size straw figure. As she walks paths usually occupied by tourists, Wright is physically reclaiming territory and challenging the tourist search for authenticity by proclaiming herself as a tourist-object.²¹ Sites passed during Wright's journey include Suffrage House and Pompey Square, referencing political protest and historic injustice.²² Wright also leads the viewer past a sign that marks Nassau as a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Creative City, raising the question of the title to the viewer, prompting thoughts about what makes a city creative.²³ Wright ends her journey at the Straw Market, a building created for straw vendors to sell and store their goods, but the doors are closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁴ She beats on the front doors of the building, before crumpling to the ground. Beyond performing the hardship experienced by straw vendors caused by the March 2020 closure of the Market and the decrease in visitors due to the spread of COVID-19, Wright expresses her own disappointment and frustration as she returns to the place where she worked with her mother as a child.²⁵ Wright also pays tribute to her aunt, a straw vendor, as her descendant in *The Patron Saint* (2020) by casting her face in gold-toned bronze, surrounded by a halo of layered straw plait, metal, gold leaf, and raffia.²⁶ Strawcraft is the foundation of this work, grounding other aspects used to decorate straw commercial goods such as raffia pompoms, raffia braided tassels, tropical patterns, and locally produced fabrics.²⁷ She uses these materials to give her aunt the status of a deity, extending the tradition of honouring individual straw vendors even further. Wright's aunt becomes a venerated saint in the eyes of the museum visitor, immortalizing her labour and skill.

The artists and exhibitions that are discussed are a limited sample of the contemporary interpretations of strawcraft in Bahamian visual culture. Artists continue to make work that centres strawcraft, using its connections to labour, industry, gender, the land, class, and tourism to present complex narratives about Bahamian society. While the welcoming of strawcraft into "high art" spaces is relatively new, these themes are also present in "Growing functional arts in The Bahamas" as my grandmother considers strawcraft's history, industry, labour, and design. "Growing functional arts in the Bahamas," consists of written text, material examples of strawcraft, and hand-drawn illustrations throughout her artbook-thesis | figs. 3–5 |. My grandmother's approach is modern and experimental. Aside from the text being handbound and handwritten, she adheres examples of raw materials, embroidered designs, embellishments, deconstructed straw goods, and small-scale straw-object construction patterns. The book also includes craft supplies such as needles and lists detailed instructions for straw work designs, functioning as a catalogue, manual, and exhibition. This multifunctional focus on materiality differs from other strawcraft literature that relies singularly on images, singles out individual practitioners from Bahamian

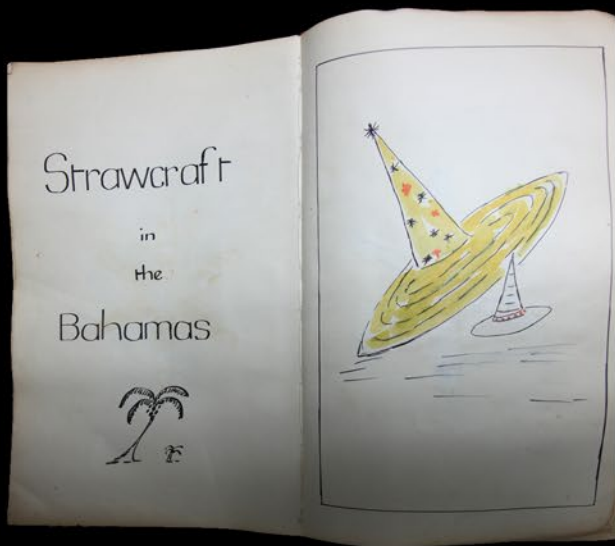


Figure 3. Thelma Eula Cambridge, "Strawcraft in the Bahamas," in "Growing functional arts in the Bahamas," 1968. Mixed Media on paper, 53.34 x 38.1 cm. Photo: The National Archives of The Bahamas.

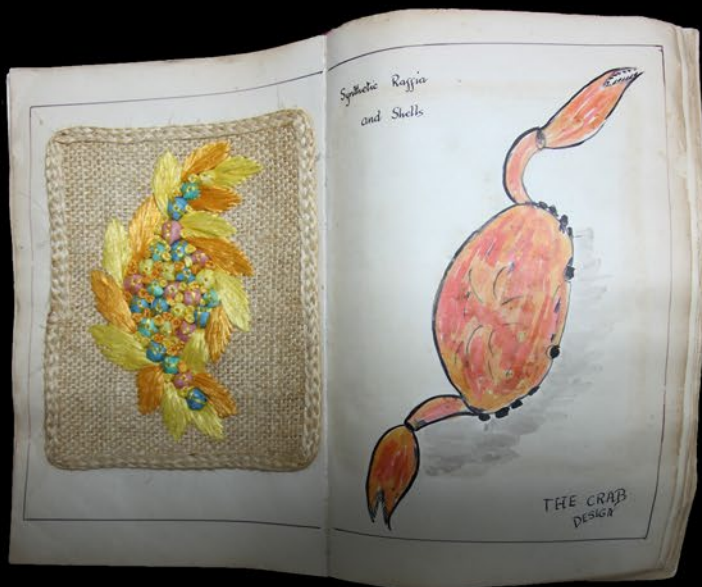


Figure 4. Thelma Eula Cambridge, "The Crab Design," in "Growing functional arts in the Bahamas," 1968. Mixed Media on paper, 53.34 x 38.1 cm. Photo: The National Archives of The Bahamas.

Figure 5. Thelma Eula Cambridge, "Notes on Pattern and Design," in "Growing functional arts in the Bahamas," 1968. Mixed Media on paper, 53.34 x 38.1 cm. Photo: The National Archives of The Bahamas.

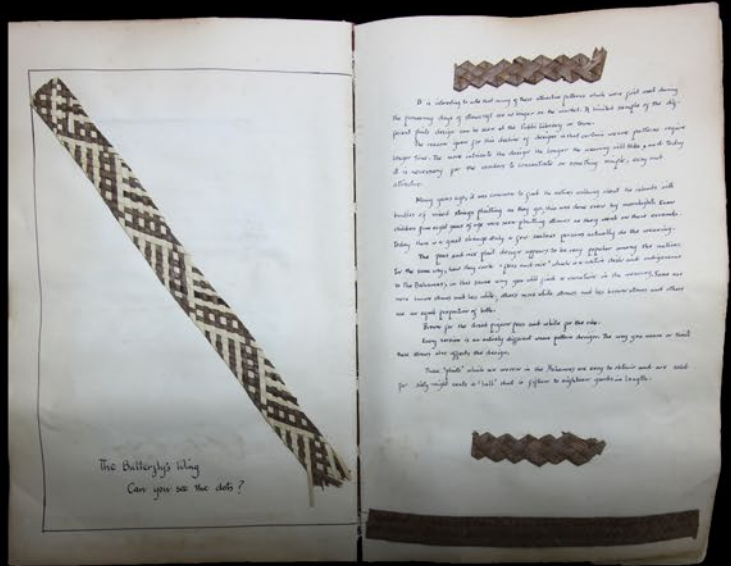
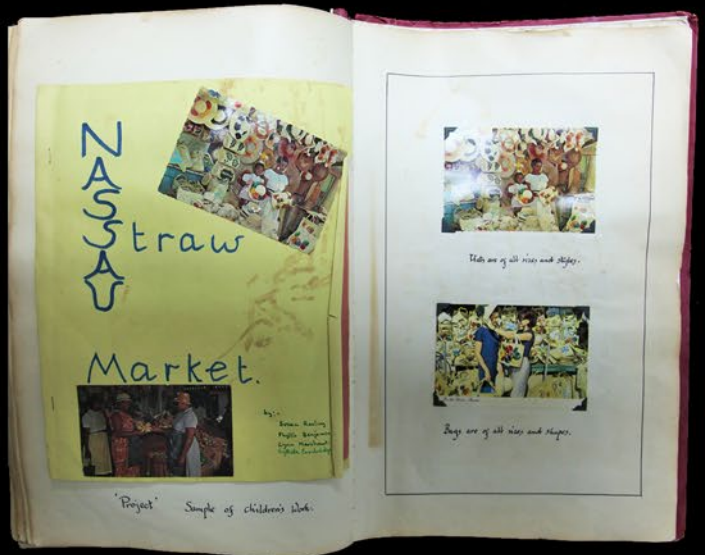


Figure 6. Thelma Eula Cambridge, "Examples of Strawcraft in Media," in "Growing functional arts in the Bahamas," 1968. Mixed Media on paper, 53.34 x 38.1 cm. Photo: The National Archives of The Bahamas.



islands, and lacks detail concerning pattern, design, and cross-cultural influences.²⁸ It draws attention to the ingenuity and endless creativity of artisans. By representing examples of strawcraft in the format of a book, the text is a break from exhibitions about straw work because, while it displays a variety of artworks, it is inherently archivable and created with the intention of preservation. “Growing functional arts in the Bahamas” was compiled to be shared as a source of information. This is particularly relevant considering the unnamed and undated display at Nassau’s Public Library cited in her bibliography, of which there is no archival record, and other media about strawcraft that precede the text, such as guidebooks, photographs, and magazines, which were created primarily for circulation outside of The Bahamas.²⁹

My grandmother’s illustrations are juxtaposed with material examples which give life to the concepts while grounding the viewer and suggesting complexity in design. Fig. 4 shows my grandmother’s interpretation of “The Crab Design.”³⁰ On undyed sisal, orange and yellow embroidered raffia highlight the shape of a crab consisting of dyed green and red shells. Her accompanying crab illustration uses shadows and highlights which are mirrored and abstracted using contrasting colours in the embroidered and embellished crab. The work suggests that vendors engaged in strawcraft possess a complex understanding of form, shape, texture, and colour. She marvels at and celebrates this creativity in a section titled “Native Response: ‘It comes from the head,’” which also discusses her experience interviewing local vendors in downtown Nassau.

Photography is also used in “Growing functional arts in the Bahamas” to highlight my grandmother’s artwork and research. Images sourced from magazines, postcards, tourist brochures, and local publications are placed throughout the text which link to the visual culture of strawcraft, including themes of the Black market woman and touristic consumption.³¹ In fig. 6 (shown in detail in fig. 7), the top right image is a postcard of a straw vendor and a young girl posed amid dozens of decorated straw goods.³² Hats and bags crowd the image, framing and surrounding the vendor and girl. The straw goods attract the prospective tourist through the large quantity and variety of handmade objects. My grandmother’s use of the image in this text, however, gives the photograph new context, becoming a tribute to woman-led industry and labour. After detailed explanations of the construction of strawcraft, the image becomes symbolic of the continuous and arduous labour done by the vendor that will eventually be continued by the girl pictured. The methodology described in her text is repeated in the image and defines the livelihood of multiple generations. Fig. 7 additionally suggests pride in the abundance of items which fill the frame. My grandmother captions the image: “Hats are available in all sizes and styles,” suggesting the considerable skill required to create a large body of straw work that appeals to the competing desires of tourists.³³

The bottom right image in fig. 7 (shown in detail in fig. 8) depicts two female tourists admiring straw goods before a vendor’s stall. Surrounded

28. Knowles, *Straw!: A Short Account of the Straw Industry in The Bahamas*; The Department of Archives, Ministry of Education, “Aspects of Bahamian History”: ‘A Brief Historical Review of Straw Work in The Bahamas.’; The Department of Archives, Ministry of Education, “Straw Market.”

29. Cambridge, “Growing Functional Arts in the Bahamas”; Mary Moseley, *The Bahamas Handbook* (Nassau: The Nassau Guardian, 1926); Mary Moseley, “Nassau - and the ‘Out Islands’ of the Bahamas,” *Magazine of Life and Times in the Enchanted Bahamas* 4, no. 2 (1951); Stark, *Stark’s History and Guide to the Bahama Islands* (Norwood, MA: Plimpton Press, H. M. Plimpton & Co., Printers & Binders, 1891).

30. Cambridge, “Growing Functional Arts in the Bahamas.”

31. Personal correspondence with Sidney Cambridge Jr. and Sythela Cambridge, March 2021.

32. Personal interview with Anina Major, November 8, 2021.

33. Cambridge, “Growing Functional Arts in the Bahamas.”



Hats are of all sizes and styles.

Figure 7. Thelma Eula Cambridge, postcard detail in "Growing functional arts in the Bahamas," 1968. Mixed Media on paper, 53.34 × 38.1 cm. Photo: The National Archives of The Bahamas.



Bags are of all sizes and shapes.

Figure 8. Thelma Eula Cambridge, postcard detail in "Growing functional arts in the Bahamas," 1968. Mixed Media on paper, 53.34 × 38.1 cm. Photo: The National Archives of The Bahamas.

by hats, bags, and baskets, the two women hold embroidered and embellished bags and hats. One woman fits a hat decorated with large pompoms on to the other woman. The vendor is again absent from this image which is a postcard captioned “In the Straw Market.” The two women shopping and engaging with strawcraft objects replace the vendor, as the straw goods visually signify the exotic and tropical. My grandmother wrote during a period where strawcraft production greatly increased. Legacies of WWII momentum placed more importance on local industries, while more accessible air travel, newly built resorts, private sector development, and expanded advertising and public relations led to a substantial increase in visitors to The Bahamas during the 1960s.³⁴ The quantity of straw vendors increased as tourism continued to expand. Writing during the final years of The Bahamas as a British colony, my grandmother situates her account of strawcraft within the boundaries of production and education, to further encourage straw work as an industry. She praises the many vendors that have created livelihoods and sustained generations of families. Throughout the text, she cites the monetary benefit of straw work, framing the tradition as a useful skill to benefit young people entering an economy increasingly dependent on tourism. While advocating for the integration of straw work into education, she also argues for the tradition’s preservation. She writes:

It is agreeable that the strawcraft is worth preserving. How this can be done is another problem. Many people think, that the craft should be taught in the schools as a means of preserving it, and because of its educational value. I feel too, that because there is so much one can learn from Strawcraft, I think, it is worth preservation and should have its place in the schools.³⁵

This conjoining of education and preservation aligns with the nationalist ideals being circulated at the time, where more emphasis was placed on aspirational values like education.³⁶ This resonated with Black middle class Bahamian women like my grandmother during a decade of fast-paced political change.³⁷ Her writing precedes the establishment of the National Archives of The Bahamas and is written in the absence of a general value being placed on non-European art in the colonial archive as well as “prejudices against most things African.”³⁸ The production of a national Bahamian history that included Black colonial subjects was only then being conceptualized during the 1960s, influenced by the Civil Rights Movement in the nearby United States.³⁹ Colonial politics of looking in The Bahamas were dictated by the tropicalized fantasy created by tourism investors and foreign developers.⁴⁰

My grandmother acknowledges the change in “people’s views and attitudes towards the Bahamian Crafts through the recent years” and embodies this change in her writing.⁴¹ She desires strawcraft’s aesthetic value to be made visible, outside of its status as a tourist-object, and for the labour and industry of straw vendors to be celebrated. She uses her text to demonstrate that the practice requires advanced technique, ingenuity, and creativity—all of which has spanned centuries:

34. Angela B. Cleare, “Pioneering Spirit, Promotion and Year-Round Tourism - 1950’s,” in *History of Tourism in The Bahamas: A Global Perspective* (Xlibris Corporation, 2007), 111–50.

35. Cambridge, “Growing Functional Arts in the Bahamas.”

36. Gail Saunders, “The Changing Face of Nassau: The Impact of Tourism on Bahamian Society in the 1920s and 1930s,” *NWIG: New West Indian Guide / Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 71, no. 1/2 (1997): 21–42.

37. Women were allowed the right to suffrage in 1962; the first elected Black majority Parliament was held in 1967; Independence from Britain would follow in 1973.

38. Gail Saunders, “Nassau, Heritage and the Impact of Tourism,” *Journal of the Bahamas Historical Society* (October 2006): 14–23.

39. Cleare, “Pioneering Spirit, Promotion and Year-Round Tourism - 1950’s.” The physical site of the National Archives of The Bahamas would officially open in the late 1980s, being granted a departmental organization by the Ministry of Education in 1981 after The Bahamas became an independent state in 1973. The Archives’ forerunner, the Public Records Office, was established in 1971. Johansson Cooper, personal interview at Department of The National Archives of The Bahamas, Ministry of Education, August 20, 2021; Leshelle Delaney, Personal interview at Department of The National Archives of The Bahamas, Ministry of Education, August 20, 2021.

40. Krista A. Thompson, “Tropicalization, The Aesthetics and Politics of Jamaica and the Bahamas,” in *An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography, and Framing the Caribbean Picturesque* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 1–26.

41. Cambridge, “Growing Functional Arts in the Bahamas.”

42. Cambridge.
43. Cambridge.
44. Minnis, "Inherited Values Statement."

45. Cambridge, "Growing Functional Arts in the Bahamas"; Personal correspondence with Averia Wright, Google Meetings, July 12, 2021; Personal correspondence with Jodi Minnis, December 2020; Knowles, *Straw!: A Short Account of the Straw Industry in The Bahamas*; Minnis, "Inherited Values Statement"; Personal correspondence with Anina Major.

46. hooks, "History Worked by Hand"; Racette, "I Want to Call Their Names in Resistance."

47. Thelma Eula Cambridge, "Growing Functional Arts in the Bahamas"; Karen Knowles, *Straw!: A Short Account of the Straw Industry in The Bahamas*; The Department of Archives, Ministry of Education, "Aspects of Bahamian History: A Brief Historical Review of Straw Work in The Bahamas," *Nassau Guardian*, March 23, 1989, sec. C; Rosalyn Howard, "The 'Wild Indians' of Andros Island: Black Seminole Legacy in the Bahamas," *Journal of Black Studies* 37, no. 2 (2006): 275–98; Keith F. Otterbein, *The Andros Islanders: A Study of Family Organisation in the Bahamas* (Lawrence: The University of Kansas Press, 1966); The Department of Archives, Ministry of Education, *Andros Island Bahamas* (Nassau: The National Archives of The Bahamas, n.d.); Jodi Minnis, "Inherited Values Statement" (Exhibition Statement, TERN Gallery, Nassau, Bahamas, March 2021). While many islands in The Bahamas are known for particular styles of straw work, the settlement of Red Bays, Andros, is known especially for a distinctive style of basket weaving that is still practiced today. This settlement is known locally for its history of Seminole migration, however, a deeper inquiry into ethnographic influences, migration patterns, local domestic practices and weaving is much needed.

48. Knowles, *Straw!: A Short Account of the Straw Industry in The Bahamas*; Krista A. Thompson, "Life as the Natives Live It': The Tourist Quest for Authenticity and the Selling of Mr. Amos Ferguson," Master's thesis, Emory University, 1999, <http://www.proquest.com/docview/304564789/abstract/5552861CE0F94E6DPQ1>; The Department of Archives, Ministry of Education, "Aspects of Bahamian History: A Brief Historical Review of Straw Work in The Bahamas."

Strawcraft is a great heritage and long before emphasis was placed on books, people were expressing their abilities and various skills...Personally, my attitude towards the industry is more positive. I appreciate the work now, more than I did a year ago. After trying to produce some of the products I have seen on the stalls. I discovered that the work, entailed is much more difficult than it appears.⁴²

She lists in detail the intricacies of straw work, noting decline in the variety of styles within the practice and the production of strawcraft for primarily tourist consumption. By titling her text as "growing," she anticipates the expansion of strawcraft as an industry, while participating in its expansion through the text's function as an educational resource.⁴³

Strawcraft is not only a tradition that is usually passed down orally but is also often practiced at a physical geographic distance.⁴⁴ Historically, certain styles of straw design are attributed to specific islands in The Bahamas or specific persons. Once woven or constructed by various artisans, the majority of items are shipped to Nassau, the capital, where they are dispersed and sold. My grandmother collects a variety of weaves and designs in one text, noting the difference in technique between islands and alluding to the presence of strawcraft in the wider-Caribbean region.

There is a collective fear within straw work discourse that certain techniques and patterns are "dying out" as knowledge held by elders is not passed down to descendants.⁴⁵ This is coupled with the dismay and mourning of what has been lost that cannot be named due the dismissal of strawcraft as enslaved, domestic, and woman's work.⁴⁶ In my grandmother's determination to preserve strawcraft, she also possessed this fear of further loss and her text occupies a unique place by memorializing strawcraft as an aesthetic practice.

Similar to other former British colonies in the region, much of The Bahamas' history, and therefore the history of strawcraft, is marked by colonial occupation and violence. Straw work is one remnant of The Bahamas' African-Indigenous heritage that has continued to occupy a space in local popular culture. Large numbers of enslaved Africans were brought to the islands for plantation labour and the practice of strawcraft has remained relevant. Rooted in African basket weaving, the practice is also influenced by Seminole weaving practices due to displaced populations settling in the northern Bahamas.⁴⁷

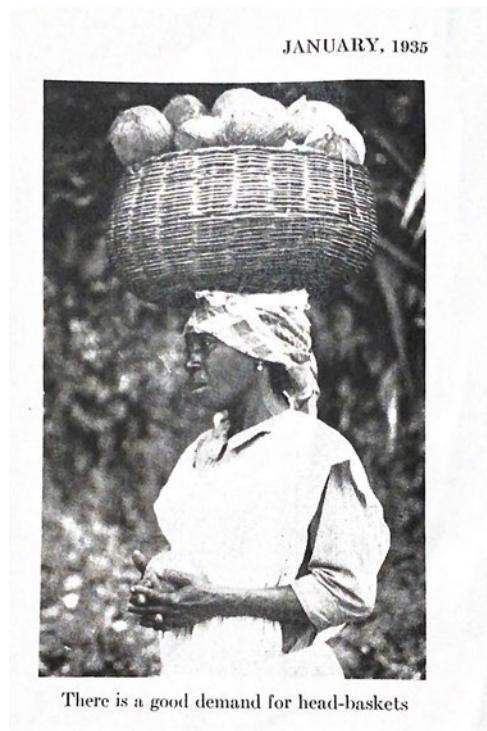
The methodology and history of straw work are typically passed down by families through oral tradition, which the literature reflects.⁴⁸ While unrecorded in slave ledgers or other official colonial documents, tourist guides suggest that strawcraft was necessary to Black domestic life. Sleeping mats, hats, bags, baskets, and shoes made of plaited straw filled the gaps created by the ruling white elite during slavery and after emancipation. Slowly, these items entered the market for tourist consumption, while strawcraft and the straw vendor became a figure in popular media.

As early as the late nineteenth century, Black female vendors, who lived in Over-the-Hill communities of the formerly enslaved, travelled to downtown Nassau to sell plaited straw hats and baskets.⁴⁹ "Palmetto thatch" was



Figure 9. Jacob Frank Coonley, *On the way to Market*, 1888–1904. Albumen print. Photo: The National Art Gallery of The Bahamas.

Figure 10. Unknown, “There is a good demand for head-baskets,” in *Nassau Magazine*, 1935. Photo: reproduced from *Nassau Magazine of The Bahamas* 2, no. 1 (1935), 16.



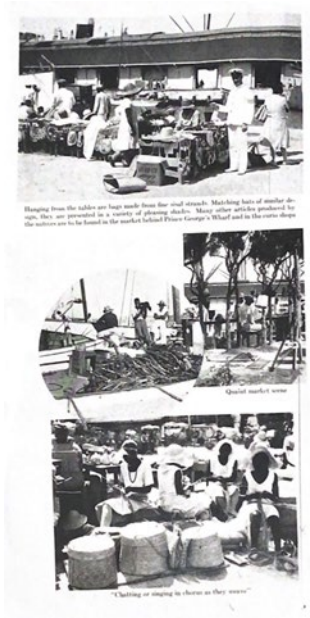


Figure 11. Unknown, image spread in Nassau Magazine, 1935.
 Photo: reproduced from *Nassau Magazine of The Bahamas* 2, no. 1 (1935), 17.



Figure 12. Unknown, "Dr. and Mrs. C. W. Tegge," in Nassau Magazine, 1951.
 Photo: reproduced from *Nassau - and the "Out Islands" of the Bahamas - Magazine of Life and Times in the Enchanted Bahamas* 4, no. 2 (Winter 1951-52), 8.

noted as a material sold at downtown markets.⁵⁰ Even earlier accounts state that white elites sold goods made by Black craftspeople.⁵¹ The Black female vendor interested early visitors and tourism promoters as the local Black population in The Bahamas were framed as part of the tropical scenery.⁵² Surrounded by palm fronds and staged in vacant landscapes, the Black market woman became an icon for image makers, representing feminized and sexualized interpretations of the tropics | **fig. 9** |.⁵³

Once enticed to visit by this imagery, the modern tourist held a discriminating eye with a nostalgia for the handmade in search of “the ultimate authentic memento” to commemorate their journey to the islands.⁵⁴ Enter Bahamian strawcraft. By 1926, Mary Moseley, editor and founder of *Nassau Magazine*, describes “straw-plaiting” in *The Bahamas Handbook*: “One of the most important cottage industries is straw-plaiting, nearly all of the working hats worn by natives being made by hand from locally grown palm top. Native mats and baskets, which are well made, are in great demand.”⁵⁵

Straw work becomes a recurring feature in Moseley’s *Nassau Magazine*, a tourist publication marketed to local and international audiences, paying tribute to tourist themes popularized half a century earlier.⁵⁶ Some images featured, as seen in figs. 10 and 11, show tropicalized images of Bahamian market vendors and straw plaiters, aligning with earlier circulated images and tropes as seen in *On the way to Market* | **fig. 9** |. Photographs are captioned and labelled with phrases such as “quaint market scene” and “chatting or singing in chorus as they weave” which solidify the local scenes pictured as tropical and naturalize the unnamed “natives” pictured | **fig. 3** |.⁵⁷

Later photographs featuring strawcraft show smiling, wealthy visitors surrounded by would-be souvenirs. In fig. 12, white elites are pictured buying straw bags at a local vendor’s table outside of the Royal Victoria Hotel, a popular tourist resort. This iconography of strawcraft is mirrored in the images selected for “Growing functional arts in the Bahamas.” The text, however, also adds to the imagery depicted by offering itself as an alternative to tourist-centered imagery, capturing straw work as a practice in its use of illustration, material, and collected photographs.

Contemporary art that uses strawcraft as its starting point of discussion and “*Growing functional arts in the Bahamas*” have potential to be in dialogue, as both mirror issues of preservation, memory, heritage, labour, and tourism and acknowledge the creativity and complexity within strawcraft, while celebrating the women-led industry created and sustained by straw vendors. My grandmother’s text through its commemoration of strawcraft as an aesthetic foundation to present complex ideas, a Black diasporic aesthetic, rejects institutional failures of memorialization while still seeking a place within the archive, education, and tourism. Calling for the expansion, preservation, and continued investigation of strawcraft, the intentions of “*Growing functional arts in the Bahamas*,” I echo my grandmother’s conclusion, “This work is not actually finished. It has just begun.”⁵⁸ ¶

49. “Over-the-Hill” is a catch-all term used to describe the several communities of free, formerly enslaved Blacks who lived south and southwest in Nassau, The Bahamas’ capital. These communities were geographically and socially segregated from the white businesses and residences located in Nassau’s downtown core and to the east of the island. The name references a long stretch of hilly terrain that marked the line of segregation. See Michael Craton and Gail Saunders, “Over the Hill and Far Away: The Life and Culture of Bahamian Blacks After Slavery,” in *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People: Volume Two: From the Ending of Slavery to the Twenty-First Century*, vol. 2, 2 vols. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 101–30.

50. The Department of Archives, Ministry of Education, “Straw Market” (Archival Summary, Nassau, Bahamas, n.d.), The National Archives of The Bahamas.

51. Knowles writes that during the 1720s the wife of Governor Phenney sold straw hats, but that little detail remains about the venture. Karen Knowles, “From the Street to the Market Plaza,” in *Straw! A Short Account of the Straw Industry in The Bahamas*, 9–24.

52. Thompson, “Developing the Tropics, The Politics of the Picturesque in the Bahamas,” in *An Eye for the Tropics*, 92–155.

53. Thompson, “Developing the Tropics,” 92–155.

54. Krista A. Thompson, “‘Life as the Natives Live It’: The Tourist Quest for Authenticity and the Selling of Mr. Amos Ferguson.”

55. Mary Moseley, *The Bahamas Handbook*.

56. Mary Moseley, ed., Nassau and the “Out Islands” of the Bahamas, *Magazine of Life and Times in the Enchanted Bahamas* 4, no. 2 (1951); Nassau Magazine of the Bahamas 2, no. 1 (1935); “Mary Moseley Collection” (The National Archives of The Bahamas, 2021).

57. *Nassau Magazine of the Bahamas* 2, no. 1 (1935).

58. Cambridge, “Growing Functional Arts in the Bahamas.”

More Life—Beyond the Archival & the Algorithmic

Mark V. Campbell

Dans cet essai, je m'intéresse aux œuvres visuelles d'artistes du Canada afin de mieux saisir comment la mémoire noire et les actes de préservation fonctionnent en dehors des contraintes institutionnelles. Ces artistes nous permettent d'imaginer une sensibilité archivistique noire émergente à partir de leurs choix artistiques et esthétiques concernant la vie des personnes noires. Dans cet essai, je cherche à découvrir comment les artistes insistent sur la vie des personnes noires par le biais de leurs portraits, leurs installations et leurs œuvres en techniques mixtes. Le projet est ici d'explorer, d'amplifier et de célébrer la façon dont les artistes encouragent leur public à voir la vie des Noires de manière ouverte, au-delà des schémas hiérarchiques racialisés et des discours sur la mort. Le « plus de vie » que je signale dans le titre de cet essai fournit un cadre pour que nous puissions découvrir, rassembler et célébrer les articulations de la vie des personnes noires dans un moment de puissance algorithmique implacable.

Mark V. Campbell is a DJ, scholar, and curator. He is Assistant Professor in the Department of Arts, Culture, and Media at University of Toronto.
—mark.campbell@utoronto.ca

Introduction

Preservation is a political act; it is never neutral. Acts of preservation are often organized by a state or municipality in an attempt at controlling public memory. Yet, beyond such forces, Black life has found ways to practice preservation and engage in memory work unbounded by social institutions and governmental practices. Institutions of preservation, such as art museums and archives, are by extension also not neutral, as Schwartz and Cook remind us, despite how the archival profession is built on perceptions and myths of neutrality and objectivity.¹ Artists remain in an interesting and important position vis-à-vis archives, as these repositories were originally designed to support academic researchers and advance colonial empires. Artists make good use of archives, and their practices and memory work often exceed what gets considered “archival.” Works such as Charmaine Lurch’s painting-installation series *Re-Imagining Henrietta Lacks* (2015), Anique Jordan’s sculpture *Arming by Clara* (2017), or Jordan’s more recent photography series *Nowing* (2021) counter and move beyond the information available to us in the historical record.² The memory work by the Black Canadian artists examined in this essay points to how acts of preservation might be marked with a Black archival sensibility. Such a sensibility could take up a salient theme in Afrodiasporic life: acts of refusal that move beyond resistance towards a relationality that evades silos and binaristic thinking. My understanding of such a sensibility not only insists on celebrating Black life, but also practices refusal as a strategic action that stretches the boundaries of disciplines and fields to ethically disrupt and discontinue cycles of harm and violence born out of the colonial project.

To explore acts of preservation and Black memory work, I turn to the aesthetic choices of three contemporary Canadian artists: Deanna Bowen, Mark Stoddart, and Elicser Elliott. Through various methods of confrontation, remixing and citation, these artists illuminate strategies of preservation, memorializing and of honouring Black life. Black memory work and practices of preservation embedded in visual art do not necessarily offer up a clarity that can be purchased, apprehended, nor appreciated by all. This opacity is not an accident; it is a practice keenly aware of the surveillant dominant culture.³ I want to suggest that a Black archival sensibility thinks differently about Black life in elaborate ways, which might frustrate existing archival

1. Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook, "Archives, Records and Power: The Making of Modern Memory," *Archival Science* 2 (March–September 2002): 1–19.

2. In *Re-imagining Henrietta Lacks*, Lurch challenges scientific and historical memory to recontextualize and reimagine how visibility and invisibility inform how we come to know the experiments that took place with Lack's cells. See "Henrietta Lacks: science must right a historical wrong," *Nature.com*, Sept. 1, 2020, <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-02494-z>.

3. Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997). Simone Browne's work on dark sousveillance also importantly informs how I think about opacity, surveillance, and Black life.

4. I want to be cognizant of our present moment in which algorithms are invisible forms of power that attempt to overdetermine our informational choices, our digital life, and dominate our attention spans as part of the expansion of an attention economy. As artificial intelligence works to make content discoverable online and reap behavioural practices in the form of user data online, notions of memory and the archive are destabilized almost daily as platforms change their algorithms as they see fit.

5. See the work of Simone Browne in *Dark Matter: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

6. See SA Smythe, "The Black Mediterranean and the Politics of Imagination," *Middle East Report* 286 (Spring 2018): 3–9.

7. See Kevin Quashie, *Black Aliveness, or a Poetics of Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), in particular his conclusion, in which he returns to Glissant's work, which also informs Moten's *Black and Blur* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

8. See Jean-Christophe Cloutier, *Shadow Archives: the Lifecycles of African American Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019). Cloutier's definition of an archival sensibility focuses on African-American mid-century writers like Claude McKay and how these authors were invested in counter-archival practices demonstrating archival sensibilities that "elude institutional capture," 305.

9. Katherine McKittrick, "Mathematics Black Life," *Black Scholar* 44, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 16.

practices and disrupt the increasing hegemony of algorithms and artificial intelligence.⁴ By focusing on the nuanced and intimate workings of Black life, a Black archival sensibility is attentive to the myriad ways that life is lived beyond racial schemas, tropes of death, and social hierarchies. This might mean the memory work of Black communities, when focused on the interiority of Black life, sits in stark contrast to virality and the means by which audiences are built and attention captured. Institutional archival work datafies the past through extensive metadata regimes and practices of metatagging. When archival items are digitized and their discoverability increased through metatagging these objects travel across the internet in ways that open up Black life to appropriation, surveillance, and commodification with increased discoverability.⁵ Artificial intelligence relies on knowledge graphs to accumulate data and make intelligible information on the internet, but the work of visual artists is not always archivable nor datafiable, at times relying on a level of opacity to speak to specific audiences

Examining visual art by Bowen, Elliott, and Stoddart elaborates ways we might sustain Black livingness beyond institutional archival relations and their colonial inheritances. Put differently, the artists explored here refuse Black death as a necessary condition to practices of memorializing, preserving, or archiving. Following the work of SA Smythe, the artists examined here open up archives (in a metaphoric sense) to a world of possibility by centring Black life and Black livingness.⁶ This livingness, usefully elaborated by Kevin Quashie's reading of Fred Moten and Édouard Glissant, is an un-catalogable "ecological disposition" in which words fail to effectively convey meaning.⁷ These artists allow us to imagine an emergent Black archival sensibility from the artistic and aesthetic choices concerned with Black livingness. These visual art works and practices encourage an appreciation of a Black archival sensibility amongst visual artists in Canada whose counter-archival poetics insist on Black life directly in the face of how Black death has been a constitutive element of colonial archival practice.⁸ In "Mathematics Black Life," Katherine McKittrick, citing Saidiya Hartman, reminds us that "the archive of the black diaspora is a death sentence, a tomb, a display of a violated body, an inventory of property, a medical treatise...an asterisk in the grand narrative of history."⁹ My attempt in this essay is to uncover how artists insist on Black living through their portraits, installations, and mixed media works. As the three artists in this article demonstrate, there exists a concerted effort at representing Black life by employing a sensibility that cannot be solely captured and defined by existing archival methods and practices. If, as Richard J. Powell suggests, portraiture is a performative act, then the portraits by both Mark Stoddart and Elicser Elliott examined here do more than simply represent Black life.¹⁰ Similarly, as Deanna Bowen's vast body of work shows, the photograph, whether public or private, governmental or familial, is an archival record that captures a desire to "transform nature into pictorial fact," often by the dominant culture.¹¹

Refusal as Frame

Refusal, as Karina Vernon discusses in her introduction to *The Black Prairies Archive*, is one way in which Black populations engage the archive and processes of archival collections. While building an impressive collection of Black life in the Canadian Prairies, Vernon was met with several refusals and decisions from families who chose not to share their archival materials with the book project.¹² Vernon's claim is echoed in Rinaldo Walcott's refusal of the archive in his decision to crush the paper from one of his speeches into a ball and leave it in this crumpled state in the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives (CLGA).¹³ Maandeeq Mohammed usefully calls Walcott's actions an "ethnographic refusal." Mohammed is interested in the messiness of the histories of Black life that cannot be contained by the archive. Yet if we zero in on Walcott's actions, his gesture of refusal becomes part of the archive in a way that usefully expands the possibilities of archival work. Histories of Afrodiasporic individuals and communities refusing the terms of archival collections do not exist within repositories where researchers might discover them. Like those who chose not to participate in the making of Vernon's *Black Prairies Archive*, refusal as a strategy of Black living also escapes capture by formal archives. Walcott, however, is able to both refuse and make use of an archive—a useful documentation of Black counter-archival poetics.

Refusal is a useful starting point to consider the many ways in which illegibility acts as an intentional opacity and opens up pathways to consider Black life in relation to the coloniality of the archive. The personal family archive in many ways flourishes outside of the institutional constraints when issues of access, digitization and reproduction are under the control of invested family members. Such family members open up the possibility of multigenerational inquiry and research possibility disconnected from possibilities and restrictions of funding cycles, academic ethics protocols and the consensus or non-consensus of family members.

Archives are predicated on the ability and desire of the researcher or inquirer to know and to know fully with a level of veracity. As both Laura Ann Stoler and Thomas Richards demonstrate, imperial archives were unstable imaginaries where completeness and "comprehensive knowledge" were assumed, yet always illusory. Their legacies continue to haunt archival sciences today and are thus suspiciously engaged by the Black diaspora.¹⁴ In the case of Walcott, his submission of a crumpled speech to the CLGA appeases the institution's desire to accumulate, store, and preserve. More importantly, his act simultaneously refuses, on his own terms, to "play by the rules." It induces an opaque relationship to the document that contains his speech. Refusal is broadly construed here as not just a denial, but also a form of participatory disavowal of institutional protocols and mores.

Confrontation

The artistic practice of Governor General's Award winner and former Guggenheim Fellow Deanna Bowen, in its multiple engagements with Canadian histories, can similarly be read as a refusal to engage the archive in

10. Richard J. Powell, *Cutting a Figure: Fashioning Black Portraiture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

11. Okwui Enwezor, *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*, exh. cat. (New York: Steidl/International Center of Photography, 2008).

12. Karina Vernon, ed., *The Black Prairie Archives: An Anthology* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2020).

13. Maandeeq Mohammed, "Somehow I Found You: On Black Archival Practices," *CMagazine* 137 (Spring 2018), 8–13.

14. Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (London and New York: Verso, 1993), 73.

normative and “comfortable” ways. Unlike the Black families that refused to participate in Vernon’s *Black Prairies Archive* book project, Bowen’s intimacy with her own family archive has led to numerous artistic projects that open up public debate in art galleries across Canada.¹⁵

Working not just with family archival content, Bowen’s practice takes up public documents and other materials from the “official record” and forces audiences to confront that which can be obscured, sanitized, hidden or intentionally overlooked. The history of Canada’s anti-Black racism is just one of these forced confrontations, a refusal of the performative neutrality of whiteness. In the face of Canadian exceptionalism and the consistent denial of racism in this country, Bowen displays the entire 1911 Anti-Creek Negro Petition which Canadians signed to deny access to migrant African Americans from Oklahoma seeking to enter Canada. Displayed across The Kitchener Waterloo Gallery wall, the petition | fig. 1 |, excavated and reprinted, is made to confront the viewer. Bowen refuses to accept the historical record as dead and disconnected from our present moment; her practice is marked with public confrontation. The signatures of more than 4,300 Canadians who opposed the migration of these African-Americans verify without a doubt the rampant forms of racism present Western Canada both at the turn of the century and sadly ensuring in our contemporary moment.

The visual confrontation that Bowen stimulates with the public exhibiting of the Anti Creek-Negro Petition is not an aberration in her oeuvre. Turning to Bowen’s theatrical re-enactment of CBC’s 1956 teledrama, *Øn Trial*, confrontation becomes a key part of Bowen’s challenge to her audiences. Commissioned by Mercer Union Gallery in Toronto, Bowen mounted, *Øn Trial: The Long Doorway* on November 4th, 2017. Rather than simply uncovering this “lost” story of a Black legal aide assigned to represent a white student charged with assaulting a Black student, Bowen provides archival documentation to set the full context of 1950s Canada and to allow for the possibility for exhibition attendees to re-record parts of this teledrama. In a similar vein, Bowen’s exhibition at University of Toronto’s historic Hart House and its relatively new Art Museum utilized archival documents from key decision makers in the development of Canada’s national identity, including Vincent Massey, Baker Fairey, and A. Y. Jackson. Bowen returns to a 1922 play in which white actors perform in red face, *God of Gods: A Canadian Play*, hailed by Massey as seminal theatre.¹⁶ Bowen unravels the “roles institutional archives play in the making and management of a historical narrative.”¹⁷ She makes clear the (not neutral) power wielded in the archival process and dislodges hegemonic forms of memory by allowing her audiences to confront Canada’s anti-Blackness and imperial desires. Bowen’s numerous projects demand that audiences confront Canada’s anti-Blackness.

Bowen’s archival disruptions counter Canada’s image as a safe haven for African-Americans seeking refuge from American enslavement. Bowen’s performance and installation work does not do the kind of preserving expected of state-sponsored archival entities. Instead, documents are

15. See Vernon, 2020. In *Invisible Empires* (2013), *The Paul Good Papers* (2012) and her most recent exhibition, *Black Drones in the Hive* (2020/1), Bowen meticulously moves through archival content relating to her family’s life in Alberta and the public and official documents that demonstrate Canada’s imperial desires

16. Vincent Massey and A. Y. Jackson were prominent Canadian men who exerted influence over the country’s cultural affairs. Massey, a diplomat and politician was asked by the federal government to lead the development of the country’s first art council. A. Y. Jackson was a painter and founding member of the influential Group of Seven.

17. Deanna Bowen and Maya Wilson-Sanchez, “A Centenary of Influence,” *Canadian Art*, April 20, 2020, <https://canadianart.ca/features/a-centenary-of-influence-deanna-bowen/>.

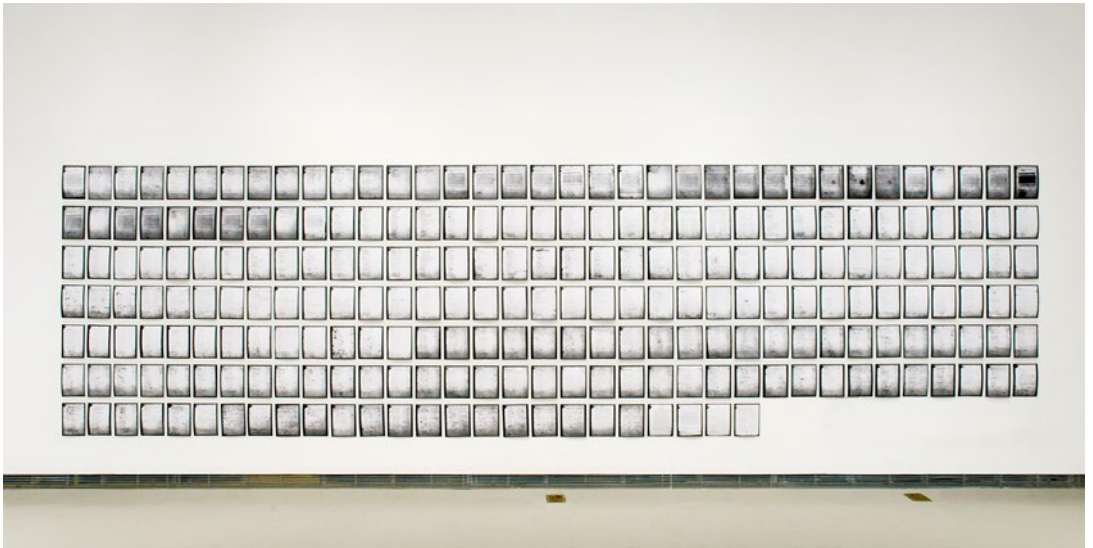


Figure 1. Deanna Bowen, *1911 Anti Creek-Negro Petition*, from the series *Immigration of Negroes from the United States to Western Canada, 1910–1911*, edition 1/2, 2013. Inkjet print on archival paper, 21.59 cm × 27.94 cm.

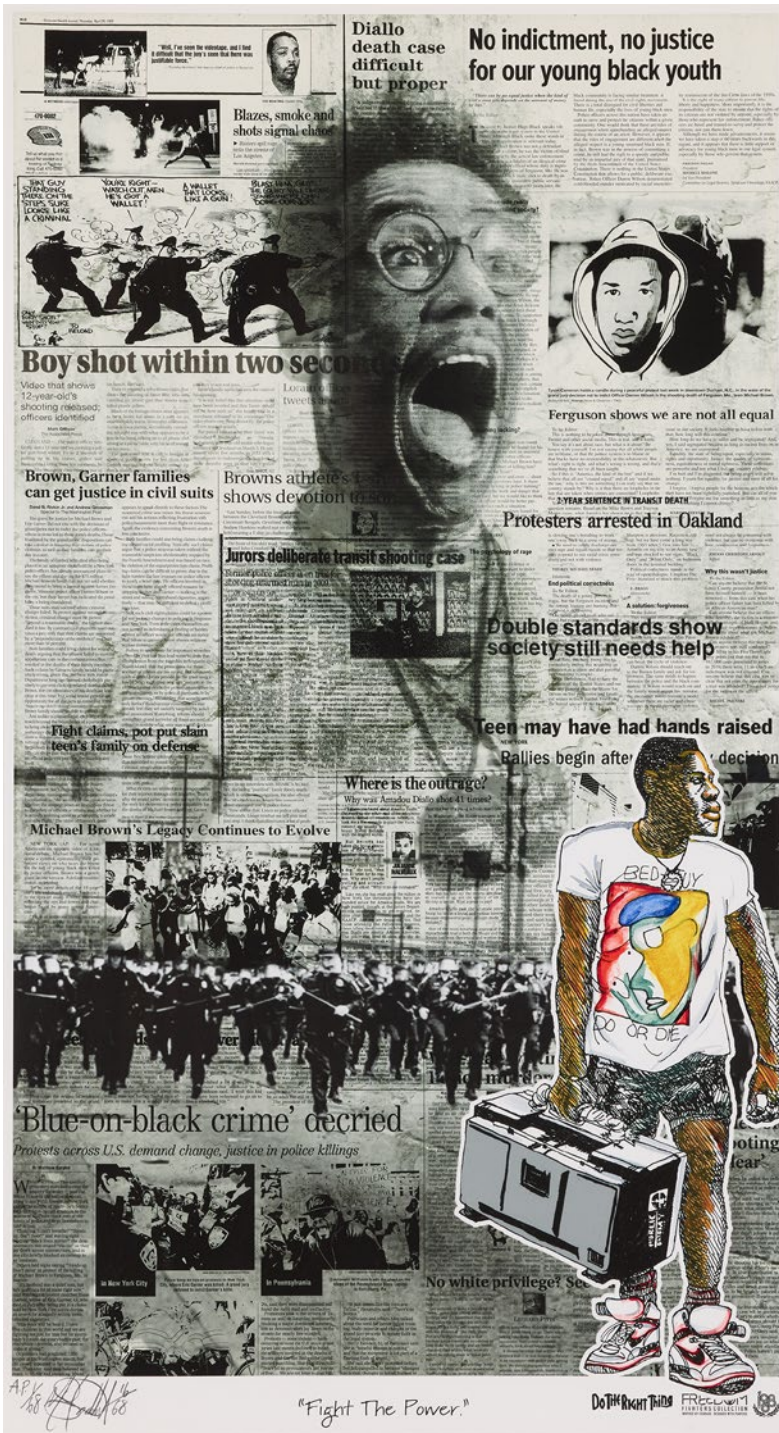


Figure 2. Mark Stoddart, *Fight the Power*, 2016. Collage on watercolour paper, 21" x 35". Courtesy of the artist.

activated to create new memories as these documents are displayed to the public to encourage new scripts of Canada's historical narrative. In some instances, as in her *On Trial* piece, Bowen actually has the public re-record and re-interpret the historical narrative. Bowen's works do not simply preserve Canadian history, they first disrupt and make messy our settled assumptions and knowledges about Canadian life. Then, in addition to re-writing historical narratives, Bowen's work also provides new descriptive possibilities that deny the performative objectivity with which institutions attempt to sanitize public memory.

A (Speculative) Remix Praxis

While Bowen forces Canadian audiences to confront their nation's imperialist and anti-Black foundations, Mark Stoddart works to secure a greater appreciation of Black diasporic life by merging narratives of Black empowerment with thickly layered, context-building canvases. Stoddart's practice, dating back to the late 1990s, has been a richly layered honouring of Black Power-era leaders and concepts, using political messaging on t-shirts alongside his graphic design work and portraiture to present an unrelenting appreciation of Black livingness. Both Bowen and Stoddart use archives to fuel their projects, with the latter focused on popular Black figures and, more recently, local heroes in his contribution to the 2018 Scarborough Nuit Blanche Art Festival. Mark Stoddart's use of confrontation augments the humanizing of the extraordinariness of Black athletes, leaders, and public figures. Stoddart is invested in a form of representation that recuperates the often-maligned Black public figure. Using both contemporary and archival images and newspapers, Stoddart practices a refusal of the dehumanization and denigration of Black life. His use of archival newspapers as backdrops for portraits of legendary leaders such as Elaine Brown, Jim Brown, Jackie Robinson, and Nelson Mandela forms a dynamic contrast of the dominant narratives circulated by the print media and the image of the individual in each work.

In his 2016 mixed-media work *Fight the Power* | fig. 2 |, Stoddart builds out from his *Heroes and Athletes* series to dig deeply into the intersections of protest and Black popular culture. In his piece, which was part of a 2016 group exhibition held at a Gallery 918 in Toronto, Stoddart brings back two characters from Spike Lee's iconic 1989 film *Do the Right Thing*. Buggin' Out is an eccentric and memorable character, while Radio Raheem is tragically suffocated to death by a police officer. Applying a collage technique of newspaper stories with a photograph of the central figure blended into the newsprint, Stoddart uses the historical context of newspaper stories as visual context. Further, Stoddart's canvas is decidedly not neutral in its refusal to mirror the white cube that galleries have historically preferred.¹⁸ In his *Heroes and Athletes* series, Stoddart's archival sensibility returns to the theme of the popular media's coverage and framing of events, and he uses this theme as a canvas for his empowering messages. Stoddart scales up his central characters who are superimposed on top and around the newsprint which retains

18. For more on the white background some painters are taught to use as the starting point of their paintings, see Omar Ba's useful reflection on his artistic training in Senegal and his refusal to use white backgrounds. See Mary-Dailey Desmarais, Rober Malbert, Nabila Abdel Nadi, and Gaëtane Verna, *Omar Ba: Same Dream/Vision Partagée*, Power Plant Pages No. 8 (Toronto: The Power Plant Contemporary Gallery, 2019).

its original type set and size. Unlike some of the other figures in Stoddart's series, like basketball legend Bill Russell or baseball superstar Hank Aaron, fictional characters Radio Raheem and Buggin' Out do not have newspaper articles written about them. Instead, Stoddart uses newspaper stories from recent 2015 and 2016 events that eerily mirror the "fictional" police killing of Radio Raheem in the 1989 film.

Centred in the monochromatic work is an enlarged image of Buggin' Out's face in all of his vibrant eccentricity: his mouth ajar, evoking volumes of expressive Black culture as veins show vocal cord strain, while his neck proudly displays a wooden medallion of the African continent. Radio Raheem is sketched into the bottom right corner of the work; his illustrated figure is the only colour image in this otherwise black-and-white piece. The two fictional characters are surrounded by various news reports with legible headlines such as "No indictment no justice for our young black youth," "Boy shot within two seconds," "Blue on black crime decried," "Brown, Garner families can get justice in civil suits," and "Ferguson shows we are not all equal." Stoddart's memory work and archival sensibility collapses a quarter-century of police brutality, and it brings into relation the fictional character and the more recent police suffocation and murder of Eric Garner. *Fight the Power* recontextualizes the moment, with the recent (at the time) murders of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and Trayvon Martin (amongst too many others). The result brings Spike Lee's character back to haunt the present and draws enduring connections to police killings of Black Canadians, such as the 1970s murders of Albert Johnson and Buddy Evans, the more recent killings of Andrew Loku, and Jermaine Carby in 2015, as well as Ian Pryce, Abdirahman Abdi, and too many more "connections" to name here.¹⁹ Like much archival work, Stoddart's piece is meant to function in the present by mobilizing memory as a connective tissue. It makes plain the decades-long patterns of police brutality and the excessive force used to kill members of the Black community. *Fight the Power*, in its relationality, connecting fictional and real police murders of Black people decades apart, offers its audiences the opportunity to contemplate and question Western European Enlightenment conceptions of progress.

Stoddart imagines an archival image of Radio Raheem and transforms it into another representational form beyond its video origins and into an illustration. His use of colour in this piece encourages viewers to focus on his sketch in relation to the numerous newsprint headings and the much larger image of Buggin' Out. The news stories which form the backdrop of the work are collaged in their original size and form, in black and white — far removed from the dominant form of viewing news in 2016 via the internet. These newspaper clippings are significant in that they refuse the context of the attention economy and the algorithmic desires of media platforms interested in clicks, click-throughs, and monopolizing audiences' attention. The clippings suggest that a return to the lessons of Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* is possible in a context designed for public contemplation—the art gallery. Stoddart's piece refuses to disconnect the present from the past;

19. One particularly salient statistic tells us a great deal about the situation in Canada: more than 30% of people killed by police are Black, while Black people account for less than 10% of the population in cities like Toronto, Ottawa and Montréal. For a more detailed analysis, Robin Maynard's *Policing Black Lives* (Halifax: Fernwood Books, 2017) is an excellent starting point.

it leverages popular culture to refuse a siloed and sanitized histories of the “one bad apple” narrative of police brutality.

Stoddart’s practice of recontextualizing using a collage method (with text, photography, and illustration) is a poignant reminder of the multi-layered ways in which his ethic performs memory and archival work differently from official institutional preservation. Stoddart’s memory work combines visual representation, speculative creative reproduction, and a sense of unbounded time, with past and present speaking to one another. A remix ethic in Stoddart’s piece employs a sampling practice found in popular music and especially in Black musical forms such as hip-hop, house, and jungle.²⁰ Stoddart must rely on the painful memories conjured by violent Black death to reanimate this memory in ways that do not rehearse the violence originally visited on the former Black life. In an era in which the constant replay of Black death via social media battles for our attention online, Stoddart’s choice to re-present Radio Raheem in this way is important.²¹ Radio Raheem is illustrated with a huge boombox in his hands, standing and looking away from the viewer with his attention elsewhere. He is donning fresh pair of red and white Nike Air high-top basketball sneakers and an Africa medallion commonplace in the late 1980s. Providing a new visual context for Radio Raheem, Stoddart engages in the kind of memory work that connects eras by collapsing time through a political priority that insists on Black life while refusing a circulation of Black death. Of all the possible screen captures of Buggin’ Out, Stoddart’s choice is one of exuberant life, an undeniably oppositional rendering of the piece’s messaging around Black death and police brutality.

Public Covert Ops

In contrast to Stoddart’s references to two characters from an iconic Spike Lee film, Elicser Elliott’s murals of Toronto street scenes depict racialized characters, who populate the city. If *Fight the Power* offers us a remix of sorts, bringing generations of police brutality together in a coherent and legible script, the public street art of Elicser amplifies the visibility of Toronto’s claim to be one of the world’s most diverse cities in its remixing the concept of visible minority.²² Rather than reifying whiteness as neutral, as the language of visible minority does, Elicser’s public murals centre the multiracial communities that form the majority of Toronto’s populations. As curator Pamela Edmonds contends, “Elicser’s street art visualize(s) the complex thing that is community, reproducing the multicultural city of Toronto as a space that reflects the hopefulness of living together despite multifarious differences.”²³

Elicser Elliott is a celebrated graffiti artist, painter and muralist whose most notable works depict warm and round-faced characters of multiple hues. The people in Elliott’s pieces, both fictional and real, humanize Toronto’s concrete canvases as the city’s condo overdevelopment dominates the skyline and the agendas of developers and investors. In his aerosol paintings, such as in his 2021 series, *Migrated Dwelling*, the outdoors are

20. Jungle is an electronic music which emerged in the United Kingdom in the 1990s featuring sped-up breakbeats samples from hip-hop and reggae songs. House music emerged in 1970s Chicago in the aftermath of the death of disco, catering largely to Black and Latino queer communities and featuring lengthy dance music tracks, innovative sampling, and DJing techniques as well as remixing long before digital technologies allowed for this practice. Hip-hop music and culture emerged in 1970s New York—sampling records became the dominant mode of music production in the 1980s and has been at the core of high-profile lawsuits due to lack of sample clearance.

21. See Tonia Sutherland’s “Making a Killing: Race, Ritual and (Re) Membering in Digital Culture,” *Preservation, Digital Technology, and Culture* 46, no. 1 (2017): 32–40, as well as Nehal El-Hadi, “Death Undone,” *The New Inquiry*, May 2, 2017, <https://thenewinquiry.com/death-undone/>.

22. As a term, “visible minority” has been one mechanism used to describe racialized populations in Canada. The term’s focus is one of race and phenotype while also obscuring the racialization process, the way in which white-dominant culture uses race as a hierarchical organizing principle.

23. Pamela Edmonds, “A Thousand Words and a Thousand More: Curatorial Imperatives, Social Practice, and the Hip Hop Archive,” in ... *Everything Remains Raw: Photographing Toronto’s Hip-Hop Culture from Analogue to Digital* (Moncton: Goose Lane, 2018), 90–91.

deprioritized with a focus on home and our extended times at home during lockdown in the context of the 2020 coronavirus pandemic. Elliott's work is a careful meditation on the human condition as it intersects with the lived realities of urbanity and Toronto's multiracial realities.

While also working with notions around hip-hop culture, Elliott's 2018 aerosol mural *T-Dot Rooftop* | **fig. 3** | can be read as a complex and nuanced take on Black memory and Toronto's condo overdevelopment.²⁴ Hung as part of a group exhibition at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection in 2018,²⁵ the work is mounted on a three-panel wooden support, with a spray-painted scene of downtown Toronto centring two racialized photographers. Elliott's take on urban landscape painting intervenes in a gallery dominated by Group of Seven landscapes, which originally belonged to collectors Robert and Signe McMichael.

Along with the two characters embedded in the scene, a woman sitting on a ledge and a male figure standing looking down at his camera, Elliott paints two audio cassette tapes and what appears to be a compact disc, which sit on the ledge beside the female figure. This ledge, a site of graffiti tags, becomes home to Elliott's citational practice and honours his crew *VTs* and another Toronto-based graffiti artist, *Skam*. While the two cassettes on the ledge cannot be clearly recognized as a particular brand, such as Maxell or Sony, these items signal a deep contrast to the scale and architecture of the Skydome²⁶ and the CN Tower painted almost directly behind them. Elliott signals a sense of nostalgia, a reminiscence of an analog era when young people carried these cassettes while listening to Walkmans in transit. More importantly, the compact disc directly beside the cassette is a recognizable album, released in 1999 by a Scarborough based emcee named *Mathematik*.²⁷ Shaped largely and more squarely than a rectangular cassette, the album is one of the nuances I quietly noticed when installing the piece. As curator for the exhibition *...Everything Remains Raw: Photographing Toronto Hip-Hop from Analogue to Digital* (2018), I confirmed with Elliott his nod to *Mathematik's* album. Further, as a practicing DJ with almost two decades of radio programming and mixtapes, I could quickly connect the green and brown outlines on the square compact disc to this critically acclaimed hip-hop album. This curious citation is made to speak to a specific audience, those who regularly decode the esotericism of underground and local hip-hop music in the small Canadian market.

In her catalogue essay, "The Art of Elicser: Reflections on the Visibility of Black and Brown Communities through Graffiti," Felicia Mings describes the artist's representational works as combatting the erasure of racialized people from the much lauded and celebrated paintings of the Group of Seven. Mings reads Elliott's work as a "potent gesture towards inserting, remembering, and reimagining absented communities' relationship to, and place within, the visual representations and physical geographies of Canada."²⁸ In astutely reading Elliott's works as in "dialogue with the iconic landscape paintings of the Group of Seven," Mings demonstrates how Elliott's "vernacular painting practice" finds itself interacting with the

24. Elicser's art has been a constant presence on the streets of Toronto since 1997. He has often been commissioned to do public pieces. See Yvette Farkas's collection *Toronto Graffiti* (self-published, 2011/2021).

25. This exhibition was on display at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection from March to September, 2018.

26. Skydome was the original name of the baseball stadium built for the Toronto Blue Jays in 1989. It has since been sold and renamed the Rogers Centre.

27. *Mathematik* is a Toronto based hip-hop artist who rose to prominence in the 1990s when his first single "Learn to Earn" was released by Beatfactory Records. His intricate rhymes and embrace of all of hip-hop's artforms (b-boying, djing, rhyming and graffiti) have distinguished him as a living embodiment of the term hip-hop.

28. Felicia Mings, "The Art of Elicser: Reflections on the Visibility of Black and Brown Communities through Graffiti" in *...Everything Remains Raw: Photographing Toronto Hip Hop Culture from Analogue to Digital* (Moncton: Goose Lane, 2018), 59.

29. See Elliott's *A Little off the Top* (2014), *Sometimes it's Like Holding Fire* (2017) and *Hug Tree* (ca. 2012), documented in Mings, 2018.



Figure 3. Elicser Elliott, *T-Dot Rooftop*, 2018. Spray paint on panel. Photo: Alex Cousins.

natural landscape in beautifully surprising ways, taking soot, broken tree trunks and even overgrown folia bursting through bricks as one character's hair!"²⁹

The accuracy of Mings' reading is bolstered by the presence of Mathematik's album, aptly titled *Ecology*, in Elliott's *T-Dot Rooftop*. Mathematik's *Ecology* album, when cited in Elliott's landscape aerosol painting, interestingly returns us to Moten's notion of consent as an "ecological disposition," a "non-performative condition." The image of the album Elliott paints includes no words; it is simply swaths of green and brown. Elliott's memory work evades a dominant reading, it cannot be fully recuperated by dominant forms of preservation or memory making. Like graffiti tags, which are often purposely obscure, Elliott speaks to a specific community in his citation of the *Ecology* album. Importantly, *T-Dot Rooftop* honors one of the original formats of the album as it did not circulate as a cassette in 1999. Elliott here helps us think about Black archival practices, in which the act of citation is not just a nostalgic homage, but also a deeply encoded and obscured gesture. By naming the album and providing only minimal visual clues beyond colour and shape, Elliott excavates and celebrates *Ecology* not as a public conversation with gallery attendees writ large, but rather as a quiet, opaque nod to a particular audience.

Using his decades of experience as a graffiti writer, Elliott, in *T-Dot Rooftop*, helps us imagine a way that opacity might be built into our archival practices and memory work. By directing his admiration of this album to those "in the know," Elliott enacts a deeply coded gesture to address specific audiences and viewers aligned with hip-hop culture. Borrowing from the kinds of values and ethics embedded in the culture of graffiti writing, Elliott is able to publicly produce art whose memory work honours the right to be opaque. Demonstrating Édouard Glissant's important intervention of the right for Black people to practice a level of opacity, Elliott provides only clues, not completely unfettered access nor a clarity that can easily be recuperated in the service of someone's agenda.³⁰ Further, the tags Elliott produces on the ledge speak directly to yet another community, not just fans of hip-hop music but graffiti artists who can decipher the kinds of urban hieroglyphs commonplace in the culture.

Elliott's coded citational practice, Stoddart's recontextualizing remix practice and Bowen's direct-confrontation approach to Black archival sensibility all involve various kinds of refusals, yet they broaden the possibilities of the kind of practices a Black archival sensibility might induce. If we can read a level of refusal in Elliott's work, we might be drawn to his use of the environment in ways that diverge from the kinds of environmental dominance imagined by the colonial project and the romanticism of modernist paintings which rid the canvas of those Indigenous communities already present on the land. *T-Dot Rooftop*, exhibited at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection as part of the...*Everything Remains Raw* group show hung in an art institution known for its celebration of Group of Seven works and presented a divergence from romantic modernist paintings from this celebrated group

30. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*.

of artists. As a graffiti artist, Elliott does not invest in reproducing the discourses that prop up the Group of Seven's works as canonical, his works are filled with a diverse array of "everyday" people. Further, Elliott's embrace of obsolete technologies, including the cassette, the compact disc, and the film camera, also points to a refusal to be convinced of the myth of progress and the linear trajectories at the core of Western European enlightenment. History, memory, and Elliott's own archival retrieval process lay bare his intentions of working beyond the institutional archive and a preference to cite, retrieve, honour and celebrate in ways not legible to established archival discourses. Like Stoddart, Elliott leans into the aesthetics of hip-hop culture and engages a remix practice, which negotiates and renegotiates linear time, with a citational practice designed to recuperate intentionally obsolete technologies. As Elliott samples and recontextualizes as needed, his brown and Black characters urge a rethinking around the term "visible minority" and its hegemonic function of making whiteness invisible. By excavating imperial archives and recirculating, reinterpreting, and even performing this archival content, Bowen's work to confront these histories breathes life back into archives, making them more perceptible as living entities with subjective dispositions and nefarious lineages. Similarly, Stoddart's recreation and recontextualization of the tragic figure of Radio Raheem in *Do the Right Thing* creates opportunities for more black life, not a rehearsal of Black death.

When we situate these practices of refusal, confrontation, remix and citation which preserve and protect Black cultural life within our current moment of algorithmic dominance and the exponential erosion of trust online, they point in a direction that demands further elucidation. If archival work is meant to preserve, the practices of Black artists present us with carefully organized and implemented strategies which do not simply preserve or reproduce anti-Black neutrality and Black death, but elaborate ways to celebrate Black living. If algorithmic life continues to reproduce varieties of anti-Blackness, the practices of Black artists' memory work can expansively re-imagine Black life beyond the machinations of imperial and colonial legacies of preservation and archival practices. ¶

Spoken Softly with Mama: Memory, Monuments, and Black Women's Spaces in Cuba

David C. Hart

Spoken Softly with Mama (1998) est une installation de María Magdalena Campos-Pons, une artiste cubaine d'origine yorouba vivant aux États-Unis depuis le début des années 1990. L'installation de Campos-Pons raconte les vies et les pratiques culturelles de part et d'autre dans l'Atlantique noir. Cette œuvre fait partie d'une série de trois installations multimédias se voulant portraits et monuments conceptuels. La série apporte un regard critique sur l'exclusion des Cubain-e-s défavorisé-e-s à la fois de l'histoire officielle, et des monuments publics conventionnels. Dans cet article, j'examine le parcours de Campos-Pons, son exploration esthétique interdisciplinaire et innovatrice de l'expérience diasporique des personnes noires, et l'importance culturelle de cette valorisation des femmes noires, leur travail, et les espaces où leur mémoire est célébrée. Comme d'autres artistes qui puisent dans le riche legs culturel de l'Atlantique noir, Campos-Pons réussit à étendre les multiples sens de l'iconographie afro-cubaine du particulier à l'universel.

David C. Hart is an Associate Professor of Art History in the Liberal Arts Department at the Cleveland Institute of Art.
—dhart@cua.edu

Nor do we need to accept a polarized view of history and memory which posits that the whites (or some other 'advanced' group with power or privilege) had the history while the blacks (or some other 'simple' group without power or privilege...) were stuck with nothing but impulsive, affective memory...¹

The installation *Spoken Softly with Mama*, 1998² | fig. 1 | by María Magdalena Campos-Pons, a Cuban expatriate artist of Yoruban ancestry living in the United States since the early 1990s, recalls the lives of people and cultural practices that span the Black Atlantic including women in the artist's own family. As a multimedia installation, this work allows an immersive, embodied experience as the viewer navigates the space of the installation, moving among and perceiving its arrangement of objects, videos, photography, light, and sound. Employing a conceptual approach to contemporary multimedia art, each element retains meanings of the objects and forms they represent while at the same time generating new meanings in their juxtaposition with objects and forms they typically would not be paired with. Moving between objects and meanings in a gallery space parallels a critical conceptual strategy of pointing to and disrupting categories such as history and memory, in order to create new meanings.³ Described by curators as non-sentimental, poetic, and elegiac in its evocations of memory, spirituality, and domestic spaces, *Spoken Softly with Mama* is one of several works by the artist that focuses on displacement as it relates to the lives of Black people from the African and Cuban diasporas.⁴

Spoken Softly with Mama is the second in a series of three complex multimedia installations Campos-Pons created between 1994 and 1999, collectively titled *History of a People Who Were Not Heroes*, works she describes as conceptual portraits. As she pursued new approaches to her artistic practice after artist residencies in both Canada and the United States, the artist, who was born and educated in Cuba, rethought her relationship with her homeland and African diasporic culture and experience more broadly.⁵ The first, *History of a People Who Were Not Heroes: A Town Portrait* (1994) | fig. 2 |, was followed by *Spoken Softly with Mama* (1998) and then *Meanwhile the Girls Were Playing* (1999) | fig. 3 |. This essay focuses on the second, *Spoken Softly with Mama*, a work some critics and curators argued was the most successful in achieving her conceptual goals and garnered the widest critical attention for Campos-Pons. It was exhibited at NYC's Museum of Modern Art in 1997 and at the

49th Venice Biennale in 2001 in the exhibition *Authentic/Ex-Centric: Africa In and Out of Africa*.⁶

Campos-Pons's installations not only function as a critique of history's exclusions, but also resist the polarized and gendered binary construction of the domestic interior as feminine and public space as masculine. In *Spoken Softly with Mama*, the artist appropriated and refashioned everyday objects (irons, ironing boards, and textiles) with creative practices (through performances in audio and video recordings) that reference the scope and history of Black women's domestic labour in Cuba. First, I will discuss the artist's background, including her education and some aspects of the cultural and political context in Cuba in the 1980s, which impacted the creation of her work and prompted the artist's travel abroad. This is followed by a discussion of Campos-Pons's innovative aesthetic and interdisciplinary exploration of Black diasporic experience. Finally, I consider the cultural significance of foregrounding Black women, their work, and the spaces where they are remembered, including artistic forms such as public monuments, and the interest that artists from the 1970s to the 1990s have had in critiquing its forms and expressions.

Campos-Pons is part of the first generation of Cubans whose lives were fully shaped by the changes brought about by the 1959 Revolution. She was born in the Cuban Province of Matanzas in 1959, the year that the forces led by Fidel Castro successfully overthrew the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista.⁷ The new government established a radical program to provide all its citizens health care, housing, and literacy, with the result that Cuba ultimately possessed one of the best educated populations in Latin America.⁸ Art literacy, an integral part of this program, was seen as a crucial vehicle to achieve cultural change and manifested in the creation of a number of schools of art across the country that built upon the extant and sophisticated—if traditional—art culture of museums, galleries, and art schools such as the Academia de San Alejandro, founded in 1817.⁹ This program of art education, post-revolution, resulted in the establishment in 1962 of the Escuela Nacional de Arte (National School of Art) or ENA—an undergraduate college of fine arts notable for the employment of prominent contemporary artists like modernist painter Antonia Eiriz, though women artists were few among the faculty—and in 1976 of the Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA), a graduate program in visual arts, institutions that Campos-Pons attended.¹⁰

Campos-Pons was among the few women and Black people pursuing a career as a professional artist and could look to very few Black Cuban artists as role models in the 1980s when she was in graduate school at ISA. Such demographics did not inhibit but rather strengthened her resolve to be included with notable artists such as Wifredo Lam in the National Museum of Fine Arts in Havana and enhance the prominence of Afro-Cuban women's lives and experience.¹¹

The Cuban government's investment in education and culture nurtured a generation of artists who, by the 1980s, would constitute the so-called New Cuban Art.¹² A signal characteristic of the New Cuban Art was its focus on

1. Geneviève Fabre and Robert O'Meally, "Introduction," in Geneviève Fabre and Robert O'Meally, eds., *History and Memory in African-American Culture* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) 8–9.

2. *Spoken Softly with Mama*, originally created in 1998, was subsequently acquired by the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa for its permanent collection. See <https://www.gallery.ca/collection/artwork/spoken-softly-with-mama>. A second version of the installation, *Spoken Softly with Mama II*, 2008, was acquired in 2011 by the Spelman College Museum of Fine Art in Atlanta. See: <https://museum.spelman.edu/spotlights/mariamagdalena-campos-pons-spoken-softly-with-mama-ii-1998-2008/>.

3. Fabre and O'Meally, 5–8.

4. A wide-ranging discussion that foregrounds these characteristics is Lisa D. Freiman, ed., *Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons: Everything is Separated by Water*, exh. cat. (Indianapolis: New Haven and London: Indianapolis Museum of Art and Yale University Press, 2007).

5. In 1988 Campos-Pons received approval to be an exchange student at the Massachusetts College of Art and in 1990 had a painting fellowship at the Banff Center for the Arts in Alberta Canada. Freiman, 27, 35.

6. Susan Snodgrass, "Vestiges of Memory," *Art in America* 95, no. 10 (November 2007), 181.

7. Maifeli Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Causes and Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) and Stephen Cushion, *A Hidden History of the Cuban Revolution: How the Working Class Shaped the Guerrillas' Victory* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2015).

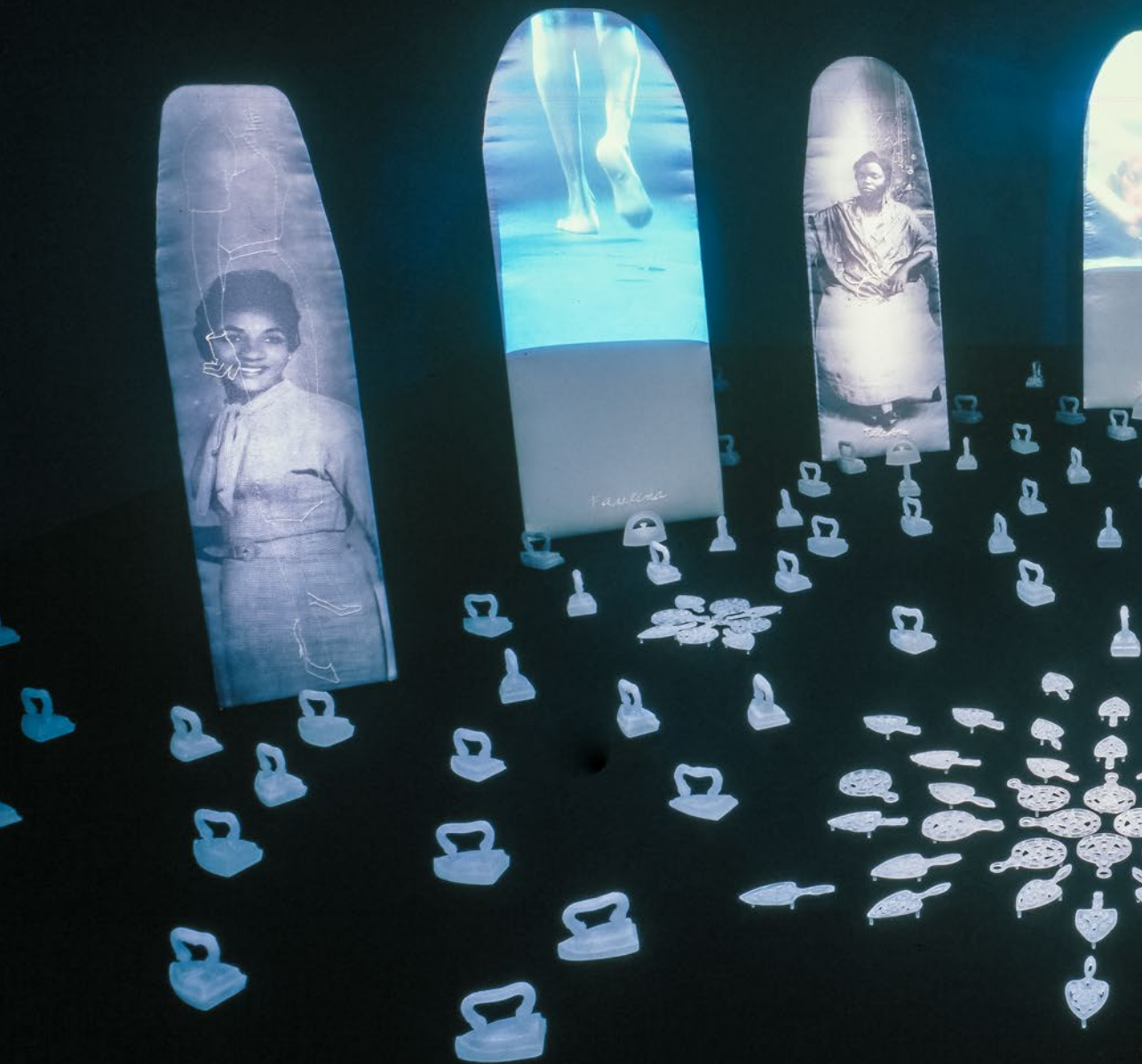
8. John A. Loomis, *Revolution of Forms: Cuba's Forgotten Art Schools* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999), 19.

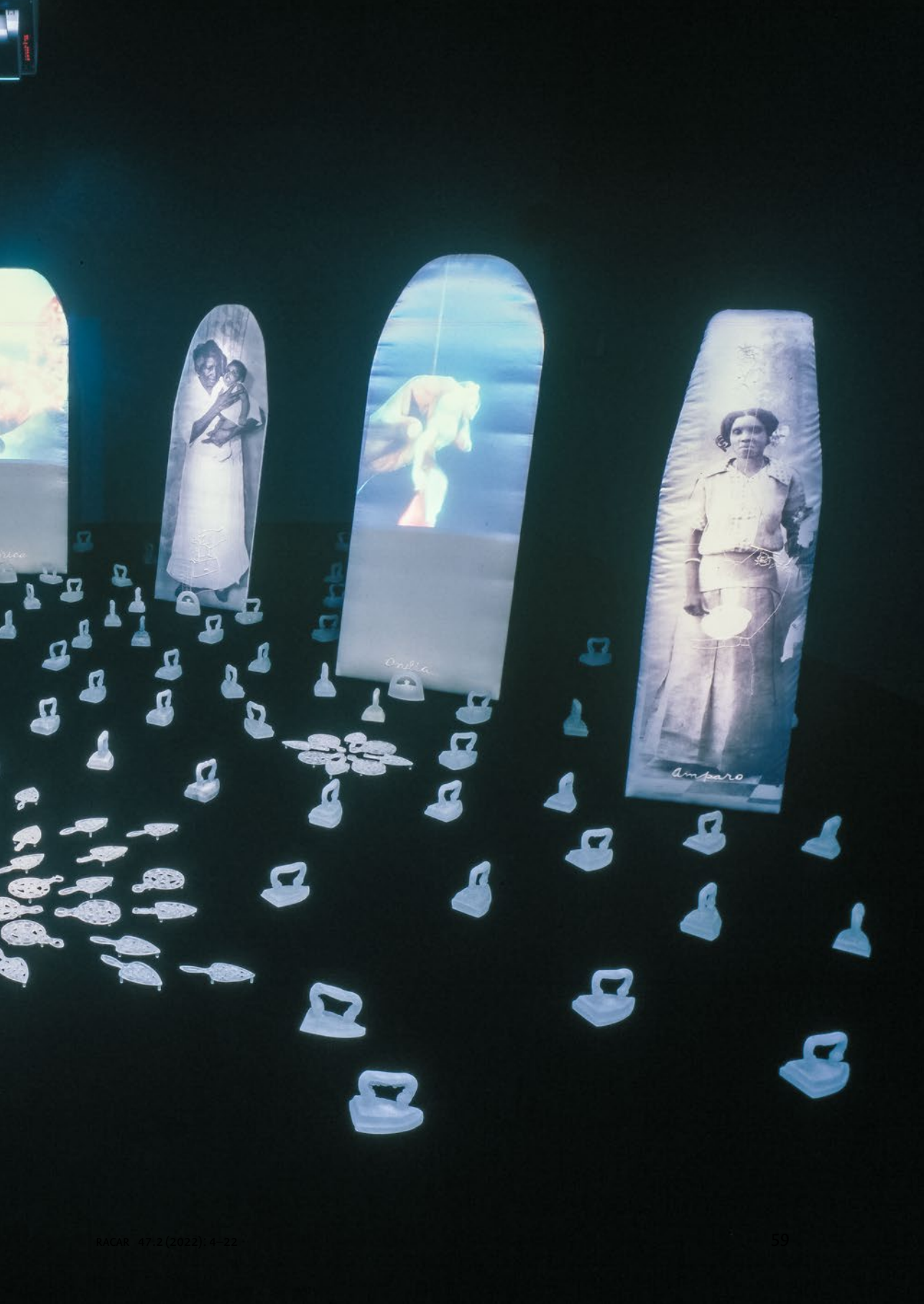
9. Lowery Stokes Sims, *Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde, 1923–1982* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 9, and Luis Camnitzer, *New Art of Cuba* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 152–159.

10. Alejandro Anreus, "The Road to Dystopia: The Paintings of Antonia Eiriz," *Art Journal* 63, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 4–17.

11. Campos-Pons, interview with the author, August 20, 2003; Camnitzer, 161.

Figure 1. María Magdalena Campos-Pons, *Spoken Softly with Mama*, 1998. Embroidered silk and organza over ironing boards with photographic transfers, embroidered cotton sheets, cast glass irons and trivets, wooden benches, six projected video tracks, stereo sound, 8.6 x 11.7 m (installation dimensions variable). Purchased 1999 National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Photo: NGC.





national identity, widely recognized in the signifiers of racial, ethnic, and cultural mixture and cultural forms (such as Santería and Indigenous cultural and spiritual practices) that those mixtures generated. To create this work, this generation of Cuban artists employed what were seen at the time as new artistic practices: performance, conceptual art, and installation. Two events in the manifestation of this new direction in contemporary art in Cuba were pivotal: the ground-breaking exhibition *Volumen Uno* (*Volume One*) in 1981 and the first Havana Biennial in 1984.¹³ The performance, conceptual, and installation art they both featured would have a profound impact not only on the contemporary art future artists would make, but also positioned contemporary Cuban artists and art on par with advanced art globally.

Volumen Uno consisted of eleven male artists, who were older than Campos-Pons but whose lives were also mostly shaped by the post-revolutionary period, and it occurred just as Campos-Pons began her graduate studies at ISA in 1980. The shift in styles between the 1970s and 1980s of one of its members, Flavio Garcandía, (who was one of Campos-Pons's teachers) is in some ways emblematic of the shifts to new art forms, discourses, and experimentation that characterized much contemporary Cuban art after 1980. His earlier photorealistic painting style was succeeded in the first Havana Biennial in 1984 by the installation *El lago de los Cisnes* (*Swan Lake*) with flat, cut-out, decorative forms sprinkled with glitter and postmodern kitsch references.¹⁴

Another feature of 1980s art that Campos-Pons would take up later and develop independently from her Cuban peers such as Manuel Mendive, Ricardo Rodríguez Brey, and Marta María Pérez Bravo, was the specificity of Cuban identity in the form of creolization in Cuba. Like other places in the Caribbean, Cuba was a crucible for the dynamics of migration, mixture, and the creation of new cultures and cultural forms. Cultural mixture as a characteristic of Cubanness became widely known in the 20th century in the writings of anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, who used the metaphor of the *ajajico*, a common type of stew in Cuba. Ajajico's resonance as a symbol for Cuban culture comes not only from the variety of ingredients depending on the cook, but also because some of its many ingredients meld together as they simmer while others retain their distinctiveness.¹⁵ Artists and critics such as Lucy Lippard commented on works like Manuel Mendive's performance art work for the Second Havana Biennial in 1986, for example, which drew on the body-centered ritual practices of Santería. What was significant for her was the practice of combining elements from popular culture; from marginalized cultures and identities; and the employment of cultural mixture as both a subject and an aesthetic—a distinctive, postmodern artistic position. The result was that Cubans were making advanced art that challenged Western assumptions of Cuba's marginalized cultural status.¹⁶

With the emergence of a distinctive Cuban art and art scene in the 1980s occurring just before the collapse of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s and the ensuing economic crisis and instances of repression and artistic censorship in Cuba, Campos-Pons carefully negotiated limited opportunities to

12. Camnitzer prefers "New Cuban Art" to "Cuban Renaissance" because the latter term is too dependent on rebirth and classicism in Italy rather than Cuba in the late 20th century; Luis Camnitzer, *New Art of Cuba*, xxi.

13. Camnitzer, *New Art of Cuba*, 1–67.

14. *Ibid.*, 19–20.

15. Fernando Ortiz, "Los factores humanos de la cubanidad," in *Orbita de Fernando Ortiz* (Havana: ediciones Unión, 1973), 154–157, cited in Gerardo Mosquera, "Elegguá at the (Post?) Modern Crossroads: The Presence of Africa in the visual arts of Cuba," in *Santería Aesthetics in Contemporary Latin American Art*, ed. Arturo Lindsay (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 226, 237; Andrea O'Reilly Herrera, *Cuban Artists Across the Diaspora: Setting the Tent Against the House* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 63.

16. Lucy R. Lippard, cited in Gerardo Mosquera, "The Infinite Island: Introduction to New Cuban Art," in *Contemporary Art from Cuba: Irony and Survival on the Utopian Island*, ed. Marilyn A. Zeitli (Tempe: Arizona State University Art Museum, 1999), 23. See also Lucy Lippard, "Made in the U.S.A.: Art from Cuba," *Art in America* 74, no. 4 (April 1986), 27.



Figure 2. María Magdalena Campos-Pons, *History of a People Who Were Not Heroes: A Town Portrait*, 1993. Installation by Campos-Pons and sound by Neil Leonard. Mixed media installation: wood, glass steel, clay tablets, black and white photographs, 3 channel video, stereo sound. Dimensions variable. Image courtesy of the artist.

travel abroad and eventually to leave Cuba permanently.¹⁷ As curator and art critic Okwui Enwezor observed: “Perhaps it is coincidental that Campos-Pons migrated to Canada and the United States at the very moment when radical content in artistic discourse was being censored and attacked by the State and artists were increasingly subjected to procedures of intimidation and arbitrary withdrawal of institutional support.”¹⁸

In 1988, Campos-Pons received approval from both the Cuban and US governments to attend the Massachusetts College of Art as an exchange student, part of only a second group of artists from Cuba to have such an opportunity in the United States. In 1990 she received an artist’s residency at the Banff Centre for the Arts in Alberta, Canada. Campos-Pons’s 1990 marriage to a Boston-based jazz musician Neil Leonard (before her Banff residency) and fears that the Cuban government might prevent her from traveling between the US and Cuba (among other reasons) led to the artist’s personal choice to live outside her homeland—a displacement that the curator of her 2007 mid-career retrospective called a “voluntary exile.”¹⁹ The artist acknowledges that the circumstances of her leaving Cuba were not as harsh as those who left for the US in successive waves after the 1959 revolution. She does not think of herself as an exile in that sense.²⁰ Exile is not merely dependent on the particularities of Campos-Pons’s circumstances but extends beyond them to the forced migration of Africans in the Atlantic slave trade.²¹ As a contemporary artist, “exile” also becomes a critical and theoretical position and resonates across multiple possible meanings in Campos-Pons’s work relative to displacement and alienation based on race and gender generally. But measuring the circumstances of her identity and her departure from Cuba necessarily judges her work only as an autobiographical “document,” a limitation that, as I will argue later, does not sufficiently consider the fuller implications and dynamics of creolization in the Black Atlantic.

Being separated from her homeland and being located in the very different geographic and cultural context of North America foregrounded the distinctiveness of Cuban identity and culture for Campos-Pons. This is also the case for many Cubans who “became Cuban,” to use Louis A. Pérez’s phrase, after traveling abroad.²² Campos-Pons contemplated those media that were the carriers of history and tradition in the Afro-Cuban community, performative and oral traditions such as storytelling, song, and ritual as well as assemblage using ritual objects of Afro-Cuban and African traditions. Campos-Pons’s exile paralleled, in a much broader sense, the experiences of enslaved laborers displaced from Africa, of women exiled from patriarchal culture, and of historical “master narratives” that excluded the personal and social experiences of poor people, especially Black women.

Prior to leaving Cuba for North America, Campos-Pons’s work was more closely linked to critiques of the systemic oppression of women than to exploration of the African diaspora. Her earlier work was characterized by shaped painted forms rather than the media arts she explored in North America. Campos-Pons’s *Contraceptive* (1987), for example, consists of gesturally painted, abstracted forms vaguely resembling reproductive organs

17. Campos-Pons, interview with the author, August 20, 2003.

18. Okwui Enwezor, “The Diasporic Imagination: The Memory Works of María Magdalena Campos-Pons,” in *María Magdalena Campos-Pons: Everything is Separated by Water*, ed. Lisa D. Freiman (Indianapolis/New Haven and London: Indianapolis Museum of Art and Yale University Press, 2007), 88, n.46. Enwezor notes that several essays in Holly Block, ed., *Art Cuba: The New Generation* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001) refer to the instances of repression and censorship, especially Eugenio Valdés Figueroa’s “Trajectories of a Rumor: Cuban Art in the Postwar Period,” which marks 1989 as a particular point of heightened tension in the Cuban art community.

19. Freiman, 35. That Campos-Pons was later able to travel between her home in the US and Cuba led some to question whether the artist should use the term “exile” when many Cubans fled the country based on arguably greater threats to their freedom and safety that preceded leaving the country.

20. Campos-Pons, interview with the author, August 20, 2003.

21. Enwezor, “The Diasporic Imagination: The Memory Works of María Magdalena Campos-Pons,” 71–74; María Magdalena Campos-Pons, interview by Sama Alshaibi, September 26, 2002, University of Colorado at Boulder. Videotape series *What Follows*.

22. Louis A. Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality and Culture* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press), 6, 1999.

surrounded by threatening phallic and spear-like forms. There are feminist implications in these works, including the oppression of women (interrogating women's ability to have control of their bodies in terms of sexuality and reproduction), and female subjectivity (celebrating "woman" in terms of bodily experiences and processes). These themes are similar in some respects to the work of feminist artists in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s in that they deal with patriarchy, female subjectivity, and woman's bodily experience, but created in very different political, historical, and aesthetic contexts. Campos-Pons, along with Marta María Pérez Bravo, were among very few Cuban artists of their generation who dealt with such themes.²³ An artist Campos-Pons identifies as an influence was Cuban-American artist Ana Mendieta, who visited Cuba several times in the early 1980s, though Campos-Pons did not adopt the same feminist position as Mendieta. The influence of conceptual strategies engaging gender issues and the cultures of African diaspora that Mendieta employed in installation art are discussed in detail below.

Although Campos-Pons and many women artists in Cuba did not identify themselves as feminists in the sense that North American women activists used that term or in the ways that North American critics understood feminism as a movement, works like *Contraceptive* emerged nonetheless in a Cuban cultural context with its own feminist discourses and analytical frameworks. Campos-Pons's woman-centered art evolved and expanded later in the artist's artistic practice. *Spoken Softly with Mama's* engagement with Black women's experience across time and space and within economic structures—and with Black women's exclusion from dominant representational systems—resulted from this expanded analytical framework. Specifically, this critical engagement across experiences, economies, and systems of representation aligned with intersectional Black feminist discourses that emerged in Latin America and North America in the 1970s and 1980s; discourses that were both distinct from and, at the time, critical of the feminist movement—largely middle class and white—that emerged in North America and Europe in those decades.

A feminist movement developed in Cuba dating at least to the post-colonial period following Cuba's war of independence. This movement, even though segregated by race and class, not only advanced women's rights politically but also culturally, even as it faced resistance by Cuban elites throughout the twentieth century. Women's feminist writing, for example—in which mostly white, middle-class women claimed their "position as social and political subjects" was part of a larger set of discourses, alongside the effort to establish an independent national and cultural identity (known as *Cubanismo*) and resist US neocolonialism in the first third of the twentieth century.²⁴

In the post-revolutionary Cuba in which Campos-Pons grew up, the realm of cultural production was where Black artists in the 1960s and 1970s made the most effective contributions concerning questions of race, gender, social justice issues, and revolution, as was the case in leftist movements

23. Gerardo Mosquera "¿Feminismo en Cuba?" *Revolución y Cultura* 6 (June 1990), 52–57.

24. Catherine Davies, "National Feminism in Cuba: The Elaboration of a Counter-Discourse, 1900–1935," *The Modern Language Review* 91, no. 1 (1996): 107–109.

elsewhere in Latin America in the twentieth century. Many progressive Cuban women, including those who attacked patriarchal attitudes and fought for women's rights, did not identify with feminists like Mendieta, who saw themselves as outside of, and working against, a patriarchal, male-dominated, and sexist mainstream culture.²⁵ The Cuban government, which criticized North American feminism as bourgeois, anti-male, and imperialist, tended to see as acceptable only those frameworks addressing women's rights in Cuba that were subsumed under the Marxist ideology of class struggle. But some artists nevertheless addressed class, race, and gender together.²⁶ Black filmmaker Sara Gomez's important film *De cierta manera* (*One Way or Another*), 1974, for instance, contained an intersectional analysis of its protagonists' romantic relationship in the sense that racism, sexism, and class prejudice needed to be confronted for the relationship to succeed.²⁷

The term intersectionality was coined by Black feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe an analytical framework for understanding how social identities such as race, sex, class, and ability, as well as forms of oppression, overlap, combine, and intersect. Any analysis that considers these identities as separate and distinct, Crenshaw argued, insufficiently accounts for the subordination of Black women.²⁸ Although Crenshaw pioneered and named what became an intersectional framework in the United States, other Black feminists in the 1980s like Lélia Gonzalez were similarly critiquing analyses in Latin America that did not address sexism and racism in an intersectional way.²⁹

Around the time of her residencies, Campos-Pons began to explore feminist theory and artists who employed feminist themes in their work more deeply.³⁰ Campos-Pons was already familiar with the Black feminist art of Lorna Simpson and Carrie Mae Weems in the late 1980s. Both made photographic work that critically investigated the practices of pictorial representation of Black women, the slippage between visual and textual representation, racial stereotypes, and the contingency and mediation of official history and personal memory. Campos-Pons attended a lecture by Weems in 1988 at the Massachusetts College of Art, spoke with her at length and saw the artist's work including her *Joke* series (1987–88), and also acquired a catalog that included Lorna Simpson's work.³¹ I argue that *Spoken Softly with Mama's* engagement with Black women's experience across time and class oppression and exclusion from representational systems is distinctly intersectional.

While she was a fellow at the Banff Centre for the Visual Arts in Alberta in 1990–1991, Campos-Pons conceived the idea for *History of a People Who Were Not Heroes*, three installations intended to be both conceptual “monuments” and conceptual portraits that celebrated the poor black Cubans who, according to the artist, “nobody hears about” in official histories and public monuments.³² *Spoken Softly with Mama* continued the theme of the first installation in her series (*History of a People who Were Not Heroes: A Town Portrait*, 1994) as both a conceptual monument to subaltern “heroes” and as a conceptual portrait

25. Mosquera, 1990.

26. Campos-Pons, interview with the author, August 20, 2003; Lois M. Smith and Alfred Padula, *Sex and Revolution: Women in Socialist Cuba* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 45–56.

27. Frank A. Guridy and Juliet Hooker, “Currents in Afro-Latin American Political and Social Thought” in *Afro-Latin American Studies: An Introduction*, eds. Alejandro de la Fuente and George Reid Andrews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 210.

28. Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, no. 1 (1989): 140.

29. Lélia Gonzalez, “For an Afro-Latin American Feminism,” in *Confronting the Crisis in Latin America: Women Organizing for Change* (Santiago: Isis International, 1988), 95–101, cited in Guridy and Hooker, 210.

30. Campos-Pons, interview with the author, August 20, 2003 and June 23, 2004.

31. Campos-Pons, interview with the author, August 20, 2003. The catalog with Simpson's work was Trevor Fairbrother, David Joselit, and Elizabeth Sussman, eds., *The BiNational: American and German Art of the Late 80s* (Boston: The Institute of Contemporary Art and The Museum of Fine Arts, 1988), 182. See Lisa D. Freiman, “Constructing Afro-Cuban Female Identity: An Introduction to the Work of María Magdalena Campos-Pons,” Master's Thesis, Emory University, 1997, 43, n78.

32. Campos-Pons, interview with the author, August 20, 2003

of the people in her community, but its subject matter centered Black women in relation to the economic and racial legacy of the Atlantic slave trade and colonialism; the contribution of Africans to Cuba's distinctive cultural mixture; and a more inclusive vision of recalling the past. It speaks to female subjectivity as it celebrates the supportive and matrilineal relationships among women and the labour relegated to Black women in Cuba as laundresses and domestics but also critiques the gendered and racial ideologies that undergird the conventional public monument.

The entrance to *Spoken Softly with Mama* is a separate antechamber-like section consisting of three simple ebony stands upon which are neatly folded white sheets. On each sheet are French and English hand-embroidered phrases in white script, "For Beauty," "For Survival," and "For Necessity." Projected from above onto the top of each sheet is a colour video repeating hands embroidering and folding sheets. This kind of work had been elided by history and the larger Cuban society, rendering these Black working class women invisible. In this part of the installation, Campos-Pons introduces her critique of the public monument, countering the convention of public sculptures celebrating wealthy white men by framing women's domestic labor as heroic. With their work, they not only support and nurture their families (and each other), their survival strategies also produce and exemplify beauty.

The main part of the installation gives a sense of both the memorial and monumental characteristics of the work in the sense of both preserving the memory of those who might be forgotten and celebrating Black women's work in a patriarchal culture that marginalizes its citizens on the basis of gender, race, and class. The objects that signify these ideas include photographs and video, sound, textiles, and the objects of these women's labor: ironing boards accompanied by irons and trivets cast in white *pâte de verre* glass.³³ There are seven upright ironing boards of varying sizes covered in shimmering white silk arranged in an arc with images and names of Campos-Pons's sister, aunts, mother and grandmother. In Cuba, the legacy of the slave trade and of sugar cultivation continued after emancipation in a division of labor in which men worked the cane fields and mills, and women were domestic servants, nannies, and laundresses for wealthy whites and mixed-race people.

The installation speaks also to the history of the forcible migration of Africans that served as commodities in Cuba's labor market. The ironing boards and the cast glass irons refer not only to the labor that Black women performed but also to the slave ships that brought Africans, including Campos-Pons's ancestors, to the Western hemisphere. The white cast glass resembles granulated cane sugar, a key product of Cuba's profitable plantations worked by enslaved laborers that enriched their white owners. This agricultural forced-labor system created racialized and gender-based classes of plantation laborers both in fields and domestic spaces.

Campos-Pons conceived the metaphorical relationship between, on the one hand, the iron and ironing board as objects of gendered and racialized

33. *Pâte de verre* (glass paste) is a form of kiln casting using finely ground glass resulting in objects with a white translucent appearance.

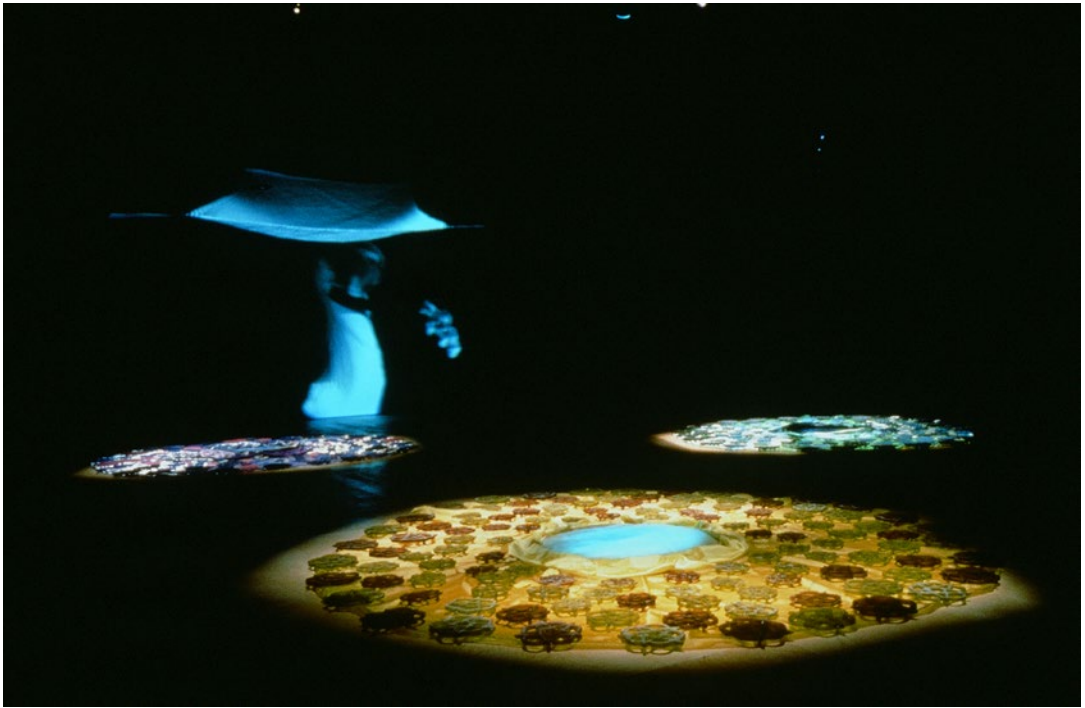


Figure 3. María Magdalena Campos-Pons, *Meanwhile the Girls Were Playing*, 1999–2000 (installation view). Installation by Campos-Pons and sound by Neil Leonard. Mixed media installation: metallic organdy, silk, embroidered fabric, pâte de verre flowers, four projected video tracts, stereo sound. Dimensions variable. Image courtesy of Gallery Wendi Norris.

labor in the Western Hemisphere and, on the other, the slave ships that transported slaves across the Middle Passage, based on her memory of seeing *Description of a Slave Ship*, a 1789 illustration, in a book in school.³⁴ Perhaps the most famous image of slavery, *Description* was based on a technical illustration for the British slave ship *Brookes* and was created to determine the number of slaves that could be packed into a ship crossing the Atlantic. It was later appropriated and distributed around the Atlantic Basin by the London-based Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade as visual evidence of the horrors of slavery.³⁵ Campos-Pons was not the first artist to use and reconfigure the plan of a slave ship for critical conceptual art. Like other Black artists in the late 20th century, such as Malcolm Bailey, Phyllis Bowdwin, and Keith Piper, Campos-Pons created works that reconfigured the schematized silhouetted figures in *Description*, such as *The Seven Powers Came by the Sea* in 1992.³⁶ Around the same time, artists Willie Cole and Betye Saar made the same conceptual connection between an iron and slave ship. Like Campos Pons's *Spoken*, their work pointed to the link between Black women's labor as domestics before and after slavery, the means of transporting slaves, and the conceptual geography of violence across the Black Atlantic, communicating counternarratives of power that resisted canonical and exclusionary versions of history.³⁷

Why have so many artists, and Campos-Pons in particular, repeatedly returned to the slave ship as metaphor in engaging the history of the Atlantic basin? As Paul Gilroy theorizes, the slave ship is central to the concept of the Black Atlantic as a "counterculture of modernity":

The image of the ship—a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion—is especially important for historical and theoretical reasons... Ships immediately focus attention on the middle passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activists as well as the movement of key cultural and political artefacts: tracts, books, gramophone records and choirs.³⁸

One set of explanations could be seen in the reception of Campos-Pons's mature work like *Spoken*—produced after her trips to Canada and the United States—in which she references the role of the legacy of slavery and the violence of the Middle Passage in geographic displacement; the strength and resilience of a people subjected to this violence; and the practices of African cultures in forming the mixed cultures of the Western Hemisphere. But she is also clear about what the three installations constituting *History of a People Who are Not Heroes* were not: "[t]he work is not about trauma. ... I am trying with the work to explain to myself... what this means for the time I am living in. What this means for the people coming after me. ... [I]t's part of my experience; the human experience."³⁹ Sally Berger, in *Authentic/Ex-centric: Africa In and Out of Africa* at the 49th Venice Biennale, saw performance in that work as largely biographical.⁴⁰ Enwezor, on the other hand, argued for a more nuanced understanding of Campos-Pons complex work in positing that it is an engagement with the African diasporic archive grounded in the ideas of W. E. B. Dubois, Édouard Glissant, Paul Gilroy, and others, who acknowledge

34. Campos-Pons, interview with the author, August 20, 2003.

35. Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America, 1780–1865* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 14–40.

36. Tanya Barson and Peter Gorschlüter, eds., *Afro Modern: Journeys through the Black Atlantic* (London: Tate Publishing, 2010), 28–29, 143.

37. Cheryl Finley, *Committed to Memory: The Art of the Slave Ship Icon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018). This argument does not suggest that Campos-Pons was inspired or influenced by these artists.

38. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 4.

39. Campos-Pons, interview with the author, August 20, 2003.

40. Sally Berger, "Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons: 1990–2001," in *Authentic/Ex-centric: Africa In and Out of Africa*, eds. Salah M. Hassan and Olu Oguibe (Ithaca, NY: Forum for African Arts/Prince Claus Fund Library, 2001), 122–143; Enwezor, 82.

that the Middle Passage is a site not only of violent displacement and trauma, but also of connection to the ongoing, dynamic, and generative forces of cultural production at the heart of creolization.⁴¹

Spoken's multiple references to home are not limited to the sphere of the domestic as a site of women's labor. Conjuring the feeling of home, motherhood, and love is also a reference for people in the diaspora to Africa as a "motherland."⁴² The content of the videos projected on the upright ironing boards are somber reflections on a longing for home, a theme the artist repeated in several installations and photographic works. The video projected on the left board features the artist's bare legs and feet walking slowly back and forth. At each turn she stops and clicks her heels together, repeating Dorothy's gesture from *The Wizard of Oz* and performing the magic act that transports her home. The central board featuring the peeling of a pomegranate, one seed at a time, refers to the Greek myth of Persephone, who, like Dorothy, suffers exile in a netherworld and longs to return home. The last video track alternates between a close-up of hands sewing a piece of cloth and the artist walking with folded laundry upon her head. This traditional way that women carry goods in Africa and in the Caribbean signifies the transfer and transformation of cultural practices across the Atlantic. *Spoken's* multivalent treatment of home across time, then, aligns with a more expansive idea of home given that it exists in diasporic consciousness more as an idea than an originary homeland one ever physically lived in: "... having a nomadic, exilic, diasporic, or migratory perspective does not necessarily imply spatial movement. The emphasis, then, is not so much on locating 'home,' but on the process of 'voyaging' ... amid multiple identities and worlds: in other words, the journey is 'home.'"⁴³

Campos-Pons makes reference to this historical process, but as in all her installations, she does not illustrate this process as a linear, historical narrative of facts. Rather she refers to it through the conceptual associations among objects, media, and images. The critical conceptual art practice Campos-Pons has pursued, like that of many contemporary artists in the 1990s, has generated work that pointed to cultural binary oppositions in order to destabilize them, an approach similar to Mendieta's installations in the landscape. On this aspect of her art works that address memory, Campos-Pons said: "...the *in-between*—the interstitial space...capture[s] the feeling in my work, the way I place myself in a Third Space: a space between territory, between what is home, between languages, between media, between performance versus ritual, between three- and two-dimensional, between what happens there *in-between*."⁴⁴

The darkened space of *Spoken Softly with Mama* as well as its formal characteristics evoke interior, spiritual, and cerebral associations with the Santería altars Campos-Pons experienced in the Cuban community she grew up in. Known as *tronos* or thrones, these altars are elaborate assemblages consisting of draped cloth, offerings of fruits, and prepared foods, money, and ritual beads, intricately woven into the ritual practices of priests and priestesses, and designed to evoke and enhance the *ashé* (spiritual power or life

41. Enwezor, 69.

42. Jordan Mason Mayfield, "María Magdalena Campos-Pons, *Spoken Softly with Mama II*," *Art Papers* 40, no. 6 (November–December 2016), 50.

43. Herrera, 7–8.

44. Campos-Pons, interview with the author, August 20, 2003 and Bell, 42. The idea of the "third" or "interstitial" space came from Homi K. Bhabha, "Beyond the Pale: Art in the Age of Multicultural Translation," in 1993 *Biennial Exhibition*, exh. cat., eds. Elizabeth Sussman, Thelma Golden, John G. Hanhardt, et al. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art in association with Harry N. Abrams, 1993), 62–73.

force) of particular Orisha, or God, for ceremonial purposes. Art historian Robert Farris Thompson in *Face of the Gods* characterized the Afro-Atlantic altar such as the *trono* in terms similar to those used to describe contemporary art installations: as additive, assemblage-like environments. They share with the altars of West Africa qualities Thompson described as “...school[s] of being, designed to attract and deepen the powers of inspiration.”⁴⁵ At the same time *Spoken Softly with Mama* sought to remember and celebrate the historical and cultural, the material and spiritual experiences of her forbears whose lives had been devalued and forgotten, it also critiqued the public monument as an art form that perpetuates misremembering.

Spoken and the other installations in the series *History of a People Who are Not Heroes* were part of two larger, interrelated critical practices that informed the creation of Campos-Pons’s memory works from the 1990s. The first was participation by scholars, designers, and artists in the multidisciplinary discourse that made an epistemological distinction between history and memory and how thinking critically about this distinction helped reveal the meanings and value of cultural practices (such as rituals) and objects (monuments/memorials) for recalling the past.⁴⁶ The second was a practice by contemporary artists to create artistic allegories of history but use references to memory to comment on and critique history’s omissions.⁴⁷ In discussing both, scholar James E. Young has argued that memory is inextricably linked to a convention of public monuments around the world.⁴⁸

An example Campos-Pons would have seen in Havana is the classicizing equestrian statue of General Máximo Gomez, Cuban “hero” in the war of independence. Twentieth-century avant-garde modernist as well as contemporary artists have critiqued such monuments as myths, as “heroic, self-aggrandizing figurative icons; grounded in conservative artistic conventions.”⁴⁹ In their monumentality, materials, aesthetics, and idealization, they evince permanence and universality, as if a single set of national ideals and narratives are suitable for everyone.⁵⁰ For artists like Campos-Pons, such monuments celebrate and reinforce the normativity of those who are white, powerful, elite, wealthy, and male, hardly appropriate for a country whose identity is characterized by creolization. By including in *Spoken* so many objects and meanings associated with Black womanhood, which collectively led the artist to describe the work overall as intimate, delicate, and feminine, the work resists the conventional public monument’s masculinist, classist and exclusionary associations.⁵¹ What *Spoken* represents, therefore, is not simply the expansion of modes of recalling the past (in terms of its references to memory) as a way of including what the concept of history and its material form in the public monument had previously excluded. In keeping with Campos-Pons’s effort (and that of cultural theorists) to disrupt binary categories, she charts new ways to conceptualize recalling the past *in-between* the categories of history and memory.⁵²

The interrogation of the public monument as a subject of critical conceptual art in the 1990s, when *Spoken* was conceived and realized, occurred alongside that of a better known institution: the art museum. This

45. Robert Farris Thompson, *Face of the Gods: Art and Altars of Africa and the African Americas* (New York: The Museum for African Art, 1993), 20–21, 147.

46. Andreas Huyssen, “Introduction: Time and Cultural Memory at Our Fin de Siècle,” in *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), 6; Geneviève Fabre and Robert O’Meally, 3–17.

47. James E. Young, “Memory/Monument,” in *Critical Terms for Art History*, second ed., eds. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 234–247; Michael D. Harris, “Meanwhile, The Girls Were Playing,” in *María Magdalena Campos-Pons: Meanwhile The Girls Were Playing* (Cambridge: MIT List Visual Arts Center, 1999).

48. Young, 234–235.

49. Young, 235.

50. Young, 237.

51. Campos-Pons, interview with the author, August 20, 2003.

52. Based on distinctions between history and memory, French theorist Pierre Nora argued that memory could be located in specific people and things, attached to specific objects, what he called *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory). See Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” trans. Marc Roudebush, in *History and Memory in African-American Culture*, eds. Geneviève Fabre and Robert O’Meally (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 284–300.

“institutional critique” of both the museum and the public monument had its origins in twentieth-century criticism, Dada, and conceptual art in the 1960s and after.⁵³ Institutional critique saw the institution of art not simply as the spaces in which art was created, exhibited, and sold (artists’ studios, museums, and galleries respectively) but also as an intersecting set of discourses including criticism and journalism. Further, it considered the viewer not simply in terms of perceiving art but as a subject of social forces such as race, gender, and class, the kinds of subject positions theorized most productively by intersectional Black feminism.⁵⁴ For these reasons *Spoken* could be seen as advancing institutional critique in innovative ways that center African diasporic women’s experiences and histories.

As an art form, *Spoken* draws on and advances the art historical genealogy of installation art from two main sources, one in neo-avant-garde art in North America and Europe in the 1950s and 1960s, and the other in the long history of conceptualism seen in assemblage altars in both West Africa and their diasporic counterparts in Afro-Cuban Santería.⁵⁵ Ana Mendieta’s works (discussed earlier as an inspiration for Campos-Pons) pioneered some of the ideas that Campos-Pons would later expand in innovative ways.

In works often made of materials of and in the landscape, Mendieta evoked the idea of a female goddess imagery found in several cultures including the polytheistic Afro-Cuban Regla de Ocha, or Santería, belief system | fig. 4 |. She was particularly interested in the symbolism and attributes of the Santería Orisha, or Goddess, Yemaya, powerful symbol of waters and maternity.⁵⁶ Mendieta used her own body as a template connecting her person to the long tradition and archetype of powerful female icons. In contrast to the archetype of the male hero in public monuments, whose solidity symbolizes the memorializing of its subject’s likeness in perpetuity, Mendieta’s earth-body works were ephemeral, subject to the forces of nature. Water, Yemaya’s attribute, disappears. Mendieta’s roughly oblong, earth-en-form work “grounds” it materially and symbolically as a metaphor for an island, the artist’s native Cuba.

Jane Blocker argues in *Where is Ana Mendieta? Identity, Performativity and Exile*, that Mendieta’s use of earth as symbolic body and island plays conceptually between ideological binaries: earth and nation; home and exile; essence and in essence. In the process, she resists those binaries.⁵⁷ By succumbing to the environment’s forces and ultimately reintegrating into it, Blocker argues, her work embodies and signifies instability and change at many levels and is therefore caught between binary categories.⁵⁸ Later, in the series *History of a People Who Were Not Heroes*, Campos-Pons would take up the idea of in-betweenness, though informed by other thinkers.

Compos-Pons’ and Mendieta’s work, although very different, share a common skepticism of the attributes associated with the traditional monument and are identified by some art historians as “anti-monumental.”⁵⁹ While the conventional monument presents itself as permanent, larger than life, and fixes memory in realistic figural form using older and conventional aesthetic traditions, the anti-monument is characterized by

53. Young, 235; Hal Foster, “The Anthropological Model,” in *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*, eds. Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois and Benjamin H.D. Buchloh (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004), 624.

54. Foster, 624.

55. Okwui Enwezor, “Where, What, Who, When: A Few Notes on ‘African’ Conceptualism,” in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s*, exh. cat., eds. Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver, and Rachel Weiss (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999), 109–110.

56. Mary Jane Jacob “Ashé in the Art of Ana Mendieta,” in *Santería Aesthetics in Contemporary Latin American Art*, ed. Arturo Lindsay (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 190.

57. Jane Blocker, *Where is Ana Mendieta? Identity, Performativity and Exile* (Durham: Duke University Press), 1999, 73.

58. Blocker, 81.

59. Young, 237



Figure 4. Ana Mendieta, *Isla*, 1981. © 2022 The Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection, LLC. Courtesy Galerie Lelong & Co. / Licensed by Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

contingency and change, human scale, abstraction, multiple interpretations and contemporary artistic practices of interdisciplinary critique and conceptualism.⁶⁰

Campos-Pons employs a critical conceptual practice that resists the materiality and permanence of the conventional monument with non-material elements that are time- and performance-based, such as projected videos and sound. The sound that permeates the space of *Spoken*, for instance, is the artist singing “Arroz con leche (Rice with Milk),” a children’s song popular throughout Latin America about a young man whose ideal wife is a widow whose virtues are limited to the domestic arts of sewing. This choice also reinforces cultural connection to Yorubaland in West Africa and cultural mixture across the Black Atlantic in Cuba’s Santería practices. The predominant white colour of the installation, for example—the frosty white cast glass and white cloth, white beads and dress in the videos, the foods in the song “Arroz con leche (Rice with Milk)” —is associated with that of the Orisha Obatala, the supreme deity of the terrestrial Orishas, whose emblematic color is white and whose initiates wear white beads.⁶¹ Far from being a replication of religious rituals and iconographic associations as a practitioner, Campos-Pons’s goal is to allude to the practices and images she observed while growing up in Cuba, based on memory.⁶² As such, it is one source among many others that the artist draws on in the installation.

What an in-depth exploration of Campos-Pons’s *Spoken Softly with Mama* reveals is that through the use of installation art and its attendant conceptual strategies, time-based media, and forms based on everyday objects, the value of Black women’s labor and their roles as both creators and stewards of a community’s history is foregrounded as a critical counter-argument to the archetypal masculine figural monument. Through the inclusion of references to personal and collective memories, Campos-Pons provides a critique of history and its exclusions by challenging the biases embedded in the public monument as an art form. She also destabilizes the notion of fixed identities—national, ethnic, and personal—by showing how all identities are multiple, interconnected, interactive, and varied across time. In other words, Campos-Pons’s works do not engage the past in search of a single cultural origin in Africa. Nor do they assume a singular conception of cultural interaction. Instead, looking to the cultural past is an exercise that, akin to the ideas of James Clifford, recognizes the complex, dynamic nature of culture and history, one that flows along temporal and geographic “routes” and recognizes that these concepts “roots” and “routes” are inextricably linked.⁶³ Campos-Pons’s installations, generally, are not limited to a nostalgic search for a fixed site of cultural origin or roots but are rather conceived, as Clifford suggests to “rethink culture, and its science, anthropology, in terms of travel.”⁶⁴ As valuable as these analyses of artistic responses to recalling the past and identity in the Black Atlantic are, the sheer range of individual experiences artists reference across spatial, ideological and identity differences in their artistic production—not to mention the equally wide-ranging responses of viewers—continues to challenge scholars’ ability

60. Young, 240–244.

61. Berger, 141. Núñez points out that Obatala’s attributes include the concept of whiteness as purity as well as “white” metal such as silver. See Luis Manuel Núñez, *Santería: A Practical Guide to Afro-Cuban Magic* (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1992), 32.

62. Campos-Pons, interview with Sama Alshaibi, September 26, 2002.

63. Lisa Gail Collins, “Visible Roots and Visual Routes: Art, Africanisms, and the Sea Islands,” in *The Art of History: African American Women Engage the Past* (New Brunswick, NJ, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 83–98.

64. James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1997), 25, cited in Collins, 64.

to take account of them. This is especially the case in relation to the particularly fraught and often painful history of the diasporic, exilic, and migratory perspectives of Cubans on and off the island.⁶⁵

If memory versus history, home versus exile, and diaspora as concepts are key subjects of critical contemplation in Campos-Pons's works like *Spoken*, how do we think of them in the conceptual, interstitial space of *in-betweenness* she also prompts us to consider? Campos-Pons pointed in her work to those concepts to disrupt our understanding of them as stable, binary categories similar to the ways scholars of diaspora have critiqued and reconsidered them. In Stuart Hall's and Paul Gilroy's writing, for instance, diaspora serves as an alternative to the essentialist notions of nation, home, race, and culture.⁶⁶ Other scholars, even in accepting the value of Clifford's theories of culture and travel, have also moved beyond them to embrace more fluidity and poly-culturalism in geographic displacement independent of travel or territory. These theories include the ideas that cultural memory can be transmitted intergenerationally regardless of one's having been in a place, that diaspora allows for multiple cultural identifications, and that a cultural consciousness can be claimed vicariously.⁶⁷

The path to the past and to cultural practices through individual and collective memory that is woven through Campos-Pons's memory works like *Spoken* cannot be reduced to a simplistic illustration of identity, a document of a linear history, a relocation and borrowing of cultural practices, or a fixation on trauma, as important as identity, the past, cultural mixture, and pain are in the memories and histories she references. *Spoken* is thus also about the transformative and generative power of Black diasporic experience. Like other artists who mine the Black Atlantic's rich cultural repository, Campos-Pons has brilliantly "extended and reshaped the meanings of the Afro-Cuban iconography beyond the space of the specific into the site of the universal."⁶⁸ ¶

65. Herrera, 7.

66. The writings of Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy exemplify this position. See Herrera, 8.

67. Herrera, 8-9.

68. Enwezor (2007), 74.

How We Became What We Are: Deanna Bowen's Forensic Gaze

Interview by Jacob Gallagher-Ross

Jacob Gallagher-Ross is Associate Professor and Chair of English and Drama at the University of Toronto Mississauga.
—jacob.gallagher.ross@utoronto.ca

In the fall of 2019, in what feels like another lifetime, I attended Deanna Bowen's exhibition *God of Gods: A Canadian Play*, at the University of Toronto's art museum—the school I attended as an undergraduate, where I am now on faculty. Commissioned as part of the hundredth-anniversary commemorations of Hart House, the University's centre for student life, *God of Gods* returned to the scene of the 1927 premiere of Carroll Aikins's *The God of Gods*, a modernist play riddled with primitivism, in which Indigenous characters were performed by white actors in redface makeup. The play was both a landmark in the history of settler-Canadian art, and a symptom of the cultural genocide that was indivisible from Canada's aspirant cultural nationalism. Hart House Theatre, where the play premiered, is often considered Canada's first "art" theatre, and the circle of (white) artists that frequented its plays overlapped significantly with the Group of Seven, who were then already being established as founder-figures in the emergent narrative of settler-Canadian art.

Bowen, a descendant of the Alabama and Kentucky-born Black Prairie pioneers of Amber Valley and Campsie, Alberta, locates Aikins's play within a wider "ecology" (to use curator Maya Wilson-Sanchez's evocative phrase) of social connections and influential players in the Toronto cultural scene of the 1920s. The staging ground for new narratives of Canadian identity, it becomes not just a symptomatic event, but much more: the script for Canadian racism. It was evident to me then that Bowen's exhibition was a landmark of both art-historical and theatre-historical investigation: a fierce reckoning with Canada's unacknowledged past hiding in plain sight, and one of the most important art or theater events I'd attended in Toronto since returning to Canada from the US in 2016. The exhibition's clear-eyed engagement with the intergrowth of white supremacy and Canadian cultural nationalism felt like an obligation to my citizenship. Thinking alongside Bowen's work was a rigorous pleasure I couldn't ignore.

The exhibition stayed with me in the ensuing months, and my poring over it culminated in a long essay-review for *Theater*, Yale's journal of theater criticism, reportage, and new plays, piecing through the exhibition's implications for the history of Canadian theatre, the Canadian museum, and, indeed, for the theatre of Canadian identity—the national drama— itself.¹

1. Jacob Gallagher-Ross, "Twilight of the Idols," *Theater* 50, no. 3 (November 2020): 29–47, <https://doi.org/10.1215/01610775-8651179>.

Sometime later, as she was preparing a major installation for the National Gallery of Canada, Bowen and I met on Zoom to discuss where the *God of Gods* exhibition—which, as is common with Bowen’s shows, was already shifting and transforming into new configurations for new publics—fits into her larger body of work, and her broader historical inquiry.

The following is condensed from her remarks. Bowen’s conversation is as historically minded as her art practice, and the epic scale of her investigation unfurled as we spoke. She departs from her family’s complex border-spanning North American experience, and her art opens into a reckoning with buried geopolitics. Bowen returns Canada and Canadian nationalism to the crossroads of a bloody imperial world—still very much in thrall to British ideals, despite burgeoning self-assertion.

As she searches for the answers that locate her family in a history that was determined to exclude them and destroy traces of their presence, she’s also identifying hidden currents in the Canadian story, currents that explain what we are better than comfortable myths. Beginning with private stories, her work is public art in the most important sense: a challenge to look beyond inherited ideology to discover new, more encompassing definitions of Canadian-ness.

In her answers, you can observe that telescoping analysis at work, bringing distant historical events closer—so close, you can see them again with fresh eyes, against a new backdrop. —JGR

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On a very intimate level, [my practice] comes from a need to know my family history in and of itself. Coming from a family that talked very little about its past, I can look now and see it’s a deeply traumatized family: not talking about its past, not talking about its present, the profound, not just dysfunction, but the profound depression of this family. And, not knowing health records, or really anything about my father, all that silence is what got me to dig in the first place. That started with birth records. And birth records led to census records, all of those things. And probably around 2008, 2009, 2010, I started working through white archives to actually trace family members. If we’re talking about the slavery era, we’re looking at the reality that Black people are property. The only way I’m going to find them is through the wills of white men who have bequeathed them to the next generation. So, the knowledge that there will be no naming of names on the census record, prior to the end of the Civil War, was also a recognition that the surface-level kind of archive of “you just want to know, and there it is,” is not going to happen for Black bodies—certainly not in the United States, but also definitely not in Canada. And the disparity between the two countries became the cue for another kind of questioning.

The Canadian archive is just so much more obscure: at least in American archives, there is a transition where Black bodies have an agency and they’re able to speak up for themselves, right? That doesn’t happen in Canada in

the same way. By blessing of the census records, I can say that I know when my family came. But then: growing up knowing that we're here, but not finding us again in the Canadian archive at all. Or when we are, it's through criminal records, quite honestly, or surveillance. The amount our family has been surveilled since we came here is great, and weird. Why is this particular community of Black people being documented as extensively as they are, through newspapers or television news, or whatever? Why is that?

That question starts opening the door to: Oh, yeah, why? What else is going on in this timeframe? And that opens the door to bigger questions around context. So, the first thread of research was just: where are they? Second is, in what context do these things exist? What is the nature of the archive itself? And then: why aren't we, for example, in other archives that are more honorific? My approach is really a bottom-looking-upwards strategy: from the basement up to the top of the archive. That's the way that I'm thinking: a deep forensic view, with the dead way below, and then coming to the surface to see how they're concealed. The thing that's on top of all of this is the splashy, purposefully obstructing mythologies, the lies that people tell about themselves, particularly famous, rich, or political, white bodies. And that retelling of their history will mix in with the "debris" of the archives of the less desirables.

How all of this intersects with art is actually through a petition generated by Frank Oliver, who was the Minister of the Interior and Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs from 1905 to 1911.

He was an Alberta politician, newspaperman, part of the federal government, deeply racist, and [he worked with] a bunch of Alberta tradesmen and boards of trade to generate this petition which I've ultimately turned into a work. [The] petition was directly related to my family's migration into Canada. It was a petition that was preceded by an ongoing chain of correspondence between Prime Minister Laurier and boards of trade in Alberta, and there was a conscious construction of the petition. In and of itself, it was like: "Whoa, what the hell is this?" Because in my family, the narrative up until I found that petition was "everybody got along, no problems, everything was cool. We (Blacks, Eastern European immigrant, and First Nations People) all work together." And I'm sure that everyday, farm-labourer kind of reality is true in a sense. But I do know that, contextually, they lived in Klan territory, Frank Oliver's Alberta, so the petition itself was a revelation. The fact that [the petition] was constructed consensually between the federal government was another deep blow. And then the eureka moment was to turn it into a piece. So that's a 236-page document with, give or take, 4300 signatures of white people saying that they're agitated for this influx of Black people that are coming in, and if the government doesn't intervene, they'd be obliged to resort to lynch mobs, right? So effectively, just explicitly saying, if you don't come and get these people, if you don't deal with this, we're going to kill them. Definitely not what my family was saying, and the difference between that and what I was raised in is massive. And obviously, that's

trauma. That's fear that's learned, learned silence, all of that stuff. That was enough.

The petition was part of my solo show called *Invisible Empires* at the Art Gallery of York University for 2013. That whole exhibition was about tracing the migration of the Ku Klux Klan into Canada. Again, there's this notion that Canada doesn't have a Klan. The show was about that, tracing the origin, and then discovering that, in the 1920s, the Klan in Canada was as large as it was in the United States, with a massive presence in the prairies where my family grew up. So that was the beginning of it. And then I never, for that show, it was just way too traumatic—I wasn't doing a word by word reading of [the petition], certainly wasn't paying attention to the names. But the reception of that piece—suffice to say that nobody really knew what to do with it. The show happened, and then it ended. And there was no critical response. There was nothing, it was just met with silence for the most part. I thought it was dead.

But my good friend Lisa Myers, who is a member of the Beausoleil First Nation, was doing a show on documents related to Indigenous artists. And by then I was quite clear about my family's Indigenous lineage. I'm not claiming that I'm Indigenous, but I am saying that I am well-aware of our lineage and interconnectedness going back to the late 1700s. The complexity of claiming status is a long story, another story, but suffice to say, Lisa's inclusion of the petition in the show felt like a welcoming affirmation and an important re-dissemination of damning anti-Indigenous, anti-Afro-Indigenous documents. In that context the petition came alive again, in a super powerful way. The registrar at the Kitchener Waterloo Art Gallery was reading the pages in order to get the grid structure of the petition installed. In that effort to put up the petition, she started reading the names, and that's when she discovered Barker Fairley. I was preoccupied with the overall impact of the collection of pages, and it was Crystal Mowry and Lisa Myers who informed me about the significance of the discovery.

Barker Fairley connects to the Group of Seven and that whole Victorian cultural community [in Toronto] we're talking about. Before he taught at U of T, he was teaching at University of Alberta when he signed the petition saying that he was behind the lynch mob killings of Black people. He transferred to U of T, and taught the rest of his career there, was on the culture committee at Hart House and was responsible for the hiring of Carroll Aikins, particularly for his white-nationalist perspective, and all the white-nationalist programming that preceded it, and then actually came after it. Barker Fairley, the well-known scholar at U of T. His papers are in Special Collections, you know, it's handled with kid gloves. What does it mean that if this guy, the biggest advocate for the Group of Seven, is fine with killing Black people as they come into the country? What does that mean? And what does that say about the group of Seven's landscapes, and the relationship between Hart House and theatre, and the performativity of the arts, and the way that culture is used to transmit nationalist ideas?



Figure 1. Deanna Bowen, *God of Gods: A Canadian Play* (installation view), September 4 to November 30, 2019, Justina M. Barnicke Gallery, Toronto. Curated by Barbara Fischer with Inaugural Curatorial Resident Maya Wilson-Sanchez. Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid.



Figure 2. Deanna Bowen, *Deconstructing the "God of Gods: A Canadian Play,"* 2019. Video, 1h 24min. Archer Pechawis, Peter Morin, Lisa Myers, John G. Hampton, and cheyanne turions in conversation. Installation view from *God of Gods: A Canadian Play*, Justina M. Barnicke Gallery, Toronto. Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid.



Figure 3. Deanna Bowen, *God of Gods: A Canadian Play* (installation view), September 4 to November 30, 2019, Justina M. Barnicke Gallery, Toronto. Curated by Barbara Fischer with Inaugural Curatorial Resident Maya Wilson-Sanchez. Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid.



Figure 4. Deanna Bowen, *God of Gods: A Canadian Play* (installation view), September 4 to November 30, 2019, Justina M. Barnicke Gallery, Toronto. Curated by Barbara Fischer with Inaugural Curatorial Resident Maya Wilson-Sanchez. Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid.

We have all been taught that this is the foundation of the nation, this is who we are. And there's almost no interrogation of the fact that all these [Group of Seven] landscapes, all these works that are being produced at this time, dance, theatre, literature, everything, are inundated with this British colonial ambition for a white nation. The timeframe that my family came to the country was literally the time that Canada was being built as Little Britain: as white as it could possibly be. There's tons of documentation about that. So again, that belies everything my family has ever said.

Of course, this all opens up the bigger question: if Barker Fairley is doing this shit, who else is in on the joke? Then you come to see that every single cultural player in Toronto in the early 1900s is part of this network of like-minded individuals who share the same ideas about what art can do for the shaping of a nation and conveying its message. And then that gets *really* interesting.

How do we not know this about these people? You want to go even further back? How do we not know that John MacDonald's second wife's whole family fortune is from slavery? How do we not know that? If you keep going backwards, what you come to understand is that these folks that built Canada's earliest cultural identity are all Brits, right? Their family, their forefathers came across just at the early founding of the nation. This is a nepotistic lineage that actually goes back to the very beginning of Canada. John A. Macdonald and his second wife, they're not the only people that came over to Canada after the abolition of slavery. They came with their wealth that they had from their slave-owning past. All of this is entangled in the national narrative, and we don't know this. This truth is obviously deeply problematic, and completely the opposite of what my family taught me about who we are and where we live.

The early settlers that came across after the abolition of slavery came here to exploit the land. But even by nature of doing that, they would have had some kind of relationship to royalty when they left. So, it's just an extension. Those first settlers become the forefathers of the Masseys and the Harrises. They all run in the same society circles and it becomes apparent that really this is all just social networking that achieves these things. It's entirely arbitrary, but I think the power of it all is that we can dismantle this if we do the digging. It's just people, they're just people, you know what I mean? If we can take it apart and dethrone them, not with malice, but with a rigorous eye, then you can see the fallacy of the cultural narrative in and of itself. You can see the potential for reshaping the archive in a way that's much more truthful, and the potential for making a much more truthful Canadian narrative about who's here.

So that's how it starts. That's where it's going. The beauty and weirdness about the Canadian cultural scene, certainly the Toronto scene, is that it's so caught up in itself that it couldn't see me coming. And then the beauty of Barker Fairley and his preoccupation with German scholarship made for the connection to Germany, knowing about theosophy and its grounding, what and where Madame Blavatsky was doing and where she was in the

world—definitely a relationship to Queen Victoria and her family. This is where the tentacles of *The God of Gods* get teased out into a global framework. Theosophy was such a critical component of this cultural community in Toronto—across the nation, really. There is at least some kind of a cultural myth about Theosophy as the foundations of Nazi thought. So, you follow that through, and then you find yourself contending with German nationalism in the early 1900s, that whole superman kind of identity. And then you start looking at the ways in which the Canadian cultural scene is performing Indian and how that gets played out in Germany as well and the weird cross-cultural thing of Karl May.

Making connections between all of that for the University of Toronto Art Museum show gave me the opportunity to put Canada and these cultural players into a global framework. And when you start thinking about the Crown within Europe, you start thinking about “Well, shit, it’s Queen Victoria, right?” But what about Queen Victoria’s nine children who all marry into other royal families, and the *German* cultural history that is Queen Victoria’s reign because of her husband, Prince Albert, and the fact that the family is actually culturally German? So: I was looking at that and realizing how that German consciousness flows through the British lineage and how it flows out across Europe to all these other royal families that were created at the time. When you start thinking about the German throughline in the royal family, then you think about what the fuck was going on around the world as far as colonial conquest. You start thinking about the rape of Africa.² In this time frame, you think about the First World War, you think about the Boer Wars, and what that conflict was really was about and what Canada’s role was within it. You think about every other major turn-of-the-century colonial conflict: the Opium Wars in China, Afghanistan, Sudan—all of these things were happening in this timeframe. The consistent presence in these wars is British warlords like Lord Kitchener, the eventual namesake of Berlin, Ontario, who fought in Egypt, Sudan, and South Africa—these kind of connections reach back to this forensic idea of archiving from the bottom, going up. Or, in this instance the top going down forever. And, with this, the seemingly coincidental connection between “Kitchener-Waterloo” and “Lord Kitchener”—becomes a much bigger, insidious thing. You would think that this little town in southern Ontario couldn’t possibly be connected to this Imperial world, but it is. It’s a critical site for the founding of the Group of Seven, for the political ambitions of Canada. Vincent Massey, Lawren Harris, Mackenzie King—they all come from this neck of the woods, Homer Watson. All of these folks come from Southern Ontario in and around Berlin and Kitchener. These painters couldn’t possibly not know about Indigenous culture. When you start looking at all of those things, and how they all unfold, how Massey in 1927 became ambassador to the United States, and how that relates to his industrial conquest. It’s all interconnected.

But because we’re thinking about the land and conquest, and because we’re in Canada at a time [now] when we’re very conscious about who are

2. See W. E. B. Dubois, “Review of *The Rape of Africa* [fragment],” 1936. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

the keepers of the land, you can't help but think about Indigenous relationships with these German settlers. [T]hen you can't help but think about all the wars that have been fought in this region by nature of it being across the border from the United States, but also because it's this area of rural white boys who all enlist. It becomes a source of endless soldiers over the generations. You could confine it to the First and Second World Wars, but you can also take it back to the American Revolution, and then you're a hop, skip, and a jump away from Lieutenant-Colonel John Butler's "gift" of the Haldimand Tract to the Mohawk people. The mythology of this German community in the area that frames itself as peaceful German Mennonites is a facade, because Victoria and the British actually hired German mercenaries to clear the land long before the settlers came in. That's the real history of the flattening of the land, so to speak. Those mercenaries stay, and then that is the beginning of the settlement, and *then* German Mennonites come, and then the Oktoberfest and all that kind of stuff.

It's also the same land on which the Underground Railroad flows. And when you start looking at the conflation of all these different histories, the overlapping of all these histories, then you come to see the richness of the terrain, and its contrast to the narrative that the Group of Seven, etc., represent. These landscapes aren't empty. The land is much more densely populated with Black bodies, Indigenous bodies, slaves. All over the place: Joseph Brant brings back the Black girl from New York, one of many, brings her across the border and there's a whole narrative that's happening there. It's such a super-rich, history-laden, region. Super-dark: the blood that's in the soil is unfathomable. And we don't know any of this, and how it relates to the cultural narrative that we've all been taught, you know what I mean? So that's kind of where I'm at these days. I know it's a super-crazy lay of the land, but one thing leads to another, leads to another, leads to another and if we agree that the world is largely run by a select handful of people like the Royals, then it makes sense that everything would flow into each other.

I'm not anybody special, nor am I easy. I'm not an easy Black artist. I come to this work as a Black chick that comes from the very, very bottom, and it's grounded in my desire to understand my family. What I mean by "I'm not special" is I just necessarily figured the shit out along the way. I'm not seriously trained. And by nature of being just this chick who figured out how to do this stuff, I believe anybody can do this work. I don't want any of my exhibitions to ever be a passive experience, where folks get to say that they've been "educated" and then forget about it. I'm gonna make you, the spectator, do some work—read the work. I'm insisting on that from the perspective of being a Black artist, and often being passed over. Yes, I want you to do the work. You do it for other artists; you can learn how to read my work, too. This naturally flows into my pedagogy and teaching practice.

I take my access to the archive, my ability to read and write, very seriously, knowing that my ancestors could have died for being literate. And because of that, I want to make the things I find as readily available to the public as I possibly can, knowing that there are people that will never learn how to do

this, will never enter a library, or receive inclusive education, but that this is here. And if they just read through one image and learn something, I'm happy. It'll be a shift. It's not gonna be fun, but you're gonna learn something about power structures, or you're going to learn something about the ways in which we have been seen, or you're going to learn something about histories that have been buried. My grandfather had a third-grade education, I realize I've never heard a story about my grandmother going to school, my mom is one of three of her eleven siblings that finished high school. My literacy and agency mean something to me. This has always been about translation of my research so that I can come back to my mom and my family and say, "These are the forces that did the things that they did. This is how we become who we are. It names all of the unspoken traumas that would explain our collective sadness and sorrow and grief. I would tell them that all of that comes from the things that these people did."

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Deanna Bowen is a descendant of the Alabama and Kentucky born Black Prairie pioneers of Amber Valley and Campsie, Alberta. Her family history has been the central pivot of her auto-ethnographic interdisciplinary practice since the early 1990s. She is a recipient of Concordia University's 2022 Provost's Circle of Distinction Award, a 2021 Scotiabank Photography Award, a 2020 Governor General Award for Visual and Media Arts Award, a 2018 Canada Council Research and Creation Grant, an Ontario Arts Council Media Arts Grant in 2017, a 2016 John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship, and the 2014 William H. Johnson Prize. She is Assistant Professor of studio arts at Concordia University. Her writing, interviews and art works have been published in *Canadian Art*, *The Capilano Review*, *The Black Prairie Archives*, and *Transition Magazine*. She is the editor of the 2019 publication *Other Places: Reflections on Media Arts in Canada*. ¶

<http://www.deannabowen.ca>

Uncoupling the Archives: Fragments from a Memory Journal

Sylvia D. Hamilton

I am who they imagined.

When we came here more than two hundred years ago, they thought, no hoped, we would not survive. We'd be a burden on the scarce resources of the new society. But survive we did. We made a way out of no way. We had to. For them: our kin who died in the Middle Passage. We survived for them, and for the children they would never know. For the children like me, from generations in the future.

I am who they imagined.

Memory is a non-linear, non-chronological moebius strip, it is fluid, porous, a collage. In this temporal site of memory, the real and the imagined co-exist. Much remains unspoken about the historical fact that Nova Scotia was a slave society, and the traces of its legacy haunt us still: in the names of prominent Nova Scotians, in street names, in archival records, and in churches. African people were present here from the earliest period of European colonization. My ancestors were the Black Refugees from the War of 1812. I am their witness.

I am who they imagined.

—Excavation: A Site of Memory, 2013

Sylvia D. Hamilton is a Canadian filmmaker, writer, and artist. She is an Inglis Professor Emeritus in the School of Journalism at the University of King's College, Halifax. She can be found on Twitter as @maroonfilms.

Forty or more years ago, I didn't know that I would spend years excavating archives, or that I would find ways to bring what I found there into public view in my work through documentary films, essays, poetry, and multimedia installations. Of all the documents from the archival file boxes, old newspapers and manuscripts that were new to my younger self, fragments of three stood out, and still resonate with me, so many decades later.

On Saturday next, at twelve o'clock, will be sold on the Beach, two hogsheads of rum, three of sugar and two well-grown negro girls aged fourteen and twelve to the highest bidder. 1769.

I imagined I was one of those girls.

Ran away from her master John Rock, on Monday the 18th Day of August, a Negroe Girl named Thursday, about four and a half feet high, broad feet, with a Lump above her Right Eye; had on when she ran away a red Cloth Petticoat, a red Baize Bed Gown, and a red ribbon about her head. 1772.

Rock offered a two-dollar Reward along with costs. I was Thursday.

Mary Postell had been enslaved but gained her freedom. She went to court to protect herself and children from being re-enslaved. She lost her case and was sold for a hundred pounds of potatoes valued at 20 pounds sterling. 1786.¹

I cried for Mary and her lost children.

I've returned again and again to the Nova Scotia Public Archives in Halifax. Yet these three stories read during my early visits have stayed with me. I've continually walked with them beside me.

In 1981, along with friend and anthropologist Savanah E. Williams and former Provincial Archivist, the late Hugh A. Taylor, we organized the first ever public exhibition of thirty-seven archival documents related to people of African descent in Nova Scotia. It was on display from April 24 to August 31. Over the years, my research into African Canadian cultural history has taken me to the National Archives in Ottawa, the Ontario Archives in Toronto, The Buxton National Historic Site and Museum in Buxton, Ontario, New Brunswick's King's Landing Historical Settlement and the New Brunswick Archives in Fredericton. In my travels I've visited libraries and archives in Detroit, New York, North Carolina, and Freetown, Sierra Leone in Africa.

What was I looking for? Traces, evidence, fragments that might tell me something about my ancestral legacy and its implications for my present. But could I trust and interpret the findings, given that the hands placing the material didn't look like mine? How would I know what was missing?

I would have to read between, above and below the lines; create spaces and cross-reference these with oral stories and family and community

1. For a detailed explanation of aspects of African Nova Scotian history see, "African Nova Scotians in the Age of Slavery and Abolition," <https://archives.novascotia.ca/africanans/results/?Search=&Search-List1=4>. Carole Watterson Troxler discusses the case of Mary Postell in "Re-enslavement of Black Loyalists: Mary Postell in South Carolina, East Florida, and Nova Scotia," *Acadiensis* 37, no. 2 (Summer/Autumn 2008).



Figure 1. *Excavation: A Site of Memory*, installation view, Dalhousie Art Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 2013. Photo: Sylvia D. Hamilton.

archives. I have uncoupled my archival findings (textual and visual records and material objects) from the physical, limited structure of the archive, for repurposing.

I follow poet Emily Dickinson’s dictum to “tell all the truth but tell it slant,” by approaching the *archive* at an angle, *slant*. In so doing, I don’t take what I find on its face as the whole truth. I triangulate, juxtapose, repurpose and re-imagine—all in an effort to tell truthful stories about the lives and experiences of generations of African Canadians.

When I began to think about the creation of an installation, whose original name was *The Slavery Project*, I struggled with how to visualize, concretize the troubling fact of *Black people as property*. How would I render that experience/idea in real time, from the abstract to a physical form? I went literal, for equivalencies: barrels and potatoes.

The Slavery Project became *Excavation: A Site of Memory* and *Excavation: Here We Are Here*, a multi-media installation that evolves with each iteration. The work has been hosted at galleries and museums in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, and Ontario from 2013 to 2019. This work is inspired by my ancestors, the strong-willed Black Refugees/Survivors of the War of 1812 whom I’ve written about elsewhere; the original, imaginative Afro-futurists.² *Excavation* incorporates still and moving images, soundscapes, large wall prints, and an array of personal and archival objects. In these sites the real and imagined co-exist, memories collide and merge [fig. 1].

The installation has several anchors. *Naming Names* is composed of five twelve-foot wall scrolls printed with 3000 names of African people, drawn from historical records. It lists enslaved Africans, free Black Loyalists from the American Revolutionary War, and free Black Refugee-Survivors from the War of 1812. In the African Baptist tradition, it is a roll call, accompanied by an audio recording of the names being read into the record.

2. Sylvia D. Hamilton, “Visualizing History and Memory in the African Nova Scotian Community,” in *Other Places: Reflections on Media Arts in Canada*, ed. Deanna Bowen (Toronto: Media Arts Network of Ontario/Public Books, 2019), <https://www.otherplaces.mano-ramo.ca/sylvia-d-hamilton-visualizing-history-and-memory-in-the-african-nova-scotian-community/>.



Figures 2 and 3. *Mining Memory*: Sylvia D. Hamilton, installation view, Thames Art Gallery, Chatham, Ontario, 2015. Photo: Sylvia D. Hamilton.

The installation includes hogshead barrels, potatoes, and prints titled *The Ledger* and *Freedom Runners*. The work also includes my own locks of hair, tied with a red ribbon, fashioned to look like I imagine Thursday's might have [figs. 2, 3].

In her novel *Song of Solomon*, Toni Morrison examines the significance of names. Her narrator says:

How many dead lives and fading memories were buried in and beneath the names of the places in this country. Under the recorded names were other names, just as "Macon Dead," recorded for all time in some dusty file, hid from view the real names of people, places, things. Names that had meaning. No wonder Pilate put hers in her ear. When you know your name, you should hang on to it, for unless it is noted down and remembered, it will die when you do. Names that bore witness.³

In creating *Naming Names*, I was conscious that the collective names typically assigned to Black/African people erased their individuality, their personhood, from public view and memory. While many did not have names, that is, when they were simply grouped and listed in the archival records as "slaves," each was an individual person whose life mattered. Each person deserves to be remembered.

Journal Entry: January 28, 2015 (Memory Fragment 1: Buxton, Ontario, site visit)

Preparation for Thames Art Gallery exhibition

With great anticipation, I enter the Buxton National Historic Site & Museum. I felt I knew this past. In selecting artifacts to share the space within my installation, I wanted to find parallel traces: first, of the ugly but utterly quotidian nature of enslavement, that could be paired with the hogshead barrels I used in the Halifax displays.

I found that parallel in the iron leg shackles—adult and child—the iron neck collar and a leather whip. As I held the shackles, my visceral, emotional response paralleled how I felt standing before wooden barrels that were my

3. Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (New York: Signet Classics, New American Library, 1977), 333.

equivalent, had I been born in 1780s Nova Scotia. The child's leg irons would have confined my feet. Had I been a woman, the larger ones were ready to restrict me. Stark, concretized evidence of brutal enslavement.

Secondly, I sought special *memory objects* that spoke of the humanity and resilience of early African people in Buxton and their will to survive in defiance of the circumstances. Family Bibles, handmade objects, and photograph albums. When I saw the carefully arranged mirror and hair combs, I saw a thread between and among the women in Buxton and those in Black communities throughout Nova Scotia. I thought of my personal archives, with an array of treasures that speak to Black women's adornment. Shannon Prince, the warm, gracious, and resourceful Curator of the museum unwrapped for me an old quilt, hand-stitched by Buxton church women; it was like my grandmother's quilt: both used a light pink binding. It drew me in. Mama Hamilton, like her mother before her, and my own mother, was active in the African Baptist church in our village. I was in the presence of objects imbued with stories, with memories, with heart.

The Buxton name quilt was a fundraiser: people paid fifty cents to add their name to it. I wasn't quite prepared to hold the heavy iron shackles. Shackles heavy with iron. Whose skin did they bind, whose feet did they force to walk along, stiff-legged, not stride as a body is meant to. The push and pull, the pull and push of history; memory embedded. Skin upon skin. If I cuff myself, if my feet are shackled, what vibrations from past Black bodies will pass through me? There is no longer a key.

I marvel at the treasures here: a fragile family Bible, it could be one hundred years old; a record of the significant events in any life: birth, marriage, baptisms, death. And albums with photographs marking moments—seemingly mundane, the details of everyday life. Who will remember them? We will. I will | **fig. 2** |.

Journal Entry: May 14, 2015 (Memory Fragment 2: Finding Isaiah)

Thames Art Gallery, Chatham, Ontario

Noon. Last big thing to do, set up the old and fragile Poindexter family Bible, the cover is detached from its spine. And there is no money to restore it.

During my visit to the Buxton Historical Museum, Shannon explained to me how to open the Bible: *place the unopened Bible on the stand, take a large group of pages in your left hand, support them with your right hand, lay them to the left, on top of the cover.*

The Poindexter family Bible came to the gallery wrapped in a layer of protective acid-free tissue paper and stored in an archival box. I was extremely nervous. I had not touched any artifact that old for a long time, since my first days at the Nova Scotia Archives. What if I cause it more damage?

Wearing white cotton gloves, very carefully I lifted the Bible from its box. Danielle, the gallery assistant, pulled the tissue out from under the Bible as I placed it on the clear plexi stand. I held my breath; bits of faded,

Figure 4. Excavation: Memory Work, installation view, UNB ART Centre, Fredericton, New Brunswick, 2018. Photo: Sylvia D. Hamilton.



tan-coloured paper were shedding from the cover. Remembering Shannon's precise instructions, I placed a gloved finger along the pages, not sure where to open it, measured half finger or so, to first knuckle.

Opening it, I gently laid the pages to the left, to rest on the cover as Shannon had instructed. I smiled, shouted, I could not believe my eyes. "Were you looking for a special spot?" Danielle asked. "Not exactly, I just wanted to open it carefully and didn't want to attempt to find Isaiah. But here he was. Isaiah was in the house, Chapter LVII! It just happened."⁴ (fig. 2, Bible is seen on the stand in centre of installation view).

On one wall near the entrance of the gallery, the text read:

Then deep from the earth you shall speak, from low in the dust your words shall come, your voice shall come from the ground like the voice of a ghost, and your speech shall whisper out of the dust. Isaiah 29: 4.

Early in colonial history, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick were one province. Mounting an exhibition at the UNB Art Centre offered me time to think about early Africans and their descendants who were living on that land. Enslavement was a harsh fact of life for them. During a site visit to King's Landing, a re-created historical village and museum, curators offered me the loan of two slave collars for inclusion in my show. Like the shackles at the Buxton Historical Museum, these tangible remnants of enslavement made the condition real in a way that reading a text cannot—wordlessly, deeply felt |fig. 4|.

Advertisements in period newspapers in both Nova Scotia and New Brunswick were stark evidence of slavery, and of the ongoing resistance and resilience of African peoples. Self-appointed owners hoped to convince others

4. Ellyn Walker's review of my Thames Art Gallery solo exhibition appeared in 2015 in *Magenta Magazine*, <https://www.magentafoundation.org/magazine/sylvia-d-hamilton/>.

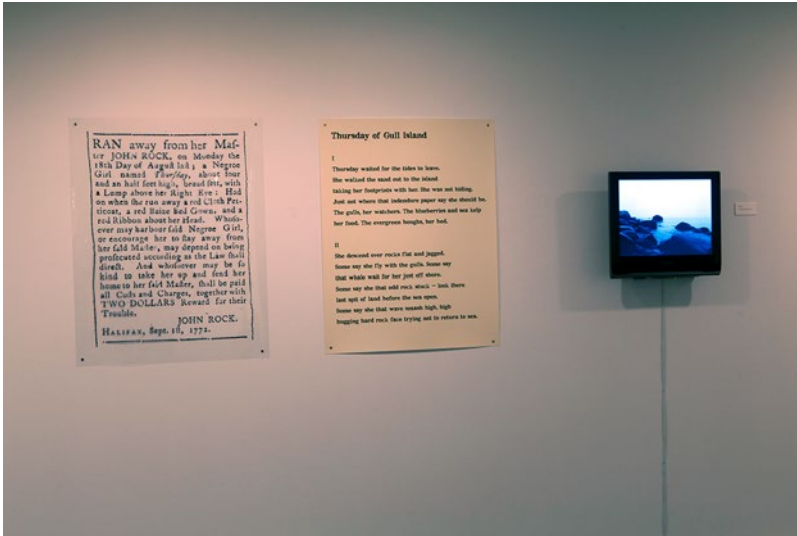


Figure 5. *Thursday of Gull Island, Freedom Runner, Excavation: A Site of Memory*, installation view (close-up), Dalhousie Art Gallery, 2013. Photo: Sylvia D. Hamilton.



Figure 6. *Here We Are Here: Black Canadian Contemporary Art*, installation view, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, 2018. Photo: Sylvia D. Hamilton.

like them to capture these *freedom runners*—who exercised control over their own bodies by resisting enslavement. I thought about what it was like for them as they ran. My enlarged text prints, in their imagined voices, are juxtaposed beside the advertisements.

Thursday, Bill, Nancy, Flora, Ben, Isaac, and Lidge were contemporaries in the struggle for freedom [fig. 5].

Objectification of Black people is not a relic of the past; nor is portraying us as hideous objects to ridicule. In addition to museums and archives, I've scanned secondhand and antique shops, bargaining down the ticket price for so-called Black memorabilia, to liberate them. Rarely did I get an argument; some shop owners were embarrassed to have the item on display, especially when faced with a Black person holding it, asking for the price to be reduced. In one case I handed an owner a one-dollar coin while saying, "that is all I will pay for this."

In 2018, when the installation was exhibited at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) in Toronto as part of the exhibition, *Here We Are Here: Black Canadian Contemporary Art*, I arranged a selection of these found pieces from my personal archives in a display case.⁵ At the request of curators Julie Crooks, Dominique Fontaine, and Silvia Forni, I wrote a title card to accompany the objects [fig. 6].

Text card notes for ROM display case: *How They See Us—Still*

Racist iconography, the spawn of slavery and colonialism, that dehumanizes and objectifies Black and African peoples, remains in worldwide circulation. These objects, from my personal archives, were purchased from second-hand and antique shops. Yet, a vast assortment—old, *and newly produced*, is a click away on eBay: dinner bells, toaster covers, finger puppets, note paper holders, pocket mirrors, recipe boxes, fridge magnets, towels and aprons, salt-and-pepper shakers, sugar and creamer sets, and more. My Black girl doll, draped in Kente cloth, asks: *is this is how they see us—still?* Enslaved Black people were routinely left in wills along with other "property," itemized, in the same way as they were listed in newspaper ads for sale at auction or recorded in bills of sale.

Excavation: Here We Are Here, mounted in 2016 at the Schulich School of Law at Dalhousie University, was timed to coincide with the International Decade for People of African Descent, 2015–2024. In addition to the anchors of the installation, I created new work that considered laws, covenants and their relationship to African-descended people in Nova Scotia and Canada.

The series *Freedom When: Works in Progress*, comprised prints of the 1833 Act to Abolish Slavery in the British Empire, and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms of the Canadian Constitution Act of 1982, both annotated, and the 1968 RCMP surveillance report titled *General Conditions and Subversive Activities Amongst Negroes in Nova Scotia*, complete with redactions, which was positioned between the two aforementioned prints. It required no annotations or commentary [figs. 7a, 7b, 7c].

5. This group exhibition borrowed its name, *Here We Are Here*, from my 2017 installation at Dalhousie University Schulich School of Law. A description of the ROM show is found here: <https://www.rom.on.ca/en/exhibitions-galleries/exhibitions/here-we-are-here-black-canadian-contemporary-art>.

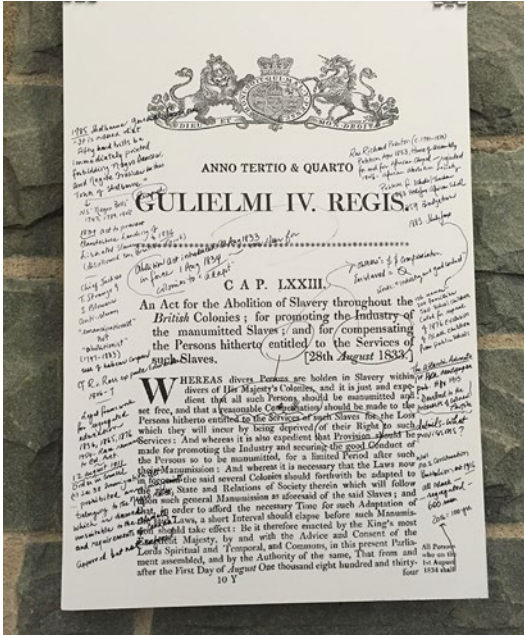


Figure 7a. Excavation: Here We Are Here, installation view, Schulich School of Law, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 2016. Photo: Sylvia D. Hamilton.

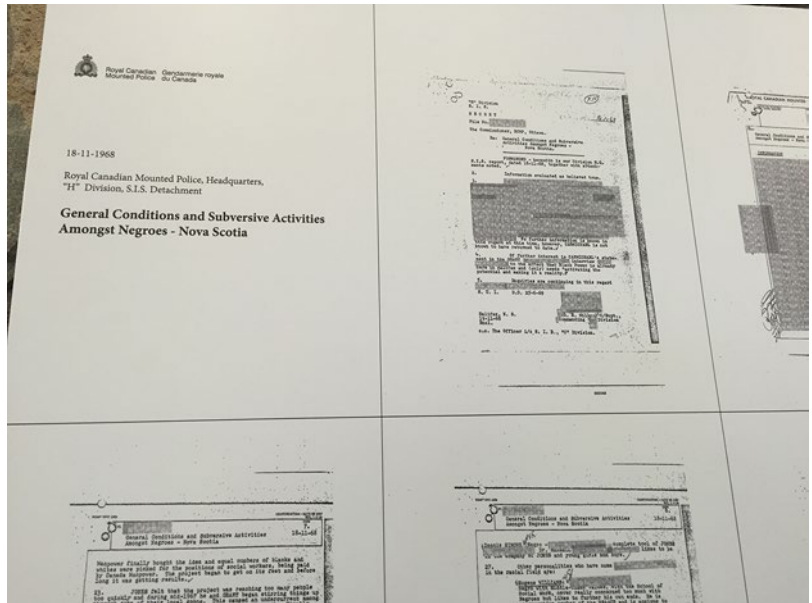
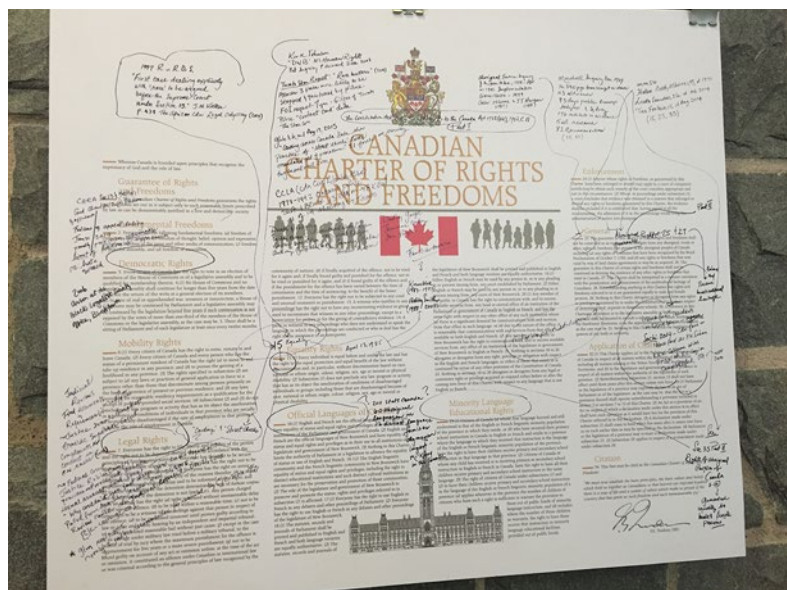


Figure 7b. Excavation: Here We Are Here, installation view, Schulich School of Law, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 2016. Photo: Sylvia D. Hamilton.

Figure 7c. Excavation: Here We Are Here, installation view, Schulich School of Law, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 2016. Photo: Sylvia D. Hamilton.



How do we understand these documents as they are thrown in stark relief against our lived experiences? How do we think about, and relate to these texts, two as fundamental pillars of Canadian democracy, and the third, textual evidence that agents of our own government conducted surveillance on its Black citizens? What rights, then, if any, can we take for granted, as others might?

One of Dr. Martin Luther King’s favourite biblical passages came from the Old Testament Book of Amos, “But Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” (5:24). I created a six-foot, vertical, free-standing, suspended fabric panel with this quotation to assert that my project is underpinned by ideas of resistance, resilience and defiance as evidenced by the long-rooted lives of African people in Canada.

When I think about the redacted names in the RCMP surveillance report, I’m reminded of Morrison’s narrator’s assertion that names have meaning. Yet, the RCMP and the Government did not want us to know the names of the Black people they spied on. Why were they being tracked? Why don’t they want us to know?

What were the so-called subversive activities? What qualified as “subversive”? The public request for human rights? Fair and equal treatment under Canadian law? The inherent right to dignity? Freedom as promised by the Abolition Act?

March 24, 2021, marked a rare day in the Canadian House of Commons. A motion introduced by Liberal MP Majid Jowhari to designate August 1st as Emancipation Day in Canada passed unanimously.

On August 1, 1834, slavery was abolished in Canada and other British colonies. Introduced in the British Parliament on August 28, of the previous year, the Act provided for: “the Abolition of Slavery throughout the British

Colonies; for promoting the Industry of the manumitted Slaves: and for compensating the Persons hitherto entitled to the services of such Slaves” (August 28, 1833) | fig. 7a |.

The Act further allowed for a period of adjustment for the former owners; they needed time to adapt to their loss of free Black labour. The Act would take effect one year later. As to compensation for the enslaved, the act was silent. August 1, 2021, became the first year for commemoration.

There are moments during the creative process when one is struck speechless. It happened to me in September 2016. I read news reports about a forty-eight-pound, six-year-old Black girlchild in a Mississauga, Ontario school. She was wrestled to the floor by two six-foot, white male police officers, each weighing at least 190 to 200 pounds. They placed her face down, cuffed her hands and feet behind her back. She was restrained that way for nearly a half hour.

I experienced a sudden physical reaction; a palpable reminder of the child shackles and slave collars used on Black children that I have displayed in my installations. According to news reports, police had already been called on the girl several times that month. It is unclear what communications may have taken place between school officials and the family about managing the child’s behaviour.⁶

These many years later, I still think about her. The results of her family’s human rights complaint came in January 2021 when an Ontario Human Rights Tribunal ordered the Peel Regional Police Board to pay \$35,000 in damages to her family. They sought \$150,000 as compensation for injury and loss of self-respect and dignity and \$20,000 for the cost of counselling for psychological damage and trauma. In rendering her decision, Adjudicator Brenda Bowlby wrote:

In handcuffing the applicant’s hands behind her back and holding her on her stomach with her ankles handcuffed for at least twenty-eight minutes, the officers violated the applicant’s rights under Sec. 1 of the Human Rights Code to equal treatment in the provision of services by treating her in a way they would not have treated a white child.⁷

Freedom (When), even in the first year commemorating Emancipation Day, is still a work in progress. ¶

6. “Decision against Peel police board comes a year after tribunal found race factored into officers’ actions,” *CBC News*, January 7, 2021, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/human-rights-tribunal-peel-police-black-girl-handcuffed-1.5865322>.

7. Kayla Goodfield, “Ontario Human Rights Tribunal orders Peel police board to pay \$35K after six-year old Black girl handcuffed at school,” *CTV News Toronto*, January 7, 2021, <https://toronto.ctvnews.ca/ontario-s-human-rights-tribunal-orders-peel-police-board-to-pay-35k-after-six-year-old-black-girl-handcuffed-at-school-1.5257749>.

PRACTICES | PRATIQUES

The House that Rosette Built

Charlotte Henay

Charlotte Henay is Bahamian diasporic storyteller, multidisciplinary artist, scholar and Assistant Professor in Women's and Gender Studies at Brock University.
—chenay@brocku.ca

The House That Rosette Built

what cannot be burned | I remember
I am made of the things that do not that are not register
the silences in the archive
an archive
the unspoken
the unnamed I am made from
nothingness the repository of tomorrow and yesterday
bat in the house the mind questing after sperrit

I remember I am made from jay feather and trance stickiness moonlight blessings on the out
breath loose teeth from a quick backhand
too tight pants shoes secrets

I remember I am made from release
as a whisper
and that you must not know me since you have forgotten what I am capable of

When I began to think through sitting with my mother's bones as a practice of memorying, I realized that there was a necessary embodied component to the process. A protocol. That I had to go where she was, where all of my people's bones are, to consider what it meant to grieve this way – as a channel for sperrit – as an archive of ancestral stories. The process compounded my grieving. It also opened up a world of connections I had elided, that were a part of my own silencing and that of my grandmothers', too. This portfolio-piece asks how do we read into the absences in which we are transfigured?

They wanted, my grandmothers. They had things to say. This is a wanting not limited only to breath. It is not to be rushed. Neither is our grief. This piece demands sitting with grief, in it, as a vehicle for journeying, deepening. Deeper analysis must begin with how we relate to and care for each other. Deathwork is an act of co-creation and reciprocity. We never do our work alone. This is a calling in to create a circle of care, responding to the call to use imagination, empathy and dreaming to unshackle our relations in the futures we dream. Sitting with the dead is work in service to spirit (Hopkinson, 1998. P. 81).

I began talking to my grammies, I had to learn how to listen, build relationships. I asked what were/are they like? What is their history? How might they have felt in their living? I asked, and ask, what they would like. This led to the cacophony/polyphony I describe - writing in a way that is collective. The protocols develop in a process of hearing and seeing from, and in, other spaces, listening to voices through landscapes, spirits, and dreams. Iterations of field notes, archival photographs and documents, models/potential outcomes of chosen methods come together to serve as introduction to what I am calling mash-up methodology, where experimentation and adaptation of methods and reflection on the effects are recognized as forms of research. Bringing my people into the writing meant taking the work out of the footnotes, which had been my original intention, and putting it into the body of the text. I did the same with citations, paying attention to other ways that people are taking up ideas in writing. Citation weaves a web of intertextuality, intratextuality and relationality. Refuses disconnection.

THE DIOCESE OF THE BAHAMAS AND THE TURKS & CAICOS ISLANDS

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Sands Road
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(242) 356-4096 or 7
Fax: (242) 322-7943



P. O. Box N-656
Nassau, Bahamas
www.bahamasanglican.org
Email: diosec@batelnet.bs

What is left after death? Where can it be found?

The Archives
Mackey Street
Nassau, Bahamas

Dear Sir/Madam,

This letter authorizes you to allow Ms. Charlotte-Ann Henay access to the church records in your possession for the purpose of researching information.

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

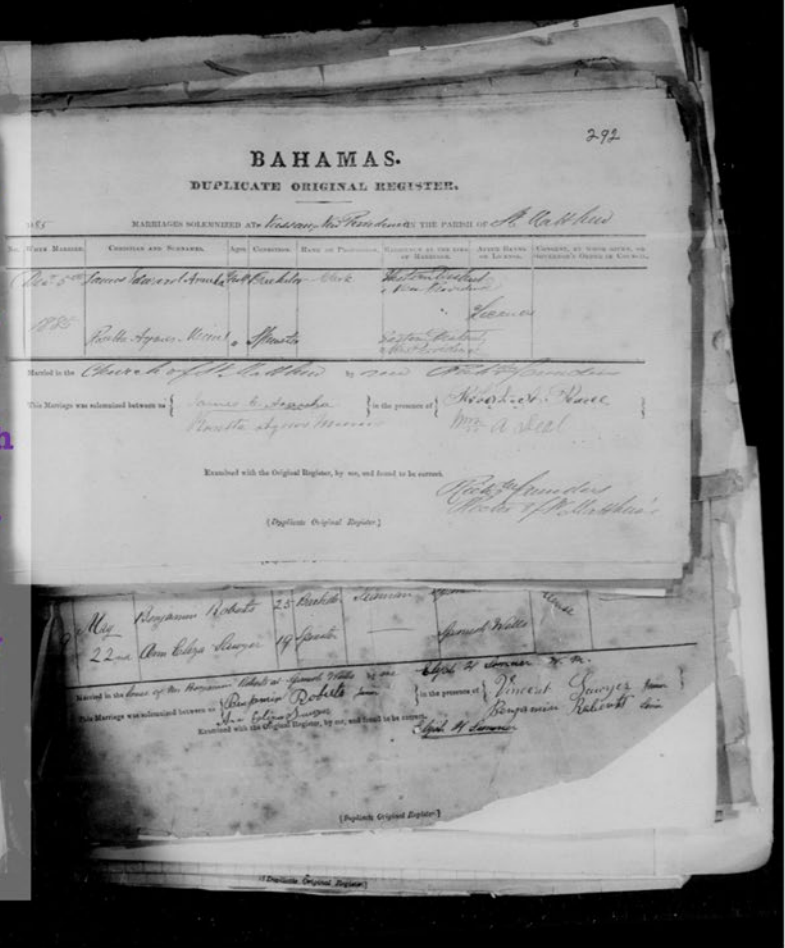
Yours sincerely,

The Venerable James Palacios
ARCHDEACON FOR ADMINISTRATION

JP/lr

Rosetta Agnes / Archive: Witness

I have a
bruise I
don't
recognize
she says
the dead
pinch you
in your
sleep do
they pinch
you to
send your
spirit
back to
your body
or to
remind
you they
are there



Ever since I was a child I have plied these sands ruthlessly digging big toe into crab holes at ebb tide seeking sea snakes relatives my father plastic buckets oil jugs coconut husks shampoo sargasso'ed remnants over honeycomb rock

Smile if you have a Bahamian passport there's us and then there's them Investigation Deportation Haitian application section customs says so few days could be fourteen could be thirty that day on the hill designed to frustrate wait fill out forms

We gat so much god there's no room for anything else

Bahamas

No 131

Government House.

Nassau, 2nd October, 1918. 19

C O
51637
Recd
27 OCT 18

Sir,

*Gov
46059
Enclosure No 1.*

In my despatch No 122 of 4th September I reported the death of Mr. J.E. Aranha, Deputy Surveyor, and I now enclose a copy of a Petition which I have received from his widow, Mrs. R. Aranha, asking for a gratuity in view of her husband's long service and her reduced circumstances.

2. The late Mr. Aranha, who died on 1st of his decease was 56 years of age and he performed 26 years service, of which 10 years were as a Colonial Engineer, somewhat less than a quarter was performed in the Out-Islands. His family consisted of:-

- Jenny -married to C.W. Black in Nassau age 24
- Maud -single- lives at home 21.
- May -single - lives at home 16.
- William -married -lives in New York 31.

3. Petitions of a somewhat similar nature to that now submitted have been made from time to time in the past to the House of Assembly by surviving relatives of Civil servants, vide enclosed list, and have invariably resulted in some pecuniary allowance being granted to the applicant.

Enclosure No 2.

4.

The Right Honble

Walter H. Long, P.O.,

&c., &c., &c.,

Secretary of State for the Colonies.

*square ghosts the emergence is pedagogical to teach us/instruct us on the perilous boundary keeping between sacred/secular. dispossession/possession...the personal is not only political but spiritual.**

James Edward was a womanizer and a philanderer.



We gat so much god there's no room for anything else

LeRhonda Maignault-Bryant in *I Had a Praying Grandmother* makes a case for considering the knowledge passed on by black grandmothers as continuation of Black womxn's intellectual traditions...and sources of archival knowledge upon which we may draw. "Black women have negotiated in-between spaces— having to reconcile inherited knowledge w their experiences...spiritual identities tied to nearly four centuries of a black intellectual tradition comprised by oral teachings, writings, religious teachings and everyday activities, domestic arts."

Orality and performance treat the work differently, they intend and privilege trance induction - where the pieces and voices are echoing and in constant conversation - versus referenced on the page to recall belonging. Neither is linear, nor is the time of spirit, they and it can be entered into at any and many points. The work sits in the time of ritual practice, encompassing collective memory and ancestral veneration. In presenting deathwork as ancestral work, a reparation, I am engaging ephemera in an archive of futurities. This ephemeral archive, as Muñoz reminds, calls out warning, imagines the absences with a sense of responsibility. It is a space for dreamwork as serious engagement to explore what our reclamation of ancestors does. It is reckoning with what is lost, recovered, obscured. It asks who refers to their art as a talking point? What immobilizes you? What do you want to heal? Poetry can do a kind of radical work. The work itself is a practice of reciprocity – experiential in design, its fracture is intended as diffraction of the moving through grief, and hearing the dead. None of the registers alone hold the dead or their voices. Death taken as a portal offers us the possibilities of deepening the exchange with our relations. Dreams, meditations, memories shapeshift into allusion, renovation, rupture in intertextual, hypertextual and intratextual relationships unbound by linear time. Alive, ongoing, borrowed exchanges – not owned.

I had not originally intended archival work. I had a series of documents from our family's amateur genealogist, and I went to the historical archive thinking I would be able to find them, looking for my great-grandmother's great-grandmother, Rosette's daughters. I hadn't fully considered the potential for trauma in the historical archive as violent, and what I didn't find. The absences were, of course, the most noteworthy. How do you describe the shape of what is absent? The dead suffer, too. Speaking with them, acknowledging them in intimate relationships is a form of what Hess Love would call spiritual advocacy, its own form of reparations.

What comes before your hand hits the page? What happens inside of you? I had to find keys to this thinking through process, learn to be in conscious collaboration with spirit versus critiquing to control, doing myself and others violence; recognize that the guidance I needed and need is rooted in my belief, and know my own worth – that I can reconceptualize an archive of loss as a mattering.

I wanted to get people to think about the ways in which we structure our work and what this does – to push the bounds of a violent system, and our own neural pathways. We been here, this is therefore ours to tell and tell as we see fit. The work of reclaiming our imaginations and healing ancestral lineages is foundational to futurities – and is largely overlooked. As such, this work - the multidirectional work of Afro-Indigenous futurities - engages in processes of visionary thinking, enjoining decolonial and abolitionist schools in communities of memory.

I wanted to show where relationship can be held, and how that is also never uncomplicated – through evoking layers of representation. Through the lens of my own archival research and a polyphony of Black women's voices, this work theorizes relationality in Black Diasporic feminist work as futurities.

LeRhonda Maignault-Bryant in *I Had a Praying Grandmother* makes a case for considering the knowledge passed on by black grandmothers as continuation of Black womxn's intellectual traditions...and sources of archival knowledge upon which we may draw. "Black women have negotiated in-between spaces— having to reconcile inherited knowledge w their experiences...spiritual identities tied to nearly four centuries of a black intellectual tradition comprised by oral teachings, writings, religious teachings and everyday activities, domestic arts."

Orality and performance treat the work differently, they intend and privilege trance induction - where the pieces and voices are echoing and in constant conversation - versus referenced on the page to recall belonging. Neither is linear, nor is the time of spirit, they and it can be entered into at any and many points. The work sits in the time of ritual practice, encompassing collective memory and ancestral veneration. In presenting deathwork as ancestral work, a reparation, I am engaging ephemera in an archive of futurities. This ephemeral archive, as Muñoz reminds, calls out warning, imagines the absences with a sense of responsibility. It is a space for dreamwork as serious engagement to explore what our reclamation of ancestors does. It is reckoning with what is lost, recovered, obscured. It asks who refers to their art as a talking point? What immobilizes you? What do you want to heal? Poetry can do a kind of radical work. The work itself is a practice of reciprocity – experiential in design, its fracture is intended as diffraction of the moving through grief, and hearing the dead. None of the registers alone hold the dead or their voices. Death taken as a portal offers us the possibilities of deepening the exchange with our relations. Dreams, meditations, memories shapeshift into allusion, renovation, rupture in intertextual, hypertextual and intratextual relationships unbound by linear time. Alive, ongoing, borrowed exchanges – not owned.

I had not originally intended archival work. I had a series of documents from our family's amateur genealogist, and I went to the historical archive thinking I would be able to find them, looking for my great-grandmother's great-grandmother, Rosette's daughters. I hadn't fully considered the potential for trauma in the historical archive as violent, and what I didn't find. The absences were, of course, the most noteworthy. How do you describe the shape of what is absent? The dead suffer, too. Speaking with them, acknowledging them in intimate relationships is a form of what Hess Love would call spiritual advocacy, its own form of reparations.

What comes before your hand hits the page? What happens inside of you? I had to find keys to this thinking through process, learn to be in conscious collaboration with spirit versus critiquing to control, doing myself and others violence; recognize that the guidance I needed and need is rooted in my belief, and know my own worth – that I can reconceptualize an archive of loss as a mattering.

I wanted to get people to think about the ways in which we structure our work and what this does – to push the bounds of a violent system, and our own neural pathways. We been here, this is therefore ours to tell and tell as we see fit. The work of reclaiming our imaginations and healing ancestral lineages is foundational to futurities – and is largely overlooked. As such, this work - the multidirectional work of Afro-Indigenous futurities - engages in processes of visionary thinking, enjoining decolonial and abolitionist schools in communities of memory.

I wanted to show where relationship can be held, and how that is also never uncomplicated – through evoking layers of representation. Through the lens of my own archival research and a polyphony of Black women's voices, this work theorizes relationality in Black Diasporic feminist work as futurities.

Images

- Figure 1** Letter The Venerable James Palacios to The Archives, Jan. 8, 2018. The Diocese of The Bahamas and the Turks & Caicos Islands. Author's personal archive.
- Figure 2** "Bahamas Civil Registration, 1850-1959", database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QJDZ-NRMB> : 9 August 2017), Rosetta Agnes Arauha, 1941.
- Figure 3** "Petition by Rosetta Agnes Aranha for gratuity." National Archives (Kew), UK. Accessed 3 June 2017 <https://www.familysearch.org/tree/person/sources/LRDS-2ZY> . Screenshot by author.
- Figure 4** Aranha family photo, circa 1900. Front row L to R: Elizabeth Jane Aranha, Maude Aranha, Rosetta Agnes Minns, Edith Aranha, ?, James Edward Aranha (?), May Aranha, back row unknown. Author's personal archive.
- Figure 5** Rosetta Agnes with parasol, circa 1900. Author's personal archive.
- Figure 6** Rosetta Agnes headshot, circa 1900. Author's personal archive.
- Figure 7** An Act, To ascertain who shall not be deemed mulattoes, "Bahamianology", <https://bahamianology.com/an-act-to-ascertain-who-shall-not-be-deemed-mulattoes/> *text excerpt from Act.
- Figure 8** Coakley Town, Andros Map, Jan. 1837. Department of Lands & Surveys, Nassau. Courtesy of Grace Turner.

Notes

James Edward was a womanizer, "When Blackbirds Gather," 1.
Guava ghosts, "Pedagogies of Crossing," 7.

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Artist Profile: Kamissa Ma Koïta

Didier Morelli

“Straight ahead
her mother whispered
before the wind turns
you are my child
child among the grasses
you are my gazelle
in the world of lions”¹

The black and white photographic scene that documents Kamissa Ma Koïta’s performance project *Reenactment, Nous serons universel.le.s* (2018) has a palpable restlessness | **fig. 1** |. First presented as an immersive experience at the Galerie de l’UQAM during the exhibition *Refus Contraire* and subsequently acquired by the university gallery as a single photograph, the image captures ten young Black individuals posing in a salon-like space. Abstract-expressionist-like paintings of various dimensions hang on the back wall of the room and a fabric curtain frames the sitters on both sides while a patterned rectangular carpet covers the floor. Many of the actors stare directly at the camera, while a few others look out to different viewpoints. Ma Koïta, seated center-left and elevated slightly on the armrest of a couch, is stoic and calm in his pose, gazing back at the viewer.

Didier Morelli is a curator, independent researcher, and visual artist, and an FRQSC Postdoctoral Fellow in the department of Art History at Concordia University. He is also associate editor at *Espace art actuel*.

—didier.f.morelli@gmail.com

1. Stéphane Martelly, *Little girl gazelle*, trans. Katia Grubisic (Montreal: Ruelle, 2020).

2. Interview with the artist, September 24, 2021.

3. Félix Chartré-Lefebvre, "Kamissa Ma Koïta—Transformers les représentations sociales," *Vies des arts* 255 (Summer 2019).

4. For more on Février's use of performance to denounce racism in Québécois contemporary art and its institutions see: Didier Morelli, "Stanley Février: Performing the Invisible," *Canadian Theatre Review* 190 (Spring 2022): 69–72.

5. Chris Dart, "These are the 2022 Sobey Art Award longlist nominees," *CBCArts*, May 3, 2022, <https://www.cbc.ca/arts/these-are-the-2022-sobey-art-award-nominees-1.6439639>.

6. Winner of the 2020 Prix de la danse de Montréal, *Désir's BOW/ TRAIL* is a multi-part outdoor performance which includes a most recent iteration dedicated to the colonial and slave trade history of Tio/Tia:Ke (Montreal).

7. Alexandre Graton, "Kama La Mackerel, l'artiste trans et anticoloniale aux multiples talents," *Radio-Canada*, July 9, 2022, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1807812/kama-la-mackerel-artiste-trans-anticoloniale-prix-conseil-des-arts-queer>.

8. Didier Morelli, "MOMENTA 2021 Centres Indigenous and Nonhumanist Notions of Nature," *Frieze*, September 30, 2021, <https://www.frieze.com/article/momenta-sensing-nature-2021-review>.

9. Interview with the artist, September 24, 2021.

10. See, for example Jose Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queer of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Duke University Press, 2003); Tavia Nyong'o, *Afro-Fabulations: The Queer Drama of Black Life* (New York: NYU Press, 2018).

11. Mechtild Widrich, "Is the 'Re' in Re-enactment the 'Re' in Re-performance," in *Performing the Sentence: Research and Teaching in Performative Fine Arts*, eds. Carola Dertnig and Felicitas Thun-Hohenstein (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014), 141.

12. For more on the dynamic relationships between performance, the archive, and documentation see: Iain McCalman and P. Pickering, *Historical Reenactment: From Realism to the Affective Turn* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010); Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains:*

Born in Quebec City, Ma Koïta grew up in Montreal where he still currently resides. Of Malian origins, his practice often reflects on the insecurities and dangers of Black Canadian and Québécois existence in a homogenous cultural milieu that has violently erased difference through a white, colonial paradigm. Tackling issues of systemic racism, slavery, and reparations in the arts milieu and broader society, Ma Koïta acknowledges that for him, like many others affected by structures of exploitation, these questions are ones of survival and not theoretical exercises or aesthetic postures.² In doing so, he joins a dynamic group of emergent Black Caribbean and Afro-descendent Québécois artists in the Montreal region who have, over the past five years, become increasingly visible on the local and regional contemporary art scene by employing hybrid models of institutional critique, performance art and public intervention with success and aplomb.³ Notable examples include 2022 longlisted Sobey Art Award visual artists Stanley Février⁴ and Michaëlle Sergile,⁵ choreographer and dancer Rhodnie Désir,⁶ as well as the poet and performance artist Kama La Mackerel whose work also reflects on issues of race, colonialism, and trans-identities.⁷ One of Montreal's largest contemporary art festivals, the MOMENTA Biennale de l'image, reflected these cultural shift in its most recent iteration focusing on the broad themes of dismantling gender dichotomies and colonial histories.⁸ *Sensing Nature* (2021) included a solo project at gallery Diagonale by Léuli Eshrāghi reflecting on the erasure of fa'afafine-fa'atane people, while the *Worldmaking Tentacles* group exhibition at the Darling Foundry displayed bodily experiences that aimed to transcend race, gender, and sexuality. Firmly involved in the local scenes of both queer and artist-run-centre culture, Ma Koïta's practice evolves in both fringe and institutional settings, from the communally oriented centre des arts actuels Skol and the socially engaged, now-defunct Centre Never Apart, to the major stages of the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec.

For Ma Koïta, the stakes and risks of exposure are high. He is often labeled as radical, or even sometimes confronted by those whom he unsettles with judgement, uncertainty, and doubt.⁹ Re-enactment, the art of tilting the prism on a historical event in order to see it anew, serves as an entry point into a practice that is conceptually grounded in deep art historical research. Drawing on the theorization of re-enactment in performance studies as a powerful tool for minoritarian subjects to enact agency upon the signs, symbols, and embodied structures of a dominant and/or oppressive society,¹⁰ it is imperative to read Ma Koïta's work through the lens of a conscious demystifying of Québécois cultural history or, more precisely, a challenge to the monumentalization and "fixation of a possibly fictional interpretation of history through physical reconstruction in the present."¹¹ To cite the art historian Mechtild Widrich on the power of re-enactment to reframe past events, specifically ones that have been "flattened" through the canonizing of documentation¹² like photographs or videos: "far from erasing all differences between an event and its later instances, [re-enactment] is a marker that allows us to see this difference more clearly, often creating new

Figure 1. Kamissa Ma Koïta, *Reenactment, Nous serons universel. le.s*, 2018. In the context of the *Refus contraire* exhibition at Galerie de l'UQAM, Montreal. Photo: Camille Richard.



Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment (London and New York: Routledge, 2011); Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield, *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History* (Bristol: Intellect, 2012); Gundhild Borggreen and Rune Gade, *Performing Archives/Archives of Performance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Megan Carrigy, *The Reenactment in Contemporary Screen Culture* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021).

13. Widrich, 145.

14. Interview with the artist, September 24, 2021.

15. Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations," *The Atlantic*, June 15, 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>.

16. Since the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis at the hands of police officers in the spring of 2020 and the global resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement, conversations about systemic racism in Quebec have been reignited. This was exacerbated by the Premier of Quebec and leader of the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ), François Legault, who flatly denied the existence of systemic racism in the province's institutions. In denouncing such public denials with his work, Ma Koïta rejoins the voices of activists, scholars, and other artists who have laboured to elucidate Quebec's past and present of slavery, colonialism, and racism. See, for example: David Austin, "Narratives of Power: Historical Mythologies in Contemporary Québec and Canada," *Race & Class* 52, no. 1 (2010): 19–32.

meaning, formally and contextually, which can only be understood in the light of the distance to the reference work or event."¹³ Following this logic, Ma Koïta frames re-enactment as a form of "reparations,"¹⁴ which echoes Ta-Nehisi Coates' argument in "The Case for Reparations" (2014) that, in addition to recognizing and addressing the economic and moral debts of slavery and Jim Crow, reparations requires "the full acceptance of our collective biography and its consequences."¹⁵ By extending the concept of reparations into contemporary art, performance, and re-enactment discourse, the artist highlights how any true challenge to systemic racism in the Quebecois and Canadian cultural context requires not only the overhaul of institutions but also an acknowledgment of past aggressions and inequalities.¹⁶

Les Automatistes were a group of dissident Montreal artists who were influenced by Surrealism and its aesthetic theory of automatism. The movement began in the early 1940s and was widely recognized locally and abroad. Commemorating the 70th anniversary of the *Refus global*, the exhibition *Refus contraire* looked to reactivate the principles of commitment, interdisciplinarity and community that brought together the signatories of one of the most significant 20th century cultural manifestos in the province of Quebec. Reviewing the ambitious retrospective project for RACAR, which included several exhibitions throughout the province and in Toronto as well as a series of lectures by the writer Gilles Lapointe, Ray Ellenwood underscores the contemporary importance of the movement in Quebec: "I have no doubt that an important energizing force behind all this was the continuing relevance of the history of Automatism for Montrealers. I only wish there were a similar élan in Toronto."¹⁷ Active during one of the most widely written-about and revered periods of Quebecois art, the group has been the subject of countless exhibitions, catalogues, and books, produced locally and abroad.¹⁸ Les Automatistes were revolutionary in their time for their overt politicization of aesthetics,¹⁹ specifically traditional Quebecois society's

attachments to the Catholic faith and the upholding of rural ancestral values. Revisiting a formative cultural monument that has been reflected upon ad infinitum, with more attention given recently to the strength of its women contributors,²⁰ Ma Koïta's *Reenactment, Nous serons universel.le.s* recreated one of the seminal group portraits of Les Automatistes from their second official exhibition presented in 1947 at Claude Gauvreau's home, 75 rue Sherbrooke West. In the original photograph from the vernissage, nine members of the group sit casually on couches and across the carpeted floor. The men wear party suits and the women are in cocktail dresses. They are: Claude Gauvreau, Julienne Gauvreau, Pierre Gauvreau, Marcel Barbeau, Madeleine Arbour, Paul-Émile Borduas, Madeline Lalonde, Bruno Cormier, and Jean-Paul Mousseau. Taken one year prior to the creation of the Refus Global, an anti-establishment and anti-religious manifesto, this black-and-white photograph has become emblematic of both the Automatistes' movement and manifesto, even though it does not capture all of its members or signatories. As Rose Marie Arbour notes, neither of the two major Automatistes exhibitions, in 1946 or 1947, included women painters in them. This, she argues, suggests that, were it not for their signing of the Refus Global, the women of the group would not have been identified as part of it, nor would they have been historically recognized as contributors to the Quebecois avant-garde.²¹

In a conversation, Ma Koïta admits to being inspired by the Automatistes as a young creator, especially the paintings of Borduas, whose works he regularly contemplated at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.²² At the same time, he recognizes that the progressive values espoused by the group lacked acknowledgments of sexism, colonialism, or racism within its own ranks or the broader art world. These juxtapositions and contradictions are what inspired him to rethink this quintessential scene with a powerful difference. In his re-enactment, Ma Koïta and his collaborators exude an unmistakable vitality in their substitution of the historical figures with Montreal's contemporary Black community.²³ Amongst those present are Magatte Cheikhovitch Wade, Anaïs Damphousse-Joly, Dimani Mathieu Cassendo, Marilou Craft, Shaina, Po B. K. Lomami, Valérie Bah, and Miriam Gabrielle Archin. Peers and friends of Ma Koïta, these individuals represent a new, more pluralistic generation of queer and Black creatives and cultural workers: Damphousse-Joly is a prominent television, film, and stage actress, Mathieu Cassendo is an illustrator and comic book author, Craft is an important literary figure and writer, Lomami is an accomplished trans-disciplinary artist, and Bah is a self-described "Black Queer Storyteller" |fig. 2|. Bold and beautiful, breaking the stillness of documentary photography, the tableau speaks volumes about the urgency of addressing the overwhelming whiteness of local patrimonial Quebecois cultural myths like the fabled avant-garde group of the 1940s.

Just a few years earlier, shortly after finishing a fine arts degree at l'UQAM, Ma Koïta employed a similar re-enactment technique at La Centrale galerie Powerhouse. Having integrated the artist-run-center as a member in 2015

17. Ray Ellenwood, "Exhibitions, Manifestos, and the Seventieth Anniversary of Refus global," *RACAR* 44, no. 1 (2019): 99–105.

18. See, for example: Lise Lamarche, "La sculpture des Automatistes," *Espace Sculpture* 25 (Autumn 1993); Gilles Lapointe and François-Marc Gagnon, *Saint-Hilaire et les automatistes*, exh. cat. (Mont-Saint-Hilaire: Musée d'art du Mont-Saint-Hilaire, 1997); Gilles Lapointe, *La comète automatiste* (Anjou, QC: Fides, 2008); Lise Gauvin, *Les Automatistes à Paris: actes d'un colloque* (Montreal: Les 400 Coups, 2000); J. R. Mureika and R. P. Taylor, "The Abstract Expressionists and Les Automatistes: a shared multi-fractal depth?" *Signal Processing* 93, no. 3 (2013); Sophie Dubois, *Refus global: Histoire d'une réception partielle* (Montreal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2017).

19. Lucille Beaudry, "Art et politique au Québec: depuis les Automatistes, un héritage modifié," *Bulletin d'histoire politique* 9, no. 3 (2001): 7–12.

20. Rose Marie Arbour, "Le cercle des automatistes et la différence des femmes," *Études française* 34, n. 2–3 (1998): 157–173.

21. Rose Marie Arbour, "Identification de l'avant-garde et identité de l'artiste: les femmes et le group automatiste au Québec (1941–1948)," *RACAR* 21, no. 1–2 (1994): 16.

22. Interview with the artist, September 24, 2021.

23. While each of the actors in this re-enactment of the original 1947 photograph by Maurice Perron has a clear corresponding historical figure, confirmed by the pose and position that they have in the image, Ma Koïta stands out as a tenth, anachronistic personage. This insertion of the artist into the group further contributes to the distortion of the photograph, creating a new embodied presence that challenges the original image's veracity and historicity.

Figure 2. Kamissa Ma Koita, *Reenactment, Nous serons universel. le.s*, 2018. In the context of the *Refus contraire* exhibition at Galerie de l'UQAM, Montreal. Photo: Camille Richard.

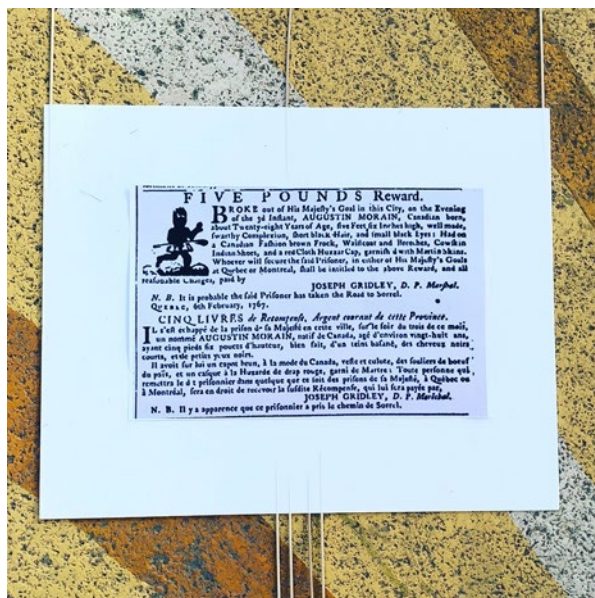


Figure 3. Kamissa Ma Koita, *N*gre d'Amérique: Affichage et rectifications*, 2018. Installation on l'Avenue du Musée at the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal. Photo: Camille Richard.

and participated in a residency shortly thereafter, he restaged a 1978 photograph showing the founding membership of the feminist art centre. This historical document functioned similarly to that of the Automatistes. With its black-and-white archival patina. This time, a group of white women sit on an assortment of chairs and the hardwood floor, papers are scattered about, and a slide projector is visible in the background—the scene embodies a quintessential moment of feminist organizing in Quebecois arts history. In his rendition, Ma Koïta includes two vintage cases of local beer (Labatt 50 and Molson Export) that mirror the original photograph, but each actor is now replaced by a member of his contemporary entourage: the artist and radio host Keithy Antoine and the filmmaker Amandine Gay, amongst others. With these two photographic projects, revisiting the 1940s Automatistes and the 1970s founders of La Centrale galerie Powerhouse, both of which created single, iconic images of local Black community members literally stepping into the void of his native province’s whitened art history, Ma Koïta shows an acumen for visually reimagining originating identitarian myths. With a keen performative sense of short-circuiting the racist and colonial paradigms that govern contemporary art and its various institutions, the works aligns with an increased mainstream consciousness within Quebec about promoting greater diversity and inclusion.²⁴ It does so with a careful consideration for the past, refusing to let disappear the reiterative pillars upon which today’s exclusionary culture is set.²⁵ *Reenactment, Nous serons universel.le.s* deploys photographic representations of Black artists, creatives, and cultural workers reperforming an entirely white historical scene in a manner that highlights “not the black body exhibited for others but a black body that has chosen to perform itself as an exhibit for itself.”²⁶ As Harvey Young describes the African-American boxer Jack Johnson’s empowered performances for white sporting audiences at the height of the Jim Crow era, “the body gains agency by replaying the conventions of the boxing spectacle differently. Entering the ring, Johnson guaranteed that the ensuing fight would be witnessed on his terms.”²⁷ Ma Koïta’s remixes present life-affirming and physically persuasive tactics similar to the world heavyweight boxing champion by recasting local iconography with certain differences that challenge the nostalgic mystique of archival black-and-white photographs and the memories they evoke.

*N*gre d’Amérique: Affichage et rectifications* (2018) is a series of reprinted archival news clippings presented on l’Avenue du Musée, which belongs to the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts [fig. 3]. In line with Ma Koïta’s previous pieces, the work subverts the institutional space of mostly apolitical, and often aesthetically dull, public art into a critical reflection on the erasure of 18th and 19th century slave narratives in Quebec. Bareboned and direct, the installation speaks with an urgency that recalls traditions of direct action in both activist and artistic circles. This emphasis on liveness and embodied engagement is confirmed by the artist’s website where the work is framed first and foremost as a performance, with documentation of the event clearly offering a perspective that bears witness to the audience’s interaction with

24. See, for example “L’art contemporain: accès limité pour la diversité” (April 19, 2019) by Marissa Grogulé in *La Presse*, which documented these slow, laborious, and uneven changes in contemporary art on questions of visibility, Black Empowerment, and equity in the workplace.

25. For more on the foundations of present-day ethno-nationalism in 1970s Quebecois history, see Bruno Cormellier’s essay on the legacy of notable writer and cultural hero Pierre Vallières, “The Struggle of Others: Pierre Vallières, Quebecois Settler Nationalism, and the N-Word Today,” *Discourse* 39, no. 1 (Winter 2017): 31–66.

26. Harvey Young, *Embodying Black Experience: Stillness, Critical Memory, and the Black Body* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 91.

27. Young, 91.

the panels. Looking down at reproductions of newspapers, fugitive posters, and other materials attesting to the presence of local slavery, viewers are confronted with realities of slavery all too often ascribed primarily to the United States. Similar to the *Stolperstein*, or “stumbling stones,” installed outside Berlin apartments and houses documenting the names and details about the death of people who once lived there, but were forcibly removed during the Nazi holocaust, *N*gre d’Amérique: Affichage* et rectifications marks the ground and monumentalizes slavery as a transgression that is part and parcel of Canadian and Quebecois heritage.

This assemblage of reprinted archival objects, scattered along the street next to one of Canada’s foremost important cultural institutions, shows figures that are “likewise transitory, perceived through glimpses and furtive glances, by fictive traces and fugitive moves.”²⁸ In *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (2017), C. Riley Snorton reads the “archive for gender as an always racial and racializing construction—as a strategy for living and dying—that in this instance provides a way for thinking about what forms of redress are possible in/as flesh.”²⁹ Ma Koïta similarly employs the archive as a space to illustrate how the direct involvement of Quebecois and Canadian citizens in Trans-Atlantic slavery at the behest of the government included enforcing gender dichotomies and ascribing Black sexuality and flesh as something to be owned, feared, and/or suppressed. Conjuring this question of fluid sexuality in the digital collage series *TransFormation* (2019), the artist poses in surrealist, queer, decolonial landscapes that are bright and iconographically rich. They give life to what Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley opens up in “Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic: Queer Imaginings of the Middle Passage” (2007) when she asks: “What new geography [...] of sexual, gendered, trans-national, and racial identities might emerge through reading for black queer history and theory in the traumatic dislocation of the Middle Passage?”³⁰ Or again, what Saidiya Hartman describes in “Venus in Two Acts” (2008) when she cites her writing about the presence of the Venus in the archive of Atlantic slavery: “By throwing into crisis ‘what happened when’ and by exploiting the ‘transparency of sources’ as fictions of history, I wanted to make visible the production of disposable lives (in the Atlantic slave trade and, as well, in the discipline of history) [...].”³¹ Created during a period where he contemplated publicly sharing his trans-identity, Ma Koïta’s prints juxtapose his transforming likeness in various colourful contexts that draw from various vernaculars that “dislocate” the Middle Passage and “throw into crisis” fictions of history. These prints juxtapose canonical Western art historical references with Black (African) bodies and cultural artifacts that have often been fetishized, appropriated, and/or represented as exotic, primitive others.

Citing the heroic, white, masculine, and heteronormative figures of Pablo Picasso, Paul Cézanne, Casper David Friedrich, and Vincent Van Gogh, amongst many others, in *TransFormation* Ma Koïta constructs a queer universe that recovers and gives place to trans Black figures in the archive. Adopting and morphing traditional physical poses from Western paintings,

28. C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 7.

29. Snorton, 66.

30. Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley, “Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic: Queer Imaginings of the Middle Passage,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 14, no. 2–3 (2008): 193.

31. Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (June 2008): 11.

Figure 4. Kamissa Ma Koita, *Picasso No. 2*, from the series *TransFormation*, 2018. Digital collage. Courtesy of the artist.

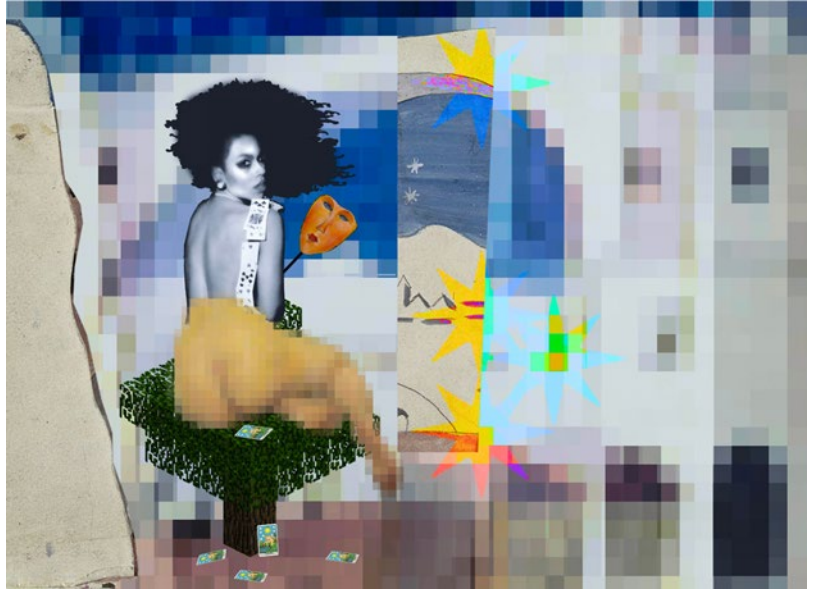


Figure 5. Kamissa Ma Koita, *Trans 2.1*, 2018. Digital collage. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 6. Kamissa Ma Koita, *TransFormation No. 5*, 2018. Digital collage. Courtesy of the artist.



cutting and pasting recognizable masterpieces with blank spaces, pixelating images in order to blur the original provenance of the oeuvres, casting the scenes in a pinkish hue, and inserting wooden masks and vibrant patterns, the artist assembles environments that give life to new fluid, decolonising forms |fig. 4|. The trope of the “mad-genius artist,” typically associated with the lone white male phenom, is rethought to address the weight, embodied trauma, and mental strain of legacies of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, anti-blackness, and systemic racism. To cite Snorton on racial histories of trans identities, Ma Koïta’s un-gendering of Blackness becomes “a site of fugitive maneuvers wherein the dichotomized and collapsed designations of male-man-masculine and female-woman-feminine remain[s] open—that is fungible—and the black’s figurative capacity to change form as a commoditized being engender[s] flow.”³² Exploring the historical treatment of neurodiversity in Western art history and its intersections with the pathologizing of Blackness in contemporary anti-black culture, Ma Koïta generates incisive self-portraits that unsettle conventional identarian, racial, and ethnic binaries |fig. 5|.

Questioning social domination by denouncing racist paradigms and exploitation because it is necessary to do so in order to survive comes at certain personal, social, and professional costs. Ma Koïta’s public exposure engenders vulnerability, emotional labour, as well as physical and intellectual demands that are rarely accounted for, adequately financially remunerated, or acknowledged. One of the most striking images in the *TransFormation* series is of Ma Koïta, a black formal gown hanging off his shoulders, next to a suit-and-tie character wearing an African mask |fig. 6|. The artist proudly wears a rainbow flag pin around his neck, held on an elaborate and pixelated necklace. In interviews about these works, the artist discussed the practice and process of collage as an important part of shaping his craft and identity.³³ Beyond the critical tactics that Ma Koïta employs in his process which are often read as overtly confrontational, these pieces can also be seen as deeply spiritual and personal statements. As Kobena Mercer has argued, the recurring presence of the mask is also a marker of protection, self-identification, and diasporic imagination: “To the extent that the inner face of the mask concerns its protective function, I would suggest that masking is a cultural form of central importance to the psychic life of the black diaspora because it seeks to hide and protect an inward relationship to Africa. What it protects is a contemplative or meditative space that allows spiritual and emotional reflection on the time and place left behind by the trauma and rupture that inaugurated diaspora.”³⁴

More reflections on inward diasporic relationships are critical to rethinking Ma Koïta’s intersectional approach to art, performance, cultural work, curation, and trans-activism. Instead of solely positioning the artist as a beacon of conflict or a bulwark for progress and change, they allow us to imagine him as his own agent, celebrating queer Black life and communities in a spiritually grounded way. With aesthetic prowess, conceptual richness, and clear understanding of power relations as they manifest themselves

32. Snorton, 59.

33. Interview with the artist, August 9, 2021.

34. Kobena Mercer, “Diasporic Aesthetics and Visual Culture,” in *Black Cultural Traffic: Crossroads in Global Performance and Popular Culture*, ed. Harry Justin Elam (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 157.

inside and outside of the artworld, his practice consciously moves away from institutional discourses of utilitarianism and of the neoliberal “greater good.” Striving towards a more sustainable ecosystem, Ma Koïta shifts the prism of history while imagining new universes for himself and his peers to thrive. ¶

SALT.

Thematic reviews

Recensions thématiques

Teju Cole, Liz Ikiriko, Mark Sealy, et al.

As We Rise: Photography from the Black Atlantic: Selections from the Wedge Collection

New York: Aperture, 2021

184 pp. 142 b/w and colour illus.

\$65.00 (hardcover)

ISBN9781597115100

Ra'anaa Yaminah Brown

What does it mean to represent Blackness within the realm of the photographic arts across the Atlantic? As speculated in Paul Gilroy's vital book, *The Black Atlantic* (1995), the modern Black experience cannot be understood in binaries of separate Black cultures (African, American, Caribbean, British), but rather must be acknowledged as an overarching Black Atlantic culture which transcends ethnicity and nationality. Within a photographic context, what then does it mean to explore the often unremarked intersection of these distinct cultural realities? Both the Black subject and the Black photographer have been either omitted or abysmally under-recognized within conventional narratives, such as John Szarkowski's *The Photographer's Eye* (1966), Mary Warner Marien's



Photography: A Cultural History (2002), and Charlotte Cotton's *The Photography as Contemporary Art* (2004).

However, where other mainstream accounts fall short, *As We Rise: Photography from the Black Atlantic* presents a platform for the just acknowledgment of photographers from the Black Atlantic, creating a safer space in which Blackness may be analyzed and represented through a lens of liberation, decolonization, and intersectionality. Featuring selections from the repertoire of the Wedge Collection, *As We Rise* is a celebratory book that uplifts a sense of kinship and social cohesion, not only between the featured artists but between the viewer and the subject.

Established in Toronto by Jamaican-Canadian arts collector Dr. Kenneth Montague in 1997, the Wedge

Collection is one of the largest privately owned contemporary art collections across the country that puts its primary emphasis on exploring Black diasporic culture and contemporary Black life. The Collection was cleverly designed to insert necessary dialogue and the works of marginalized artists into the art historical narrative through exhibitions and collections such as *As We Rise*. A friend and frequent collaborator of Montague, Nigerian-American writer, photographer, and art historian Teju Cole, begins the book with an eloquent preface suggesting the book's invitation to listen to the photographs. His text is followed by a powerful introduction by British curator and cultural historian, Mark Sealy. Both Cole and Sealy's texts effectively position the forthcoming images, addressing the importance of scholarship of this caliber in developing the interconnectedness of members of the Black diaspora. As Cole rightfully notes, "These are pictures that say: *I am not alone, I have another with me*" (7).

To preface each detailed section—Community, Identity, and Power—the book features three vivid preludes by Nigerian-Canadian artist, curator, and educator Liz Ikiriko. These introductions

are used as an opportunity to break down each theme in relation to the photographic arts. Community as a locus for belonging, Blackness as an uncategorizable yet boundless force, and the prioritization of agency over machinations of supremacy are brought to light as the key concepts and basis for the book—offering, perhaps, a new perspective on the core aspects of what it means to be Black within an Atlantic context. It is through this contribution to scholarship that a newfound sense of kinship and relatedness may be suggested among members of the Black diaspora. Reminiscent of a family photo album, *As We Rise* presents a feeling of ease and connectivity. As Liz Ikiriko states in one of her eloquent interviews, “The collection extends out to a global diaspora and proclaims, ‘We are home’” (12).

Each interview is followed by a series of photographs in dialogue with brief texts by fellow artists and art historians. All three sections amount to over 100 original works by Black artists from across Turtle Island (North America), and throughout the Diaspora. While the juxtaposition of images is quite striking, there does not appear to be a rhyme or reason for the placement of images within each respective section. Why is it that Gordon Parks’ *Husband and Wife* (1950) is placed opposite Deanna Bowen’s *Treasury of Song* (2007)? While the lack of elaboration on the reasoning for the mismatching of eras—and black-and-white with colour photography—is perhaps a missed opportunity for additional vital context, it may

likewise have been an intentional choice to allow for viewer speculation on the character of the book.

Perhaps Yannius Davy Guibinga’s *Opposition* (2016) and *Leaves* (2016) are followed by James Van Der Zee *Jean-Michel Basquiat* (1982) to accentuate the atemporality of Black power and the ways the movement ebbs and flows with each generation. And quite possibly, the juxtaposition of Kwame Brathwaite’s *Sikolo Braithwaite* (1968) and *Self-Portrait* (1964) was done to address the artist’s perceived inner identity against his perception of that of the subject. The pairing of varying photographs within this context is, conceivably, a commentary on the intricacies of possessing layered identities and of the lived experience of members of marginalized communities. Despite the variances in style (self-portrait, group photo, double exposure, collage), colour scheme (colour, black-and-white, sepia), and time, this book’s successful curation allows it to be experienced as the expression of a compelling (though diffuse) narrative.

As *As We Rise* eloquently addresses what it means to be Black in Western society through photography. There is no oversimplification of the Black lived experience, but rather the presentation of numerous complex layers of being and identities that are intersectional. While these conversations are implied in the inclusion of the imagery, there does, however, appear to be a dearth of textual commentary on said nuanced identities. The book touches on ideas of queerness and gender through Texas Isaiah’s *My Name Is My Name I* (2016) and Rotimi Fani-Kayode’s

Twins (1985). Still, something is left to be said, particularly around the striking and necessary presentation of queerness in works such as Jody Brand’s *Moffie in Irma’s Garden* (2017) in relation to gender nonconformity and its interrelatedness to Blackness throughout time and space.

The same can potentially be said about the intersectional identity of Black women. The book includes a plethora of impressive works displaying femininity and femmehood; Michèle Pearson Clarke’s *Gloria* (2018), Raphael Albert’s *Miss Black & Beautiful* (1972), and Kennedi Carter’s *Untitled (Self-Portrait)* (2020), but the potent conversations on the intersectional identity of femmehood and Blackness are not contextualized in writing. And where is the significant commentary on sexuality, hypervisibility, and the sexualization of Black femme bodies that Mickalene Thomas’ *Afro Goddess with Hand Between Legs* (2006) so poetically demands? But perhaps these conversations are meant to be implied; rather than be provided with a complete analysis, readers are meant to infer and formulate an introspective exploration of Blackness, identity, and their own connectivity.

In centering Blackness, *As We Rise* allows for the reimagining of Black people across the Black Atlantic as main figures in their own stories. There are conversations on Black joy in Tayo Yannick Anton’s *Backway* (2013) and Jamal Shabazz’s *Flying High* (1982), among numerous other representations of Black beauty, happiness, and excellence across the ages. *As We Rise* serves as an important addition to existing scholarship in establishing an environment in

which the Black body is forefronted in a way that uplifts the community rather than painting it in a light of fragility and pain. As Teju Cole declares in his spirited preface, this dynamic photographic treasure trove is a nod to the Black lived experience and is wholly imbued with a sense of compassion, Black love, and joy.

The book beautifully finishes with a final interview with Dr. Kenneth Montague outlining his motivations, influences, and guiding principles not only in the creation of *As We Rise*, but his development of the Wedge Collection. This text, intentionally the last moment experienced, allows readers the opportunity to synthesize their own introspections about the book without being influenced by the curators' intentions. Montague's interview provides necessary context about the importance of taking up space as Black folks within the realm of the arts.

In a society where Blackness is frequently scrutinized and under question, this excerpt of the Wedge Collection refuses to accept any conventional narrative and instead presents varying depictions of Black identity, extending across eras and beyond both time and space. It combats harmful stereotypes and inaccurate narratives while simultaneously placing the Black body, both behind and in front of the camera lens, on a pedestal of reverence and pride. *As We Rise* speaks to the instrumental power of photography; as having the power to present the world from a familiar, loving perspective—from within a community, as a device to exorcise,

celebrate, and heal, and as a historic and vital tool for the acknowledgment of Black power.

Ra'anaa Yaminah Brown is a doctoral student in Art History at Concordia University in Tio'tia:ke, on unceded Kanien'kehá:ka traditional territory. Her research explores the emergence of the intersection of Black queer art and activism in N'Swakamok, later colonized as Sudbury, Ontario. She is the Co-Founder and Chair of Black Lives Matter Sudbury and Installation Coordinator for Up Here: Urban Arts Festival. —raanaa.yaminah@gmail.com

Blackity

Artexite, Montreal
September 23, 2021 to June 23, 2022
Curated by Joana Joachim

Jenny Burman

The first things you notice when you enter both the material and virtual exhibition spaces of *Blackity* are the vertical lines on the walls or screen, which are like lines on an old dot-matrix printer, the way they look grey but your brain knows they're made up of tiny black dots. There are skinny and fat lines, stretching from the bottom to the top, with lots of white space in between, and lots of printed or scanned materials

laid out against this line-blank-line space. The lines are a data visualization, marking the volume of materials this exhibition draws from, according to decade: 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, 2010s. *Blackity* “begins to trace a temporal cartography of Black Canadian art history,” writes curator, art historian and Concordia professor Joana Joachim.

The lines, like the exhibition overall, hold in place this wonderful assemblage of images, texts and artworks, against the ephemerality (the “blips in time”) of Black artists' visibility in Canadian art and criticism worlds, and towards the creation of another archive to stand with the scores of archives, mostly “little ‘a’ archives,” that exist on websites, in gallery and community centre basements, in magazines and books and libraries, in people's memories and stories.¹ Together these materials form a bold tradition of making, performing, talking and writing about Black diasporic and Black Canadian art over the last fifty years. The tradition is multifarious, multi- and intergenerational, collaborative, and engaged with Indigenous art and art by other



Blackity (exhibition view), Artexite, Montreal, 2021. Photo: Paul Litherland.

racialized people. It is installation and painting and poetry and dub and photography and criticism and performance, and it is sweaty, bloody, political work. It is beauty and rage and historical memory. “*i am not sleeping fruit despite denial,*” says Jan Wade’s *Soul Tone Poem*, on a 1993 pamphlet from a Vancouver grunt gallery show, tacked on the wall in the exhibition room. The tradition may be kaleidoscopic but it’s unbroken, because this art and world-making has been happening all the time, all over the place—as other forms of Black study happen, write Moten and Harney in *The Undercommons*²—both inside and outside of art world spaces: here we have posters for group shows in museums and in malls, postcards from exhibitions or distributed guerilla-style (as Melinda Mollineaux did with her Canboulay faux-tourist postcards, slipping them in with the BC Ferries timetables), flyers for Lillian Allen’s Dub Poets performances and for ten-year “artistic journeys” (Hollis Baptiste’s 2003 *Gun Play* work). Here we have the 1990s outpouring of anti-racist art and activism that Joachim describes in the curatorial statement, which curator and critic Andrea Fatona attributes partly to post-1988 Multiculturalism funding for the arts (interview cited above). Here we have university-based art galleries and collections hosting amazing shows and programs that I’d have never heard of if I hadn’t seen their catalogues in this exhibition (at, for example, Bishop’s, msvu, and York University), and generative interdisciplinary conferences

that brought diasporic artists together regularly (Celebrating African Identity or CELAFI stands out for its 1992 and 1997 gatherings and subsequent archive-building).³

Here we have a range of printed-matter objects that revels in different sizes, textures, fonts, designs (a nubbly catalogue cover like corrugated cardboard; a trio of tiny pastel-coloured books). Here we have old media: slides of Deanna Bowen’s installations and Stan Douglas’ projections, zines and fading photocopies, DIY catalogues (I was especially taken with the 1985 “Art and Community” catalogue, put out by A Space and the Community Arts Group in Toronto, featuring writing by Lillian Allen, John Greyson, the Regent Park Video Workshop, and others), and copies of *Fireweed* and *FUSE magazine* hanging precariously from wooden hooks. Here we have visible evidence of lifelong creative practices and relationship-building: a porous collective of Black women artists and curators have worked together in various formations over decades, across the country: Andrea Fatona, Busejé Bailey, Deanna Bowen, Camille Turner, Sylvia Hamilton, Jan Wade, Denyse Thomasos, to name but a few. In the gallery space at Artexte, you could see and trace these collaborations over the years.

There are touchstones and laden images that echo across the materials. Many artists and works are haunted by the embodied histories of transatlantic slavery, as Joachim touches on in her curatorial statement and as several texts in the exhibition elaborate. Some of the artists here work with old newspaper

announcements about fugitive enslaved people (e.g., Camille Turner and Camal Pirbhai’s *Wanted*, 2017), others with maps and ships, others with ancestral stories and practices. The curator herself is an art historian whose doctoral and postdoctoral research and writing delved deeply into the histories and archives of slavery in New France. Joachim’s scholarship, which has paid particular attention to the everyday lives and traces of enslaved women, is strongly critical of the absences in and institutional neglect of these archives, making her archive-building work in *Blackity* especially meaningful. Another thematic touchstone is home: losing and remaking it in diaspora (Fatona’s 1994 *Hogan’s Alley* documentary), longing for it in ways both tangible and ineffable (Michael Fernandes photographed in his garden), reinventing and forecasting its future permutations (Syrus Marcus Ware’s 2068: *Touch Change*).

What is remarkable is that, when an exhibition is curated this well, you can get a glimmer of fifty years of Black Canadian art from *one documentation centre collection*. Montreal-based Artexte, a library, documentation centre and exhibition space, houses an impressive material and digital collection (and a great e-catalogue). The centre engages in student and artist collaborations: *Blackity* germinated out of a collaboration between Artexte and Concordia’s Ethnocultural Art History Research group, EAHR. But *Blackity*’s digital exhibition extends the featured artists’ connections outside of Artexte’s walls and into multiple fora, which layers and thickens the “temporal cartography” in a way

that I've never experienced in an exhibition. This is where Joachim's curatorial skill impressed me the most: each material object in the show, appearing on the website as a scanned image, is paired with something else, which you join by following a link. The 1989 Artexte publication *For Fear of Others: Art Against Racism* brings you to Camille Turner's Afronautic Research Lab and a trove of resources curated by Turner and Black studies scholar Phillip Howard at McGill University in 2018. A Dub Poets poster brings you to a digitized 1983 videotape of a live Lillian Allen mixdown! The poster for a 2019 show at Galerie de l'UQAM in Montreal, *Over My Black Body*, brings you to a popular education website on Quebec's Caribbean (Hi)stories. Some links are to PDFs of scholarly articles or critical reviews about the artists and exhibitions. Many items are also accompanied by a short audio clip in which Joachim tells you something else about the artist or the work: sometimes it's biographical, sometimes it is unexpectedly quirky and touching. I swear—and I'm thinking like a professor who is always building imaginary syllabi—you could build a whole Canadian Art course out of this web exhibition.

Joachim's bilingualism, and Artexte's French and English-language collections, make this a particularly strong exhibition, showing and creating thematic and interpersonal connections between Black artists and curators (Manuel Mathieu, Dana Michel, Gaëtane Verna, Dominique Fontaine) working in Quebec and other provinces.

I was struck by all of it: the aesthetic and political power of the

work, the longevity of individual careers, and the steady and enduring formation of networks of affinity, collaboration, cross-inspiration, mentorship, and mutual care. As importantly, I was struck by the care with which the Artexte librarians have handled—and Joachim as curator has animated and contextualized—the materials, to keep holding a place for this tradition.

Jenny Burman is an Associate Professor in Communication Studies at McGill University. —jenny.burman@mcgill.ca

1. Both "blips in time," which Joachim uses as a title for her curatorial statement, and "little 'a' archive" are described by Andrea Fatona in a 2020 interview with Liz Ikiriko: "I think that the big 'A' archive exists to overshadow the little 'a' archive, which, for me, is the archive that I know and touch and feel, and most of us do through stories at your dining table, through photographs that you go through with your family." See "Speaking Ourselves into Being," *C Magazine* 144 (Winter 2020), <https://cmagazine.com/issues/144/speaking-ourselves-into-being>. <https://cmagazine.com/issues/144/speaking-ourselves-into-being>

2. Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013).

3. See <http://www.celafiz5.com>

Julie Crooks, ed.

Fragments of Epic Memory

Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario/
DelMonico Books D.A.P., 2021

274 pp. 100 colour, 50 b/w illus.

\$40.00 (hardcover)

ISBN 9781636810126

Lillian O'Brien Davis

In her introduction, exhibition curator Julie Crooks quotes Derek Walcott, from his series of essays *What the Twilight Says* (1998): "Only our own painful, strenuous looking, the learning of looking, could find meaning in the life around us." This exhibition catalogue, *Fragments*

of *Epic Memory*, keeps this quotation close to the heart, as the act of strenuous looking is a core theme addressed throughout the book. The catalogue contains commissioned essays along with excerpts of other previously published texts that are foundational to the exhibition. Each text or essay is a fragment that creates a whole, reframing perspectives on the Art Gallery of Ontario's recently acquired Montgomery Caribbean Photography Collection in a way that gives agency to its subjects and explodes the colonial lens. Acquired in 2019, the Montgomery Collection comprises almost 4,000 photographs, lithographs, and ephemera and spans the period of emancipation beginning in 1834 to the first half of the twentieth century, documenting regions in the Caribbean and the related diaspora. The exhibition is significant as it is the first organized by the AGO's new



Department of Arts of Global Africa and the Diaspora and blends the Montgomery Collection with historical and contemporary artworks exploring how the Caribbean's histories are constantly being reimagined and rearticulated by artists across time.

Within this constellation of artworks, Walcott's strenuous looking suggests that we must learn to look with eyes that see beyond the colonial frameworks that caused the images in the Montgomery collection to be produced in the first place. Julie Crooks describes her understanding of strenuous looking in her curatorial essay, which focuses on her observation of a young boy returning the cold, all-encompassing colonial gaze of the camera in the photograph *Boy with optical device at market* (ca. 1915). The act of strenuous looking appears repeatedly in many forms within the Montgomery collection and, as the catalogue contributors suggest, beyond in Caribbean art at large. Like the exhibition, the catalogue is a site of speculation with shifting rhythms between poetry, lectures, and formal essays—what contributing essayist Andil Gosine describes as the always potential dynamism of the material within the archive.

The book's affective recollection of personal memory is powerful. This is something felt keenly in the initial text in the book, Derek Walcott's eponymous "Fragments of Epic Memory," which includes vivid descriptions of the writer's own experiences returning to the Antilles—an experience many of the Caribbean diaspora can understand, a shift in perception, where one's eyes begin to see without the colonial lens placed over them.¹

Walcott's text establishes the tone of the book and his writing recurs throughout its entirety, in excerpts and quotations. The catalogue uses

fragmentation as foil to the false coherence of colonial time, drawing from language reflected in Walcott's writing describing the fragmentary nature of memory as a defining feature of the Caribbean archipelago. The texts in the catalogue seek to fill in loud silences in the colonial archives, writing about Caribbean and diasporic artists who have not been adequately recognized for their impact and accomplishments by the Western canon. In addition to the collected writing, the catalogue includes image plates from the Montgomery collection, reproductions of artworks in the exhibition, and installation views. The catalogue brings these artists and images together, an effective gesture of speculation that suggests how much we are missing when we rely on colonial visions.

At times, this act of speculation is done through the lens of the family, a theme that courses throughout the book. Family depictions found within the Montgomery collection portray how the word "family" itself assumes a subtle horror, with Black subjects standing amongst the white "family" to whom they have been unwilling bound (173). In contrast, depictions of Black families posing in front of their own homes suggest a different sense of the word, referring to bonds of love and mutual support (175). Writing in the catalogue reflects this theme as well, exploring patriarchal and matriarchal lineages established by blood as well as by influence.

Barbara Paca's essay on Frank Walter's artistic practice and life explores the ingenuity and creativity of a Caribbean artist, a "Black

Caliban," splintered between many worlds. Walter's artwork stitches together fragments of history, memory and diasporic experience. Paca outlines Walter's imagined patriarchal duty to his country, capturing memories of the past in plantation depictions as well as conceptions of the future in his later work. Paca's reference to Caliban feels apt, as Walter transforms from servant who worked the land to a visionary, expanding the scope and scale of the definition of a Caribbean artist. As Paca describes, Walter rejects the European perspective of Lévi-Strauss's *tristes tropiques*, instead seeing his home and the Caribbean in general as an unknown thread of epic history.

Other unknown threads include the short reflection by Mary Wells, the daughter of watercolourist Dorothy Henrique Wells, that recalls the efforts her mother made as an artist and educator. An artist who extended her studio into the world, bringing her paintbrush and watercolours anywhere she wished to work. Despite her proficiency as an artist and educator, there is a dearth of information about Wells in the art-historical canon. Emily Cluett's preface to Mary Wells' piece suggests that, despite this, the legacy of the elder Wells persists through the rigor of her work as a painter, her decades as an educator, and through her own children. A small but important note at the end of the preface recognizes Dr. Andrea Fatona's impact in bringing Dorothy Henrique Wells's work to the common consciousness.

Both of these artists, though they orbited the Caribbean, are described through these essays as

being intrinsically tied to the land through their work. A common theme in these collected writings being the act of returning to the Caribbean, an important step in rearticulating how the Caribbean is seen from the outside. Each piece of writing addresses this through what artist Christian Campbell describes as the diasporic theory of reassemblage—like a broken piece of ceramic stuck together again—something whole but fundamentally changed. Campbell pulls together quotations from Walcott's *What the Twilight Says* along with other poetic fragments drawn from various sources, using his own theory of reassemblage to outline a survivalist ethic of imaginative possibility. Overall, this act of reassemblage is done effectively throughout the book, though the blank pages that appear sporadically throughout feel like their own kind of unintentional gaps where an image might otherwise be perfectly at home.

In the catalogue, time is non-linear, something evident in the placement of the epilogue in what is ostensibly the middle of the book. Michel-Rolph Trouillot's "EPILOGUE" explores colonial time and memory, as what were meant to be permanent monuments to imperial power in Haiti shift or lose their meaning through subsequent generations and changes in power: monuments dumped into the sea, where they will likely face judgment by those they had previously condemned. Marsha Pearce, in an essay on history as narrative, later describes postcoloniality as a "long-moment," a perpetual afterness with no clear beginning or end.

Pearce draws examples from the exhibition, such as Nadia Huggins's work *Transformations No. 7* (2016), which proposes new ways of seeing, positioning the viewer underwater. In Huggins's work, Pearce underscores how the body finds agency, free from historical constructs of race, gender, and class. Pearce's analysis works to deepen our understanding of how the works in the exhibition complement and expand on Crooks' work on the Montgomery Collection, suggesting that the works in this exhibition recall—or rather revoke—fixity. If as Pearce suggests, history is a narrativization of the past then the exhibition as a whole offers an alternative narrative that is routed through rather than rooted in history.

The writing in the catalogue reframes art made by people of the Caribbean as well as historical images of the place to suggest that the people depicted, rather than being nothing more than a detail of the landscape, embody what Pearce describes as the "defiant dignity" of people—like artist Frank Walter—who live close to the land. Pearce refers to Walcott's writing to suggest that the "rictus smile"—applied in order to do business with tourists out of the shame of necessity—of the Caribbean belies near constant resistance. The continuum of resistance and rebellion is reflected in the evolution of artists like Peter Dean Rickards, a maverick Jamaican photographer who embraced the digital early in his career, exploring aspects of Jamaican culture not often put on display. Annie Paul reflects on the "cancelling" of artist Peter Dean Rickards in England in the first part

of the 2010s when many galleries that showed interest in presenting Rickards' work were warned against it by rights groups that were able to influence programming decisions in what Paul describes as "performative wokeness at its worst." Without going into detail about the nature of the "cancelling," Paul suggests that Rickards' work documenting the Jamaican dancehall scene in the 2000s and his political satire through his magazine, *FIRST*, is not easily interpreted by a society so resolutely committed to policing class and colonial boundaries.

An account of an earlier rebel appears by way of an excerpt from a chapter in C. L. R. James' *Black Jacobins* (1838), "The San Domingo Masses Begin," which describes the revolution of enslaved people against the colonizers of La Cap, Haiti. The text traces Toussaint's arrival and the mythology of his hero-hood. James' description of the actions of the revolution in La Cap feels timeless when considered against recent events from the summer of 2020, distinguishing the cruelties involved in perpetuating injustice from the angry rebuke of the impoverished and oppressed—they cannot be equated.

Overall, the catalogue captures the inordinate influence Caribbean artists and culture have had on the wider world. Dominique Fontaine reflects on Caribbean art in its current form within the diaspora, linking this exhibition with other such shows that have been presented in Canada over the last ten years. Fontaine suggests that perhaps the Caribbean is not the periphery but, in fact, within our own urban

archipelagos, we are all connected back to the Caribbean as a cultural and artistic centre.

Fragments of Epic Memory frames the Montgomery collection as a speculative site of emancipation, using its collection of photographs to reframe dominant historical narratives about the Caribbean. Walcott's strenuous looking cues the reader to see these photographs with new eyes, asking: what is it that cannot be consumed? The catalogue contributes to the growing crescendo of voices that affirm that the colonial photographer has not and will never capture these subjects in their entirety. Through the collection of essays, texts and images documenting the Montgomery Collection and other artworks, the catalogue is distinguished beyond its association with the exhibition as a record of Caribbean artists, thinkers and writers reflecting on the impact of the Caribbean on the western artistic canon. One of the final texts in the catalogue, O'Neill Lawrence's interview with exhibition artist Leasho Johnson captures the essence of the catalogue's collected writings, successfully proposing an interrogation of a particularly rigid way of thinking by re-interpreting, re-looking, cutting up, collaging, to ask the question: "is this who we were—who we really were?"

Lillian O'Brien Davis is Curator of Exhibitions and Public Programs at Gallery 44 Centre for Contemporary Photography.
— lillian@gallery44.org

1. Walcott's text was originally delivered as the 1992 Nobel lecture. See Derek Walcott, *The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory — The Nobel Lecture* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1993).

Jan Wade et al.

Jan Wade: Soul Power, exh. cat.

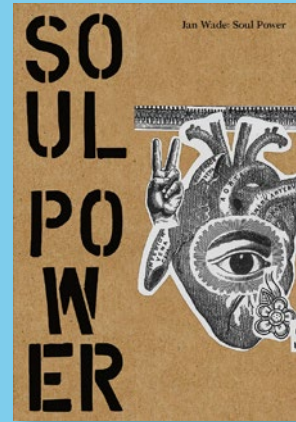
Vancouver: Information Office and the Vancouver Art Gallery, 2022

176 pp. 150+ colour illus.
\$35.00 (paper)
ISBN 9781988860138

Yaniya Lee

Much was made in the press about the fact that Jan Wade's recent solo exhibition, *Soul Power*, presented at the Vancouver Art Gallery from July 2021 to March 2022, was the first major show for a Black Canadian woman artist in the gallery's ninety-year history. As a student of Black Canadian art, I know that these practices existed here for a long time, even if, until very recently, they were overlooked by major Canadian art institutions. More than the VAG's ability to fulfil current socially responsible representation targets under pressure, I was excited for the publication of a new monograph on an important Black Canadian woman artist, of which there are too few—monographs, not artists, I mean.

Jan Wade: Soul Power, a 176-page tome with over 150 full-colour images, was co-published by the Vancouver Art Gallery and Information Office to accompany the most comprehensive survey of Wade's artwork to date. The catalogue lays the groundwork for a fuller understanding of her practice through the introduction of discourses around the work, and in this way achieves its purpose of presenting Wade's career as an artist. In what follows I will give an overview of the contents of



the book and some of the main ideas it therein.

Three major texts are included in the catalogue: "Breathe: A Conversation," an interview with Wade by the artist Deanna Bowen; "Life Lessons," a biographical essay by curator Daina Augaitis; and "Signifying, Text and Movement in the Art of Jan Wade," an analytical essay by writer Wayde Compton, all preceded by a brief foreword by VAG director Anthony Kiendl and followed by a list of Works, a Curriculum Vitae, and Acknowledgements. Interspersed between the texts and images are two-page spreads of testimonials by the artist, in which she describes her upbringing, her work, and her values.

Wade was born to an interracial couple in Hamilton, Ontario, in 1952, and raised in the local Black community. After art school in Toronto, she moved to Vancouver in the early 1980s, and there she found a local scene that nurtured a practice that soon had her showing her work in solo and group shows across the country and abroad. Wade's many mediums include painting, collage,

sculpture, and textiles. Her altars, crosses, praise houses, memory jugs and embroidery are often connected to the politics of Black life, a reflection of her spiritual upbringing in the local African Methodist Episcopal Church.

The photographs reproduced in the book are a combination of close-ups and installation shots, which together provide the viewer with a strong impression of Wade's distinct visual forms. Her sculptures, paintings and illustrations often incorporate found objects and, at times, resemble meticulously crafted 3-D collages. In the catalogue's richly coloured reproductions, Wade's beautiful, intricate works could transfix with their aesthetics alone, but instead gain another level of depth through the discussions of cultural and political contexts included in the accompanying texts.

Augaitis's essay compiles a sequence of biographical information from personal interviews with the artist. The author awkwardly broaches race in relation to Wade's life and career, uncomfortably imparting race and racial characteristics. She refers to Wade as "a person with a dark skin tone," for instance, and seems to describe Wade's relationship to Black culture as something discovered through research. Luckily, the two other texts by artists Bowen and Compton, who have both invested a significant amount of time in Black life and Black Canadian history, do not have these same issues.

Bowen introduces her interview by describing Wade's significance to her when she began her own career as an artist in Vancouver. (Part of

Bowen's artistic research traces her own family lineage from Vancouver to the Prairies and down to Nicodemus, a historical Black community in the Midwest of the United States.) Black Canada is often defined in relation to the monolith of Black American culture, but in the discussions included in this monograph there is no antagonism between the two—instead, there is an appreciation of complex, diasporic histories and identities. Bowen connects to Wade because they have a shared heritage and the shape and tone of the back-and-forth between the two artists in conversation is animated and lively. Bowen notices the labour-intensive work in the series of embroidered textile paintings *Breathe* (2004–2020) and then raises questions of labour, citation, and representation. Wade explains the rhythm and pace of the work, and how time is as important to the work's completion as any other material. Wade says: "I wanted it to flow, to move, but to convey a sense of time at first glance, and then when you realize it is a textile piece—each stitch made by hand—you realize that time is a definite element: sitting in time, moving in time" (28).

In his essay, Compton applies theory to Wade's work, referencing Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s essay on signifying in Black culture. He is attentive to Wade's careful and plentiful use of words and language, as well as her patterns, rhythm, and repetition. He notes: "Another way Wade's work ingeniously doubles and doubles again, from the point of view of her inclusion of text, is the way the positive and negative—the ecstatic and the painful parts of history—are

interlaced, creating a jarring simultaneity" (35). Compton attributes Wade's use of readymades and found objects in her sculptures and installations to a class commentary, by way of which "Wade's art is rooted unequivocally in Black Proletarian life" (36).

At one point, Wade declares that she's not interested in putting an interpretation on her work, that she prefers to leave it up to the audience. This generous sentiment gives a lot of room for the people seeing her work to generate their own opinions and also sets up the various texts in this catalogue. Together, the essays and testimonials situate Wade's work and visual forms within an artistic legacy. As an artist making work since the 90s, Wade is a part of a generation of Black Canadian women artists, including Buseje Bailey, Grace Channer, June Clark, Lucy Chan, and Charmaine Lurch, who for decades have steadily made work both inside and outside mainstream Canadian art institutions. As a practising artist, Wade often sold her work herself, which is evidence of her ingenuity in earning a living outside a traditional Canadian art system that relied heavily on municipal, federal and provincial grants to support emerging artists' careers. Funding that, as curator Andrea Fatona writes about in her 2011 dissertation "Where Outreach Meets Outrage: Racial Equity at The Canada Council for the Arts (1989–1999)," was largely only opened up to marginalized artists in the delayed aftermath of the 1988 multiculturalism act.

From activist work to traditional domestic crafts, Black cultural practices have been developing in

Black communities for hundreds of years. These art works and cultural practices did not always fit into mainstream platforms. Black artists in Canada, including Wade and her contemporaries, have found varieties of ways to make and share work outside of, or parallel to, those spaces. Later generations of artists, like Bowen's, were influenced by their work, but unfortunately still not enough of the history of this Black Canadian art is known. Students in art school, or without access to the actual communities in which these artists work, do not learn the stories of these Black Canadian artist foremothers. The history is missing, and this has caused breaks in the legacy of Black Canadian art's visual language.

The texts in this catalogue are attentive to formal and material aspects of Wade's work in a way that is gratifying and, sadly, often unattended-to in studies of racialized artists, when shallow representation talk takes precedence over analytical discussion of forms and contexts. The awkwardness of the first essay is only a reminder of the difficulty some white art workers have engaging Black Canadian culture, as they tend to see race as something that has nothing to do with them, but is instead a trait or series of accidents that belongs solely with the subject.

Catalogues like this are important to the burgeoning Black Canadian art history. As a part of the historical record, they become primary source material for how we see and think about Black art in Canada. As Black

curator Andrea Fatona explained in a recent interview, "If there's no writing as there would be for other kinds of exhibitions, and if there's no conversation from folks in the field who come from these communities, I think we're always going to end up with a void in the historical record of what happened, and the impact of what happened then gets lost." As of yet, there is no official history of Black Canadian contemporary art. This catalogue will be an important addition to that nascent field, which right now exists mostly in archives as critical reviews, academic studies, exhibition texts, and sometimes, on rare and lucky occasions, as exhibition monographs. I look forward to more such catalogues for other Black Canadian women artists with prolific exhibition track records, such as Deanna Bowen, Tau Lewis, Sandra Brewster, Erika DeFreitas or Michele Pearson Clarke.

Yaniya Lee is a PhD candidate in the department of Gender Studies at Queen's University.
—yaniya@yahoo.com

Tina M. Campt
A Black Gaze: Artists Changing How We See

Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2021

232 pp. 78 colour & 33 b/w illus.
\$29.95 US (hardcover)
ISBN 9780262045872
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(February 2023)

Leticia Cosbert Miller

A Black Gaze: Artists Changing How We See is the much anticipated follow up to Tina M. Campt's groundbreaking book *Listening to Images* (2017),

which introduced and explored the concept of photographic frequencies, that is, the haptic quality of images—"how they move, touch, and connect us to the *event* of the photo"—while championing a practice of listening to and looking beyond what we see in a photograph.¹ Campt, a Black feminist theorist of visual culture and Professor of Humanities and Modern Culture and Media at Brown University, amplifies many of the discourses presented in her 2017 monograph in this latest offering on making and viewing Black art.

In *A Black Gaze*, Campt trains her senses (sight, touch, hearing) on nine prominent contemporary artists whose practices straddle multiple media, including performance, video, film, photography, sculpture, and music: Deana Lawson, Khalil Joseph, Arthur Jafa, Dawoud Bey, Okwui Okpokwasili, Simone Leigh, Madeleine Hunt Ehrlich, Luke Willis Thompson, and Jenn Nkiru. As we encounter each artist in the book's



seven chapters, which are titled as "verses," we get a sense of Campt's continual "commitment to understanding visual culture through its entanglement with sound" (19). The

significance of sound to Camp't's scholarship is well-trodden in *Listening to Images*, contextualized as a redirection of Ariella Azoulay's proposal to "watch" rather than "look at" images,² Camp't chooses to "listen to" rather than "look at," in order to disrupt the equation of vision and knowledge. Drawing upon Paul Gilroy and Fred Moten, Camp't demonstrates that sound, in particular, "is a sensory register critical to Black Atlantic cultural formations,"³ and while this is not explicitly restated in *A Black Gaze*, its significance persists and is understood. Rather than fixing a definition to what she means by "a Black gaze," Camp't allows for a fluid interpretation of the term, carefully exploring its meanings as informed by particular cultural moments, citing the proliferation of digital photographic and video documentation of Black life on social media platforms, and bringing in the cultural power brokers who are actively reshaping the circulation of Black culture, such as The Carters, Shonda Rhimes, Barry Jenkins, Rihanna, and others. Blackness, as it were, is everywhere, and yet too often its depiction allows for engagement at a safe distance, "through a lens of pity, sympathy, or concern" (7), something to be seen rather than to be felt. In response, through the book's introduction and its seven "verses," Camp't asks what it would mean to "see oneself through the complex positionality that is Blackness—and work through its implications on and for oneself," rather than simply looking at Black people (7).

Throughout the text Camp't draws upon Black cultural critics and film

scholars who have challenged rigid understandings of the gaze, namely bell hooks' "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators" (and, to a lesser extent, hooks' 1992 essay "Eating the Other") and Manthia Diawara, whose "Black Spectatorship: Problems of Identification and Resistance" (1988) hooks famously critiques for its dismissal of gender disparity.⁴ Acknowledging the formative role both scholars have played in her thinking, Camp't signals a departure from their ideas towards an approach that refuses to affiliate a gaze with domination, to reduce subject to object, or to sacrifice agency for pleasure: "A Black gaze rejects traditional understandings of spectatorship by refusing to allow its subject to be consumed by its viewers" (38–39). Camp't, then, also situates herself within a younger, contemporary milieu of scholars reconsidering the gaze, such as Simone Browne, whose *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* considers the constancy of being watched and how Black people have resisted, as well as Nicole Fleetwood's *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness*, which juxtaposes the simultaneous hypervisibility and invisibility of Blackness in American visual culture, among others.

Each of the seven verses combines tropes from memoir, art criticism, exhibition essay, and didactic text. Camp't consistently begins with a personal anecdote, detailing how she has arrived at the artist's studio or exhibition, where they first encountered one another, and under what global or social conditions. This particular stylistic choice concretizes Camp't's "transition to

writing about art" (204), which she first gestured towards in *Listening to Images*, a notable departure from her previous ethnographic investigation of Afro-Germans through identification photography such as passport photos and studio portraits.⁵ Verse One takes Camp't to the Brooklyn studio of Deana Lawson, the Rochester-born photographer whose large-scale photographs highlight both the mundane and the exquisite in Black life across the globe. Most arresting in this chapter are Camp't's accompanying interpretative texts or image descriptions, which illustrate the rigour with which she encounters art, and are in themselves demonstrations of a Black gaze at work. Camp't cites a "humming" in Lawson's work, a refusal of her subjects to be reduced to objects, and a demand for confrontation with its viewers: "neither voyeuristic nor narcissistic, they stage encounters that require work" (39).

Verse Two sees Camp't board a plane to Los Angeles to visit an exhibition of the work of Khalil Joseph, lauded filmmaker and brother of the late painter Noah Davis. Here Camp't entwines Joseph's moving images with Christina Sharpe's theories involving *weather*—that is, "weathering the persistent weather of anti-blackness" (45)⁶—as well as the idea of *fabulation* as defined by Saidiya Hartman in her pivotal essay "Venus in Two Acts."⁷ Camp't also introduces her own theoretical concepts, which will reappear in subsequent chapters, such as "*Black countergravity*: the state of suspension between fungibility and fugitivity" and "*Black*

gravity: the force which propels Black flow” (73). Campt concludes that Joseph’s moving images and the performances of their subjects refuse to capitulate to weather and gravity, creating a gaze that centres the Black subject, with “whiteness fully outside of the frame” (74).

Verse Three turns to Arthur Jafa, whose influence on the book is acknowledged at length in the introduction (or “prelude”) and again in the dedication. Campt focuses on two lesser-known works by Jafa, the Mississippi born video artist and cinematographer: *Crystal & Nick Siegfried* (2017) and *Apex* (2013), before turning to his more well-known *Love Is the Message, The Message Is Death* (2016) which is held in the collections of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, MOCA Los Angeles, and many other institutions. Here Campt reintroduces her theory of frequency, augmenting it this time in describing it as a “*visual frequency of Black life*: irregular rates of vibration that register the differential value of the Black experience” (93). Here she adds a new term, “*hapticity*: the labor of feeling across difference and precarity; the work of feeling implicated or affected in ways that create restorative intimacy” (104).

Verse Four juxtaposes performance artist Okwui Okpokwasili and photographer Dawoud Bey to explore the relationship between *slowness and quiet* (the latter being “a sonic modality that infuses sound with impact and affect...a frequency perceptible through vibration rather than pitch”) (135). Verse Five explores Campt’s experience of

Loophole of Retreat, a 2019 solo exhibition of Chicago born artist Simone Leigh presented by the Guggenheim Museum, before shifting to Madeline Hunt Ehrlich’s 2019 short film *Spit on the Broom*.

Provocatively, Verse Six attends to the work of Luke Willis Thompson, a New Zealand artist of Fijian and European heritage, who “has described himself as a Black artist, albeit not of the African Diaspora” (171). Campt takes Thompson’s positionality seriously, ascribing to him “*adjacency*: the reparative work of transforming proximity into accountability; the labor of positioning oneself in relation to another in ways that revalue and redress complex histories of dispossession” (171). In a remarkable flourish near the book’s end, Campt clarifies that a Black gaze is not necessarily the viewpoint of a Black person, saying “it is not a gaze restricted to or defined by race or phenotype. It is a viewing practice and a structure of witnessing that reckons with the precarious state of Black life in the twenty-first century” (172). This important explication would perhaps have been useful at the text’s beginning and could have been developed throughout the chapters. However, Campt foreshadows this flourish in explaining her use of the indefinite article in the book’s title: “I am proposing that we think about *a* Black gaze (rather than *the* Black gaze) and understand it as both multiple and polyvalent” (21).

The final chapter, titled “Reprise,” very briefly engages the work of Nigerian-British artist and director Jenn Nkiru. Though Campt

notes that the Black artistic renaissance we find ourselves in is a global one, stretching to the UK, Caribbean, and the African continent (5), the vast majority of the artists discussed in *A Black Gaze* are American, with the aforementioned Thompson and Nkiru being the lonely exceptions. “Reprise” is a jubilant end to the book, filled with vivid stills of dancing, singing, and praise and worship taken from Nkiru’s *Rebirth Is Necessary* (2017), situating Nkiru in a cultural milieu that extends beyond, but also fits firmly within, her contributions to critically acclaimed music videos for The Carters.

A Black Gaze offers readers an engaging exploration of what it means to make, view, and experience Black art in current (American) cultural and political moments. Campt’s multi-sensory approach to contemporary art will inspire artists, writers, curators, and patrons of the arts alike, challenging all to engage blackness from unexpected, and sometimes discomfiting, vantage points. In some ways, *A Black Gaze* is an illustration of Campt’s theory of frequencies first proposed in her 2017 monograph: here, at one frequency level, Campt grapples with theoretical concerns—as evidenced by the multitude of innovative terminology peppered throughout the text’s margins—while at another frequency she strives to engage in an approachable and accessible discussion of the artists and artworks that prioritizes the emotional and interpersonal relationships between artist, audience, and artwork. The result is a polyvalent representation of what it means to create art and

what it means to confront art's complexities. *A Black Gaze* is a welcome companion to *Listening to Images*, a timely reconsideration and application of what it means to listen to and through art.

Leticia Cosbert Miller is a curator and PhD Student in the Department of Classics at the University of Toronto.
—lc.miller@mail.utoronto.ca

1. Tina M. Campt, *Listening to Images* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).
2. Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone, 2008).
3. Campt, *Listening to Images*, 6–8.
4. bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators," *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992).
5. Tina M. Campt, *Other Germans: Black Germans and the Politics of Race, Gender and Memory in the Third Reich* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004); Tina M. Campt *Image Matters: Archive, Photography, and The African Diaspora in Europe* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).
6. Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).
7. Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (June 2008): 1–14.

Stan Douglas: Revealing Narratives

PHI Foundation, Montreal
February 9 to May 22, 2022
Curated by Cheryl Sim

Raven Spiratos

PHI Foundation's *Revealing Narratives* exhibition comprised Stan Douglas's two photo series *Disco Angola* (2012) and *Penn Station's Half Century* (2021). In *Disco Angola*, Douglas assumes the role of a fictitious photojournalist from the 1970s who works in New York City, often attends the burgeoning disco scene, and frequently travels to Angola to report on the civil war. The series is set in 1974 and 1975, pivotal years for the world's political economy, marked by the oil crisis, the stock market crash, deteriorating US-Soviet ties, and civil wars. It also was the origin of



Stan Douglas: *Revealing Narratives* (installation view), PHI Foundation, 2022. Stan Douglas, *Club Versailles*, 1974, 2012; *A Luta Continua*, 1974, 2012. Digital C-prints mounted on Dibond aluminum. Courtesy of the artist, Victoria Miro and David Zwirner © PHI Foundation for Contemporary Art. Photo: Richard-Max Tremblay.

disco, which became a major genre for queer, Black and Latinx people in New York City and around the world. In the second series, Douglas reconstructs New York's original Penn Station as it existed at nine moments. *Disco Angola* was presented in the PHI Foundation building at 451 rue Saint-Jean while the Penn Station series hung in the Foundation building at 465 rue Saint-Jean.

Stan Douglas was born in Vancouver in 1960, where he is currently based. He has a remarkable international reputation and was chosen to represent Canada at the 59th Venice Biennale in 2022. His work examines photography as a medium, challenging "authenticity" by examining the connection between remembered past and fact. Archival research is integral to Douglas' process of reproducing and reinventing historical settings in digital images.

Sprawled out across all four floors of PHI Foundation, the *Disco Angola* portion of the exhibition features a total of eight pieces (of varying dimensions above 5' x 9'), two pieces to a floor, as per the artist's

vision. These large-scale panoramic photographs are paired, one work geographically tied to Angola and the other to New York. Writing for *Artforum* in 2012, Rachel Kushner explained: "Disco Angola, like its name, is a diptych: eight large-scale panoramic photographs, four related to disco, four to Angola, each carefully re-created either from a found source image or as an amalgamation of research and lore."¹ In Douglas' words: "The idea of *Disco Angola* is looking at how certain things which have positive possibility or a very momentary utopian possibility can often be ruined by the intrusion of some foreign forces."²

One such arrangement sees *A Luta Continua*, 1974 and *Two Friends*, 1975 compelled into dialogue with one another. In *A Luta Continua*, a figure with long wavy hair in a green jumpsuit stands outside, in front of a building painted with the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola party flag. On the lip of the building is written: "A LUTA CONTINUA VITORIA E CERTA" which translated from Portuguese into

English as “The struggle continues, victory is certain.” In *Two Friends*, a busy social scene unfolds, people at tables are engaged in lively conversation with drinks in hand. The focal point of the photograph, however, is the two silent people who seem to be in contemplation rather than conversation. The figure in the red evening dress and the plunging neckline places their sunglasses on the table where their elbow rests, while their gaze is pulled to the top left corner. Their companion, in a pastel green suit, with their elbow also on the table, has hand to head and stares directly at the viewer.

Displayed together, *A Luta Continua* and *Two Friends* ask the viewer to consider similarities and differences. The audio guide from the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia—where the exhibition travelled after Montreal—explores these questions and reminds visitors that “both the Angolan post-colonial revolutionary movement and the hedonistic nightclubs of the 1970s were confronted by forces of resistance.”³ Economic, social, and legal obstacles existed for both. Alongside this shared story of struggle, *Two Friends* is also showcasing white leisure in strong contrast to *A Luta Continua* where the subtext suggests unyielding Black activism and freedom fighting. The audio guide continues: “Do they [the two friends] support the marginalized partygoers? Are they friends? A bored, disenchanted couple? Or announcing the growing commercialization of Disco?”⁴

A second example is the pairing of *Capoeira, 1974* with *Kung-Fu*

Fighting, 1975. During Angola’s fight for independence from the colonial empire, dancing also functioned as a means of self-expression and escape. In *Capoeira, 1974*, a group of rebel fighters create a half-circle around two of their companions while they perform capoeira. This dance-martial arts fusion was developed in the sixteenth century by West Africans who had been sent to Brazil as enslaved people by Portuguese colonizers. Prohibited from their cultural practices and rituals, capoeira was created and disguised as a dance with the addition of instruments and songs. Douglas states: “My fantasy was what would happen if there were fighters from South America who came to Angola via Cuba and showed the locals an unfamiliar dance that was in fact their own.”⁵

By contrasting capoeira with disco music, Douglas invites viewers to consider the African origins of both and their complex political contexts, both having catalyzed strong, shared artistic expression that crystallized into two major cultural movements. Douglas comments: “It was a time of the greatest concentration of wealth and the least amount of productivity. What the Angolan Civil War and disco shared, in their earliest moments, was that they were both utopian spaces destroyed by the intrusion of outsiders.”⁶ This photographic pairing also highlights the importance of the body in both the Angolan independence movement and the disco scene. Both moments in time found freedom through the body’s expression of dance: capoeira and disco.

Penn Station’s Half-Century was commissioned by the Empire State Development in partnership with the Public Art Fund. It is a series of nine panels created as murals to inaugurate the Moynihan Train Hall, the new expansion of New York City’s Pennsylvania Station. The prints in the exhibition came out of the mural project. Douglas points to moments of the station’s history: it was a location for the 1945 Vincente Minnelli film *The Clock*, starring Judy Garland and Robert Walker, as well as a site for showcasing the trimotor plane Amelia Earhart made famous. The station earned legendary status in the wartime imagination due to the hundreds of thousands of soldiers who said farewells to their loved ones there before departing for overseas duty. Douglas reflects on how architecture enmeshes itself into the lives of those who interact with it: “The station itself had as much of a profound effect on the psychogeography of New York City as it had on the physical one.”⁷ Such consideration is palpable in the photo series.

Notable is Douglas’ approach to narrative and the archive. Douglas resurrects the forgotten history of Penn Station by researching and embedding the real people who would have passed through it: musician Al Anderson, labour advocate and organizer Angelo Herndon, comic duo Flournoy Miller and Aubrey Lyles, and vaudeville entertainer Burt Williams, among others. These artists and performers that transited through Penn Station are all brought together—through Douglas’ digital image compositing—invoked from

beyond the grave into a flattened time and space not unlike limbo.

The artist has previously characterized his method as involving the creation of a “recombinant narrative.” Douglas is speaking to the act of recombining archival materials to make visible the relationships among history, subjective memory, personal experience, and the present. Interestingly, in a footnote of her essay “Venus in Two Acts,”⁸ Saidiya Hartman mentions credits Stan Douglas and NourbeSe Philip as having introduced her to the notion of “recombinant narrative.” Hartman considers it to be the act of “loop[ing] the strands of incommensurate accounts” and “weav[ing] present, past, and future.” By reenacting pasts and playing on the fine line separating unreal and fantastic, we are left with a question: what do these impossible stories tell us about our future?

Raven Spiratos is a curator, researcher, and art historian of African Canadian art.
—ravenspiratos@gmail.com

1. Rachel Kushner, “Close-Up: Rebel Movement — Rachel Kushner on Stan Douglas’s *Disco Angola*,” *Artforum* (April 2012), <https://www.artforum.com/print/201204/rachel-kushner-on-stan-douglas-s-disco-angola-30575>.

2. “Stan Douglas — Artist Talk,” Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, June 18, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/ArtGalleryNS/videos/757395058728506/>.

3. “Stan Douglas: Revealing Narratives — Audio Tour Transcript,” Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, <https://artgalleryofnovascotia.ca/sites/default/files/Stan%20Douglas-%20Revealing%20Narratives-%20Audio%20Tour%20Transcript%20.pdf>. The exhibition *The exhibition at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia* runs from June 18 to November 6, 2022.

4. “Stan Douglas: Revealing Narratives — Audio Tour Transcript.”

5. Robert Enright, “History Maker: an interview with Stan Douglas,” *Border Crossings* (November 2020), <https://bordercrossingsmag.com/article/history-maker>.

6. Clare Davies and Nils Stelte, “Disco and the Angolan Civil War,” *The New Yorker*, March 21, 2012, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/photo-booth/disco-and-the-angolan-civil-war>.

7. “Stan Douglas: Revealing Narratives — Audio Tour Transcript.”

8. Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008): 12.

Reviews

Recensions

Martha Langford and Johanne Sloan,
eds.

Photogenic Montreal: Activisms and Archives in a Post-industrial City

Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2021

368 pp. 136 colour illus.
\$49.95 (hardcover)
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Elizabeth Anne Cavaliere

Photogenic Montreal: Activisms and Archives in a Post-industrial City is simultaneously reflective and reflexive—both a process of thinking about events of the past and a reaction to events taking place in the present. The editors, Martha Langford and Johanne Sloane, have drawn together a collection of essays that reflect deeply on the history of a place—namely, Montreal—and the ways that collecting institutions and collective memories construct, share, and circulate those histories through the photograph. Yet, each contribution to the volume is a particular reflexive response to both the authors' own relationships, and those of the photographs and photographers they write about, to Montreal as a city in transformation. The attribute of being photogenic,



or being attractive and well-suited to being photographed, encompasses this reflectivity and reflexivity in the ways that Montreal as a photogenic site is “able to thrive within a range of photographic practices and relationships, while resonating across architectural history and theory, urban planning, community building, civic pride, and civil unrest” (6).

More than an examination of the relationship of photography and architecture to place, *Photogenic Montreal* positions the city itself as the subject of reflection and as an active site of work in which photographs become records of progress, transformation, decay, and preservation; tools of activism and persuasion; and visual manifestations of histories, communities, and imaginations. As the editors remark: “Montreal is a perfect example of utopic/dystopic development, a

history in which photography has often played a dual role, as both visual record and work of art” (5). Indeed, Montreal has a storied and engaged history of photographic practice and scholarship centered on the city as subject. Writings such as Michel Lessard's *Montréal au XX^e siècle. Regards de photographes* (1995), Pierre Dessureault's *Regards échanges: Le Québec, 1939–1970/Exchanging Views: Quebec, 1939–1970* (1999), Lise Lamarche's essay “La photographie par la bande” (2003), the winter 2017 issue of *Ciel Variable*, “Montréalités/ Montrealities,” to name only a few, are woven and extended throughout *Photogenic Montreal* as continued conversation.

The collection of essays comes together from the editors' long-standing research into visualizations of the city: Langford's session at the 2016 Association of Critical Heritage Studies conference addressing the question “What does Photography Preserve?” and Sloan's ongoing collaborative research project, “Networked Art Histories: Assembling Contemporary Art in Canada, 1960s to the Present.” The roots of the project run deeper, however, with both of the editors bringing to bear their own relationships to Montreal and being forthright about their

unique insider and outsider perspectives. In fact, each of the contributors has a close relationship to Montreal, having lived, studied, or worked there. *Photogenic Montreal* presents an ongoing lived experience where many of the transformations towards a modern and post-industrial city in both infrastructure and attitude—industrialization, ruination and decay, civic shame and pride, and gentrification—have been experienced and expressed directly by the authors.

The edited volume is divided into two parts, though both find resonance in one another. The first, “Activisms: City as Social Laboratory,” opens with Langford’s essay on the ways that the discursive spaces of the museum and the community have transformed Alain Chagnon’s photographs of the Plateau-Mont-Royal neighbourhood throughout the 1970s and 80s from works of social documentary and memory to art and back again upon their return to the community through public exhibition, bridging then and now through place. Langford writes, “the social function of photography is the construction of individual and collective identities. The political function of the medium is as a tool for activism through the raising of working-class consciousness” (43). These social and political functions are further complicated in Louis Martin’s essay that looks for the “human factor” in Melvin Charney’s 1972 exhibition *Montréal, plus ou moins?* And Suzanne Paquet’s study of urbex (urban exploration) in abandoned industrial architecture, through visually alluring and stylized photographs that are

“simultaneously mysterious and astonishingly realist” (138).

One of *Photogenic Montreal*’s greatest strengths is the way the text itself is an active site for the bridging of reflection and reflex across time. Most of the essays feature some form of direct engagement with the photographers themselves. Three essays in the first section take on this approach, each in a distinct way. In Tanya Southcott’s essay on Edith Mather, the author reflects on her conversations with the photographer whose experiences of motherhood, photographic process, and architectural preservation become intimately entangled. Johanne Sloan’s transcribed interview with Selwyn Jacob on his film *Ninth Floor* (2015) considers the filmmaker’s uncovering of an archive of footage of the occupation of the Henry H. Hall building in protest of racism at Concordia University in 1969. Artist Clara Gutsche’s essay reflects upon her own personal motivations in photographing the gentrifying neighbourhood of Milton Park, her becoming of an “accidental archivist” (110), the impact of time on public reception of the photographs, and how her photographs have endured precisely because of their artistic impact. The photograph is not static, and neither is its maker. *Photogenic Montreal* makes a point of acknowledging how photographs, cities, and people can transform over time.

The second half of the volume, “Archives: Ruins and Revisions,” complicates the idea of archive by addressing the many forms that an archive can take and the ways that institutional vision shapes

both photographic function and interpretation of the city space. Annmarie Adams considers the archives of Ramsay Traquair, director of McGill University’s School of Architecture from 1913 to 1939, and Traquair’s use of photography as a progressive teaching tool in the face of his own regressive resistance to Modernism and Americanisation, along with his racist and misogynistic attitudes. Philippe Guillaume looks to the work of the official city photographer Jean-Paul Gill’s Red Light District photographs, now in the Archives of the City of Montreal, as a “felicitous paradox” (195) in the ways the photographs participated in the destruction of a neighbourhood and yet today are celebrated as visual impressions of a bygone era. Will Straw turns to photographs of crime scenes and mug shots in the historic weekly magazine *Allô Police*, a “longlasting example of Quebec’s sensational ‘lowbrow’ periodical culture” which acts itself as an archive of a specific form of photographic documentation of the city” (200). Cynthia Imogen Hammond looks to three photographs of domestic architecture from Montreal’s most elite neighbourhoods in which “the buildings in question, and the entire district, were caught in the crosshairs of a remarkably unregulated urban-renewal ethos, and its nemesis, a burgeoning urban-preservation movement” (220). Martha Fleming reflects on the photographic outputs of her site-specific installations in abandoned civic architecture with Lyne Lapointe, remarking of the photographs that “they are objects with a particular ‘memorial’ agency that

→ Elizabeth Anne Cavaliere *Photogenic Montreal: Activisms and Archives in a Post-industrial City*

issues in part from the very processes from which they have emerged” (255).

The final two essays by the volume’s editors act as a kind of epilogue, but also as an invitation. Langford meditates on the photographs of empty lots—from those razed by the Great Fire of 1852 to artist Isabel Hayeur’s 2014 public projection, during the 2014 Montreal Biennial, of still and moving images drawn from the Occupy movement, which was then taken down at the request of the property owner—as interstices ripe with opportunity and potential yet laden with the (often violent) spectres of the past, now erased though somehow even more present. In Sloan’s examination of the residua of Expo ‘67, a moment that signaled to the world Montreal’s emergence as a modern metropolis, we find again the notion of potential, here framed as an envisioning of the city’s utopic future. Sloan remarks that “futurity has become a part of our heritage” (309). Potential binds together the past, present, and future; drives both the activist and archival impulses that call for ordered preservation and radical progress; and exists sometimes overtly and oftentimes latently in the photographic medium.

It is also in the idea of potential that these last two essays extend an invitation. While the authors and photographers featured throughout the volume are predominantly white and settler, the work of *Photogenic Montreal* as a reflective and reflexive investigation intentionally opens up histories and imaginings

of the photographed city to encompass a plurality of possibilities and perspectives. The thoughtful and thought-provoking essays that make up this extraordinary volume are only the beginning. While one might wonder what a volume so concerned with the specificity of place might offer to those beyond the physical and metaphorical island of Montreal, taken as a whole the essays deliver a proposition and a precedent that urges us to rethink understandings of photography’s role in heritage and activism, challenge what and whose stories are being told through photographic archives, and wonder what histories and futures are yet to be developed in the photographs.

Elizabeth Anne Cavaliere is a sessional instructor at OCAD University, Queen’s University, and University of Lethbridge.
— elizabeth.cavaliere@queensu.ca

Anuradha Gobin
Picturing Punishment: The Spectacle and Material Afterlife of the Criminal Body in the Dutch Republic

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021

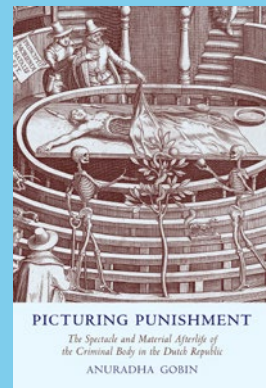
304 pp. 75 b&w & 25 colour illus.
\$80.00 (hardcover) ISBN 9781487503802
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Stephanie S. Dickey

This ingenious study weaves together the visual history of four distinctive features of the urban landscape in the Dutch Republic: the town hall, the house of correction, the gallows field, and the anatomy theatre. Each site has its own tradition of visual

representation that has typically been treated separately, but Gobin links these sites as loci for the performance of civic justice.¹ Taking Amsterdam, the Republic’s largest city, as her central case study, she charts the movement of the criminal body from trial to imprisonment, execution, and finally to a punishment that persisted beyond death in the form of dissection and denial of burial. The book derives from the author’s dissertation research at McGill University, a portion of which first appeared in this journal.²

The journey begins at the town hall, a focal point of urban life that typically housed a court of law and a jail as well as government offices. In her first chapter, Gobin describes the imposing classical building that was erected in the 1650s on the Dam Square in Amsterdam. Throughout its public spaces, sculptural reliefs



and paintings promoted themes of justice and good government to the building’s many visitors. In Chapter 2, Gobin follows the path of an accused criminal through the building from arrest to sentencing, emphasizing the public visibility

that characterized the process from start to finish. On the lowest level of the Town Hall, the city jailer presided over cells and a torture chamber where interrogations were conducted. Citizens passing by could glimpse prisoners through the basement windows. Trials took place in the magistrates' hall on the main floor above. After a death sentence was pronounced in the *vierschaar*, a room designed for that purpose, a scaffold was erected in front of the building, bells were rung to advertise the event, and crowds of onlookers came to witness the execution. Gobin argues that these public spectacles served to assert governmental authority while offering a moral warning to observers.

Following execution, some criminal bodies were transported to the gallows field, where they would hang until thoroughly decayed (Chapters 3–4). The denial of a proper burial thus served as a further form of punishment while the body continued its function as public admonishment. Gobin shows that the motif of bodies on the gallows was both a theme in itself (for instance, Anthonie van Borssum's watercolour sketch, *Gallows Field on the Edge of the Volewijk*, 1664–65, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, fig. 42) and a surprisingly frequent background motif, even in ostensibly carefree scenes such as Hendrick Avercamp's painting, *Enjoying the Ice near a Town*, ca. 1620 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, fig. 58). Downplaying the obvious connotation of *memento mori*, Gobin recasts this motif as an allusion to civic authority: gallows fields such as the Volewijk, situated on the bank of the river IJ near the harbor of

Amsterdam, served to advertise the city government's power to punish transgression. These liminal sites also drew urban dwellers for recreation, and Gobin contrasts images of travelers contemplating bodies on the gallows with scenes in which leisure-seekers ignore their looming presence. She argues that the latter suggest indifference to civic authority but, for this viewer, the very heedlessness of merry-makers seems an ironic reinforcement of the *memento mori* theme. A curious folkloric tradition associated the Volewijk with childbirth, new life emerging from decay. Here, Gobin's analysis builds on an earlier study by Angela Vanhaelen, who interprets midwives' appropriation of this legend as a protest against the rise of academic medicine.³ Like Vanhaelen, Gobin views the gallows field as a contested space that testifies to both civic power and its limitations. In this context, the recurring motif of a figure defecating at the foot of a gallows post-convincingly figures subversive rejection of authority since it illustrates a colloquial expression of defiance, "to crap on the gallows," that dates back at least to the mid-sixteenth century (128–134).⁴

Amsterdam and other Dutch cities maintained houses of correction where men and women convicted of lesser offences were sentenced to hard labour. Gobin links these public institutions with the anatomy theatre as sites in which the criminal body was exploited for public benefit (Chapters 5–7). Despite scientific advances in the seventeenth century, the dissection of a human body was still a transgressive act

fraught with moral implications; like executions, it was also a popular public spectacle. The bodies examined were typically those of executed criminals such as the thief Aris 't Kint (roughly, "Harry the Kid") whose corpse appears in Rembrandt's famous *Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* (1632, The Hague, Mauritshuis). Here, Gobin argues that by providing public benefit, "the actions of the anatomist redeem the sinful actions of the criminal" (170). In Chapter 6, she emphasizes that meaningful accoutrements displayed in the anatomy theatre included not only skeletons but also flayed skins. Once again looking beyond the obvious connotation of *memento mori*, she invokes the theoretical concept of the "skin ego," whereby skin is construed as both boundary and interface, a barrier ruptured when the flayed skin is offered up to be seen and touched by visitors to the anatomy theatre (178–179).

Overall, Gobin's analysis demonstrates strong critical thinking and thorough research into her specific themes, but a broader grasp of Dutch art and cultural history is sometimes lacking. For instance, the term *Stadhouder* is mistranslated as "city holder," and Gobin suggests this administrator should have had an office in the Amsterdam Town Hall (46). In fact, the *Stadhouder*, based in The Hague, held broader authority as military governor of the Dutch Republic; the ambitions of the Princes of Orange who occupied this role often brought conflict with the power-hungry city fathers. Jan Zoet was a poet, not an artist (p. 3), and Cornelis Anthonisz's view of Amsterdam is a painting, not a map

→ Stephanie S. Dickey *Picturing Punishment: The Spectacle and Material Afterlife of the Criminal Body in the Dutch Republic*

(fig. 33). More significantly, I wonder if more attention might have been given to the condemned person's point of view. To illustrate the transportation of corpses to the Volewijk, Gobin chooses a book illustration, *The Bodies of the Anabaptists on the Gallows*, but does not identify it fully (fig. 34). Executed following a riot in 1535 that culminated in occupation of the old town hall of Amsterdam, the deceased in this case were religious dissidents; while their actions were seditious, the event took place during the Reformation, when Anabaptists were being tortured and killed for their faith. In the 1570s, Anabaptists condemned as heretics were burned at the stake on the Dam Square (another form of admonitory public spectacle).⁵ In 1664, when 18-year-old Elsje Christiaens struck and killed her landlady in an altercation over unpaid rent, she was an illiterate, unemployed immigrant struggling to make her way in a foreign, unforgiving place. Her dangling corpse was recorded at the Volewijk by Rembrandt and other artists (figs. 38–39, 42). There is tragedy here on both sides. Still, the weaving together of Gobin's themes produces some intriguing insights. Dr. Nicolaes Tulp was not only a celebrated anatomist but also a magistrate who presided over trials and sentencing in the Amsterdam Town Hall (149–156). Today, this dual role might seem a conflict of interest, but it illustrates how wealthy oligarchs controlled the power centers of the growing metropolis. Their effectiveness was linked to the maintenance

of civic order, and this book clearly shows how the public punishment of the criminal body was deployed to serve that goal.

Stephanie S. Dickey is Professor of Art History and Bader Chair in Northern Baroque Art at Queen's University.
—stephanie.dickey@queensu.ca

Elsa Guyot
Rejouer l'histoire. Le Moyen Âge dans les musées du Québec

Montréal, Leméac Éditeur, 2021

182 pp.

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Roxanne Mallet

Dans *Rejouer l'histoire*, Elsa Guyot retrace les éléments clés de la réception et de la mise en scène du Moyen Âge au Québec. Son analyse est axée sur le milieu muséal de la province, principalement de 1944 à nos jours. L'objectif de l'autrice : mettre en lumière la façon dont s'est développée l'histoire médiévale localement, notamment en considérant le développement de collections phares, leur mise en place et leur diffusion, en insistant sur le contexte et l'intention discursive de leur expographie ainsi que sur les personnes clés derrière leur mobilisation.

Cette recherche s'inscrit dans le courant médiévaliste, qui analyse l'histoire médiévale dans une perspective critique. Cette approche contemporaine réfléchit à la réception du Moyen Âge en tant que construction, parfois motivée par des desseins esthétiques et religieux, politiques ou encore touristiques et

ludiques, tel que souligné dans les perspectives explorées par l'autrice dans ses cas d'études (p. 11). Ainsi faut-il rappeler que cette période est souvent perçue comme regroupant des événements et des styles se développant essentiellement en territoire occidental, voire euro-



péen. Une approche historique plus globale permet aujourd'hui de souligner que cette délimitation eurocentrique peut et doit être remise en contexte en regard de la production extra-européenne. À titre référentiel, la bibliographie ciblée que présente l'autrice en fin de livre est divisée en deux sections, dont la première, titrée « Sur l'étude et la réception du Moyen Âge », est majoritairement orientée sur ces enjeux dans un contexte nord-américain. Aux côtés de publications telles que *Medievalisms in the Postcolonial World: The Idea of "the Middle Ages" Outside Europe* (2009), codirigé par Kathleen Davis et Nadia Altschul, ou *Mapping Medievalism at the Canadian Frontier* (2010), de Kathryn Brush et ses collaborateurs, Guyot propose une analyse micro et locale, qui

positionne la spécificité québécoise dans un contexte mondial.

Riche d'une formation complétée de part et d'autre de l'océan Atlantique, Elsa Guyot est historienne de l'art, spécialiste de la période médiévale et du domaine muséologique. Par sa position interdisciplinaire, elle fait de ce livre une contribution appréciable pour le domaine de la muséologie québécoise tout en invitant les historiennes et historiens à reconsidérer l'héritage à partir duquel l'histoire actuelle évolue. Ce premier livre, publié chez Leméac en 2021, résulte de l'adaptation de la recherche doctorale qu'elle a soutenue en 2015 et qui lui a valu le Prix de la meilleure thèse en cotutelle France-Québec octroyé par le ministère des Relations internationales et de la Francophonie du Québec et par le Consulat général de France. La publication a bénéficié du soutien à l'édition du Centre de recherche interuniversitaire sur la littérature et la culture québécoises (CRILCQ).

Le livre est structuré en trois chapitres : « Une référence esthétique et spirituelle », « Des usages politiques du Moyen Âge » et « Une île dans le temps ». Il en résulte une synthèse efficace qui, au fil des pages, traite d'abord du Moyen Âge dans un contexte nord-américain, avant de se centrer sur le Québec, puis sur les acteurs de son développement local, dont le Père Wilfrid Corbeil qui a grandement contribué à la formation des collections d'objets médiévaux, ainsi que sur son développement muséal (p. 33-44).

Dans le premier chapitre, l'auteur aborde l'architecture néo-médiévale, l'apport du Musée des Clercs de Joliette dans le paysage québécois

ainsi que l'iconographie religieuse en relation aux bouleversements sociaux du milieu du XX^e siècle. Elle y explique que, dès les années 1830, l'architecture en Amérique du Nord s'inspire largement du Moyen Âge, dans les édifices à vocation tant politique qu'académique, tout en étant populaire chez les particuliers (p. 20). Les styles néo-roman et néo-gothique font depuis bonne figure dans l'architecture publique et privée, forts de cet héritage. Parallèlement, dès le début du XX^e siècle, ce sont les médiévistes qui font leur marque sur le continent nord-américain, tandis que les artefacts médiévaux circulent sur le marché grâce à des collectionneurs tels que Louis-François-Georges Baby, qui a offert plus de 20 000 documents à la Bibliothèque des Livres rares et Collections spéciales de l'Université de Montréal (collectionbaby.umontreal.ca), Adélar-Joseph Boucher, fondateur de la Société de numismatique de Montréal, ou encore Renata et Michal Hornstein, couple bien connu pour ses nombreux dons au Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal (p. 28-30). Dans ce contexte s'ajoutent les artistes du Québec, dont le Père Corbeil et ses élèves (p. 35), qui vivent une sorte d'immersion par des formations outremer, puis les personnes mobilisées par les deux Guerres mondiales qui rapportent les souvenirs de leurs rencontres avec les traces de ce passé. Ces contacts transforment la perception du Moyen Âge en Amérique du Nord, le rendant plus concret et tangible, voire accessible. Guyot présente efficacement les grandes lignes de cette évolution et conclut ce survol contextuel

par la situation actuelle des études sur cette période dans les milieux universitaires, en regard de la littérature existante, proposant à la fois une synthèse québécoise et se posant comme actrice d'un renouveau partagé par la communauté médiévaliste à l'échelle globale. Ainsi connaît-on d'entrée de jeu la place du Moyen Âge dans le paysage québécois, tant sur le plan architectural qu'académique.

Dans son deuxième chapitre, l'auteur passe en revue différentes expositions tenues au Québec en analysant *quel* Moyen Âge a été mis de l'avant et dans quel contexte, par le biais de choix scénographiques. Son argumentaire est concentré sur deux sujets principaux : la Tapisserie de Bayeux, œuvre textile du XI^e siècle relatant l'épopée de Guillaume le Conquérant en l'Angleterre en 1066, et ses référents à la guerre, puis l'importance de l'héritage médiéval français au Québec par une sélection d'artefacts qui y ont été associés, au lendemain de la Révolution tranquille. Ce second sujet est exploré tant du côté francophone qu'anglophone. Guyot étudie les objets de collections, d'abord comme symboles d'une réalité qui transcende les âges, puis comme référents à un héritage auquel le public peut s'associer ou se dissocier, selon sa position personnelle, dans le cadre d'une exposition sur un sujet donné. Le rapport au Moyen Âge s'y retrouve échantillonné et remodelé dans la forme discursive qui sied au contexte, social, politique, linguistique et colonialiste, durant les années suivant la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, la Grande Noirceur et la Révolution tranquille. Ainsi, les

objets médiévaux collectionnés, empruntés ou sortis des réserves dans ces occasions précises, sont rassemblés en expositions dans l'objectif de faire découvrir cet univers au public tout en appuyant une position d'ordre sacré ou politique.

Le dernier chapitre est également construit autour de deux axes : le Moyen Âge comme sujet de reconstitutions ludiques, puis comme sujet d'expositions *blockbuster*, qui proposent des activités complémentaires à la visite. C'est dans ce cadre qu'on trouve notamment les reconstitutions immersives invitant le public à vivre le quotidien d'un Moyen Âge populaire. Dans certains exemples, le public n'est pas qu'observant mais membre contributoire : les événements dits du Duché de Bicolline proposent ce genre d'expérience. D'abord lié à des événements ponctuels, ce lieu s'est développé en un ensemble d'habitations permanentes où se déroule encore aujourd'hui, à date fixe, une immersion influencée par l'esthétique et les hiérarchies sociales médiévales. Les amatrices et amateurs s'y rassemblent afin d'y jouer un rôle de manière improvisée, mais dans un scénario développé au préalable. Une réelle communauté est circonscrite en ces lieux, qui semblent ouvrir une brèche dans l'espace-temps. Ces cas sont fort intéressants pour saisir l'ampleur de cette pratique de reconstitution idéalisée qui cherche à brouiller la frontière entre l'histoire et le jeu, ou encore entre le passé et le présent. En parallèle aux éléments

extra-muros, le contexte muséal y est quelque peu dilué, perdant de sa prépondérance dans l'argumentaire de l'autrice. Qu'à cela ne tienne, cette section du livre incite à lever les yeux pour non seulement voir et côtoyer les traces de ce Moyen Âge parcellaire, mais bien pour y vivre une expérience, en plus de rencontrer au passage les grands noms de sa reconstitution historique. Ce chapitre s'achève par une ouverture sur les perspectives d'un nouveau rapport à l'histoire, entre commercialisation et écho à la société contemporaine.

Le livre d'Elsa Guyot est rythmé par trois motifs. Le premier est le récit par lequel se forme l'autrice. Ainsi, celle-ci plonge son lectorat dans son aventure, à la suite de sa traversée transatlantique, dans la découverte de l'histoire médiévale en Amérique du Nord. Cette recherche doctorale, Guyot la présente ici revisitée par sa propre expérience, sous la forme d'un essai parsemé d'anecdotes. La lecture en est plus intimiste, quoiqu'une plus grande distance de l'autrice ait pu renforcer l'aspect pédagogique de l'exercice. Deuxième caractéristique du livre, il est synthétique, même en brossant un portrait des grands événements ayant forgé la perception qu'entretient l'Amérique du Nord de l'histoire médiévale. L'autrice couvre une longue période historique pour exposer à son lectorat les assises du développement des études médiévales. Rédigé sous la forme de l'essai, cet état des lieux est ambitieux, ce qui s'avère nécessaire pour bien développer les ancrages sur lesquels elle appuie ses observations. Guyot aborde le Moyen Âge

en insistant sur la façon dont il est présenté et reçu au fil des générations. En décrivant les relations, voire les liens, qu'elle trouve entre cette période et ses itérations, plutôt qu'en suivant un ordre chronologique, elle relève les personnalités prépondérantes ayant influé sur la constitution des milieux universitaires et muséaux. En troisième lieu, l'autrice explique la relation entre la période médiévale et le public québécois, composé tant de spécialistes que d'amatrices et amateurs. Ces trois caractéristiques se tissent et s'entrecroisent en une contribution littéraire colorée, entre anecdotes personnelles, adaptations contemporaines et récits ponctuels des actrices et acteurs ayant participé à cette évolution. Dans une formule courte et accrocheuse, cet essai présente un bilan de recherche efficace sur la relation culturelle et patrimoniale du Québec à l'histoire médiévale européenne.

Roxanne Mallet est doctorante en histoire de l'art, spécialisation muséologie, à l'Université de Montréal.
— roxanne.mallet@umontreal.ca

Tammy Gaber

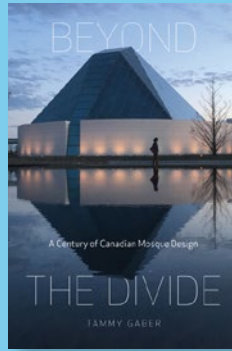
Beyond the Divide: A Century of Canadian Mosque Design

Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2022

304 pp. 306 photos, 135 drawings, all colour

\$95.00 (cloth) ISBN 9780228008262

Ozayr Saloojee



As an undergraduate student in the fall of 1994, I walked into the School of Architecture at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada, through the loading zone doors at the back of the school. This entry opens into tall, double-height space, with a roof gantry that extends perpendicular to the long length of the hall ahead. The garage doors were open as I strolled into the building, accompanied by the loud roar of the wood and metal workshop dust collecting system. As I entered, to my right, the massive doors of the Michael Coote Gallery were propped open. A lanky man, his long hair pulled back into a ponytail, was wearing safety glasses and slowly sanding smooth the profile of what happened to be the in-progress dome of the soon-to-be Kingston Islamic Center. Over the course of the next few weeks, I visited the gallery frequently, watching the dome take shape and watching Steve Beverley (the craftsman) work its materials, slim trusses disappearing under layers of foam and cladding. We talked about the dome, and how it came to be. One of the mosque architects, Gulzar Haider, now Dean at Lahore's Razia Hassan School of Architecture at Beaconhouse University in Pakistan, was

then faculty at Carleton, teaching classes in design studio, morphology, and Islamic miniatures. Dr. Haider would meet us in the gallery and show us drawings of the dome, its construction and proportions, with beautiful, mathematical sketches drawn in ink on graph paper. He described the trusses in the prayer-hall as a thicket of trees, their metal spans and the future skylights above them as canopies of architectural leaves and light, and the dome as a highlight over the women's prayer space beneath it. The mosque was described as an analogue of a Kingston grain tower and barn, with simple materials, and an early sketch shows it in an eastern Ontario farm setting, the dome rising up out of patch of wheat and corn. The dome eventually would be moved from its workshop space in the school, trucked on the back of a semi to Kingston, Ontario, where it would be installed on the building described in Tammy Gaber's excellent and necessary new book, *Beyond the Divide: A Century of Canadian Mosque Design*.

Dr. Gaber, an Associate Professor of Architecture and Director of the McEwen School of Architecture at Laurentian University, has compiled

in *Beyond the Divide* a multifaceted and layered text in a thoughtful and timely addition to Canadian architectural history. Her book works in multiple ways, all interwoven into a volume that is at once a compelling initial survey of Canadian mosques, a parallel history of Muslim communities across Canada, an initial probing of questions of gender and spatial segregation and their architectural implications, and a concluding index of building plans that were the subjects of Dr. Gaber's cross-country fieldwork. The book, following a general introduction, is front-ended with six surveys that pair major themes of the text to a regional context. The prairies, which begin Dr. Gaber's study, are linked to the formal establishment of Islam and the Muslim community in Canada. Quebec follows, with an emphasis on the "potential of converted space." Third, the text looks west to British Columbia and explores "purpose-built" design, then east to Maritime mosques contextualized with an investigation of these sites as "hubs of community space." The shortest chapter of the text couples questions of orienting mosques in Canada and the extreme north, and the final section of *Beyond the Divide* takes up the prompt of the book: the knotty questions of gendering mosques in Ontario, informed, as Dr. Gaber writes, by "years of study on the history and practice of contemporary mosque design, always with an eye to women's place and space within them" (219).

Beyond the Divide is thoughtful and necessarily constrained as a text, while addressing an important

lacuna in Canadian architectural history and in Canada's built environment. The surveyed buildings and their parallel social contexts of local and immigrant histories, peoples, ideas and efforts are given centre focus, and deservedly so. We have here, at last, a collected and more complete image of the history of Canada's diverse Muslim communities, and of their attempts to build home, hub and community, in new geographical, climatic and social geographies. Dr. Gaber demonstrates how individuals and community organizations worked and wrestled with both pragmatic and everyday questions, in addition to the larger religious and spiritual concerns that underpinned their efforts at crafting a sense of belonging in new and unfamiliar places, while maintaining essential connections to familiar religious terrains and antecedents. The conceptual structure of the book allows for these questions to be explored across the diversity of the Canadian landscape, and in turn, as enduring issues in local spaces. *Beyond the Divide* allows for a fuller locality to be foregrounded in what can often become a more universal (and less particular) study of Islamic spaces. The book substantially expands and builds on Hassan-Uddin Khan, Kimberly Mims, and Renata Holod's engagement with the limited Canadian mosque landscape in their text, *The Mosque and the Modern World: Architects, Patrons and Designs Since the 1950s* (1997). Twenty-Five years on, Dr. Gaber has provided the first

attempt at an expansive and local accounting of Canada's Islamic community since the establishment of the Al-Rasheed Mosque in Edmonton in 1938. While Dr. Gaber's study includes ninety of the "approximately 160–180 mosques" (10), the surveyed buildings in *Beyond The Divide*, add, critically, the voices of Muslims, worshippers and community organizations into the conversation around architecture. This is a great strength of the book, and Dr. Gaber's decision to prioritize this, over the more typical and perhaps more expected typological monograph (common to architectural publications), celebrates both diversity and unity, the celebrated and the contentious.

While the voices of designers and architects (such as Sharif Senbel and Gulzar Haider) are present in the text, *Beyond the Divide* is a plural project of community rather than the usually valorized singular voice of design. This raises a potential future trajectory for this work: a deeper dive into the design of Canadian mosques. The Gulzar Haider Design Group, for example, was a multidisciplinary collaborative that included young designers of Chinese, Iranian, Egyptian and South African descent. Conversations around and for the design of some of the mosques mentioned in Dr. Gaber's texts (including the Kingston Islamic Center, the Edmonton Islamic Academy, and early designs for mosques in Vancouver) engaged directly with questions of tradition and modernity, with the entanglements of gendered space and of cultural/religious needs and perceptions, and ultimately, of the search

for Canadian expressions of Islamic architectural identity.¹ *Beyond the Divide* is an attempt to do this from the ground up, as it were, rather than the drafting board (or computer screen) down.

It is of course, impossible to disentangle the spiritual from the spatial in this context. Mosques, as catalysts for worship and connection to the divine, are instruments of community, of faith, and togetherness. Etymologically the words in Arabic for mosque, for congregation, for assembly and collectivity are tied together and share similar roots structures. Mosques are, ultimately, spaces that are intended to facilitate 'ubudiyah (which very loosely translates as "acts of worship"), but this is a worship that is informed and guided by loving devotion and loving submission. And this 'ubudiyah is spiritually centred in the heart, where one (potentially) sees the Divine. But this is not a review from the perspective of religious studies, but centred rather in the discipline of architecture. The discussion of gendered space in Dr. Gaber's book is particularly powerful as seen in the index of architectural plans that conclude *Beyond the Divide*. Here, one can see quite clearly the implications of the gendered assignments of space across these drawings. The discussion of seeing in *Beyond the Divide* is rendered through three categories—no view, partial view, and full-view—of how the space for women in the mosque connects to the fuller optical experience of worship, through views of the *mihrab* and the *mimbar*, and of the more total expanse of the prayer hall. Helpful as a spatial prompt, I would offer that

the potential of “view” and “viewing” (perhaps even inspired by the same etymological entanglements described above) could serve as a useful conceptual premise, particularly in extending the conclusion of Dr. Gaber’s text. Perhaps a result of the necessary constraints of the text, *Beyond the Divide* ends a little abruptly, but this is acknowledged by Dr. Gaber when she writes “there are varying cultural trends in the Islamic world regarding women’s spaces in mosques, and a study of this needs separate research” (218). Perhaps that additional study will help additionally nuance Dr. Gaber’s already excellent work. What might it ultimately mean to view in part, in full, or not at all, in the context of both the physical and the spiritual space of the mosque itself? What does it mean to view (or not) in a Canada still wrestling with the fraught, tragic (and ongoing) issue of settler colonialism, or in the face of increasing Islamophobia? How does architecture begin to wrestle with other existing divides?

I drive to Toronto often, and as is our usual habit, we’ll stop just past Kingston (exit 613, to be precise) at the Kingston Islamic Center. This place conjures up all sorts of meanings, memories and histories. I’ll see its familiar dome above the trees, a mosque-barn amidst the slow urbanization of its surroundings and am always struck by how local the project aimed to be—in its design, its building, and its realization. This locality is a core—and a gift—of Dr. Gaber’s expansive text, particularly when she enables the reader to see the fullness *and* the localness of these places across Canada’s

Islamic landscapes of place. Dr. Gaber’s books is an attempt, through architecture, to help make a place, a home, an orientation, and to overcome—or at least to try to—some divides.

Ozayr Saloojee is an Associate Professor in the Azrieli School of Architecture and Urbanism at Carleton University.
—ozayrsaloojee@cunet.carleton.ca

1. Full disclosure: The author of this review was both a student of Dr. Gulzar Haider, as well as a member of GHDG (Gulzar Haider Design Group), from 1994–2005. GHDG’s core designers included Raymond Chow (now an architect and principal at gh3 in Toronto), Marjan Ghannad (an architect and professor/coordinator of the Architectural Technology program at Algonquin College in Ottawa), and Muhammad Moussa, an architect in the United States.

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